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## From the Desk of the Chief Editor

On behalf of the Editorial Board I am happy to place before our readers Volume III Issue 1 June 2017 of *Mizoram University Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*. The response received for contribution of articles has once again been most encouraging. This issue contains 17 research articles on divergent areas of Social Sciences and Humanities. We are happy to note that this volume also presents a *Translation Section* which contains two translation pieces from Mizo into English which is in keeping with our initial objectives of having sections for Translations, Book Reviews and Creative Works as well.

In the lead article on traditional institutions of Northeast India, Prof T.T. Haokip makes a telling statement on the fact that while some communities demand recognition of their tribal institutions to legitimize the formation and maintenance of ethnicity, there are others who are accepting of the constitutional form of governance. According to him it is also a fact that so long as there is lack of good governance, traditional institutions and values associated with them will continue to operate alongside modern democratic governance.

On the issue of electoral reform, an article submitted by Joseph C. Lalremruata shows how Mizoram has worked out a unique mechanism to help effectively enforce the model code of conduct issued by the Election Commission of India for political parties and candidates during election. The Mizoram People Forum (MPF) spearheaded by the church organizations in 2005, continues to play an active role each election season, not only with regard to the code of conduct mentioned above, but even to the extent of issuing guidelines for what is deemed to be the “ideal candidate”. Prof. K.V. Reddy’s submission on Union-State Political Interfaces in Telangana makes an interesting exploration of selected concrete issues and political concerns with the fluctuating relationship between the Union and State government.

Lallianchhunga deals with, and examines a number of relevant issues and challenges of post-accord Mizoram such as the emergence of human rights groups vis-a-vis the protection of cherished values of the Mizo community; a growing discontent in the state, and makes an interesting observation by admitting that the signing of the peace accord did not ensure peace dividend and lasting solution to



several problems due to the fact that some of these are pre-insurgency in nature. His study shows how Mizo society is now at a crossroad, for it is seen that political stability and peace do not necessarily translate into economic development. Lalnundika Hnamte in his paper makes a study of the components of Peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and its connect with political, social and economic development. Sustainable peace is not the absence of conflicts as conflicts are inevitable. To have sustainable peace a system must be developed whereby political, social and economic development takes place in a system that can manage internal conflicts as well.

The submission on a study of human rights perspectives in Mizoram from C. Lalhmanmawia factors in Third generation Human Rights, alongside the YMA, an NGO of Mizoram. The study believes that though the public lack knowledge on the significance of human rights, it is also true that majority of the population simply negate human rights movement in the state. The focus of the paper on India-ASEAN relations received from K. Zonunmawia, is on the evolution of this very relationship since Indian independence, and of how the virtual absence of economic content in India's foreign policy contributed to the lack of substance in its relationship with ASEAN till 1991. Albert Vanlalruata in his submission, makes an interesting study of situating Mizo ethnicity through difference. The key point made is that whatever may be the word applied to the "others" by the Mizo ethnic groups, they did not denote the tribes or clans within their own cognate areas as *vai*, *kawl*, *kawr*, or *sap*. They identified themselves in clans, lineages or villages.

Cherrie L. Chhange's submission on Alice Walker, a black American woman writer, is an engrossing work on sieving the past through "womanist eyes", based on select writings of Walker. Walker's works contain an alternative telling of histories, both personal and collective. This retelling of history is in particular through the perspective and approach of women, hence a 'womanist' approach. Returning to the northeast region of India, Ph. Jayalaxmi in her study of female sexual politics takes her bearings from an anthology of poems by Meitei women poets entitled *Tattooed with Taboos : An Anthology of Poetry by Three Women from North-East India*. The focus of the paper is on the pervasiveness of sexual taboos which circumscribe women through ages with the use of the powerful symbol of phanek, the wrap-around used by Meitei women. The imposed taboos are not only questioned, they also question the myth concerning the glorification of ideal womanhood.

In the brief study on the relationship between education and economic growth in northeast India, JV. Lalnunchanga attempts to identify the nexus between education and growth in Northeast India. The conclusion drawn is that education is neutral to economic growth in the region because of lack of skills. Lalropuii and Prof. NVR

Jyoti Kumar make a comparative study of customer perceptions of the public distribution system (PDS) in the two underdeveloped states of Chhattisgarh and Mizoram, and their findings reveal positive response in both the states from their respondents on issues such as satisfaction with the prices of goods distributed through the PDS, and with the functioning of PDS, despite some significant differences that exist in their perceptions. In respect to the replacement of PDS over cash transfer system, more than 70% of respondents in Mizoram, and nearly 89% of respondents in Chattisgarh did not want cash transfer. The paper concludes that this implies the need to support and strengthen the existing policy of supplying the commodities at subsidized prices through PDS.

Prof. S. Pathi in his submission makes it a point to emphasize that India represents a unity in variety, not diversity, and goes on to further explore the notion of nation building and nationalism in India. While the traditional meaning and implications of nation or nationalism are present in India, they go beyond it as well. The ideal of commonness in terms of language, religion, economic equality etc is not found in India, but rather its opposite – wherein lies its uniqueness. David V. Khiangte in his paper claims that criminalization of politics and corruption are two major challenges of good governance in India which need to be addressed on an urgent basis. According to him, while India is moving towards development and prosperity there is a parallel need to reformulate our national strategy of good governance in the country. It is apparent that good governance is dependant not only on good policies but more so on the processes and incentives to design and implement good policies themselves.

Irene Lalruatkimi in her paper attempts to highlight the role of media in vocalizing important issues and challenges on human rights particularly in the context of Mizoram. This gains in importance as NGOs and associations as well as church organizations contribute to confusing the public in their definition of demarcations of human rights. The presence of the politics of representation from different agencies further complicates the business of reportage on issues of human rights by the media. A study of an opinion survey of students of Mizoram University on choice based credit system (CBCS) conducted by F. Lalrinzuali and Prof. R.P. Vadhera deals with several issues such as impact of CBCS on quality of education, adequacy of choice in selecting courses on open electives, factors affecting students' choice of open electives, and impact of CBCS on the workload of students etc. The conclusion drawn is that for the present, the University is still in the process of adjusting and experimenting with CBCS, and so, it may be too early yet, to make final judgment as to whether CBCS is the right step to address quality issues in higher education.

The other submission received from the field of education from J. Lalhriatpui and Prof. Lalhmasaii deals with the problems faced by students of vocational stream in higher secondary schools of Mizoram. The questionnaire prepared for respondents included parameters of courses pursued, facilities, practical work, textbooks, contents of the textbooks, teachers, on-the-job-training, test and examination and methods of teaching. The findings were - worry about college admission, insufficient equipments, less number of practical classes, less time allotment for practical classes, and worry about job placement.

This current journal is rounded up by a translation section that contains two interesting submissions. The first is a sampling of an old Mizo play song and one Mizo lullaby from Kristina K. Zama, and the second, an essay by Vanneihluanga, from K.C. Lalthlamuani. The significance and relevance of translations in areas of culture and literary studies, particularly from tribal communities cannot be overemphasized. They help contribute towards a deeper understanding of the 'other' as it were, while providing valuable resource for research studies for various disciplines.

Margaret Ch. Zama  
Chief Editor

## **Conceptualizing Traditions and Traditional Institutions in Northeast India**

**T.T. Haokip\***

### **Abstract**

*Traditions and traditional institutions still exist in different parts of the world. Tradition is understood as the total heritage - beliefs, customs and practices transmitted from generation to generation. Tradition also has been classified as passive and active. Tradition also has its own role in the formation and maintenance of ethnicity. Traditions and traditional institutions are interconnected with governance. Some tribal communities of the Northeastern region are demanding for recognition of their traditional institutions, while another section seems to be accepting the constitutional form of governance more seriously.*

**Key words:** Tradition, traditional institution, ethnic, tribal, Northeast India

### **Introduction**

Traditions and traditional institutions exist in many societies in different parts of the world. While it is easy to identify these institutions, it is extremely difficult to define them and locate their historical origin. It is also difficult to categorize them into social, cultural, political and economic institutions, as traditions in any given society exist as a composite whole. In many tribal societies, land, divinity and the enjoyment of certain privileges were the basis of authority, legitimacy and power. Further, since many societies have undergone a sea change throughout the colonial and post-colonial times, it is difficult to extricate their traditional content from the supposedly modern one. Indeed, many tribal societies are as

modern as they are traditional. Thus, at one level there are societies that have changed over time to a very modern industrialized society, but still have traditional leaders who perform powers and functions. At another level, we find a society that maintains its basic form of tradition and traditional institutions but where traditional leaders have lost their importance or have disappeared. There is no unanimity among scholars regarding the democratic content of these societies. However, one thing is clear that the remnants of traditional values continue to influence many tribal societies even in the post-colonial period. The interaction of the values of traditional institutions and modern democratic governance has generated considerable debates,

\* T.T. Haokip is Professor, Department of Political Science, NEHU, Shillong.

controversies and even conflicts. The paper therefore attempts to examine the meanings and uses of tradition as a passive analytic construct and as an active indigenous force. The relationships between traditional institutions and modern political institutions in the context of Northeast India will be another focus of this paper.

Of late, many scholars have studied the socio-political institutions of African societies in the pre-colonial period.<sup>1</sup> The values of traditional institutions such as age, kinship, group solidarity, exclusion of women etc. remained strong throughout the colonial period. The accepted principles in such societies were that the 'wise men' should rule and all members of the group, except slaves and women, should participate in ruling.<sup>2</sup> The chiefs, who assisted the Colonial administration in collection of revenue, house tax and other functions, were paid a share of the collection.<sup>3</sup> In many tribal societies of Northeast India, traditions and traditional institutions remain a conservative force jealously guarding powers and privileges of the kings and chiefs. In different settings, the traditional institutions lay anchored primarily in customs and traditions, and the incumbents acted as the legitimate upholders and interpreters of the scope and contents of the tradition. The interaction of the values of traditional institutions and modern democratic governance has generated considerable debates and controversies. However, this phenomenon is not only experienced by tribal societies but many Western

countries have also experienced almost similar conflicts during what Bendix called, the 'great transformation'.<sup>4</sup>

### **What is Tradition?**

Anthropologists speak of "a tradition," or of "traditions," of "traditionalism" and of "traditional" societies as opposed to preliterate or modern ones. Thus, a "tradition" in anthropological literature means a time-honored custom, and a "traditional past" usually means a pre-conquest or pre-colonial past.<sup>5</sup> The term 'tradition' carries unspecified assumptions because of the tendency to use it as a residual term. The term has been used so often and in so many contexts that, as Shils<sup>6</sup> suggests, it may not have any meaning at all.

The term tradition has been derived from the Latin word 'traditio' meaning handing down, handing over, delivery etc. It is handed down from person to person or from one generation to another generation.<sup>7</sup> In its most general usage, tradition may be defined as the element of historical continuity or social inheritance in culture or the social process by which continuity is achieved. Tradition is understood as the total heritage-beliefs, customs and practices transmitted from generation to generation. According to Acton, tradition is a belief, practiced and accepted as authoritative or deferred to, without argument.<sup>8</sup> Tradition, thus, encompasses the whole spectrum of inherited customs, practices and beliefs, styles and opinions of the people transmitted from generation to generation.

Tradition may be of recent origin or invented or constructed at any historical time.<sup>9</sup>

Williams points to a split in definitions between tradition as a passive and tradition as an active process.<sup>10</sup> While the former considers tradition as a set of time-honored and respected beliefs, the later looks at traditions as an active process in which beliefs are handed down from father to son and require only two generations to become traditions.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Tradition as a passive**

The use of tradition as passive or ideal type construct was established early in the social science literature through the writings of Durkheim, Marx, Redfield, Weber and Tonnies, among others. A “tradition” in the anthropological literature often means time-honored custom, respected beliefs, seen as an ideal type construct, stultifying force that engendered and enforced cultural homogeneity. Marx, who did not use traditional/modern distinction per se in his writings, considered tradition as a stultifying device for enslaving people, although he was also aware of the ideological uses of tradition.<sup>12</sup> He predicted that traditional ideas would be dissolved once modernization was complete.<sup>13</sup> Tonnies considered tradition as part of ‘natural will’ and believed it to be an unthinking emotional reaction.<sup>14</sup> Durkheim emphasized that tradition was given its force by the old people who transmitted it and acted as the intermediary between the present and the

past because of their prestige and authority.<sup>15</sup> He predicted that tradition would decline as rationalism grew in modern and urban settings but did not share the view that it would erase the evils of the past. Redfield’s use of tradition as homogeneity, irrationality, and respect for age-old custom at the folk end of the continuum<sup>16</sup> repeats the assumptions of the early theorists. In short, tradition was seen as a force in preventing change, growth, creativity; and tradition as irrational, emotional response and the agent of promoting internal solidarity. While the conservative Burkean perception of society views tradition as the accumulated wisdom of the past,<sup>17</sup> Andrew Heywood maintains that tradition stands for absence of change.<sup>18</sup> The underlying fears in all these tendencies is the assumption that traditions or traditional institutions are static, frozen in time, and cannot be modified.

#### **Tradition as an active**

Tradition as a passive has been challenged by Malinowski (1922), Tardits (1958), Dube (1958), Savage (1964), Gulliver (1969), Brode (1970), among others. To Malinowski (1922), myths and traditions serve as sociological “charters”. In fact, traditions and myths were recited as social sanctions to induce conformity or serve as charters for social action. Of late, ecologists have also shown that some traditions are quite rational. On tradition as a device for promoting internal solidarity, Leach (1965) concluded that traditions could promote either internal

equilibrium or disequilibrium, depending on whose version of the tradition gained prominence.<sup>19</sup> Indigenous versions of tradition are used both to sustain internal solidarity and to promote internal dissension. Similarly, the view that tradition would disappear in urban environments has been proved wrong as the rise of ethnic groups depended heavily on a shared “traditional” past. Barnes (1951) who described several uses of tradition among the Ngoni people mentioned that traditional legends were modified in conformity with modern values to evaluate their present circumstances. Another use of tradition is made in the law courts, where Ngoni people appeal to traditional practices in different ways. This is also true of the majority tribal societies of the northeastern region of India where customary laws are recognized. As a storage device, tradition serves not merely to store antique behavior; it also serves to align past and present and to set new precedents for behavior. Instead of being an irrational, emotional response, traditions are employed to promote rational innovation. In addition, tradition is used as a divisive tool to further individual and group ambitions. Instead of disappearing in urban environments, traditions have been reformulated and revived to serve as a basis for claims to political and economic power and privileges.

### **Traditions as invented**

Sociological theories raised the issue that tradition can be both dynamic as well as static. In fact, the adherents of tradition

often questioned and modified it over time to make it dynamic. In line with this view, tradition is defined as any cultural product that was created or pursued, in whole or in part, by past generations and that, having been accepted and preserved, in whole or in part, by successive generations, has been maintained to the present. Other social scientists such as Eric Hobsbawm, Ramila Thapar, and Terence Ranger have argued that it is not only important and necessary but also possible to locate the historical origin of traditions. For instance, Hobsbawm and Ranger argued that traditions could be constructed and that what sometimes has been considered as being very ancient traditions are in fact of quite recent origin if the history of the tradition is traced.<sup>20</sup> Thus, traditions or traditional institutions need not be very old and exist from time immemorial. Indeed, people created or invented traditions or traditional institutions at a particular time to suit their interests, although the importance of traditions is not uniform in all societies. What is implicit within these directions is the assumption that tradition has a storage function with respect to selected traits only and not to a plethora of antique behaviors. These traits need not be very old or even indigenous. Thus, one can argue that many of the traditional institutions operative in Northeast India have their origins in the very act of invention. Barth indicated that the revival of traditional cultural traits and the establishment of historical traditions to justify and glorify the identity of ethnic

groups is one of the most fascinating subjects of modern field research. Internally tradition is used as a storage device to preserve the “distinctive culture” of the group and externally tradition is used to sanctify ethnic identity as a group. Many tribal communities in Northeast India use tradition and traditional institutions as counter-threats of assimilation. Stevens’ documentation of the Kisra tradition<sup>21</sup> shows that selective alteration of traditions over time has enabled the threatened societies to assert their equality to, if not superiority over, the threatening power; justify their successful maintenance of independence in spite of this threat; and thus re-establish a basis for societal unity.

The traditional political institutions of the tribal communities of Northeast India have been evolving over time and hence it would not be correct to use historical phrases like “from time immemorial,” while referring to them. As tradition does not remain stagnant but change with the times, it would also be wrong to presume that traditions remain unchanged. According to Eric Hobsbawm traditions which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented to suit a particular group. Invented traditions include both “traditions” actually invented, constructed and formally instituted. These so-called traditions may not have been in use for long, but because of their usefulness are termed as ‘tradition’. Hobsbawm sums up by saying that inventing traditions is essentially a process of formalization and

ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition. Therefore, we need to consider whether, even among the tribal communities, traditions had been invented to suit a particular section of society and at a particular point of time they stopped changing after having achieved the desired goal.

### **Traditions and Ethnicity**

Tradition as an active force for change can be used in many ways including the role of tradition in the formation and maintenance of ethnic groups. Barth (1969) and Cohen (1976) stress the importance of the study of tradition for understanding ethnicity. While Cohen’s interpretation of ethnic groups depends on political and symbolic factors, Barth’s interpretation relies on economic and ecological factors. As Cohen pointed out, tradition is emphasized for political purposes “as the symbols of traditional culture are used as mechanisms for the articulation of political alignments.”<sup>22</sup> This has more relevance in the context of Northeast India where traditions are used to support claims to economic and political rights and privileges. Thus, traditions need not be necessarily very old but can also be invented or created according to the exigencies of the situation. It is a cultural product invented or created at any historical time and modified, accepted and preserved by successive generations.

To Donald Horowitz, ethnicity is a myth, which is based on collective



ancestry.<sup>23</sup> Smith recognized ethnic community as a distinct group of people who share common ancestry, traditions, customs, culture, language, etc.<sup>24</sup> Thus, ethnicity can be viewed as a sense of belonging to a particular group that distinguishes them from others, in terms of social, cultural, language, religion, region, history, customs, and traditional orientation. Ethnic politics is the politics of assertion on the part of 'others' protesting their subordination or exclusion by the nation. It is how ethnic groups use traditions and ethnic identity to mobilize and maneuver people in order to challenge existing societal arrangements and also to assert their claims for material resources and political clout. Thus, in popular view, it is the groups small in number, low in power and hungry for resources that assert ethnic identity as a political strategy by which their lot can be improved. However, ethnic politics also refers to cultural politics of the dominant groups. Indeed, the role of ethnicity and identity politics in the construction of and maintenance of political power by majority and dominant groups is no less important. Thus, rather than being solely 'a weapon of the weak and minority', ethnic politics also is central to modern forms of state formation and maintenance. While certain ethnic features were consolidated into a national identity, other ethnic features were excluded. Generally, the dominant groups' identity is affirmed in the state's culture and institutions. Thus, various ethnic groups assert their identity through different forms and demands for

recognition of traditions, language, economic opportunities, political representation, culture and religious rights. Further, the demand may include autonomy for a specific area or even independence from the nation.<sup>25</sup> The demands either peaceful or aggressive in asserting certain rights in a multiethnic state can be called as ethnic politics. In other words, ethnic politics is the mobilization or utilization of ethnic categories based on recognition of difference in order to capture state power, influence state policy, or structure state institutions.

#### **Traditions and Democratic governance**

The traditional values of tribal communities under study are kin protection, group solidarity, socially exclusive, privileging of community over individuals, exclusivist and discriminatory politics against other communities, limited or no space for civil and political liberties, respect for seniority of age, patriarchy and gender inequality in terms of division of labor, property ownership and decision making. Thus, traditional institutions are seen by many as backward instruments of social oppression, exclusion and domination, a historic burden on the road to modernity. In contrast, many in rural areas still consider traditional system of governance as the true representatives of their people, accessible, respected and legitimate because of poor governance, lack of transparency and accountability of the government officials and other government machineries. They still

consider the institution of chiefship as legitimate by virtue of history and experience.

In almost all the tribal communities of the region, some leaders are demanding for recognition of their traditional institutions, while another section seems to be accepting the constitutional form of governance more seriously.<sup>26</sup> Some Naga intellectuals think that the introduction of traditional institutions is the only answer for the Nagas, because the present alien political system, which is an imposed one, can never bring solution to meet the needs of the Nagas.<sup>27</sup> Other argues that the traditional institutions, which were not inclusive of women and ethnic minorities, have become instruments for privatization of community resources of land, water and forests. The issues of women's role, representation of minorities, and public scrutiny of functionaries and auditing of accounts of traditional institutions need a critical analysis before giving them constitutional recognition. Thus, there are democratic governance with elected representatives, rule of law, equality and other legal systems on the one hand and traditional structures with long-standing historic norms, often linked to spiritual, religious, political, judicial and economic functions on the other interacting at different levels of governance.

However, there is a significant variation among the tribal communities of northeast India regarding the extent of their attachment to the traditional values. Nevertheless, it is clear that traditional

values were and continue to be the source of political authority in most of the tribal societies. Therefore, the tendency to revive traditional institutions for various reasons remains strong in many tribal societies of the region. Thus, the issue of recognition and revival of the traditional institutions of the tribal communities therefore is a major political problem generated by conflicting political aspirations and complex political realities of tribal areas, particularly in the northeastern hill states.

### **Conclusion**

So long as there is lack of good governance, traditional institutions and values associated with them will continue to operate alongside modern democratic governance. In addition, since the possibility of having good governance is very remote, the only option is to reconcile the two systems of governance. Traditional and modern democratic institutions must have well defined jurisdiction spaces to avoid confrontation and conflict. The traditional values that profess group assertion, kin-protection and collective efforts and deference (place the community ahead of the individual) act as the main obstacles for consolidating, sustaining and making democracy stronger and viable in most of the tribal societies of northeast India. The democratic system of choosing leaders and making decisions through majority votes has now been firmly established in most of the secular and religious organizations, although people continue

to hold on to their traditional values, which greatly hamper democratic politics. As in the past, the community has precedence over the individual in many tribal societies of the region. The traditional political values such as group assertion, kin-protection and collective effort contradict the principles of democratic politics, which include among others, the rule of law, individual liberty and competitive politics. Unless these dichotomies are resolved, the conflicts between democratic politics and traditional institutions will be inevitable. Traditions or traditional institutions need re-examination from time to time. Indeed, institutions in all cultures evolve over time because of

lessons garnered from experience, and occasionally through interactions with other cultures. The adoption of modern political institutions wholesale without realizing the fact that the traditional institutions also have alternative approach to governance has been the main reason for crisis of governance in northeast India. The proper approach would be to borrow some features from both the modern and traditional political institutions in order to come up with a hybrid system with local legitimacy and authority. One effective way of capturing the minds of the people of northeast India would be to work through their traditional institutions, which they consider legitimate by virtue of history and experience.

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## **Electoral Reform: A Lesson from Mizoram People Forum (MPF)**

**Joseph C. Lalremruata\***

### **Abstract**

*In order to enforce effective voting system, the Election Commission of India has issued a model code of conduct for political parties and the candidates at the time of election. The first model code had been circulated at the time of the fifth general elections held in 1971. Since then the code has been revised from time to time to come up with the changing political situation of the time. The code of conduct has laid down the guidelines as to how political parties and the candidates should conduct themselves during elections for the implementation of free and fair polls. Despite the acceptance of the model code of conduct by political parties, the cases of the violation of the code of conduct are on the increase. Hence, electoral reform continues to be one of the most important issues in Indian politics. This paper analyses the origin, organizational set-up and the interesting role of the MPF for implementing electoral reform in the State of Mizoram. The conformity of Election Model Code of Conduct and the activities of the MPF is also discussed.*

**Key words:** Election, Mizoram People Forum, Electoral reform, Model code of conduct.

Today, it is no exaggeration to state that conducting elections has become more critical and election related issues happen to be the most burning topics in national and state politics. As the largest democratic country in the world, election occupies an important place in Indian political system, so election at all levels cannot be neglected for the successful functioning of democratic system. If we look at the Constitution of India, it attaches great importance to elections by making an independent powerful body known as Election Commission of India in Article

324 to conduct free and fair election at Parliamentary and State Assembly elections (MP, MLA) as well as the election of President and Vice President of India. Even at the State level elections like municipal council, autonomous district council, panchayat and village council, an autonomous body known as State Election Commission (SEC) is functioning in different states. If we look at the elections in India, the major defects which come in the path of electoral system in India are money power, muscle power, criminalization of politics, poll violence,

booth capturing, communalism, casteism, non-serious and independent candidates etc. In fact, all these bad things today have become the features of election politics in various parts of the country.

Elections are the most important and integral part of politics in a democratic system of governance. While politics is the art and practice of dealing with political power, election is a process of legitimization of such power. Democracy can indeed function only upon this faith that elections are free and fair and not rigged and manipulated, that they are effective instruments of ascertaining popular will both in reality and in form and are not mere rituals calculated to generate illusion of difference to mass opinion. It cannot survive without free and fair elections. The first three general elections (1952-1962) were free and fair, but, the standard of elections seemed to be decline in negative ways from the fourth general elections in India. The distortion of electioneering process appeared for the first time in the fifth general elections in 1971. After some candidates and political parties started to appear in the elections so as to win them at all costs, our electoral system suffered from various shortcomings. Several unfair practices during elections have now become a tradition in election politics in many states of India. In fact, several loopholes in the election system are the breeder of the so called political corruption in our country.

Mizoram, the 23<sup>rd</sup> State of India, located in the North Eastern part of India

bordering Myanmar and Bangladesh, has a peculiar characteristic about elections. Compared to many other States in the country, the voters in Mizoram witness very cool and free atmosphere during elections since the first electoral activities took place. Despite the State having insurgency around 20 years (1966-1986), the electoral activities particularly MLA and MP elections were not much disturbed by the long insurgency. The elections in Mizoram are free and fair compared to other States in various ways though the State is not at all free from other problems.

#### **Origin of MPF**

Since the first Assembly elections in 1972, the largest denomination in Mizoram i.e. the Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod has made a serious appeal to the public in every election in Mizoram for conducting free and fair election. The people of Mizoram had attached great importance to the election guidelines issued by the Mizoram Presbyterian Church in the earlier times. In these election guidelines, the Church requested the political parties to put up honest and upright people with high standing in the society as candidates. Even the political parties had been requested to organize peaceful election campaigns and to refrain from buying votes, giving unrealistic promises and other illegal means. Simultaneously, the Church also strongly requested the people not to sell their votes and to exercise their franchise freely and without fear. Moreover, Mizoram Presbyterian Church used to organise

seminars and political education campaign through one of its wings, namely, the Synod Social Front at various places of Mizoram. The Synod Social Front is the committee set up by the Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod, to strengthen and widen the Ministry of the Church especially in the Society. And right from the time of its inception, the political education programme has been followed up keenly and effectively for the purpose for which the Synod Social Front was set up. However, it was realised that all these activities of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church were not effective enough for the public since the 2003 State Assembly elections of Mizoram.

The unusual electioneering activities that took place in 2003 Legislative Assembly Election where indirect involvement of certain armed groups was said to be detected for the first time by the media and there was also rampant use of money which automatically led to huge election expenditure. Even the people of Mizoram were largely surprised when Suangpuilawn kidnap incident occurred in which some candidates of Suangpuilawn constituency were kidnapped before the polls in 2003 Assembly polls. In view of the emergence of various untoward incidences which erupted in 2003 State Assembly election of Mizoram, the Synod Social Front prepared questionnaires to study the view and attitude of public regarding the said election. The answers of 3480 questionnaire collected from 84 pastorate circles had revealed that the atmosphere of election politics in

Mizoram was not fair enough like before and it deteriorated since 2003 elections. The Synod Social Front also carried out a serious study on other election related matters and tried to introduce reform in electoral politics so as to bring solution the arising problems.

As the Synod Executive Committee (SEC) agreed cooperation with different civil societies and churches to reform the political system in Mizoram, the responsibility was given to the Synod Social Front. The Synod Social Front organised consultations and discussions with other voluntary associations, civil societies and churches; and all agreed that it was necessary to form non-political social reform body for initiating campaign and awareness for conduct of free and fair election. Finally, at their fifth meeting, the leaders of different civil societies and churches in Mizoram had unitedly formed Mizoram People Forum popularly known as MPF on 21st, June, 2006. Even though, MPF is established under the initiative of Presbyterian Church of India (PCI), Mizoram Synod, there are also other church associations and civil societies as affiliate members of the forum. The MPF has eleven Constituent members and six Associate members. The Constituent members are also the founding members of the MPF.

They are as follows:

- i) Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod.
- ii) Catholic Church, Mizoram.



- iii) Wesleyan Methodist Church.
- iv) Evangelical Church of Maraland, Saiha.
- v) Evangelical Free Church of India.
- vi) Lairam Isua Krista Kohhran (Lairam Jesus Christ Church).
- vii) Young Mizo Association.
- viii) Mizoram Upa Pawl (Elder's Association).
- ix) Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (Largest Women's Association in Mizoram).
- x) M.T.P Headquarters, Saiha (Mara Youth Association).
- xi) Young Lai Association (YLA) Headquarters, Lawngtlai.

The following organizations are the Associate members of the MPF:

- i) Mizoram Young Chakma Association, Chawngte.
- ii) Mizoram Chakma Student Union.
- iii) Mizoram Chakma Mahila Samiti.
- iv) Mizoram Buddhist Association.
- v) B.R.K Headquarters, Chawngte (Buddhist Association).
- vi) M.CH.P Headquarters, Saiha (Mara Women's Association).

Unfortunately, some Church organizations in the State like the Salvation Army, the Seventh Day Adventist, United Pentecostal Church-Mizoram, United Pentecostal Church-North East India and the Baptist Church

of Mizoram have not joined the MPF. Among them, the Baptist Church of Mizoram has the second largest number of members in Mizoram and is the most influential and strongest Church organization in the Southern part of Mizoram so their absence in the MPF is certainly weak point for the smooth functioning of the MPF especially in the Southern part of the State. All of them opted to remain out of the MPF and its activities since the establishment of the MPF till date.

### **Structure & Objectives of MPF**

The MPF has been registered under the Mizoram Societies Registration Act, 2005 (Act No.13 of 2005) as a registered body. It is also desirable to highlight that more than 80 percent of the population in Mizoram are members of the MPF by virtue of their membership in the church, civil societies and voluntary associations.

The major areas focussed by the MPF are electoral reforms, political education, good governance and awareness. Hence, the MPF strongly opposes nepotism, favouritism, criminalization of politics and corruption in administration. In order to achieve its aim and objectives, the MPF has done the following activities such as, organising seminars and conferences at the State level, conducting trainers' training programmes, organising seminars and awareness programmes in all districts of the State and consultation with all political parties of the State for the implementation of free and fair polls in Mizoram. The **goals and objectives** of the MPF are as follows:

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- (1) To work towards establishing democratic government through free and fair elections.
- (2) To reform the electoral process and do away with the corrupt and malpractices in the electoral system in the State.
- (3) To put in place a transparent, accountable and responsible government.
- (4) To educate the people on the governance issue and make them responsible citizens.
- (5) To guide and advise the government on developmental issues.
- (6) To conduct social audits for the social reforms.
- (7) To counter any form of violence, use of arms and terrorism.

The organisational structure of MPF has properly been set-up in the following stratum, such as, Headquarters, District Forums, Constituency Forum (MLA Constituency) and Local Forums. Its headquarter is located at Aizawl the capital of Mizoram and it is also known as the Central Forum. There are twelve (12) Office Bearers in the headquarters of MPF, namely, President, Senior Vice President, three Vice Presidents, General Secretary, Secretary, three Joint Secretaries, Treasurer and Finance Secretary. Besides, there are also 18-Governing Board Members and 5-Advisers in the headquarters. There are District Forums in all Revenue Districts and Autonomous

District Councils except Aizawl and Lunglei District, because Aizawl can be effectively mobilised and organised by the Central Forum, however in the case of Lunglei, the largest church association of the district, namely, Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) is not a constituent member of the Forum. There are now seven District Forums of MPF in Mizoram and the District Forum also has Office Bearers and Executive Committee Members. Constituency Forum is supposed to be established in every constituency of MLA especially in times of MLA election to enforce the guidelines of MPF but it cannot be established in all constituencies of MLA. Local Forums set-up in every village and locality all over Mizoram is the grassroots unit of the MPF. The Local Forums of MPF are established in all Village Council jurisdictional area as well as Local Council jurisdictional areas (in the City) and more than one Local Forum can be established in big villages as well as large areas of Local Council. It is interesting to note that all constituent members of the MPF have been accommodated in the Office Bearer Posts as well as Governing Board Membership in the Forum. As the Forum is a non-political body, office bearers as well as executive members at every level starting from the grassroots level i.e. Local Forum up to the apex layer i.e. Headquarters are strictly forbidden to become primary member of any political party. Hence, any office bearer or executive committee member who joins a political party is automatically suspended from the MPF.

With regard to membership of MPF, Church Association can become constituent member with payment of Rs.1000 while the Civil Societies and Voluntary Associations can become constituent members with the payment of Rs.500 to the MPF Headquarters. Even individual from non-constituent bodies can personally become member with the payment of Rs.100. However, as stated above, the MPF has strictly monitored its leaders at various levels to be a non-political body as well as a non-political forum working for the well being of the society and state especially for the implementation of free and fair elections at various level elections and good governance in the State of Mizoram.

After its establishment, the MPF convened an All-Party meeting and invited the major political parties in Mizoram on September 25, 2006. In the meeting, leaders of the political parties gave advice and suggestions for the functioning of MPF. Even the party leaders expressed their views about the election expenditure and stated that election expenditures had now become considerably high. The expenditures incurred during election campaigns, mainly for organizing public meetings, feasts, posters, banners, house to house campaigns etc became a great burden for the candidates of all political parties. So, if this trend continued in the electoral process it would be very difficult for some candidates to campaign for elections with such high election expenditure. Therefore, the political parties stated that the MPF must stop such

events and occurrences like buying of votes, public feasts, house to house campaigns, providing transportation for voters, hiring singers and other entertainers, excessive use of flags, posters and banners etc, which amounts to high expenditure during elections. Various suggestions and advice from the leaders of political parties were seriously taken up by the MPF and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was drafted on the basis of the views and opinions of the political leaders, an agreement was reached and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between the MPF and major political parties. Finally, the MPF and political parties held another joint meeting and completed the final draft of Election Guidelines on April 30, 2008. And the Memorandum of Understanding became the main principle and the basis of the activities of the MPF and election guidelines till date. And we should not forget that the Election Guidelines is prepared in keeping the Election Model Code of Conduct issued by the Election Commission of India, the legal, social and moral aspects, as well as the sentiments of the general public of the State.

#### **MPF & Model Code of Conduct**

The Election Model Code of Conduct is a comprehensive book of guidelines which is to be followed by political parties, candidates, officials and the public and violation of Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is punishable by the Election Commission of India, even censure from the Election Commission of

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India (ECI). The Election Model Code of Conduct had been drawn up based on the People's Representative Act, 1951 for free and fair elections. With the announcement of the date of elections by the Election Commission of India, be it MLA or MP elections, the Election Model Code of Conduct comes into force with effect from that day. As already mentioned above, violation of the Model Code of Conduct attract disapproval and punishment from the Election Commission of India. Indeed, the ECI asks the Center and State governments, the political parties and candidates to observe the Model Code of Conduct. This Code of Conduct is expected to restrict and control the behaviour of contesting candidates and political parties in their campaigns and performances to capture voters during elections. The Center and State governments are also clearly given the notice of what to do and what not to do. But, in our present context, the Election Model Code of Conduct set by the ECI does not appear to be effective enough for the implementation of free and fair elections. Today's elections see that the wealthy and powerful candidates mostly survive, and any candidate contesting the elections with less financial and manpower resources hardly wins the elections. This means the personality and vision of the Candidates may not be given priority while casting the votes.

The MPF called a meeting with all political parties to discuss what the parties themselves wanted towards a free, fair and inexpensive election. Among the many

issues discussed was, as already highlighted above, the abandonment of house to house campaigns and entertainment programmes like organising concerts and road shows employing singers to attract the crowds. These two things take the lion's share of the election budget of the candidates, and political parties believed that if all agreed to discontinue these practices, which seem to be traditional practices in various elections, then the expenditure for elections would come down considerably. The MPF also wanted that all public meetings be conducted by their local forums which function at village and city locality levels to ensure that no-political party has advantage over another political party at any public rally. The MPF even discouraged public feasts to attract the voters. In the beginning, this seemed to cause more problems for MPF than the political parties who accused one another of preparing feasts even if it was only meant for party members at block and unit level conferences. However, what the MPF is trying to discourage is the community feasts funded by candidates of the area for the general masses.

Alongside the Election Commission of India's Code of Conduct, the church issued its own code to help prevent practices which could hamper the smooth and free atmosphere of elections in Mizoram, like door to door campaigns, organising community feasts, use of loud-speakers and musical bands. The MPF even put out guidelines describing an "ideal candidate" as somebody upright

and free from corruption and alcoholism. In Mizoram, around 60 per cent of the total population adheres to the influential Presbyterian Church that backs MPF.

### **Evaluation of the MPF**

The function of MPF is deeply appreciated and welcomed by different political parties, churches, civil societies, State Government and the citizens of Mizoram. Since its establishment, many awareness programmes for political reforms like seminar, consultation and trainers' training have often been conducted in various places of Mizoram by MPF. No doubt, these MPF programmes have imparted ethical values and political integrity to the people of Mizoram. Further, the MPF consulted leaders of various political parties on the eve of elections and concluded acceptable agreements with them for conducting free and fair elections. Starting from Tlungvel MLA by-election-2006, it is evident that election at different levels, namely, MP, MLAs, Autonomous District Council, Municipal Council, Local Council and Village Council could be smoothly conducted in Mizoram and that this was made possible mainly due to the painstaking efforts of the MPF. The contributions of MPF in various elections for electoral reform in Mizoram shall be highlighted as given below:

- Tlungvel Assembly Constituency Bye Election, held on October 30, 2006.
- Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) Elections 2007 & 2012.

- Chakma Autonomous District Council elections 2008 & 2013.
- Mizoram Legislative Assembly elections, 2008 & 2013.
- Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) Election, 2010.
- Lok Sabha Elections Mizoram, 2009 & 2014.
- Aizawl Municipal Council (AMC) Election, 2010.
- Chalhfilh MLA Bye Election, 2013.

Besides electoral reforms, the MPF has widened its activities upon the issue of good governance in Mizoram. Due to this, the MPF Hqrs. had also organised District level seminar for good governance in different districts of Mizoram. The participants and organisers felt that the seminars for good governance held in different parts of the state were beneficial for inculcating awareness among the citizens. Further, the MPF had organised seminar related with good governance and the responsibility of the citizens in different places of Mizoram every year.<sup>1</sup> The MPF leaders also met the top ranking leaders of the government just after the new ministry led by Lalthanhawla had been installed, urging them to pursue their election manifesto and promises effectively without discrimination.

The movement and efforts of the MPF for electoral reform and good governance is distinctive from other social movements in other parts of the country. Popular social movements in mainland

India mainly focusses on the issues of livelihood, opportunities, dignity and development and there is no exaggeration to state that none of the movement focus upon good governance and electoral reform. As such, the movement and activities done by the MPF for electoral reform as well as good governance is unique and not focused by any civil society or group in other parts of the country till today. The conduct of free and fair poll happens to be one of the most essential features for successful working of democracy, whereas, unfair poll and bogus voting automatically destroys the democratic values. The constructive role of the MPF in electoral reform has been acknowledged by the media, Election Commission of India and even by the former Governor of Mizoram. Thus, the MPF has performed a herculean task for implementation of electoral reform in Mizoram. No doubt, there may be some limitations and shortcomings in the performance of MPF and there is a room for improvement. But, the great contribution and tireless effort of the MPF for electoral reform in Mizoram is valuable and emulative for other States of the country so as to introduce reform in the electoral system of India on the whole.

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## Union-State Political Interfaces in Telangana: Fluid Consistencies

K.V.Reddy\*

### Abstract

*This paper explores the trends and tendencies in the realm of Union-state relations in Telangana. While locating the problem of Centre-state relations in a theoretical context, the paper identifies certain concrete issues and political concerns that impact the fluctuating relationship between the union and state governments. Although there are several extents that the problem had been contextualized, the issue of shifting political relations has been focused in this paper. And, this paper has been grounded mostly on the exchange of incidents and events that happened between the Union and state governments in Telangana recently. Further, this paper is confined to only those issues that became controversial and obviously affected the mutual relations during the period.*

**Key Words:** Centre, State, Political, Relationship, Telangana

### Introduction

The Constitution of India has clearly mentioned about the powers and functions of the two governments. Thus there cannot be any controversy on the exercise of their respective powers. Yet, the Centre-state relations became one of the most controversial issues since independence. The expectations of the founding fathers of the Constitution have been sometimes neglected and even some provisions have been abused to the disadvantage of the states. There are no states which are completely immune from the infection of Centre-state conflicts. Constitutionally, both the Centre and the state governments can accomplish their responsibilities, administrative or financial uninterrupted.

On majority of items that figured in the State List, states hardly join an issue with the union government. Similarly, on the issues of Union List too, there is no ground for any sort of controversy between both these governments. But, it is on the Concurrent List as well as on the Residuary subjects on which union have bigger say, that both the regimes got entrapped in some sort of stalemate. Sometimes, the very interpretation of a subject or two by either of the regimes would give scope for the other party to take a different position from that of the one regime.

Union-State relations in India have been marked by many a controversy for over several decades. Although the

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constitutional arrangement is consistent and that hardly affected the changes in the relationship between both the governments, political strategies of the concerned governments appeared to be instrumental in making them fluid. Over the years, political regimes at the Centre had always tried to disturb the equilibrium between the two governments and thereby caused the controversy of Centre-state tussle. As a new state of Telangana, it had faced such a regime in the present NDA government at the Centre. The Telangana state and its leadership remained adamant and stuck to its political position in the initial phase. During the course of engagement on various developmental issues, both the governments have been set up on collision course at times. On the other hand, political scenario had mostly influenced the very discourse of Centre-state relations in the state. This is mainly because of different parties ruling both at the Centre and in the states at once, and since the political parties have had their ideological differences displayed so blatantly, there could hardly be any sort of conciliation when the issue of governance is debated. Failure to receive any positive response to its politics and governance from the Centre, the state leadership had gradually changed its stances and seemed to have yielded to the pressures of the Centre. Thus, the consequence of emerging fluid relationship between the two governments is witnessed.

This paper has been aimed at exploring the trends and tendencies in the

realm of Union-state relations in Telangana in the recent period. While positioning the problem of Centre-state relations in an academic context, the paper identifies certain concrete issues and political concerns that impact the shifting relationship between the union and Telangana governments today. Although there are several magnitudes that the problem had been contextualized, the issue of shifting political relations has been focused in this paper. And, this paper has been grounded mostly on the exchange of incidents and events that happened between the Union and state governments in Telangana in the last few years. While some of these incidents were reported in the media channels as occurred on a regular basis, there were some commentaries authored by academics about some other incidents. Incidentally, this paper is confined to only those few issues that became quite controversial and obviously affected the mutual relations during the period. Thus, several other incidents still relevant for the study could not be covered due to paucity of space and time.

### **Federal Relations**

Indian federalism<sup>1</sup> has had a history of unique identity and it is distinct from several other classical federal states like the US, Swiss, Australia and Canada. The implications of federalism have been pragmatic in various federal countries. Hence, it becomes imperative to ensure clear-cut division of powers between the two governments, central and state. As a

follow-up of colonial legacy, federal features have been binding on the governance in the country. Conversely, in the aftermath of partition of Indian sub-continent into India and Pakistan, centralizing tendencies have been on the rise in both theory and practice of our constitution. Accordingly, the constitution of India is a mixture of federal and unitary features<sup>2</sup>. Over the years, changing political and economic circumstances have acclimatized the prospects of Indian federalism. Even the judicial interpretations of the constitutional provisions had also shaped and reshaped it to a great extent. Academically, any reading of Indian federalism enables one to understand the changing Centre-state relations due to its various manifestations at different points of time. Although the constitutional provisions with regard to federal relations between the Centre and states remain constant, its political use had continually altered the applied federal relationship. Thus, practical federalism on account of political manipulation by various regimes at the Centre upset the mutual relations. Started with political dimension of the relations, administrative and economic relations have also undergone major fluctuations.

In consequence, the very federal spirit that bonded the mutual relations had caused to the conflicts among various parties and thereby upset the weighing scale in favor of ruling parties at the Centre. For, usually the central regimes enjoy maximum powers and functions, when compared with their counterparts in

the states. Constitutionally, such an unevenness of governing relationship has been justified in the country. In fact, DrB.R.Ambedkar was on record supporting a strong Union as it was inevitable, as part of his Constituent Assembly debates in 1948-49. Noticeably, the kind of federalism that was incorporated into the Indian political system could scarcely be questioned. Yet there were some states being ruled by the non-congress parties like the CPI in Kerala, DMK in Tamilnadu, Akalidal in Punjab that had raised their voice way back in 1950s and 60s itself.

For instance, the Rajamannar Committee<sup>3</sup> had proposed a number of changes that were intended to increase the powers of the states in respect of planning, finance, taxation and judiciary. The sum and substance of that report was in favor of granting more autonomy for the states, in consistent with the unity and integrity of the country. There were many such efforts towards that end by some non-congress parties and regimes. Yet, nothing progressive materialized thereafter. Given the emerging challenges on the subject, the Indira Gandhi regime at the Centre had appointed the Justice R.S.Sarkaria commission<sup>4</sup> to look into the institutional grievances of the non-congress regimes. Although the commission had undertaken a series of consultations with the major stakeholders, posturing changes were proposed in the relations. Later on, the Sarkaria commission<sup>5</sup> has offered some moderate recommendations whereby the mutual relations could be balanced to

some extent. However, such positive recommendations were hardly considered, leave alone implemented so far.

### **Financial Matters**

Of late, there have been tangible changes in the institutional design of Indian federalism in the last few years. This is more so in the case of its practice on financial relations between the states and the center. The main problem is a disparity between revenue and expenditure dimensions in the case of states. Usually, the state governments implement programmes related to health, education and other public services, but unable to collect their revenue from these public services. Possible way out for the central government would be to allocate more revenues to the states and also permit them to collect more revenue in areas like service tax, for instance. More revenue could be internally generated within states, and the Centre can transfer more money to the states. But the central government does not do this. Along with the streamlining of several centrally sponsored schemes, this move recognized the demand of state governments to have more autonomy over their spending decisions. It constituted a substantial increase in the untied funds that the states would receive from New Delhi.

Perhaps, it is the financial dimension that affected the Centre-state relations the most in the 1980s and 90s. Keeping the political differences in view, the governments at the Centre used to ill-treat some states, while favoring the other

states. The other major institutional innovation related to federalism was the abolition of the Planning Commission in the recent past. For, the Planning commission was used and abused, as the case may be, in terms of providing funds and packages to the concerned states. In fact, the planning commission has taken away much of the autonomy of the states in respect of finance. While the Finance commission remained an ideal body of *dejure* nature, the Planning commission was operating as the *defacto* agency of the central government.

### **NITI Aayog**

Experiencing the discriminatory attitude of the Planning commission, during his tenure as Gujarat Chief minister, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi acted upon it at once in 2014. Thus, the Planning commission was replaced with a new body, NITI Aayog, as pronounced in his Independence Day speech<sup>6</sup>. The NITI Aayog, is expected to oversee a transition from a top-down, Centre-to-state policy flow towards an open cooperative partnership between the two. Yet, there are signs that in a number of fields that the Centre-state relations were becoming more and more politicized in ways that undermined the goal of cooperative federalism. This also raises questions about how far the Aayog is able to function as an impartial platform for promoting the Centre-state dialogue and policy discussion. Meanwhile, in recent times, two important developments are perceived in the Centre-state financial

relations, which have implications for State Governments. These include:

- Higher tax devolutions under the Fourteenth Finance Commission(FFC)<sup>7</sup>
- Restructuring of the Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS)<sup>8</sup>

Thus, there is an expectation of huge increase when compared to the previous Finance Commissions' recommendations. The main idea of the FFC is to reduce central assistance to state plans as a whole and thereby to offer greater devolution of taxes. In recommending a horizontal distribution, the FFC has used broad parameters of the population figures, income distance, forest cover, and area. Similarly, there is a growing concern among several states on the implementation of the CSSs. In the light of FFC recommendations, the NITI Aayog has constituted a sub-group of Chief Ministers on 'Rationalization of Centrally Sponsored Schemes' in March 2015, which submitted its report in October 2015. Incidentally, following the horizontal distribution criteria, the share of Telangana, for instance, is worked out to be 2.44% of total tax devolutions. The benefit of increase in tax devolution to states from 32 to 42% of the divisible pool of central tax revenue recommended by the FFC has largely avoided the state of Telangana<sup>9</sup>. The reduction in the share of the state by 0.456 percent has reduced the tax devolution<sup>10</sup> to it by Rs.2,389 crore in 2015-16. And, the increase in transfers to the state is far below the average of all states. On a per capita basis, the increase

in tax-devolution in 2015-16 is Rs.858, as compared with an all-India average of Rs.1564. Apparently, the decreased tax devolution to Telangana is mainly due to the following factors<sup>11</sup>:

- Per Capita Income occupies 50% weightage in deciding the state share
- Telangana's per capita income is considerably higher than the national average. Reduced allocation has increased the resource crunch for the state.

### **Goods and Services Tax**

As part of streamlining the economic arrangements in India, the present regime at the Centre has launched several national level economic reforms. More significant of these is the passage of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Act recently. The configuration of indirect taxation by central and state governments and the elimination of inter-state tariff barriers are major steps towards achieving a supposed common market in the country. This step has required the Centre and states to pool their power to pursue shared objectives. Incidentally, the states cannot have veto rights on the GST Council that governs the operations of the new tax regime. And, they will have to form alliances with the central government to get requisite amendments passed. It is time to engage in a deeper debate about Centre-state relations and the operation of federalism, lest the states like Telangana would be in the receiving end. Yet, the state was ahead of many states, including the BJP-ruled, in getting the GST Bill passed on war

footing on Sunday (April 16, 2017), notwithstanding many harmful consequences of the Act which affect the state once it will be implemented from July 1, 2017.

### **Demonetization**

Of late, one observes the entry of 'Demonetization' in the political vocabulary of Centre-state relations. Notwithstanding its multiple implications in the governance domain, the process of demonetization has polarized the political parties afresh. Its introduction, if not execution, has been applauded by the Chief Ministers of both BJP and non-BJP ruled States alike. These included Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan, Odisha and Telangana, though some have criticized its sudden execution and potential to hit state revenues. Many states complained that the means by which demonetisation was carried out had certainly violated the spirit of cooperative federalism. Various states have grumbled about the probable smash to their revenues caused by it. Whereas, the political effect of demonetisation has made Centre-state relations a much sensitive issue. Consequently, the Centre-state relations became a key theme around which the non-NDA opposition seems to be united. A growing number of states, especially those ruled by non-NDA parties are reluctant to play along. Some of the more vocal ones, like West Bengal and Delhi have long proved a thorn on the side of central government. In fact, their chief ministers had organized series of protest

rallies in Delhi and elsewhere. And now, it is apparent that partisan divisions between the NDA and non-NDA ruled states appear to eclipse the vision of cooperative federalism as was proposed by the Modi regime.

### **Political Relationship**

Of all the relations that constantly transformed the course of Centre-state relationship in the country was the issue of politics of the two governments. Political relations seem to have dominated the overall relationship at any point of time. Suffice it to cite the case of how the Congress-led regimes were infringing upon the powers and functions of various state governments that were run by the non-congress parties for decades since Independence. Similar examples can be given even when the non-congress parties like the Janata, Janata Dal and the BJP that ruled at the Centre and how they had reciprocated to the gestures of congress and other regimes in states. Irrespective of the institutional and ideological differences, political relations between the two governments have always been marked by the acrimonious tussle.

Viewed in this perspective, political relations between the BJP-led NDA regime at the Centre and the TRS-led Telangana state government cannot be any different. But, both the parties since positioned on the same point of political-ideological spectrum in the country, it was expected to be a normal relationship. Yet, respective electoral considerations in the state seem to have kept them apart. Thus,

both the parties exhibited political divergence at times on some local issues. Starting with the party-to-party divergence being watched, there emerged regime-to-regime differences in the state over a period of time. The TRS regime was accused of adopting an aggressive approach *abinitio*. The BJP national leadership<sup>12</sup> had appealed to the TRS regime to be more proactive so that there could be better relations between the two regimes. In other words, the political differences had certainly dominated over the other relations.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi who was once a CM himself could have done his bit to patch-up the Centre-state ties. Similarly, Modi was expected to have facilitated a platform where states could learn from each other's success. Perhaps, the Inter State Council (ISC) could be one such useful platform. Modi<sup>13</sup> observed that the ISC was the most significant platform for strengthening the Centre-state and inter-state relations in the country. Further, during the meeting, it was decided that the recommendations of the commission on Centre-State relations headed by ex-Chief Justice of India MM Punchhi (2006) would be placed before the council. On the same occasion, Home Minister Rajnath Singh also focused on the importance of cooperative federalism and supposed that the central government was committed to the ideal of Centre-state cooperation. And, 'In the past two years, our main aim has been to promote federalism, be it cooperative federalism or competitive federalism,' he said.

'Constitution of NITI Aayog after abolishing the Planning Commission was also a step forward in the same direction,' the Home Minister said, adding that with NITI Aayog coming into being the concept of 'one size fits all' followed by the Planning Commission has been done away with<sup>14</sup>.

### **Case of Telangana**

As a new state of the Indian Union, the Telangana has had a series of difficulties being faced in different arenas of development. More than anything else, the T-state since carved out of the united Andhra Pradesh, on the eve of 16<sup>th</sup> General Elections, had to emerge self-sufficient in several respects. Since the process of bifurcation of the state and its resources was incomplete, the state of Telangana was dependent upon the Union government. For, issues like the distribution of resources, employees and institutions are still kept in pendency. Besides, the ruling party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh being an electoral/coalition ally of the NDA regime in the state and Delhi, no amount of TRS influence on the central government had impact. While taking the TDP on at home and in Delhi, the TRS regime had almost irritated the NDA regime on numerous occasions. In fact, one can trace the origins of such indifferent attitude towards the Telangana movement and its state formation thereafter. Ever since the national BJP leadership was tied up with the TDP in Andhra Pradesh, one could imagine its detrimental repercussions on the TRS in

Telangana state. More specifically, it was alleged that prejudiced by Chandra Babu Naidu of the TDP, Narendra Modi became inaccessible to the TRS regime. Conceivably, the Modi wave<sup>15</sup> that swayed the electorate in numerous states including that of Andhra Pradesh did not create any electoral impact in the 2014 elections in Telangana, as the BJP could win just one Lok Sabha seat in Secunderabad, albeit a traditional BJP seat!

In any case, when he became the Prime Minister, Modi himself was unenthusiastic to visit the new state for over two years since the inception of the Telangana state. At last, the Prime minister was there for a couple of hours only on an occasion to inaugurate a few developmental projects. And, his halfhearted attitude towards the new state and its government speaks volumes on the subject. It was also remarked that even the NDA regime and its Union Ministers hardly favored the Telangana state and its government on governance issues, leave alone developmental projects. At one stage, the state government had to file a Public Interest Litigation against the union government in the Supreme Court as there was hardly any response to its 23 letters seeking clearance of the pending projects in the state<sup>16</sup>. This sort of biased approach on the part of the union regime towards the Telangana state cannot but be dismissed as an inadvertent fault. It is reported that both the regimes had consistently maintained their political positions along reverse directions on several occasions and for a long period.

Lot of water has flown in the Krishna and Godavari rivers during the period. Due to testified cold war between the union and the Telangana state regimes, several developmental projects seemed to be kept in abeyance. But, its counterpart in Andhra Pradesh was ostensibly getting a megabrother treatment in the allocation of projects and funds in the initial years. AP's Polavaram multi-purpose irrigation project is case in point. However, the TRS-NDA relations appeared so strained that even both the governments had to travel along parallel lines. It looked as if there was hardly any meeting point between these regimes.

Obviously, there appeared some standstill in their mutual relationship. Had such standoff continued then the Telangana state would possibly have cut an apologetic figure on domestic front leading to its disastrous implications. Reportedly, the Telangana state and its leadership was in no way receiving any favorable response from the Centre. For instance, the Praanahita-Chevella irrigation project that was conceived as a national project was not undertaken in Telangana due to the alleged non-supportive attitude of the Union government. Similarly, the issue of bifurcation of the state High Court was incomplete despite the fact that the Telangana government's pursuit was widely known in the state and outside. Interestingly, the Union response on this issue was identical with that of the AP government. Even in the case of funding of state budgets, the union government's alleged step motherly attitude towards

Telangana is quite visible. While the Andhra regime reportedly snatched a large quantum of funds towards its new projects and establishing national-level institutions, the Telangana regime has attributed it to the biased stand of the Centre.

Evidently, this kind of indifferent attitude towards the Telangana regime certainly exposed the reported partiality of the union government. Obviously, the state government had to pay heavy price in terms of pendency of several schemes and projects at the Centre. What irritated the TRS leadership more was the Centre's supposed lenient approach towards its counterpart in AP. Viewed in this perspective, the TRS regime cannot but review its political relations with that of the BJP. And thus it became more pragmatic only to emerge a camp follower of the ruling regime at the Centre. Although it is hardly convincing and digestible to the common masses in the state, the leadership seemed to have adopted it. In consequence, the party leadership, particularly the CM, KCR was on record flattering the PM and his policies day in and day out. Clear signals were given to its leaders and cadres so as to maintain a cordial relationship with the union leadership. Anticipating an earnest response from the union government, the state government and its various functionaries at home and in Delhi had sustained their soft stance towards the former. Thus, the TRS leadership and its MPs were trying to show the Centre a rosy picture about issues and concerns that smacked of its changing political landscape.

Given the uneven power relationship between the Centre and the states, the states hardly have any other option but of bargaining on political differences with the central government. Despite being faced with such a step-motherly attitude from the Centre, the state government had tried to contain its antagonism and joined the bandwagon of the ruling party. For, half of the tenure is almost exhausted getting polemical. In a fixed and time-bound governance schedule, no state government can defer its developmental activities beyond five years. Thus, the volte-face by the ruling TRS regime in the state was obvious. Of course, the local regime looked wary in projecting its neutral image for quite some time. While keeping closer relations with the Union government and its national leadership, the Telangana regime was distancing itself from the local unit of the BJP. At times, mutual criticisms were being bartered, not on national issues, but on some local issues and problems. At one level, the TRS leadership was dancing to the tunes of the Prime Minister, at the other level, an impression of its confining to government realm was apparent. In any case, this sort of dual role of the TRS regime was not to the liking of its rank and file to any extent. Although the local regime was trying to clarify the doubts of collaboration with the national leadership, critics could hardly be quietened.

Ultimately, the TRS leadership was found echoing the political line of the ruling regime at the Centre even on some



controversial issues within the parliament and outside. For instance, the notorious issue of Demonetization that had almost polarized the political parties and state governments in the recent past. Even the state units of the ruling regime were alarmed at justifying such unpopular move. But, the parties like TRS that was in opposition camp since 2014 elections was found to be positioned in the company of the Prime Minister. Of all these Demonetisation protagonists who appeared topmost were KCR and his regime that stood by the Modi regime consistently. This sort of U-turn on the part of a non-NDA state had exposed the hollow claims of TRS and its fight against the NDA leadership. But, the effect has been inconsistent as the TRS regime had employed a 'hide and seek' strategy. At times, the Telangana government that was swayed by the central regime, oblivious of any reverse setbacks, became a key protagonist of the central government. At other times, the TRS appeared to be fighting the BJP within the state politically, if not otherwise. Either way, Centre-state relations in Telangana can hardly be expected to stabilize if not improve in the days to come.

To conclude, in the ultimate analysis, union-state relations depend very partly on legal, administrative and financial arrangement, but actually on political relationship. And, they largely depend on only human behavior at different levels of governments. In other words, it is not governmental institutions per se, but those individuals who man such institutions that

could be held accountable for the abnormalities in the relations between the Centre and the states. Keeping their political interests in view the individuals may be aggravating the regime conflicts. Viewed in this perspective, any attempt to find fault with the existing institutions, rather than with those who run such institutions, seems to be an alibi. And, their inability to run the institutions effectively cannot be let off at all. Perhaps the main problem stems from the politics of the Centre-state relations as was observed from numerous examples in the past. In fact, most of the problems in the Centre-state relationship are political.

In recent times, a number of states have complained that the way in which the policy was enacted violates the spirit of cooperative federalism about which Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken so often. For those critical of the centralizing instincts of the Modi government, demonetization among others presents an occasion to refocus debates on Centre-state relations. Yet, many regional/state parties seem to be continuing a pattern of Centre-state negotiating rather than building the new cross-state alliances that would act as a counterweight to the central government. Telangana regime is a case in point. In fact, the new state and its leadership had played their part in sustaining the fluid Centre-state relations so far. Besides, the Telangana regime since claimed to have had some open concerns that merited early settlement lest the state would have to face developmental snags, with or without the political compromise.

**Endnotes & References**

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- <sup>5</sup>Govt. of India, *Report of Commission on Centre-state Relations*, Vol.I&II, 1987.
- <sup>6</sup> *Times of India*, August 16, 2014.
- <sup>7</sup>As per the Article 280 of the Constitution of India.
- <sup>8</sup>Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) are floated by the Central Government falling either in the State or in Concurrent Lists of the Constitution while implemented through the State Governments.
- <sup>9</sup>The government of Telangana has suffered revenue loss on account of the reduction of its inter se share tax devolution from 2.893 percent in 2014-15 to 2.44 percent in the award period of the Fourteenth Finance Commission (2015-2020) and more so on account of reduction in plan transfers from 2015-16 onwards.
- <sup>10</sup>Tax devolution to States is budgeted at Rs.5,23,958 crore in the Central Budget for 2015-16. See *The Outlook* (English Magazine) July 25, 2016.
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## Mizoram: Post-Accord Issues and Challenges

Lallianchhunga\*

### Abstract

*The paper attempts to address the major issues of the post-accord Mizo society and the various challenges thereof. The signing of peace accord does not ensure peace dividend and lasting solution to problems that are pre-insurgency in nature. The paper seeks to explore the reasons for the non-recurrence of major conflicts in the state due to the presence of discontentment among the minority groups, such as Hmar in the north and Brus in the west. The paper also tries to analyse the emergence of human rights groups vis-à-vis the protection of the cherished values of the Mizo community. It then examines the factor responsible for the growing discontentment in the state and offers a solution for it.*

**Key Words:** Peace Accord, Discontentment, Human Rights, Mizo Society, Mizoram, Community, Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA).

Mizoram, now one of the eight Sisters' state of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura, was least known in pre-independence period. It was not until 1947 that Mizoram could be said to have been firmly integrated, politically and administratively, with the rest of newly independent India. The difficult geographical terrain of the region was one of the reasons for its long isolation from the mainstream. The isolation of the state was such that, even today, Indians from other states are treated as foreigners/strangers by the common village folks in several parts of Mizoram. Being a late comer in the national mainstream, it has its own legacy of emotional and

psychological ambivalence in its relationship with the rest of India, though such a feeling is not uniformly prevalent throughout Mizoram after 30 years of peace and moreover, is increasingly feeble with the passage of time.

The State of Mizoram is now 30 years old. It came into being as a separate state on 20<sup>th</sup> Feb., 1987 following the signing of Peace Accord<sup>1</sup> on 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1986 after an arduous struggle of insurgency of two decades. Since then Mizoram exudes a semblance of peace reflecting a testament of the peoples' love for peace. It is the only peace accord that the Union Government has signed that has stood the test of time in the North-eastern

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region. However, the fact that peace in Mizoram has provided stability and development is a matter to be reckoned with though, there are now questions regarding the sustainability of peace through development.

### **The Peace Accord and Its Aftermath**

One of the most deserving of considerations in reasoning about the peace accord in India is Mizoram. The causes of insurgency and the accord itself in the state still attract scholars, not only in Mizoram, but also scholars in the north east and the national mainstream even after three decades of the signing of the accord. The root causes of the Mizo insurgency were many: unsettlement of the future of Mizoram from a meaningful political platform in an amicably manner, the nature of civil administration under the District Council, apathetic treatment of the Mizo District before and during the Mautam<sup>2</sup> famine by the Assam Government and Laldenga's personal grievances against District Council authorities at that time etc.

The declaration of independence by the MNF on March 1, 1966 was preceded by an attempt to revive the dying spirit of Mizo nationalism through various activities by the MNF party and submission of memorandum to the Prime Minister of India on October 30, 1965. Like other insurgent groups in the north east, the MNF also depended on the use of violent means to strike terror against supporters of government. Although their violent tactics were further responsible for

the coming of deep schism within the Mizo community, but in a way, it contributed in strengthening the hands of those who were involved for the return of tranquillity in the state. Anyway, the road to peace was a long journey and hard struggle for those who were actively drawn in for the restoration of normalcy in the state. There was no doubt that the church was the first social institution which started to intervene between the Gov't of India and the MNF insurgents. The involvement of political leaders, prominent citizens, and church leaders coupled with the peoples' aspiration toward ending of insurgency in the state was responsible for the signing of accord between the Congress (I) Party and the MNF on June 25<sup>th</sup> 1986 on the one hand and Gov't of India and MNF on June 30<sup>th</sup> 1986 on the other.

This accord is hailed as the most lasting peace accord ever signed by the Indian Government with any insurgent group in the country, making Mizoram the most peaceful state in India. Although, numerous scholarly works have already been written about dealing with the causes of insurgency in Mizoram, scholars often tend to ignore the factors that contribute to the near total absence of major conflicts in the state. This is mainly due to the non-identification of the various factors that work for the prevalence of peaceful atmosphere thereby preventing the recurrence of conflicts in the state.

The Peace Accord, apart from granting Statehood to Mizoram, also seeks

to protect the religious or social practices, customary law or procedure, civil and criminal justice system on the basis of Mizo customary law and ownership and transfer of land of the Mizo. The accord has provided for review and codification of the existing customs, practices, laws or other usages of the Mizo by the state government. The rights and privileges being enjoyed by the minorities in Mizoram, as envisaged in the Indian Constitution, are supposed to be preserved and protected along with their social and economic advancement. Besides, the accord promises not to amend or repeal the existing Inner Line Regulations without consulting the State Government. Moreover, conduct of border trade in locally produced or grown agricultural commodities is another important feature of the Mizo peace accord. Apart from these, proposal for the establishment of a separate University was put in the hands of the State Government; being an ambiguous term *a separate University* was, after much public discussion and pressure, the state government gave the nod for a central University<sup>3</sup>. Creation of a separate High Court for Mizoram lies with the State Government, if it so desire, which is still kept in abeyance.

A closer analysis of the Peace Accord points to the fact that more responsibilities are put on the shoulder of the State Government than in the hands of the Central Government with regard to the maintenance of peace and tranquility, and the security of the people. Conferment of statehood to the Union Territory of

Mizoram and transfer of resources to the new state for development and relief and rehabilitation of the overground personnel were, no doubt, a Herculean task on the part of the Central Government as it involved numerous responsibilities, but it was successfully achieved. It is now opined that the Central Government has completed its duties as is stated in the Memorandum of Settlement, although there may be some exception relating to payment of compensation in respect of damage to crops, buildings destroyed/damaged during disturbance in the state and rental charges of buildings and lands occupied by the Security Forces.

When one examines the Memorandum of Settlement signed by the Gov't of India and MNF after thirty years of its operation, there are many unsolved puzzles that could be a breeding ground for the rise of dissidents and to justify their undemocratic activities. One of these is the unsolved boundary dispute with the state of Assam<sup>4</sup>, which caused lots of trouble for the Gov't of Mizoram as it is always a politically charged issue. Another relates to the preservation and protection of the rights and privileges of the Minorities coupled with their social and economic development. It may be mentioned, in this connection, that soon after the signing of peace accord in 1986, Hmar People's Convention (HPC) started an armed struggle for their social, economic, cultural and educational development. Although an accord was signed between HPC and the Gov't of Mizoram on July 27, 1994, it could not

provide lasting and amicable solution to their problems. Besides, Reang (Bru) community faced mass exodus in the later part of 1997 and solution to their problems is still a far cry even after 20 years of hardship and suffering. If minority communities' social and economic developments are not ensured properly, it amounts to violation of the accord itself thereby encouraging the minority communities to fight for their own social, cultural and economic advancement in an undemocratic means which could jeopardize the existing peace in the state. Rehabilitation of former underground personnel is still a headache for the state government. The slow pace with regard to the setting up of a separate High Court for Mizoram could also disrupt the peaceful atmosphere in the State as there is every chance of violating individual and community rights in the absence of independent judiciary.

### **Challenges of Human Rights**

The feeling of a certain uniqueness marking the state of Mizoram from the rest of India is more than matched by a sense of social autonomy. Its people are traditionally an atomized group and the society is characterized, more than anything else, by a nearly total absence of social intercourse with members of other community for a very long time, though it is changing very fast as the society has been more and more exposed to the rest of the country. Yet, it still tries to maintain its own uniqueness and identity in certain areas, of which issues on human rights is

one of them where even laws find it hard to impregnate the social autonomy. Therefore, it is very necessary to analyse how the maintenance of social harmony comes into conflict with the promotion of individual human rights in the state, how the Non-governmental Organisations and Church leaders interpret human rights in the context of Mizo society, and how human rights activists in the state try to resolve clash between individual human rights and community rights.

In recent years, a hot debate has been triggered in the Mizo society regarding the promotion of human rights, whether it should take precedence over the civil society or vice-versa. This has happened at a time when the watchdogs of human rights and the so-called defenders of Mizo Civil Society seem to cross paths. The issue of the relationship between human rights and civil society has assumed great significance in the context of the transition of the Mizo society from tradition to modernity. In fact, the link between human rights and civil society is questioned when one group accused the other of unleashing a 'reign of terror' unmindful of human rights and dignity in the name of cleansing the Mizo society.

A serious controversial issue of human rights in Mizoram is the validity, nature and form of community vigilante organized by local Village Defence Party (VDP)/Joint Action Committee (JAC) in collaboration with police personnel. The role of local community is crucial in checking crimes due to the relative

strength of the communitarian relations at the grassroots level. The members of Village Council/ Local Council are also directly involved in issues of public order and crime fighting because their reputation depends on their effort to control them. Community policing has singlehandedly been done by local VDP/JAC, and many a time it involved in violating and abusing individual human rights against the principles of human rights regime. Sometimes after being assaulted, alleged offenders are handed over to the police.

Therefore, one of the most important human rights issues in Mizoram is the debate between Community rights and individual human rights. This emerged from the argument that ‘what characterizes western societies is that they tend to put rights and privacy first, whereas collectivist societies tend to value harmony and duty’. The Mizo society is a close-knit society, where individual life has been secondary to community life for many years, and it is this community life that has shaped and re-shaped Mizo identity for many generations. Even after the exposure of this society to the outside world, many members still have a very strong inclination towards community life. This community life has been built on the premise of ‘traditional Mizo value’<sup>5</sup>, which is expressed in the various roles they are being played by the members within the social structures and the way these social structures are so deeply structured. However, when a society is exposed more and more to the outside, new ideas and knowledge began to step

in, which shape and mould (perhaps challenge) the values cherished by the members of the society; and, this has naturally led to the reshaping of their world view system.

In Mizoram, the war on drugs and liquor is blamed for the increasing NGOs’ repression, adding to the woes of people already worn down by poverty. In their effort to reduce the supply line, they are rolling back the rule of law, taking their cue from the parent body’s war on drugs and illicit liquor. The Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA)<sup>6</sup> as the unrivalled hyper-power also sets the tone for governmental behavior, and is accused of trying to ‘subcontract torture’. When the most powerful NGO in the state thumbs its nose at the rule of law and human rights, it naturally grants license to others to commit abuse with great impunity. Apart from that, the insensitivity of the government towards human rights abuse by verbally supporting and defending such activities of NGOs maintain the existence of harmonious interests between government and such voluntary, civil association in Mizoram. What begins as an endorsement of the value of community and social harmony ends in an assertion of the supreme status of the NGOs regime and its leaders. In view of this, there is a need to maintain a degree of separation between the government and civil society that can provide a public space for the flourishing of Mizo community.

If the claim that human rights emerge in the context of particular social,

economic, cultural and political conditions is correct, the circumstances that prompted the institutionalization of human rights in the West may not exist in Mizoram, but the Mizo society has been experiencing tremendous changes to drive the state in the direction of imbibing a robust human rights regime. The importance of maintaining core identity and the community in Mizo Society is incompatible with the primacy of the individual, upon which the Western notion of human rights rests. The relationship between individuals and community, coupled with the primacy of 'traditional Mizo values' constitutes the key difference between Mizo society and Western society. Increasing rate of all types of crime and the fear of social breakdown can be cited as evidence that bond of community and cooperation within community can be an effective instrument in checking this unwanted trend in the Mizo society. However, identification of those societal problems that can jeopardize social harmony and integrity of Mizo community should be of central importance before moving too far from global human rights regime.

### **Culture of Discontentment**

There are important groups in the Mizo society like the Church, the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and other prominent members of civil society that are playing a crucial role in sustaining peace in the State; in the last couple of years, however, there seems to be a growing sense of discontent among the

people, and this begins to affect governance of the State.

The process of assimilation of minor tribal groups like the Chakmas and Brus within the State of Mizoram seems to have run into difficulty due to numerous reasons. Despite the efforts of the State and Central governments in bringing back the Bru refugees, who had fled home to Tripura during the disturbances in the late nineties, there are still problems regarding their re-settlement in the State. Opening of polling booths in the Bru refugee camps in Tripura by the Election Commission of India during elections to the Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha in Mizoram has not gone down well with groups in civil society. 'If they (the Brus) want to cast their votes, let them do so inside Mizoram' is the common refrain. Similarly, even though the Chakmas have their won Autonomous Council in the State, the majority of Mizo are not yet ready to treat them as 'sons of the soil'.

The political scene is heavily tilted in favour of the Congress party. The ruling Congress party bagged 34 out of 40 seats in the State legislature, an increase from 32 in the previous elections held in 2008. This thumping majority seems to have sealed the fate of other minor political parties like the Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP) and Mizoram People's Conference (MPC), at least in the foreseeable future. The largest opposition party could manage to win only four out of forty seats. Against this political backdrop, the people are now expecting miracles from the political elites – miracles



that will solve myriad problems such as bad roads, scarcity of daily necessities like domestic gas, insufficient power supply, etc.

### **Conclusion**

The Mizo society is now at a crossroad. Political stability and peace do not necessarily translate into economic development. The present ruling party may have won a majority of seats in the Assembly, yet there has been no major economic progress. There are rising expectations on the part of the people, but the government hasn't quite been able to meet their growing aspirations. The gap between the two is creating deep chasms in the society. The aspiration for growth

and development has happened concurrently with the rise of political consciousness among the people. Meanwhile, the near total absence of economic growth seems to have encouraged many people to take the easy but illegal way out. Drug use and smuggling are on the rise, with people looking for quick financial gains within a short span of time. Some State Government officials have also been booked for their alleged involvement. Therefore, what is most needed in Mizoram is very vibrant civil society organizations that are able to effectively address the growing democratic deficit in the state.

### **Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> The official title is Memorandum of Settlement. This so called accord could never be acceptable to some people since, as they said, it is a memorandum signed between the insurgent group, MNF and the Gov't of India for the settlement of the overground MNF personnel who once fought for independence.
- <sup>2</sup> It refers to the flowering of bamboo, during which there is an increase in rat population and this leads to massive destruction of crops and often results in famine. It is a cyclic ecological phenomenon that occurs every half century in the state of Mizoram and its adjoining areas.
- <sup>3</sup> Mizoram University, a Central University was established by an Act of Parliament in 2000. It started functioning since July 2, 2001.
- <sup>4</sup> Mizoram State Boundary Committee with C.Chawngkunga, former Minister as its Chairman was formed in March, 2012 to resolve the boundary disputes with neighbouring Assam and Tripura. In the monsoon session of the State Legislative Assembly in July, 2014, replying to a query from Lalruatkima of the opposition Mizo National Front (MNF), Land Revenue and Settlement Minister R Romawia said that the state government's accepted boundary with neighbouring Assam was the border accepted in the treaty signed between the then Mizo chief Suakpuilala and the British government representatives in 1875.

<sup>5</sup> Many Asian Scholars and Government leaders talked about ‘Asian Values’ that cherished ‘Order and Discipline’ as opposed to ‘Western Value’. Here, ‘traditional Mizo Values’ simply refers to ‘the willingness to do community services by members of the Mizo society’.

The idea of society, according to Mizo, is a community of trust rather than merely a system of adversarial relationships, and that human beings are duty-bound to respect their family and society.

Many members of local NGO (YMA) and VDP/JAC whom I interviewed testified that their involvements in such activities are due to their willingness to serve their community, in spite of their busy time.

<sup>6</sup> The Young Mizo Association is the largest and most comprehensive non-governmental organization, established on 15<sup>th</sup> June, 1935 under the auspices of the then Christian Missionaries and the pioneer Mizo Christians in Mizoram. Initially, it was called ‘Young Lushai Association’ but later changed into ‘Young Mizo Association’ in October, 1947. All the branches of YMA, within Mizoram and outside of the State are subjected to the Central YMA (CYMA) which has its headquarters at Aizawl, Mizoram.

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## Components of Peacebuilding: Conflict Resolution through Political, Social and Economic Development with Reference to Northeast India

Lalnundika Hnamte\*

### Abstract

*Peacebuilding is one of the approaches towards conflict resolution in peace and conflict studies. It focuses on political, economic and social development to resolve conflicts through the establishment of legal and institutional frameworks which are expected to manage internal conflicts so that there may be sustainable peace. Northeast India has been a region of conflicts and insurgencies since India's independence in 1947. Some of the Government of India's approaches for resolution of conflicts in the region such as reorganization of states, creation of regional institutions like the North Eastern Council and special administrative provisions such as the Sixth Schedule may be categorized as peacebuilding. This paper seeks to identify and study the contributions of the government's peacebuilding initiatives for conflict resolution in Northeast India.*

**Keywords:** Peacebuilding, Conflict Resolution, Northeast India, Development, Peace

The term "Peacebuilding" first emerged in 1976 through the work of Johan Galtung in *Three Approaches to Peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking and Peacebuilding*. In his words, "The mechanisms that peace is based on should be built into the structure and be present as a reservoir for the system itself to draw up... More specifically, structures must be found that remove causes of wars and offer alternatives to war in situations where wars might occur."<sup>1</sup> From the words of Galtung, peacebuilding is necessarily the establishment of peace mechanisms or structures in the state that will manage itself to create favourable conditions for peace and remove the causes and roots of conflicts. The peace mechanisms or

structures, in the Indian context, may comprise the government both at the centre and the states, an autonomous government within a state, other decentralized governments and institutions such as the North Eastern Council and the Ministry of DoNER. The favourable conditions for peace may include political, economic and social development as most of the armed conflicts in Northeast India find its roots in the claim for the right to rule coupled with economic deprivation and social oppression.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the then UN Secretary-General published *An Agenda for Peace* in June 1992 which describes

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the role of the United Nations for international peace and security. The report described interconnected methods of conflict resolution for the maintenance of peace and security in the post-cold war context. They are:<sup>2</sup>

- Preventive diplomacy: It is the action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of conflicts.
- Peacemaking: It is the action to bring conflicting parties to agreement through peaceful means. The agreement may be manifested in the form of peace accords.
- Peacekeeping: It is the action of deployment of peacekeeping forces in the field of conflict with the consent of the parties concerned. The purpose of peacekeeping is to create conditions for both the prevention of conflict and the making of peace.
- Peacebuilding: It employs building and rebuilding of institutions and infrastructures of states torn by conflicts; and building bonds of peaceful mutual benefit.

The components of peacebuilding may be divided into establishment or strengthening of political institutions, economic development and social development. There are overlappings in the functions of the three components of peacebuilding. Establishment of an institution may have economic and social impact but at the same time economic and social development may take place outside the institution.

One of the most important components of peacebuilding is development and strengthening of political institutions. In this respect, the award of autonomous governments under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India; the Northeastern Areas (Reorganization) Act, 1971; and the award of Statehood to Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh in 1987 comprise the Government of India's efforts to include, accommodate and integrate the Northeast region into the Indian Union. The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution enumerated in Articles 244(2) and 275(1) was a pre-accord peacebuilding initiative by the Constituent Assembly. It was adopted in 1952 and provides special provisions for the administration of Tribal Areas in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. It creates autonomous governments which have a certain degree of executive, legislative, financial and judicial powers. The 'tribal areas' specified in Paragraph 20 of the Sixth Schedule are:

**Part I**

- 1) The North Cachar Hills District
- 2) The Karbi Anglong District
- 3) The Bodoland Territorial Area District

**Part II**

- 1) Khasi Hills District
- 2) Jaintia Hills District
- 3) The Garo Hills District

**Part IIA**

- Tripura Tribal Areas District

### **Part III**

- 1) The Chakma District
- 2) The Lai District
- 3) The Mara District

It may be noted that the Sixth Schedule does not guarantee peace. To cite the case of Bodoland Territorial Council, it is the most powerful autonomous government established under the Sixth Schedule, however, this does not pacify the desires of the Bodos to have a separate state from Assam. On the other hand, the autonomous district councils of Mizoram have been pushing for amendment of the Sixth Schedule for the enlargement of their powers and functions in line with the Bodoland Territorial Council.

The enactment of the Northeast Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971, was another peacebuilding initiative of the Government of India. According to the Act, it created three new states, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura and the Union Territories of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram were created. For example, the creation of Union Territory of Mizoram on 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1972 strengthened the political institution of the Mizos. It had a 33 member Legislative Assembly (30 elected and three nominated) and one seat each in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. After 20 years of armed conflict, Mizoram state was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister,

Rajiv Gandhi on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1987 to become the 23<sup>rd</sup> Indian State with 40 member State Legislative Assembly. It also has one Member of Parliament each in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

As a consequence of the Northeast Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971, the North Eastern Council was also created in 1972 so that coordinated efforts of the new units may be geared towards balanced socio-economic development and filling the development gap with the rest of India. B.P. Singh, a senior Indian civil servant who held key positions both in the NER and the Indian Home Ministry, referred to this process as “twins born out of a new vision for the Northeast”.<sup>3</sup>

The NEC and the Ministry of DoNER are two important institutions that comprise the economic component of peacebuilding. The NEC was inaugurated on 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1972 by the North Eastern Council Act, 1971 for securing balanced and coordinated development and effecting coordination among the Northeastern States. The NEC, in its inauguration, was addressed by the Prime Minister as an advisory body and not a supervisory body.<sup>4</sup> However, the NEC acts as a planning and funding agency since the very beginning.

The Sector-Wise Release of Funds under NEC Plan during the 12th Five Year Plan (Rs in crores) is given in Table No.1 below:

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No.	Sectors	12th Plan Approved Outlay	Annual Plan (2012-13) Actual Expenditure	Annual Plan (2013-14) Actual Expenditure	Annual Plan (2014-15) Budget Estimate
1	Agriculture & Allied	425.99	77.34	81.98	104.67
2	Power Renewable Resources of Energy	1,135.98	66.5	73.65	74
3	Irrigation Flood Control & Watershed Management	227.2	36.19	45.84	33
4	Industries & Tourism	483.64	33.49	54.8	47.46
5	Transport & Communication	2,732.04	368.4	319.84	347.32
6	Medical & Health	454.39	45.92	26.81	50
7	Human Resource Development & Employment	454.39	76.83	69.7	72.93
8	Science & Technology	129.5	17.44	17.69	27.94
9	Information & Public Relations	56.8	8.89	7.05	9.63
10	Evaluation & Monitoring	8.07	1.76	0.69	3.05
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>6,108.00</b>	<b>732.76</b>	<b>698.05</b>	<b>770</b>

Source: NEC Secretariat, Shillong.<sup>5</sup>

The State-Wise NEC Fund Released for the members of the NEC are given in Table No.2 below: (2010-2012: Rs. in lakhs and 2012-2014: Rs. in Crores)

State	Rs. in Lakhs		Rs. in Crores	
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Arunachal	11,387.06	10,568.51	91.7	75.7
Assam	8,835.30	5,715.64	91.4	69.05
Manipur	4,613.78	4,481.67	52.55	91.06
Meghalaya	7,185.73	5,623.58	86.35	53.23
Mizoram	4,394.89	7,403.50	83.18	55.54
Nagaland	4,856.85	8,455.43	84	114.86
Sikkim	3,233.28	5,340.00	55.84	53.12
Tripura	4,209.70	5,275.44	37.99	81.37
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>48,716.59</b>	<b>52,863.77</b>	<b>583.01</b>	<b>593.93</b>

Source: Source: NEC Secretariat, Shillong.<sup>1</sup>

The above tables explain the role of the NEC as a funding agency. Table 1 shows the sector-wise release of funds by the NEC. One of the priority sectors as seen from the funding is transport and communication. Development in inter-state transport and communication infrastructure through road, railways and air open up markets, private investment and create employment opportunities for the youth of the region. The Look East Policy also necessitated this development.

The Look East/Act East Policy is one of India's foreign policies that strengthen economic peacebuilding for the Northeastern region though the sole purpose of the policy may be otherwise. The region is the only gateway to the eastern and the south eastern Asian countries such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand etc. Thus, the region holds an important strategic location and India cannot talk of the Look East/Act East Policy without its Northeast India. In India's pursuit of the Look East Policy, border trade agreement was signed with Myanmar on 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1994 which sanctions border trade to take place through two Land Custom Stations (LCSs) i.e. Moreh in Manipur and Zokhawthar in Mizoram, corresponding to Tamu and Rih in Myanmar respectively. It came into effect on 12<sup>th</sup> April, 1995. The agreement has served to fulfill the Mizo Accord that of 1986 which provided a provision for border trade in local produced or grown agriculture commodities under a scheme to be formulated by the Central

Government, subject to international arrangement with neighbouring countries.

The establishment of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER) comprising the eight northeastern states in September 2001, and its subsequent upgradation into a Ministry in May 2004, was another governance initiative that can be perceived as peacebuilding. As per the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961, the Second Schedule (Rule 3), the Ministry of DoNER has been allotted subjects such as: (i) matters relating to the planning, execution and monitoring of developmental schemes and projects of NER including those in the sectors of power, irrigation, roads and communications; (ii) Hill Area Development Programme in NER; (iii) Non-Lapsable Fund for NER; (iv) North Eastern Council (NEC); (v) North Eastern Development Finance Corporation (NEDFC); (vi) North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation Limited (NERAMAC); (vii) the Sikkim Mining Corporation Limited; (viii) North Eastern Handloom and Handicrafts Development Corporation (NEHHDC), Shillong; (ix) Road works financed in the whole or in part by the Central Government in the NER; (x) Planning of road and inland waterways transport in the NER.<sup>2</sup>

The Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR) was created during the Devegowda's United Front government in 1997-98 (operationalized in 1998-99). It is the accrual of the

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unspent balance of the mandatory 10% budgetary allocation of the Ministries/ Departments. The broad objectives of the NLCPR Scheme is to ensure speedy development of infrastructure by way of filling the existing infrastructural gaps (economic and social) in the region by making funds available from the pool.<sup>3</sup> To cite an example, Tuirial Hydro Electric Project (60 MW) in Mizoram, being implemented by North Eastern Electric Power Corporation, Ministry of Power has been partly funded under NLCPR-Central Scheme. So far, an amount of Rs. 97.94

crores has been released to Ministry of Power against Rs. 300 crore to be provided by Ministry of DoNER for the Project.<sup>4</sup> With the signing of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Accord in 2003 by the Government of India, the Government of Assam and the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), the Government of India is to provide financial assistance, BTC Package of Rs.100 crore per annum for a period of five years.<sup>5</sup> The table below shows the year-wise release of funds under NLCPR and BTC Package by DoNER:

State	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13 (Up to 28.02.13)	Total
Arunachal	152.89	152.17	194.33	98.21	770.65
Assam	107.49	168.61	122.46	177.87	639.03
Manipur	90.09	96.32	77.81	45.28	410.43
Meghalaya	76.72	58.42	88.28	79.56	378.63
Mizoram	19.91	73.73	59.64	79.62	198.04
Nagaland	102.94	98.43	136.28	54.93	513.16
Sikkim	22.91	61.04	45.88	92.1	241.2
Tripura	95.67	97.05	74.31	56.83	418.62
<b>TOTAL NLCPR</b>	<b>668.62</b>	<b>805.77</b>	<b>798.99</b>	<b>684.4</b>	<b>3569.76</b>
BTC Area Projects	3.15	50	50	11.16	270.18

Source: Press Information Bureau (Rupees in Crore)

Building or strengthening of political institutions and transfer of power therein creates a sense of ownership and therefore occupies an important position in peacebuilding in India. It also creates a sense of trust towards the Government of India. The creation of Mizoram as a result

of the peace accord between the Government of India and the Mizo National Front (MNF) has become a successful peacebuilding initiative and the State has seen 30 years of peace now. Thus, the guarantee of decentralization in India's federal framework needs to be



secured and protected. It is also evident that regions such as Manipur where political institutions are weak have remained the sources of tensions and conflicts as it does not fall under the Sixth Schedule. Institutions for governance such as the NEC and the Ministry of DoNER have offered development possibilities regional in character and have addressed the issues of connectivity, unemployment, lack of skilled labour and lack of opportunities.

Sustainable peace is not the absence of conflicts. Conflicts are inevitable and can occur anytime. One may look for a cost-effective peacebuilding in Northeast India but the situation is complex as the region is diverse in terms of economy, identity, culture and polity as well. The region had been detached from mainland India and from infrastructural development throughout the British rule. Development and integration of the region in the Indian Union takes time. The true essence of peacebuilding is to create peace mechanisms that will ensure political, social and economic development. In this context, sustainable development will also mean a system where political, social and economic development takes place and where the system is able to manage internal conflicts itself. (Source: Press Information Bureau).

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## A Study of Mizoram in Human Rights Perspectives

C. Lalhmanmawia\*

### Abstract

*Human Rights occupied central place in the Indian culture and heritage. The mind and ethos of the Indian right from ancient times reflects deep concern about the recognition and observance of human dignity and due respect of others' rights. The advent of foreigners into the Indian soil and consequent domination of the whole territory severely shattered the well established tradition of respect for human dignity. The matter became worsened during the Indian National Movement as a result of extreme steps taken by British to subdue the rising nationalism. When India got her independence in 1947, the lost cherished principles of human rights regained its due place in the newly framed Indian Constitution. Though not categorically mentioning the word Human Rights in the Indian Constitution, it was practically contained and elaborated in the form of Fundamental Rights under Part III of the Constitution. However, despite its clear expression and reflection of the human rights in the Constitution, the position of the Indian society has not improved nor come up to expectations. Sadly enough, proper enjoyment of rights enshrined in the Constitution is still a matter of distant dream. There is no significant improvement of the lot of downtrodden masses! The situation in Mizoram is not much better either. In fact, level of awareness or consciousness on the subject as a whole is comparatively low. People not only lack knowledge on the significance of Human rights but it appears that majority of the population simply negate human rights movement in the state. Studies made here to highlight various human rights provisions enshrined in the Indian constitution with an objective to bring out suggestions for making the Indian culture in general and Mizo culture in particular a human rights friendly society.*

**Keywords:** United Nations, Human Rights, Fundamental Rights Commission, Preamble, Third Generation Human Rights, Young Mizo Association (YMA).

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## Introduction

### Human Rights and the Indian Constitution

While the Indian Constitution was on the process of making, on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a historic document, 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights'. India being an original member of the UN, voted for the adoption of the Declaration.

The Declaration that contains comprehensive list of human rights was regarded as the first international standard of human rights. The Declaration exerted heavy influence upon the framers of various constitutions including India. Moreover, the framers of the Indian Constitution were fully aware about the need of guaranteeing basic human rights to all its citizens and therefore pledged to draw up a Constitution wherein Justice, Social, Economic and Political, Equality of status, of opportunity before the law, freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship, vocation, association and action, subject to law and public morality. Accordingly, in the Constitution of India, most of the human rights that are enshrined in the Declaration of 1948 are incorporated in the form of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principle of State Policy under Part III and Part IV respectively.

However, the Constitution of India is marked by its absence of the words 'human rights'. But this does not mean that the Indian Constitution does not

recognize or not given effect to human rights. It has been made enforceable under Chapter III (the Fundamental Rights). The Constitution, especially of Chapter III (The Fundamental Rights) that came into effective from 26<sup>th</sup> January 1950 is one of the most complex and detailed provisions which ensures and guarantees human rights to citizens as well as foreigners living in India.

The Preamble of the Indian Constitution is, as remarked by Thakur Dass Bhargawa, '*the most precious part of the Constitution, the soul and the key to the Constitution,*' and it firmly recognizes basic human necessities for the meaningful and dignified life.<sup>1</sup> The Preamble to the Constitution expresses aims and objectives of the Indian Constitution which reads as under:

"We, *the people of India*, having solemnly resolved to constitute *India* into a *Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic* and to secure to its citizens;

*Justice*, social, economic and political;

*Liberty* of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

*Equality* of status and opportunity; and to promote among them all;

*Fraternity*, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation.

In our Constituent Assembly, on this *twenty-sixth day of November 1949*, do hereby *Adopt, Enact* and to give to

ourselves this Constitution.” (The words, ‘Socialist’ ‘Secular’ and ‘Integrity’ were added to it by the 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment 1976 to the Constitution.)

It is clear from the above that the whole text of the Preamble ensures and guarantees basic human rights to all citizens. Certain basic ideals like Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity etc, which the framers of the Indian Constitution want to secure to all its citizens are in fact basic ideals of human rights.

The Fundamental Rights, which are contained in Part III of the Indian Constitution, are the reflection of the dignity of individuals and they are the basic rights of all people in the state. Rights of all human beings enlisted in this Part are fundamental and are justifiable. They are essential for human existence, as nicely put by Laski that: “*Rights are those conditions of social life without which no man can seek to be himself at his best*”. Hence the Fundamental Rights listed in Part III of the Constitution are necessary conditions for the fullest development of human personality and without them we can not live a meaningful and dignified life. In this sense, the Fundamental Rights of the Indian Constitution are the provisions of human rights.

Human Rights in its political and social dimensions contained in Fundamental Rights Chapter are as follows: -

1. Right to Equality. (*Articles.14, 15,16*)
2. Right to Freedoms, viz, (*Article. 19*)
  - (i) *Freedom of Speech and Expression,*
  - (ii) *Freedom to Assemble peacefully and without arms,*
  - (iii) *Freedom to form Associations or Union,*
  - (iv) *Freedom to move freely throughout the territory of India,*
  - (v) *Freedom to reside and Settle in any part of the territory of India, and*
  - (vi) *Freedom to practice any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade or business.*
2. Right to Life and Personal Liberty, (*Articles. 20,21,22*)
3. Right to Freedom of Religion, (*Articles. 25,26,27,28*)
4. Cultural and Educational Rights, (*Articles. 29,30*)
5. Right to Property. (The 44<sup>th</sup> Amendment has deleted this right and re-enacted it in Art. 300 A, as a constitutional right). (*Article.31*)
6. Right against Exploitation and (*Articles. 23,24*)
7. Right to Constitutional Remedies. (*Article. 32*)

It is clear from the above that rights listed in Chapter 3 of the Indian Constitution are the same with those guaranteed in the Charter of United

Nations as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Yet, it may be essential to mention that rights mentioned in the Chapter of Fundamental Rights are not absolute rights and especially Article 19 that guaranteed six freedoms are to be suspended during the proclamation of 'National Emergency' under Article 358 of the Indian Constitution. Again, Article 359 (1) mentions about the suspension of Article 32, which guarantee right to constitutional remedies. However, rights like right to life and liberty cannot be suspended even during the proclamation of national emergency.<sup>2</sup>The Executive cannot deprive a person of his life or liberty without the authority of law.

A Chapter on Fundamental Rights mainly deals with the civil and political rights. However, rights without economic and social concern are incomplete and in fact, enjoyment of human rights without economic and social dimensions is not imaginable. To make rights mentioned in Chapter III more feasible and more meaningful, a number of important economic and social rights, such as right to work, rest and leisure, education and social security etc are enshrined in the Directive Principles of State Policy under Part IV of the Indian Constitution. Some of the Cultural, Social and Economic Rights guaranteed to the citizens under the Directive Principle of State Policy are as follows: -

- (1) Right to adequate means of livelihood. (*Article 39 (a)*).
- (2) Right against economic exploitation. (*Article. 39 (b)*).

- (3) Right of both sexes to equal pay for equal work. (*Article. 39 (d)*).
- (4) Right to work. (*Article. 41*)
- (5) Right to leisure and rest, and
- (6) Right to public assistance in case of unemployment, old age, sickness, and the like. (*Articles. 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 39(a), 51 etc.*

One of the prime purposes of this part of the Constitution is to establish a welfare state. Article 38 provides that the state shall strive to promote welfare of the people by securing and protecting social order. Accordingly state is under obligation to strive in particular to minimize inequalities in income and endeavor to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities. Article 39 specifically mentions that the state shall direct its policy towards securing,

- (a) *adequate means of livelihood to all citizens (mentioned above),*
- (b) *a proper distribution of the material resources of the community for the common good,*
- (c) *prevention of concentration of wealth to the common detriment,*
- (d) *equal work for equal pay for both men and women, (mentioned above),*
- (e) *protection of strength and health of workers and avoiding circumstances which forces citizens to enter evocations unsuited to their age or strength and*
- (f) *protection of childhood and youth against exploitation or moral and material abandonment.*

Though the Directive Principles of State Policy has been criticized for its non-justifiable nature yet no one can deny its importance because it is a direction for the state to bring about necessary conditions essential for the meaningful dignified life. Again due to its nature of economic, social and cultural dimensions, Part IV of the Constitution can be rightly connected with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 16 December 1966, to which India also was one of the signatories. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, though there is no mention of the term human rights in the Constitution, the Constitution of India has incorporated human rights in a big way in the form of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy. While the former incorporates civil and political rights, the latter incorporates the economic, social and cultural rights.

Besides the Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policies, there are some other provisions in the Indian Constitution concerning human rights. Article 265 lays down that, "*No taxes shall be levied or collected except by authority of law*". This implies that a person has a right not to be taxed except under a law. Similarly, Article 301 guarantees freedom of trade and commerce throughout India. Article 300 (A) guarantees that "*No person shall be deprived of his property save by authority of law*". Again, there is still another important provision for the enforcement of human rights under Article 226 which

empowers the High Courts to issue to any person or authority or government within its territory, directions, orders or writs or any of them, for the enforcement of any of the fundamental rights.

Protection and promotion of rights of weaker sections of the society has been one of the main concerns of human rights movement around the globe. A study of the Indian Constitution proves affirmative in this regard. Article 244 provided for a special kind of administration for the Scheduled areas in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan and administration of Scheduled Tribes in some states of the northeastern states like Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. These provisions of the Fifth Schedule and Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India are formulated with a goal to protect the interests and welfare of the weaker sections of the Indian Society and the objectives of these provisions are very similar with the ideals of human rights movement around the world.

With regard to implementation and realization of human rights provisions in the Indian Constitution, Government of India right from the very beginning has been taking measures with remarkable success. Moreover, courts at various levels have made efforts for fullest enjoyment of human rights contained in the Constitution.

To cite case of the Supreme Courts commitment for protection of rights of



citizens such as Right to Equality, the Supreme Court pronounced its sentiment that:

*“We the people of India have given to ourselves the Constitution which is not for any particular community or section but for all. Its provisions are intended to protect all, minority as well as majority communities... We conceive, the duty of this Court to uphold the fundamental rights and thereby honour the sacred obligation to the minority communities who are our own”*

The Court further stressed that;

*“The purpose of law in plural societies is not the progressive assimilation of the minorities in the majoritarian milieu. This would not solve the problem; but would vainly seek to dissolve it”*<sup>3</sup> There are various instances where the supreme Court and High Courts had successful intervention in the state administration for the realization of various constitutional measures assuring equality of all sections of the community irrespective of religion, economic or social status.

Despite all these significant steps taken during the past years, it is an undeniable fact that cases of violations of human rights have been reported from various nooks and corners. Efforts of the National Human Rights Commission since 1993 do not produce desired results. For thousands of people in India feasibility of numerous human rights contained in the provisions of the Constitution is still questionable. Sadly, the cherished

objectives and ideals enshrined in the Preamble remain meaningless. Various schemes launched by the successive governments in this regard can not prevent denial of basic human rights and rather, problems are still rampant in this country. These socio-economic maladies in fact are a matter of violation of both human rights and the socio-economic provisions of the constitution.<sup>4</sup>

Keeping in mind the harsh reality in terms of denials and violations of basic human rights all through the country in general and rampant violations of human rights in Mizoram, it is an urgent need to make efforts to meet an alarming requirement of building human rights culture in Mizoram.

### **Study of Mizoram in Human Rights perspectives**

We have just mentioned in the above that despite various efforts on the part of the Government as well as judicial intervention for the realization and proper enjoyment of rights enshrined in the constitution, trends have not shown positive developments in this regard. The very theme of human rights movement, that is, upliftment of human kind in general, and improvement of the lot of downtrodden masses in particular still remain an unfulfilled dream. Looking into the situation here in Mizoram, things are not any better either. In fact, the level of awareness or consciousness on the subject as a whole is comparatively still stumpy. People of Mizoram not only lack knowledge on the significance of Human

rights but it appears that majority of the population simply negate human rights movement in the state.

The above contention seems to contain some truth because reports of rape cases, broad daylight robbery, violation of individual freedom, alleged corruption cases, excessive behaviour of some leaders of Non Governmental Organizations resulting in threat to life and even death of some people etc. are being reported from various corners. Under these circumstances, enjoyment of human rights enshrined in various international human rights instruments in general and the rights enshrined in the Constitution in particular are still a distant dream.

Keeping in mind present situation in the state, it is now imperative to make some future action plan for dissemination of education on human rights. It is now an urgent need to take prompt action on the part of the state government as well as conscious citizens. Consequent upon this situation in the state, suggestions may be made as follows:

1. Keeping in mind ethos and mindset of the population, dissemination of human rights literature is an urgent need. The bitter truth about Mizo society is that human rights do not find much favour. The reason for which can be put to downright ignorance or complete negation of the concept itself.

It is the general opinion that the concept of human rights carries with it 'individualism' in the Western sense of the

term, and this ultimately creates a fear psychosis in the minds of the people that the practical application of the principles of human rights would violate the general norms and values of the society. That is, if every individual be aware of his/her rights and these be exercised, then, it is felt that the communitarian ethos of the society would be badly damaged (for instance, throughout the state, every locality has its own set of rules and regulations laid down by leaders of different NGOs, and every member of the locality is supposed to abide by these. It is thus of vital importance to make efforts for human rights awareness movement in Mizoram.

2. Article 26 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 says that, "education shall be directed for the full development of the human personality". According to this direction, education aiming at better understanding of the whole concept with its implications and ramifications need to be introduced in education system in the state at all stages. Government decision makers and public officials need to have a fresh look in framing the educational system in the state to meet these necessities. Programmes and educational curriculum need to be changed to inculcate human rights awareness to the new generations. Hence, introduction of the human rights studies from the bottom to the top educational system is an urgent need.

3. Human Rights friendly behaviour of the police personnel is one of the most

important foundations of human rights culture. Law agencies like Police should behave in human rights friendly ways while discharging their duties in maintenance of law and order, detection of crime, booking of criminals, prevention of anti-social behaviour and criminal acts, etc. In order to establish human rights culture among the police personnel, regular training programme on human rights need to be organized among the police personnel. Awareness on human rights among them would surely prevent atrocities or excesses which would result in reduction of violations of rights of innocent people. It would also wipe out wrong contention that personnel wearing khaki colour uniform have liberty to behave as they like without limitations!

4. Compliance of Section 21 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, which suggests for the formation of human rights commission in all states is another desired goal in the state. Establishment of State Human Rights Commission would strongly indicate the degree of our state Government's commitment to human rights cause. It is to the interest for the state to establish Human Rights Commission at the earliest possible extent for the creation of better governance and a more humane society. The only obstacle for establishment of State Human Rights Commission like financial constraint or administrative reasons should be set aside keeping in mind how best the people could have access to the institution for redressal of violations of their basic human rights.

5. Fulfillment of the Second Generation human rights is also a much needed requirement in Mizoram. For this development targeting general welfare of the people must be the main objective of the State Government. All the developmental schemes and projects must be made people oriented. More emphasis must be made to realize human development to ensure right to life in all its ramifications. Mention of right to life in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution implies not a mere existence but to live with dignity and freedom from starvation. Availability of fundamental attributes like food, shelter, and medical facilities should be the main concern of the public authorities. The capitalistic pattern of development needs to be readjusted to realize the welfare interests/needs of the poor rural people/masses comprising around 80 percent of the total population of Mizoram.

6. The third Generation Human Rights also known as Right to Development is rights of all irrespective of any considerations. Do achievements on education, health care, infrastructure, communication etc. really touch or reach majority population is to be tested at this moment. For proper realization of the main objective of development as opined by Amartya Sen, enhancement of human freedom should be the main target. In this regard, it is emphasized that majority share of the total budget should be earmarked for developmental activities. While making budgetary allocations enhancement of human freedom should

always be kept in mind. It may be stated here that all developmental programmes and schemes may be rearranged to give more emphasis on the welfare of the general masses.

7. Finally, emerging role of NGOs/CBOs is to be considered with great caution. Many instances of outright violations of human rights are no doubt linked with some activities of members of NGOs. The most powerful NGO in the state, the Young Mizo Association (YMA), a non-state body, assumes an authoritative role. It has now assumed the status of vigilante group, who together

with the Church, show no hesitation in their authoritative control of the state decision making in various issues. In fact, YMA is today a repository of power feared even by the elected government. MLAs, ministers and other political wannabes desirous of contesting the next elections have to please the YMA. Activities of leaders of Students Organizations like Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP), Mizo Students Union (MSU) in some instances are not found conducive for human rights protection. It is therefore very essential to inculcate human rights awareness among leaders of these NGOs.

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## India-ASEAN Relations in Retrospect

Zonunmawia\*

### Abstract

*The focal point of India's Look East Policy (LEP) and Act East Policy (AEP) is the region of Southeast Asia and Asia Pacific region, particularly ASEAN nations. Therefore, it is imperative to have a historical understanding of the relationship between India and ASEAN nations. The focus of this paper is to look at the evolution of India – ASEAN relations since India Independence. It focuses mainly on political dimension owing to its primacy during the cold war era of international relations. In highlighting the circumstances and event, the attempt is to discuss the impact of the cold war dynamics that had effectively distorted the mutual relations of India and the ASEAN and factors that created hurdles on the path to forging a mutually beneficial relationship. It also emphasizes on how the virtual absence of economic content in India's foreign policy contributed to the lack of substance in its relationship with ASEAN till 1991.*

**Key Words:** India, ASEAN, Relations, Three Dispensations

### I. Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to present a historical linkage between India and ASEAN member states since India's Independence up to the launching of India's Look East Policy. In highlighting the political events, ups and downs of India-ASEAN relations during such period will help us to understand the factors that make India look to Southeast Asia and Asia Pacific region. Further, it mainly focusses on India-ASEAN relations in the context of the Cold war international environment. The paper is divided into the following sections: the introduction is followed by the

understanding of Southeast Asia regional settings in section II. Section III focusses on pre-colonial relations. Section IV focusses on the post-colonial relations (1947-1990) with special reference to the three dispensations and finally, section V concludes the paper.

### II. Southeast Asia: Regional settings

Before the Second World War, historians and geographers, especially academics, divided Asia into two - the *Near East* and *Far East*. Present day Southeast Asia (ASEAN) states were included in the Far East. However the term, Southeast Asia was occasionally used by Europeans in the late 19th century.

According to MC Cloud, "It was first brought to general prominence with the establishment of Southeast Asia military command by the British during the Second World War and it is one of the first attempts to bring together the previous fragmented colonial perspectives of British, Dutch, French and American".<sup>1</sup> Actually, the Southeast Asia command was created by the President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill at the first Quebec Conference in August, 1943. Henceforth, Southeast Asia as a political unit was first recognised from the time of Second World War. Milton Osborne, a noted historian of Southeast Asia noted that,

*"For the most part, however, neither the foreigners who worked in Southeast Asia before the second world war, whether as a scholar or otherwise, nor the indigenous inhabitants of the countries of southeast Asia, thought about the region in general terms. The general tendency to do so came with the second world war when, as a result of military circumstances, the concept of a Southeast Asia region began to take hold"*<sup>2</sup>

Generally, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia including present day Brunei and Singapore, and Indonesia were considered as some kind of geographical unit. However, Philippines was not included. Osborne noted that while the omission of the Philippines was deliberate at the time of the Second World War, the question of whether the Philippines formed part of

Southeast Asia was to remain a matter of scholarly uncertainty as late as the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> Presently, Southeast Asia denotes ten nation-states: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam.

Southeast Asia is a part of Asia which lies to the South of China and to the east of India. It is a transitional area between East Asia and South Asia and is sometimes called the tropical Far East. Southeast Asia lies between 28-30°N and 11°S latitudes and between 92,20°E and 141°E longitudes covering a total area of 4, 492,088 sq.km. The whole of Southeast Asia is divided into two areas - Mainland and Maritime.<sup>4</sup> One unique characteristic of the region is the historical influence of India and China upon its cultures, especially in religion, art and politics.<sup>5</sup>

### III. Pre Colonial relations

The significant influence of India on the pre-colonial Southeast Asia is evident from the fact that many authors used the terms like 'Greater India', 'Further India' to refer to Southeast Asia. Micheal Brecher, describing the role of extra-regional powers in Southeast Asia in the pre-colonial era, characterized the Chinese and Indian impacts as the presence of relatively powerful peripheral states whose power gave them de facto membership in the system.<sup>6</sup> Many Southeast Asian states of the ancient and medieval era derived significant benefits given their location in trade routes

between India and China. In the pre-colonial era, small Southeast Asian states through the control of sea route transformed themselves into larger empires. The rise of the port city-state of Srivijaya between the seventh and thirteen centuries attested to this trend. The command over the sea route between India and China especially control of the straits of Malacca was the basis of its strength and prominence. Malacca, Aceh, Penang and Singapore, all port city-states, followed these examples in the later period.<sup>7</sup>

The robust maritime trade linkage that existed among various ancient and medieval states of India and ASEAN region were shattered with the arrival of the Europeans on the continent in the 17th century. Both sides subsequently embedded into the colonial empires of the British, Dutch, French, Spanish and the Portuguese. The worldview of the people in these lands had been altered to such an extent that they started looking towards their respective colonial masters for political ideas and economic development. As they were not in control of the circumstances, they could not interact much with their immediate neighbours. With the result, the age-old maritime and land connections among them disconnected.

#### **IV. Post-Colonial relations (1947-1990): The three dispensations**

Since the focus of the present paper is to have retrospection on India ASEAN relations on the post India independence

of India launched Look East Policy, an attempt has been made in identifying the three stages of India-ASEAN relations. It has been divided into three dispensations, such as the following:

##### **1. 1947 - 1955: Period of Engagement**

This period was marked by the revival of contacts between India and Southeast Asia and efforts to create pan-Asian regional associations. It was also the period of high points in their relationship. Jawaharlal Nehru was an ardent advocate of Asian unity. The idea of an Asian Union was present in India much before 1947.<sup>8</sup> Under his leadership; India convened the Asian Relations Conference in March 1947 that is five months ahead of attaining its independence. India took up the cause of Indonesia's independence in 1947. Even before securing its own freedom India made earnest efforts for the early realization of freedom of Indonesia from the control of the Dutch colonial regime. It convened an international conference in 1949 to support Indonesia's freedom struggle. India also played a crucial role in the Geneva Accords of 1954 regarding the future of Indo-China. The Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)<sup>9</sup> Pact of 1954 launched the Cold War politics formally in Asia that subsequently had adverse implications for the relationship between India and ASEAN. The Bandung Conference of April 1955 marked the zenith of India's engagement with Southeast Asia. Nehru's active interest in the Southeast Asian affairs declined after

the Bandung Conference in 1955<sup>10</sup>. Consequently, Southeast Asia became an area of secondary importance in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. India's main objective since its independence in Southeast Asia was to assist the creation and support the maintenance of independent states in the region. Paradoxically, India's relation with Southeast Asia had to face the cold war politics nexus between US and Soviet Russia. It really blocked India's intention to come forward with Southeast Asia states. Thus, at the end of this period India's relation with ASEAN countries moved towards distrust and suspicion of each other's moves.

## 2. 1955 -1985: Period of Disengagement

This period provides ample evidence for the pernicious impact of the ideological conflicts that were so pervasive during the Cold War era. India and Southeast Asian nations were caught up in the Cold War politics and could not prevent the extraneous factors from distorting their mutual relationship. This phase marked the beginning of the period of low points in the relationship. The interest in each other waned and both sides drifted apart. On the one hand, India was advocating non-alignment (NAM) as the ideal foreign policy approach for other Third World nations to avoid getting sucked into the vortex of Cold War power politics. On the other hand, Southeast Asian nations were becoming part of the bloc politics. As Thailand and the Philippines were part of SEATO, their

interests clashed with the non-aligned stance of India. Malaysia and Singapore became part of another western alliance of AMDA<sup>11</sup>. The foreign policy of Indonesia gradually assumed radical tone under the leadership of Sukarno. The goodwill that existed between India and Indonesia existing earlier evaporated completely since the late 1950s.

The contrasting approaches of Nehru and Sukarno towards the issues of anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, and China, ensured that there was no meeting ground. The 1961 proposal of Tunku Abdul Rahman, Prime Minister of Malaya to form the Federation of Malaysia by combining the Federation of Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak, Singapore, and Brunei led to a dispute with Indonesia. Indonesia indulged in coercive diplomacy, termed as Konfrontasi (Confrontation) to prevent the formation of the Federation of Malaysia. Its stand was a reflection of the strong ideological passions prevalent during the Cold War era. The lack of economic content in the relationship between India and Southeast Asia further contributed to the drifting of the two sides. India could not contribute substantially to the growth of the Southeast Asian economies. Moreover, the top political leadership in India discounted the possibility of any economic cooperation with Southeast Asia.

Meanwhile, efforts were on in Southeast Asia to form regional associations. The first association that was set up for regional cooperation in



Southeast Asia was the Association of Southeast Asia (ASA) comprising of Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. This was formed in 1961. However, it remained only in embryonic form owing to the territorial disputes between Malaysia and the Philippines over Sabah (North Borneo). The situation was further aggravated by Sukarno-led Indonesia's policy of 'konfrontasi' (confrontation) against Malaysia.

Gen. Ne Win took over power in Burma after staging a coup in March 1962. His pursuit of 'Burmese Way to Socialism' as the national ideology, autarky as the economic strategy, and isolationism as the foreign policy had completely turned Burma into an inward-looking state and the doors were firmly shut on the international community for the next three decades. It remained outside all blocs throughout the Cold War era in order to observe neutrality rather strictly. Even though it was invited to join ASEAN at the time of its formation in 1967, it refused to do so. Thus it emerged as a barrier that effectively contributed to the lack of physical interaction between India and Southeast Asia until the early 1990s.

The brief border war of October 1962 between Indian and Chinese forces across the Himalayas had been a shattering blow to India's image. It had destroyed all that Nehru had wished and worked for. He had introduced Zhou Enlai to other Afro-Asian leaders, some of whom were apprehensive of China, at Bandung in 1955 to herald a new age of Afro-Asian solidarity. His

dream for Asian unity had been shattered. The border war was a major turning point in the history of India's relationship not only with China but also Southeast Asia. Malaysia, under the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman, extended open support to India. On the other hand, India was severely disappointed with the pro-China stand of Indonesia and Vietnam. This subsequently forced India to lose its interest in the Southeast Asian affairs. During the 1965 India-Pakistan war, Malaysia and Singapore extended support to India. But Indonesia's stand supporting Pakistan deeply disappointed India. Singapore, a part of the Federation of Malaysia since 1963, got separated in August 1965 to emerge as an independent state. Narrating the developments that took place on 9 August 1965, the day Singapore got separated from Malaysia to become an independent nation, the statesman of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew writes in his memoirs:

*"After meeting with the diplomatic corps, as the diplomats left, I drew aside the Indian deputy high commissioner and the UAR (Egyptian) consul-general and gave them letters for Prime Minister Shastri and President Nasser. India and Egypt were then, with Indonesia, the leading countries in the Afro-Asian movement. In my letters, I sought their recognition and support. From India, I asked for advisers to train an army, and from Egypt, an adviser to build a coastal defence force".<sup>12</sup>*

However, India could not extend assistance to Singapore in its need of hour, as it did not want to antagonise Malaysia.

Singapore was displeased with India for being unwilling to offer any military assistance. India nearly withdrew from Southeast Asia during the Indira Gandhi period as it was constrained by various developments in the Indian subcontinent. The separation of India and Southeast Asia was formalised with the launch of the ASEAN in 1967. While earlier efforts at regionalism in Southeast Asia like ASA and Maphilindo were not successful, they laid the groundwork for the launch of the ASEAN, which had the combined membership of the ASA and Maphilindo.

The relentless efforts continued in Southeast Asia to establish a regional association. With the change of regime in Indonesia, the regional environment became more conducive for the formation of another association. The ASA was revived in another form and soon expanded to include Indonesia and the newly independent Singapore and thus the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was born on 8 August 1967 with the signing of the 'Bangkok Declaration'.

India's reaction to Vietnam War was at variance with the stand of ASEAN states, especially Thailand and the Philippines as they were allies of the US. The US-China rapprochement that began in July 1971 with the secret visit of Henry Kissinger to Beijing via Pakistan had resulted in a realignment of forces in Asia. It hastened India to sign the 20-year Treaty of Peace and Friendship with the Soviet Union in August 1971. Both sides were

firmly allied with the opposite camps, that is, India was on the Soviet side and the ASEAN on the American side. Indira Gandhi concluded the treaty "*to create a sense of deterrence for the Chinese and the Americans.*" Although this step helped India tackle the Bangladesh crisis later in the year, it has seriously dented the image of India as a non-aligned nation in the eyes of the ASEAN. Indeed the smaller nations like Singapore were worried about the implications of external intervention.

The ASEAN perceptions of China had undergone a dramatic change in the wake of the normalization of the relations between the US and China and withdrawal of the US from Vietnam. Malaysia took the lead when it established diplomatic relations with China in May 1974. The Philippines and Thailand followed suit in June 1975 and July 1975 respectively.

The North Vietnam forces marched into South Vietnam and with the 'fall of Saigon' in April 1975, Vietnam was reunified after more than two decades. The alarm bells started ringing in the non-communist part of Southeast Asia soon after the defeat of the US-allied Republic of Vietnam by the Communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam based in Hanoi. The ASEAN, which was maintaining a low profile till then was galvanised into action. Within eight months, the First ASEAN Summit was held in Bali in February 1976. Several momentous decisions in the early history of the ASEAN were taken during this summit. The leaders adopted the Declaration of ASEAN Concord and

signed the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) laying the guidelines for ASEAN's internal as well as external relations in the political and economic fields. They have also signed an agreement to establish the ASEAN Secretariat. India approached ASEAN to grant it dialogue status on the eve of the Second ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur in August 1977. However, it did not materialize.

The Cambodian quagmire became acute with the invasion by Vietnam in December 1978 that replaced the regime of Pol Pot and installed HengSamrin regime. The stationing of its troops in Cambodia soon brought Vietnam into a severe diplomatic conflict with the ASEAN on the one hand and a military conflict with China on the other hand. Eventually, both ASEAN and China joined hands to resist the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. As Vietnam was perceived to be advancing the Soviet designs in Southeast Asia, the US sided with the ASEAN and China. Thus once again the entire Southeast Asia was caught up in the whirlpool of international power politics of the Second Cold War era with adverse implications for India's relationship with ASEAN states.

India became the first non-communist government in the world to extend recognition to the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) led by HengSamrin. On the other hand, ASEAN members along with China and the US extended support to the Coalition

Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) that was established as a government-in-exile to resist the HengSamrin regime backed by Vietnam and the Soviet Union.

China's new 'Open Door' policy under the pragmatic leadership of Deng Xiaoping announced in mid-December 1978 had meanwhile set China on a radically new path both internally and externally. Deng Xiaoping, in order to build a powerful market economy, infused a strong economic content into the formulation of the Chinese foreign policy. China soon started the process of closely integrating itself with the Capitalist economies of the West, Japan, and ASEAN. The invasion of Cambodia by Vietnam in late December 1978 proved to be a windfall for China. Since then China managed to move closer to the US and ASEAN in the diplomatic sphere by harmonizing its Vietnam policy with that of the latter. The frequent diplomatic interaction between China and Thailand has brought the former closer to the ASEAN. The habit of cooperation forged between ASEAN and China during the handling of Cambodian issue had considerably narrowed down the gulf between them.

Thus during the decade of the 1980s, the alienation of ASEAN from India coincided with the growing interaction between China and the former. This trend was to exert the tremendous effect on the development of ASEAN's relations with China and India in the following decade.

With the benefit of retrospection, it may be stated that the Chinese stand on the Cambodian issue abridged its diplomatic gap with the ASEAN. On the other hand, India's stance on the same issue created diplomatic barriers to having fruitful exchanges with the ASEAN.

The relations between India and founder members of ASEAN were set to improve during the Janata Government. ASEAN was all set to invite India as a Dialogue Partner in May 1980. However, India's recognition of Heng Samrin regime in Cambodia was severely criticized by ASEAN countries. So the earlier attempt at initiating ASEAN-India dialogue partnership proved to be a non-starter and the relations remained almost frozen until the end of the Cold War that paved the way for the resolution of Cambodian conflict. Dr. Mahathir became the Prime Minister of Malaysia in July 1981 and soon Malaysia embarked on 'Look East' policy aimed at learning and implementing the highly successful economic development model of Japan and also of South Korea.

Being a prominent statesman of the region, his views counted a lot while setting the agenda of ASEAN's external policy and relations. His 'Look East' policy was also responsible for his later initiatives like East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) and even ASEAN+3 forums. Thus during this period, the relations between India and ASEAN are overwhelmed by a political difference. Cold war politics envelop the whole

international system. Asia continent is a fertile soil for the race, consequently the repercussion in a political difference between India and ASEAN.

### 3. 1985 - 1991: Prelude to Re-engagement

Mikhail Gorbachev's accession to power in the Soviet Union in 1985 was one of the most remarkable events of the twentieth century. By launching groundbreaking reforms both in the domestic as well as the global arena, he set in motion the train of events that had far-reaching consequences across the world within a short span of time. "If any single man ended some forty years of global cold war it was he."<sup>13</sup> His historic Vladivostok speech of 28 July 1986 marked a quantum leap forward in the dissipation of Cold War tensions in the Asia Pacific. Indeed, the renewed engagement between India and the ASEAN region itself was one of the 'peace dividends' of the end of the Cold War.

The Group of 7 (G-7) advanced industrialised states, viz. Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, UK, and the US, was established in September 1985. All these high-income economies have decided to come together to set the global economic agenda. Although all these states happened to be the dialogue partners of ASEAN, the latter became increasingly concerned about their position in the emerging international economic order.

The Rajiv Gandhi government launched efforts to engage ASEAN

countries. His economic liberalization initiative and the recession of ASEAN economies raised hopes for the greater level of economic cooperation. However, the economic reforms introduced by the Rajiv Gandhi administration in 1985 were merely preliminary steps at structural adjustment. The overhaul of the Indian economic system was to commence six years later. The substantial shift in economic development strategy from import substitution to export-led one took place only in 1991 in a response to the unprecedented economic crisis.

The internal political changes since 1988 had deepened the Myanmar muddle and increased the Chinese influence. The junta in Myanmar established the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in September 1988 in the wake of student demonstrations. Soon after the National League for Democracy (NLD) was formed to establish a democratic form of government under the charismatic leadership of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (the daughter of the national independence hero, Gen Aung San). She was placed under house arrest in July 1989. However, the NLD registered an emphatic victory by securing eighty per cent of seats and sixty per cent of votes in the general elections held in May 1990. But the Myanmar generals refused to transfer the power to the NLD. The dissident NLD members formed the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB) in exile at a rebel camp on Myanmar's border with Thailand. India and Thailand that share long land frontiers

with Myanmar, witnessed a massive influx of refugees and pro-democracy activists. Meanwhile, the international community awarded the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi in recognition of her non-violent struggle to establish democracy in Myanmar.<sup>14</sup>

The normalization of relations between India and China symbolized by the visit of the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, to Beijing in December 1988 opened a new chapter in their turbulent relationship. The Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng visited India in December 1991. The visit was the first by a Chinese Premier after a long gap of thirty-one years. This visit was a further step on the path towards the normalization of the relations between India and China.

The growing shift in East Asia towards geo-economics away from the traditional preoccupation with geo-politics was reflected in Thailand's clarion call in 1988 to "turn battlefields into marketplaces" in the Indo-China. The shift has changed the terms of diplomatic discourse in the region and increasingly nations began giving higher priority to the economic interests. The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) was established in 1989, with 12 founding members.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the membership comprised of the six members of ASEAN and its six dialogue partners, viz. Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, and the US. In November 1991, APEC admitted three new members, namely People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, and Chinese Taipei

(Taiwan) in a significant move that maintained the momentum towards the growing trend of geo- economics. The center of world politics and economics has now shifted to the Pacific Ocean.

Vietnam's withdrawal of troops from Cambodia in 1989 was akin to fall of the Berlin Wall in the region. With this step, Vietnam paved the way for the emergence of 'one Southeast Asia'. Cambodia conflict was finally resolved with the disengagement of all external forces and the formal end of Cambodia conflict was marked by the Paris Peace Agreement signed in October 1991. Vietnam, by adopting the policy of 'befriending all' at the Seventh National Party Congress of the Communist Party in 1991, has decided to improve relations with the ASEAN and normalize relations with China and the US. In a nutshell, it can be summed up that the domestic and international trends since 1985 created a new context for India and ASEAN to perceive each other in a more positive light. India and the ASEAN region have finally become free of Cold War arrangements and were free to refashion their alignments afresh in the

emerging international system, without any ideological impediments, while keeping their own national strategic and economic interests in mind. Therefore, this period is given a nomenclature of prelude to re-engagement.

## V. CONCLUSION

Thus, it can be concluded that India's relations with ASEAN nations passed through different stages during 1947 – 1990 i.e. from the period of engagement to period of disengagement and had entered a period of re-engagement at the beginning of 1990s. It is to be remembered that India's Look East Policy is preceded by this structural change in India's foreign policy dimensions. High politics of cold war which prevailed for almost four decades put a stumbling block on the relations of India and ASEAN. The prison of political ideology on which both India and ASEAN nations were trapped no more exists in the international relations structure. At present, there is the way for reopening and reengagement of their relationship with new element of economic vigour which was missing in the last four decades of their relations.

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<sup>4</sup>Tiwari R.C. "Geography of South east Asia in India Interactions with Southeast Asia", New Delhi, project of History of Indian Science, philosophy and culture, Centre for Studies in Civilization, 2006, p.17

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.p.18

<sup>6</sup> Michael Brecher, "History of Southeast Asia: Pre Colonial Period", in Robert O.Tilman (ed.), "*Man, State and Society in Contemporary Southeast Asia*", New York, 1971.p.21

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.p.24.

<sup>8</sup> Ton That Thien, "*India and South East Asia: 1947-1960*", Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1963, pp. 60-61.

<sup>9</sup> It is also called Manila Pact. It is Military Alliance which was formed on September 8, 1954, when the representatives of Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States signed the South East Asia Collective Defence Treaty (SEACDT) in Manila, the eight countries which became the members of this organisation were described as SEATO.

<sup>10</sup> D. R. Sar Desai, "India and Southeast Asia", in B.R. Nanria. (ed.). *Indian Foreign Policy: The Nehru Years* (Delhi: Vikas, 1976), pp. 78-101. Also see Charles H. Heimsath and Surjit Mansingh, *A Diplomatic History of Modern India* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1971), Chapter IX, "Relations with Non-aligned States in Southeast Asia", pp. 225-47 and Chapter X, "Relations with Aligned States in Southeast Asia", pp. 248-71.

<sup>11</sup>AMDA stands for Anglo Malayan Defence Agreement

<sup>12</sup> Lee Kuan Yew, "The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew". Singapore: Times Editions, 1998, p. 15. also see Lee Khoo Choy, *Diplomacy of a Tiny State*, 2nd ed. (Singapore: World Scientific, 1993), p.31. The decision of Singapore in the late 1960s to choose Israel as its most suitable defence partner was justified "by a reluctance on the part of non-aligned states, such as India and Egypt, which Singapore had sought to cultivate, to offend Malaysia by becoming involved in the Republic's military development." Michael Leifer, *Singapore's Foreign Policy: Coping with Vulnerability* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 479.

<sup>14</sup>Baladas Ghoshal, "*India and Southeast Asia*", in A. K. Damodaran, and U. S. Bajpai, (eds), *Indian Foreign Policy: The Indira Gandhi Years*. New Delhi: Radiant, 1990, pp. 180-97.

<sup>15</sup>Namely Australia, Brunei, Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and the US.

## Situating Mizo ethnicity through difference

Albert Vanlalruata\*

### Abstract

*Ethnicity is not exclusively generated by self-consciousness and the awareness that one remains distinctively the way they are. The “self” exists only in relation to the “other”, and vice versa. The sense of difference or the knowledge of different “other” cohesively deepens the feeling of an ethnic group. General customs and beliefs, spatial existence and socio-politics functions as a substantial coalescent force; nonetheless the existence of “other” is essential in defining one’s group and locating one’s own place. The paper analyzes the concept of “otherness” by “Mizo” while considering the idea of Mizo “ethnicity” being reflected in tandem. With intent, “otherness” is employed in a more neutral sense recounting differences between two or more entities without constructing any “power” relationship nor the opposite being pejoratively marginalized. The “othering”, or of the “alterity” of “epistemic other” has generally been based on the imaginary spatial, racial and cultural differences. The sense of intimacy experience by the “Mizo” cognate clans through their noesis of parallel existence engendered by the “others” has been dealt with.*

**Keywords:** ethnicity, difference, other, otherness, alterity

The studies of earlier “Mizo” culture give us an idea about their contacts with the “other” community inhabiting their immediate environs, which they labeled as different and alien from their daily existence. The consciousness of ethnic and cultural similitude given by the differing cultures encountered and the parallel perception of closeness between the various groups—against the “others”—is observable. This consciousness had shaped the ideas about the group to which ‘they’ belonged and

how ‘they’ want to be perceived by ‘others’.

Psychological and sociological approaches have dealt with identity formation in their respective ways. While psychological approach specifically deals with individual identity formation, sociological approach inspects the formation of collective social identity. An individual’s cognitive and moral connection with a larger community, category, practice, and institution, which may be rather imagined than experienced

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directly, can be broadly taken as collective identity.<sup>1</sup> "Ethnicity"<sup>2</sup> is such kind of collective identity where one has a sense of belonging to an ethnic group for some specific reasons.

The relevance of 'ethnicity' is often in a situation of relativities and "differences", and it is a process of identification, which however often culminates to concrete status.<sup>3</sup> Though ethnic groups may appear to be socially defined, they are differentiated both from *inside* and *outside* the group based on cultural criteria, so that the defining characteristics of a particular 'ethnicity' have usually depended upon the various purposes for which the group has been identified.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, both "ethnicity" and its components are relative to time and place and are dynamic and variable.<sup>5</sup> Ideas of similarity and "difference" are essential to the way in which one realizes a sense of identity and social belonging. Identities, therefore, have some aspect of exclusivity of the "others".

## I

"Ethnicity", according to Fredrick Barth, can be said to exist when people claim a certain identity for themselves and are defined by "others" as having that identity.<sup>6</sup> Barth's focal point is not upon the cultural characteristics within ethnic groups but upon relationships of cultural differentiation, and explicitly upon contact between collectivities thus differentiated - 'us' and 'them.'<sup>7</sup> TH Eriksen considers that "ethnicity" refers to aspects of relations between groups, which regard

themselves as, and are held by "others", as being culturally distinctive.<sup>8</sup> Ethnic groups, in line with Everett Hughes require ethnic relations, and ethnic relations involve at least two collective parties—the *outs* as well as the *ins*.<sup>9</sup> The consciousness of ethnic identity is thus, generally in the context of "other" ethnic groups.

The significance of "others" in the construction of an ethnic identity is demonstrated repeatedly by several scholars. In that case, a brief exposition of the concept is required. Articulating in general term, the "other" is anyone who is different from one's self. The existence of "others" is substantial in locating one's own existence in the world.<sup>10</sup>

The most prominent contemporary use of the notion "other" is perhaps, established by Edward Said. The "other" may be designated as a form of cultural projection of concepts. This projection constructs the identities of cultural subjects through a relationship of "power" in which the "other" is the subjugated element.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, in post-colonial theory, the "other" can refer to the colonized "others" who are marginalized by the imperial discourse, identified by their difference from the centre. The colonized subject is typified as "other" through "discourses" such as "primitivism" and "cannibalism", as a means of establishing the "binary" dissection of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the legitimacy and primacy of the colonizing culture and worldview.<sup>12</sup>

However, “otherness” in the context of earlier “Mizo” culture is impartial in sense, recounting relative “differences” between two or more entities without constructing “power” relationship nor the opposite being pejoratively marginalized. Beyond doubt, *ethnocentrism* markedly expressed, subsequently spawning—*prejudice* and *stereotype*—over the “others” and their culture. However, evidence for imposing their culture as universally and exclusively true is not decidedly marked.

## II

As for appellation, specific words exist designating the “others” in Mizo language; such as, *Vai*, *Kâwl*, *Kawr*, *Sap*, and so forth. These words, in the early period were primarily applied for christening what they regarded as outsiders and foreigners to them. Evidently, the “others” called them “Kuki” or “Chin”, and thus identified them as a separate ethnic group at the same time based on their cultural ties. *Vai*, *Kâwl*, *Kawr*, and *Sap* are specifically dealt with in the paper since they were the most significant “others” in generating “Mizo” identity formation.

TH Lewin (1874) in *Progressive Colloquial Exercises in the Lushai Dialect of the ‘Dzo’ or Kuki Language* puts the word *Vai* as ‘foreign’.<sup>13</sup> JH Lorrain (1940) transcribes the implication of *Vai* as:

a foreigner, foreigners (excluding Europeans, and latterly the better known neighbouring tribes as well); the foreign settlement or bazaar, or a place where the foreigners live.<sup>14</sup>

On studying the Chin ethnic group, Lehman (1963) mentions that the word *Vai*:

is used for the Burmans and their culture, which is more widespread in the Northern Chin area than is *kawl*. *Vai*, but not *kâwl* is used in ritual formulas and in poetical language in Haka, and is undoubtedly an older and more fundamental way of referring to Burma.<sup>15</sup>

Semantic analysis of the word shows the contemporary usage of *Vaias* “non-Mizo Indians, particularly plains people, and foreigners in general.”<sup>16</sup> It is intelligible however, that a semantic shift occurred as regards the word *Vai* in tandem with their migration and settlement, and the ethnic groups they encountered in the course of their expansion.

The *Vai* kings, mentioned in the folktales of *Mauruangi*<sup>17</sup> and *Tualvungi and Zawlpala*<sup>18</sup> seem most likely the *Vais* living east of their territory. The general conception with reference to the old usage of *Vai* in the earlier times pointed mostly to the inhabitants of the cultural and geographical space, whom they regarded as culturally different from theirs, occupying the plain areas. It was a connotation applied against any ethnic groups whom they considered as virtually unrelated to their daily existence. Moreover, in that matter, the *Vais* were mainly the ethnic Bamar (Burman proper), mostly occupying the eastern sphere of their settlement.

*Kâwl*, according to Lorrain includes “the Burmese, a Burman.”<sup>19</sup> Lehman

opines that *Kâwl*, seemed to be used by the Haka, Lushai, Lakher, and related areas in referring the Burman as a person and to the country he/she inhabits.<sup>20</sup> The noticeable fact is that *Kâwl* was used explicitly to identify the Burmans proper and their culture.

While gradually making a westward migration, they encountered another group of people whom they considered as different to them; they dubbed the new ethnic group as *Kawr* or *Kawl* in dialect having retention of /r/ sound. TH Lewin incorporates ‘*Korh*’ in his collected vocabularies, meaning “a Bengalee or a coat wearing person.”<sup>21</sup> JH Lorain records *Kawr* and *Kawrmi* as “a Bengali, the Bengalis”.<sup>22</sup>

We find the tradition of using *kawr*, *thlangkawr*, *kawrvai*, or *thlangkawrvai* in certain folksongs,<sup>23</sup> referring to the Bengalis or other ethnic communities living to their west, generally in the plain areas. The typical application of *Kawr* implied the plains people living to their west, whom they they regarded as outsiders, differing from their culture.

*Sap*, as Lorrain defines is/are “a sahib, a white-man, a government, or other official.”<sup>24</sup> The contemporary application labels *Sap* as “a sahib; English; European; white-man.”<sup>25</sup> Mention may be made that indigenous inhabitants of the then Lushai Hills coined the armed expeditions made by the British during 1871-2 and that of 1889-90 as *vailian*.<sup>26</sup> This simplifies that *Vai* was applied to any outsiders—including the Europeans—since the

composition of the armed forces were mixtures of different ethnic communities.

It seems probable that after realizing the eminence of the British, they used *Sap* in referring to the white colonialists in specific, following the tradition within the militia. *Sap* was a corrupted word *sahib*, used especially among the ‘native’ inhabitants of colonial India when addressing or speaking of a European of some social or official status.<sup>27</sup>

The discussion explains that the general word for designating any foreigners was *Vai*. Inhabiting a higher elevation on hilly terrain, the “alterity” of communities dwelling in the plains was observed. The ethnic groups occupying east of their settings were usually labeled as *Kâwl* or sometimes as *Kâwlvai*. These ethnic groups called them “Chin” as well. Because of the westward migration and a wider settlement, the ethnic groups dwelling in the western part of their settlement were commonly identified as *Kawr* or *Kawrvai*. “Kuki” was the name applied to them by these ethnic groups at the same time.

### III

James C. Scott argues that ‘civilizational discourses’ has represented about “barbarian”, the “savage”, and the “primitive” as basically meaning ungoverned, not-yet-incorporated. It does not admit the preference of people voluntarily going over to the ‘barbarians’, hence such statuses are debased.<sup>28</sup> It is for this reason that, according to Victor Lieberman, the colonialists apprehended

“the law of Southeast Asian inertia”: unless acted upon by external forces, “native” societies remained at rest.<sup>29</sup>

The colonialists therefore labeled any ethnic groups as “uncivilized” through their doctrines of “civilizing mission” and “universalism”, which did not subsist in parallel with their justified “civilization”, accordingly imposing their cultural value and colonial practices to the groups they encountered. Geographical boundaries were prepared without any respect for the “natives”, and natural geographic terrain and cultural limits that had long been in place were disregarded.

Maps and mapping/ “cartography” are dominant practices of “colonialism”. Exploration and consolidation of the colonialists is often reinforced by the construction of maps as a means of textualizing the spatial reality of the “other”, renaming spaces in a symbolic and literal act of mastery and control.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, “Mizo” were distributed under different political authorities. With their imperialistic “discourse”, the colonialists disparaged what was contrasting with the western concept of “nationalism” and nation-state. This was the reason why they wrongly attempted in searching a common *ethnonym* covering certain ethnic groups.

Utilizing their political “power” as a means of an instrument, combining with the colonial ethnographic discourse, they coerced new geo-political spaces to breed new identities, deviating from the earlier existence of ethnic consciousness in a

roundabout way. For instance, AS Reid (1893) theorized that, “the Chins and Lushais are practically one race.”<sup>31</sup> Carey and Tuck (1895) “reasonably accept the theory that the Kukis of Manipur, the Lushais of Bengal and Assam, and the Chins...are of one and the same stock.”<sup>32</sup> With that knowledge, they however, executed the geographic partition of the entire area;<sup>33</sup> this evidently exposed their policy of *divide and rule*.

“Mizo” identity formation was reshaped by the colonialists’ partition of their geographical space and imposing their political rule over their state of affairs. Besides, mass scale conversion to a new religion introduced to them was significant in reinforcing a sense of identity. Being common subjects of the British Empire, embracing the same religion, and a broadened communication within the territory fostered a newer identity. British administration in the Lushai Hills and the subsequent political autonomy attained by the territory under the Indian Union bolstered “Mizo” identity. The impact of this geo-political circumscription introduced a new “Mizo” identity in “othering” what they considered as differing ethnic groups.

#### IV

The mapping out of the Lushai Hills by the colonialists contained the dominant clan of Lusei, using Lusei or Duhlian dialect as the language of communication. J. Shakespeare (1912) has mentioned that even before the consolidation of the

British rule, the process of absorbing certain tribes into the Lusei tribe had been experienced that was discontinued by the British administration.<sup>34</sup> Lewin (1874), Shakespear (1912), and Lorrain (1940) recorded unvaryingly that the Lusei or Duhlian dialect served as a *lingua franca* in the then Lushai Hills.<sup>35</sup>

The first group of new modern elites that appeared during the colonial period mainly composed of Lusei or Duhlian speaking commoners. These members mostly received formal education in the schools established by the Christian missionaries and they were affiliated to the Church. Even though the composition contained diverse tribes, Christianity provided a substituting space for tribe specific *sakhua* that was intertwined with the concept of *hnam*.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, one's identity as a tribe was no longer relevant and thus began creating a more coherent collective identity.<sup>37</sup>

History was subsequently reconstructed and a larger space for "Mizo" identity was proliferated. The cultural intimacy and commonality of the people, markedly "different" from "others"—especially the Indian *Vai*—was asserted through print media. The Young Mizo Association (YMA), in the collaboration with the Church initiated *Chanchinthadak* programme through which literatures written in Lusei language were sent to the Chin Hills attempting to break the language barrier by popularizing Lusei language.<sup>38</sup> On the formation of Mizo Union, the union considered it

necessary to use "Mizo" as to integrate all the 'children of Chhinlung'.<sup>39</sup> The ethnic-Christian component of the MNF ideology was against the "other" whom they called as *vai*.

As a result, the semantic symbol of *vai* newly represented general plain Indians differing in phenotype, culture, language, and religion. Under the government of the Indian Union, and especially because of the propaganda of the MNF movement against the *vai* and the consequent psychological trauma, *vai* became the most prominent concept of "other" against which "Mizo" defined its identity. As formerly mentioned, the contemporary popular concept of *vai* usually means non-Mizo Indians, particularly plains people. It replaces *kawr*, the usage of which is almost limited to only poetry and songs.

*Sap* initially signifies a white colonizer who settled for the interim, then departed. Even their short intervention had left an immense impact on "Mizo" sense of building their identity against them. Their orientalist "discourse" on civilization has deposited "hegemony" of their cultural practices and values, thus persisting to perform as a standard of identity maker for which "Mizo" constantly define their existence.

The current usage of *kâwl* retains its primeval root and it still means "the Myanmarese; people living in Myanmar."<sup>40</sup> However, in "Mizo" speaking group, whether *kâwl* refers to the Burmans proper, or any citizens of

Myanmar including the “Chins”—which is often used synonymously with ‘*khawchhak mi*’, meaning ‘people of the east’—is not certain since the usage of *kâwl* in popular parlance often overlaps in reference to the modern political state Myanmarese and the Burmans proper. Even if the impact of colonial “cartography” or geo-political division is experienced, corresponding to the etymological essence, the politically correct meaning of *kâwl* refers generally to the Burmans proper, occupying the plain areas.

Generalizing the concept of “others”, it is acceptable to surmise that “Mizo” had a feeling of relatedness in “othering” certain ethnic groups whom they had encountered. The shared memories they

retained, the close cultural practices they observed, the mutually intelligible language they verbalized, the hilly terrain they occupied, and the similar phenotypic appearances they possessed were all important in the “alterity” of the *vai*, *kâwl*, *kawr*, and *sap*; thus maintaining a sense of oneness to a certain degree.

The main point of the argument is thus: whatever word was applied to the “others” by the ethnic groups within “Mizo”, they did not denote the tribes or clans within their cognate areas as *vai*, *kâwl*, *kawr*; or *sap*; instead, they identified themselves in clans, lineages, or villages. These terminologies contain a long history and it is employed as words against whom they regarded as not belonging with them—i.e. the “others”.

### Endnotes & Works Cited

<sup>1</sup>Polletta, Francesca and JM Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 27, pp.283-305.

<sup>2</sup> The etymology of ‘ethnicity’ is the Greek term *ethnos*, which survives in modern French, *ethnie*, with the associated adjective *ethnique*. The French adjective exists in modern English as ‘ethnic’, with a suffix added to give ‘ethnicity’. For details, see Tonkin, Elisabeth, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman, “History and Ethnicity” in Hutchinson, John and Anthony D. Smith (ed.), *Ethnicity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p.19.

Theories of ‘ethnicity’ differ as regards their view on the formation of ethnic identities. *Primordialism* holds that ‘ethnicity’ has existed at all times of human history and that modern ethnic groups have historical continuity into the distant past. *Constructivism* sees *Primordialists*’ view as flawed, and rejects the notion of ‘ethnicity’ as a basic human condition. It holds that ethnic groups are only products of human social interaction, maintained only as far as they are valid social constructs in societies. *Modernism* correlates the emergence of ethnicity with movement towards nation state beginning in the early modern period. Proponents of this theory, argue that ethnicity and notions of ethnic pride, such as nationalism, are purely modern inventions. They hold that prior to this; ethnic homogeneity was not considered an ideal or necessary factor in the forging

of large-scale societies. *Instrumentalism* treats ethnicity primarily as an ad-hoc element of a political strategy, used as a resource for interest groups for achieving secondary goals such as, for instance, an increase in wealth, power or status.

- <sup>3</sup> Tonkin, Elisabeth, Maryon McDonald and Malcolm Chapman, *op.cit.*, p.23.
- <sup>4</sup> No ethnic group will contain the essential defining traits; however, all will exhibit different components to different degrees. See, Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, Routledge, London, 2009, pp.80-1.
- <sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, p.81.
- <sup>6</sup>Kottak, Conrad Phillip, *Anthropology: The Exploration of Human Diversity*, 10th Edition, McGraw Hill, New York, 2004, pp.367-8.
- <sup>7</sup> Jenkins, Richard, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*, Second Edition, Sage Publications, Los Angeles, 2008, p.12.
- <sup>8</sup> For further details, see Eriksen, Thomas Hylland, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Second Edition, Pluto Press, London, p.3.
- <sup>9</sup> Jenkins, Richard, *op.cit.*, p.11.
- <sup>10</sup>*ibid.*, p.169.
- <sup>11</sup> Sedgwick, Peter, "Other" in Edgar, Andrew and Peter Sedgwick (ed.), *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts*, Routledge, London, 2008, p.235.
- <sup>12</sup> Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *op.cit.*, p.169-70.
- <sup>13</sup>Lewin, TH, *Progressive Colloquial Exercises of the Lushai Dialect of the 'Dzo' or Kuki Language with Vocabularies and Popular Tales (Notated)*, Calcutta Central Press Company Limited, Calcutta, 1874, p.xvi.
- <sup>14</sup> Lorrain, James Herbert, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, The Asiatic Society of Bengal, Kolkata, 1940, p.539.
- <sup>15</sup> Lehman, F.K., *The Structure of Chin Society*, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 1963, p.29.
- <sup>16</sup> Vanlalnggheta, J.T., *The BritAm Pocket Dictionary of 'Mizo'*, Hlawndo Publishing House, Aizawl, 2013, p.584.
- <sup>17</sup> In the folktale, Mauruangi married a *vai* king. The material culture represented oriented more towards the plain Bamars than the plain Bengalis; for instance, the mention of *kawlhnam* (Bamar sword) and the practice of *puantah* or weaving related objects, the material of which is more related to the eastern culture. See, Thanmawia, RL, *Mizo Hnahthlak Thawnthu, Vol.3*, Din Din Heaven, Aizawl, 2012, pp.99-118.
- <sup>18</sup> Phuntiha, a *vai* king is introduced in the folktale paying a profuse nuptial price for Tualvungi, the wife of Zawlpala on Zawlpala's demand for falsely avowing his spouse as his sister. When Phuntiha's couriers came into sight, meeting the terms of their conditions, Tualvungi sadly burst out that they splendidly came crossing the Tuichang river. Legend

has it that Tualvungi's burial ground where she went back to Zawlpala's domicile is in the region of the present Thenzawl town, situating to the west of Tuichang river. It seems plausible that the *vai* king referred to in the folktale approached from the east. See, Thanmawia, RL, *Mizo Hnahthlak Thawnthu, Vol. 2*, Din Din Heaven, Aizawl, 2009, pp.63-73.

<sup>19</sup> Lorrain, James Herbert, *op.cit.*, p.233.

<sup>20</sup> Lehman, F.K., *op.cit.*, p.28.

<sup>21</sup> Lewin, TH, *op.cit.*, p.viii.

<sup>22</sup> Lorrain, James Herbert, *op.cit.*, p.240.

<sup>23</sup> For example, Hmuaki romanticized that even if her flesh decays, she yearned for her songs to overshadow the rulers of *Thlangkawr mi* or—perhaps—the Bengalis. See, Thanmawia RL, *Mizo Hla Hlui (Mizo Folk Songs)*, Din Din Heaven, Aizawl, 2012, p. 217.

<sup>24</sup> Lorrain, James Herbert, *op.cit.*, p.404.

<sup>25</sup> Vanlalnggheta, J.T., *op.cit.*, p.440.

<sup>26</sup> See, Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, Mizoram Publication Board, Aizawl, 2002, pp. 118 & 139. Also, see Siama, V.L., *Mizo History*, Lengchhawn Press, Aizawl, 1991, pp.92-102.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com>. Accessed on November 12, 2015 at 3:50 pm. *Sahib* is derived from Hindi or Urdu, *sahib* meaning, 'master, lord'; which comes from Arabic *sahib*, originally 'friend, companion'; from *sahiba*, meaning, 'he accompanied.' Female form ('European lady') is *memsahib*. See, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=sahib>. Accessed on: November 16, 2015 at 1:30 am.

<sup>28</sup> Scott considers that hill peoples can be understood as been escaping the dominations of state-making projects in the valleys—slavery, conscription, taxes, corvee labour, epidemics, and warfare. Most of the areas in which they settle may be appropriately called shatter zones or zones of refuge. Virtually everything about these people's livelihoods, social organization, ideologies can be read as strategic positioning designed to keep the state at arm's length. See, Scott, James C., *The Art of Not Being Governed*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi, 2010, p.ix-xi.

<sup>29</sup> Lieberman, Victor, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800-1830, Volume 1: Integration on the Mainland*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p.8.

<sup>30</sup> Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth & Tiffin, Helen, *op.cit.*, pp.31-2.

<sup>31</sup> Reid, A.S., *Chin-Lushai Land*, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 2008, p.6.

<sup>32</sup> Carey, Bertram S. & Tuck, H.N., *The Chin Hills, Vol. 1.*, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 2008, p.2.



- <sup>33</sup> For more information, for example, see Go, KhupZa, *Zo Chronicles: A Documentary Study of History and Culture of the Kuki-Chin-Lushai Tribe*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2008, pp.59-60. Also, see Reid, Robert, *TheLushai Hills*, Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1942, pp.59-61.
- <sup>34</sup> Shakespear, J., *TheLushei-Kuki Clan*, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 2008, p.40-2.
- <sup>35</sup> For details, see Lewin, TH, *op.cit.*, p.3. Also, see Shakespear, J., *op.cit.*, p.112. See, Lorrain, JH, *op.cit.*, p.v.
- <sup>36</sup> What made the recognition of group categorization very confusing was definitely the arbitrary nature of one's *sakhua* that resulted in the ability of initiating one's own *hnam* by a man completing matrimonial rites, by the process known as *sakung* or *sakungphun*. One of the most important markers of one's ethnic identity was a relationship known as 'dawisakilpui<sup>theih</sup>'. It means that it was against the custom for a family having different *sakhua* to dine together for the animal's flesh used in the performance of their sacred rites, and that only who affiliated as sharing similar *hnam* and *sakhua* were accepted as one's own kin. See Dokhuma, James, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), 'Mizoram Publication Board, Aizawl, 2008, p.32. Also, see Dokuma, James, *Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna*, R. Lalrawna, Aizawl, 2008, p.32.
- <sup>37</sup> Pachuau, Joy, "The Creation of Mizo Identity: From Colonial to Post-Colonial Times". Unpublished M.Phil Dissertation submitted to Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford, p.66.
- <sup>38</sup> Vanlawma, R., *YMA History (1935-1995)*, CYMA, Aizawl, p.33.
- <sup>39</sup> Vanlawma, R., *Ka Ram leh Kei*, Zoram Printing Press, Aizawl, p.80.
- <sup>40</sup> Vanlalnggheta, J.T., *op.cit.*, p.249.

## Sieving the Past through Womanist Eyes: A Study of Select Writings by Alice Walker

Cherrie Lalnunziri Chhangte\*

### Abstract

*Alice Walker in her fiction examines and questions existing official historiography and discourse which often leave out the stories of marginalized individuals and races. Through her works, she presents an alternative telling of histories both personal and collective. She is particularly interested in the retelling of history through the perspective of women – a concept that embodies her strong belief in what she terms a ‘womanist’ approach. She explores the intricacies of the black woman’s experiences, and how she uses the tools available to her to create and reshape her narrative.*

**Keywords:** Womanist, African-American, historiography, retelling, myths, slavery, counterdiscourse, Blues, revisioning, reinterpretation.

Alice Walker’s commitment to writing is linked to her social and political activism, which gives her work an added significance. In an interview reprinted in *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose*, she states:

I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival whole of my people. But beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, the triumphs of black women... For me, black women are the most fascinating creations in the world. (250)

She views the role of the black artist as multifaceted, and one of the most crucial responsibilities of the artist is the presentation and representation of history:

The real revolution is always concerned with the least glamorous stuff. With raising a reading level from second grade to third. With *simplifying history and writing it down* (or reciting it) for the old folks. (135. Italics added).

Walker’s preoccupation with history is shared by many other contemporary black women writers, such as Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou, as well as earlier writers like Zora Neale Hurston. Like Toni Morrison’s use of ‘rememory’,<sup>1</sup> Walker often alludes to the past in order to gain a better understanding of the present. The past that she delves into in her fiction is both the collective past of the black race, as well as the personal pasts of individual characters. She underlines repeatedly the lasting impact of the past over the present:

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It is memory more than anything else that sours the sweetness of what has been accomplished.... What we cannot forget and never will forgive. (166)

In order to explore the past and its impact on the present, Walker occupies herself with an examination of African-American history. History, as defined by Pierre Nora<sup>2</sup>, is the method whereby “our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past”. It is, therefore, subject to modifications and misrepresentations. This is particularly true of African- American history, which is largely dependent upon the oral tradition for its historical records. Again, the oral tradition is one which relies heavily on the memory of the person who transmits the (his)story by word of mouth. Furthermore, early studies on African-American history were mostly done by white scholars, and writers like Walker feel that there were serious misrepresentations in their studies. Through her works, we see a juxtaposition of the traditional, Eurocentric historical discourse and African-American representations of history. As an artist, she presents through her fiction an alternative to the existing official historiography regarding black people.

Walker’s “simplifying” of history is done through the consciousness of her characters, predominantly black women and the experiences that they have undergone. Black women play an important role in the oral tradition because they were most often the storytellers

within the family, and in effect, the transmitters of history. The relationship between history and memory is one that is explored in all its complexities by the author through her characters, often resulting in a radically different view of history as opposed to the traditionally accepted version, which often cannot accommodate the history of those who are marginalized along gender or racial lines. It is a history that has been purported by the dominant classes in society, and to quote Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn, the limitations of conventional historiography are such that,

What has been designated historically significant has been deemed so according to a valuation of power and activity in the public world. History has been written primarily from the perspective of the authoritative male subject – the single triumphant consciousness- with a view to justifying the politically dominant west – individualism, progress, conquest – i.e., to providing pedigrees for individuals rising classes, nations, cultures and ideologies. As long as the “transmission and experience of power” are its primary focus, as long as war and politics are seen as more significant to the history of humankind than child-rearing, women remain marginalized or invisible. Its androcentric framework...has excluded from its consideration not only women, but the poor, the anonymous, and the illiterate. (Gates Jr.106)

Walker follows the pattern of traditional black male discourse in her

fiction by questioning omissions based on race in the historical narratives, but she goes a step further and persistently challenges this discourse by offering a feminine counter-discourse. Oral discourse, myths, demythologizing existing myths, and folklore constitute part of this alternative history offered by a womanist ideology. While the notion of broadly representing blacks as an oppressed and marginalized race is a preoccupation of male and female black writers alike, it is not completely able to represent the intricacies of black women's experiences. In the words of Elliot Butler-Evans.

Inscriptions of the feminine in Walker's novels are marked by their difference from the racial history she invokes. Quite often, they become alternative narratives that disrupt or address, directly or indirectly, the omissions of the framing historical discourse. The preemptory movement of a feminine-feminist counterdiscourse becomes the dominant textual activity. These historical narratives of women, while contained within the framework of the racial historical narratives, become signifiers of sexual difference. (Gates Jr. 106-7)

In *The Color Purple* (1982) Walker examines in depth the experiences of the black female psyche and forwards an overt womanist discourse. The primary focus is on the perceptions of its female protagonist, Celie, who must confront her fears of her stepfather, of her husband, and

of losing her children and her sister Nettie. Abused and raped by her stepfather from a very young age, Celie is perpetually scared of people and situations that have the potential to hurt her. She goes to extraordinary lengths to avoid confrontations at the cost of her own integrity. It reaches a point where she ceases to live as a human being, existing only to please those whom she serves. She denies herself any sense of identity, and becomes meek, subservient and self-effacing in her attempt to please the very people who brutalize her. All this is a result, not of her behavior, but because of who, or what, she is, as articulated by Albert: "You black, you poor, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all." (213)

Celie's suffering is an account of an individual's trauma, but it is also symptomatic of much more than that:

*The Color Purple* is not only about the brutalization of one black 14-year old, but concerns a historical discourse of international politics which makes Celie's suffering possible; the novel shows how the structures of power which oppress her are institutionalized and historicized as 'natural'....One of the remarkable aspects of Walker's novel is the way it contextualizes Celie's suffering in terms of the entire history of Black Americans. (Millard 65)

History, as Celie and Nettie know it, is rewritten for them as they begin to widen their horizons and come into contact with new experiences. Nettie's

travels and extended stay in Africa is an educative one in more ways than one. In Harlem, she learns, for instance, that there are black Americans 'living in houses that are finer than any white person's house down home' (*Color* 141), and that these black people are knowledgeable about, and proud of, their African descent. She also learns, before she arrives in Africa, that Jesus was not a European white:

Think what it means that Ethiopia is Africa! All the Ethiopians in Africa were colored. It had never occurred to me, though when you read the bible it is perfectly plain if you pay attention only to the words. It is the pictures in the bible that fool you. The pictures that illustrate the words. All of the people are white and so you think that all the people from the bible were white too. But really white people lived somewhere else during those times. That's why the bible says Jesus had hair like lamb's wool. Lamb's wool is not straight, Celie. It isn't even curly. (113)

Nettie also learns that white people in America come from Europe, that the Egyptians who built the pyramids were colored people, and that black Americans were sold into slavery and came into America in ships. In coming to Africa, Nettie feels as though she has come home to 'the land for which our mothers and fathers cried' (120-21) and despite finding that Africa is not a 'place overrun with savages who didn't wear clothes' (111) as she was taught in school, Nettie does not find Africa to be any kind of Utopia for black people. There are many disturbing

parallels between culture and society in Africa and the Southern America states, and the exposition of these parallels is an important part of the novel's structure and ideological freight. 'The Olinkas do not believe girls should be educated... like white people at home who don't want colored people to learn' (132) and the Olinka husband has 'life and death power over the wife'; moreover, they subject women to circumcision: 'the one ritual they do have to celebrate women is so bloody and painful' (161).

Nettie's educative journey has a direct bearing on many key aspects of Celie's life. In Africa, Celie's family history is uncovered when Samuel explains how he came to adopt Celie's children. Perhaps even more importantly from the point of view of Celie's wholeness and healing, her past, or her history, as she knows it, is revised and her sense of identity undergoes a fundamental change. She finds out the truth behind all the lies and guilt that have haunted her:

'My daddy lynch. My mama crazy. All my little half-brothers and sisters no kin to me. My children not my sister and brother. Pa not Pa.' (151)

It undoes the taboo of incest that Celie has lived with, and it offers her a different family lineage in which her real father was an entrepreneur so successful and prosperous that the white merchants found it necessary to wipe him out by lynching him and his brothers. Her mother was a woman who had aspirations that her black neighbors found 'grander than

anything they could ever conceive of for black people.’ (ibid 149). Significantly, her neighbors shunned her ‘partly because her attachment to the past is so pitiful’ and she loses her sanity. This reconstruction of her personal past is an important tool that enables Celie to have self-confidence, to move forward and lay the past to rest. From being a victim, she becomes a successful entrepreneur, starting her own business and becoming whole as a woman.

For Nettie, her journey of self-discovery also involves the demystification of Africa is a perspective that is also shown in other novels such as *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989). This demystification inverts the Black Power/ Arts Movement’s philosophy of the 1960s, in which anything African tended to be glorified and Africa itself was seen as the ‘homeland’ to which its people must return to find themselves, an attitude that had already taken root in 1920s Harlem:

...they give and give and then reach out and give some more, when the name “Africa” is mentioned. They love Africa. They defend it at the drop of a hat....Even the children dredged up their pennies. Please give these to the children of Africa, they said. (114)

The disenchantment with Africa and all it stands for is further explored in *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) where the ‘cultural’ practice of female genital mutilation in Africa is taken up. Walker’s choice of the protagonist Tashi, who is a victim of such a horrifying practice, is

significant. If Walker strongly condemns the racist acts of white people against American blacks, she is no less forgiving of the treatment the patriarchal society metes out to women in the African context.

*Meridian* (1976) is set during the Civil Rights Movement, and simultaneously gives an account of the historical events that occurred during this time, as well as the personal reactions of a young black woman to these historical events. The protagonist, Meridian Hill, is actively involved in the Movement, and she is the medium through which history is largely revealed. The violence and political assassinations that marked this period are denoted in a section, which is simply entitled:

MEDGAR EVERS/ JOHN F. KENNEDY/ MALCOLM X/ MARTIN LUTHER KING/ CHE GUEVERA/ PATRICE LUMUMBA/ GEORGE JACKSON/ CYNTHIA WESLEY/ ADDIE MAE COLLINS/ DENISE MCNAIR/ CAROLE ROBERTSON/ VIOLA LIUZZO.(*Meridian* 21)

In *Meridian*, Walker explores both political and private histories, which in her ideology are inextricably linked. She does this by telling the story of a ten year long love triangle involving Meridian, Truman and Lynne – their misadventures, their ability and inability to love or forgive each other, the dreadful believability of how they flay and feed and comfort by turns. As Meridian’s story unfolds, we see her in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement

in New York. A group of Black women, veterans of marches and voter-registration campaigns in the South, are recommitting themselves to their cause. The question each must answer is whether they will kill for the revolution. It seems like an easy, necessary question. Anne-Marion, Meridian's friend from their days at a black women's college in Atlanta, presses Meridian to say yes, but Meridian is unable to do so. This issue becomes a central problem in the novel: whether killing in any form is ever justified. She parts ways with Truman and Anne-Marion, who abandon non-violence and, at least in theory, embrace violent militancy in New York, while she continues to work at the grassroots level in the South.

The novel's engagement with history goes deeper when the narrative explores other layers of history through the interspersed stories of slavery, and the even earlier presence of Native Americans in Mississippi. *Meridian* has a tripartite structure which moves from the South ('Meridian'), to New York ('Truman Held') and back again ('Ending'); Lynne, Meridian, and Truman discover that the scars of their time together in the South cannot heal by simply removing themselves physically from a place. The original trauma is confronted by returning there. Part of the healing process is an integration of what can be recognized as feminist (or womanist) and Black Civil Rights positions. It is an integration brought about by Meridian, a philosophy of resistance without resentment. Like so

many of her ancestors who are so good at this kind of resistance, Meridian's seeming passivity is in itself a mode of action whereby she leads by example rather than exhortation or authority.

A significant part of Walker's feminine counterdiscourse is a privatized version of historical events, with myth and folklore as alternatives to history. These myths provide alternative historical readings, and the demystification of existing myths serves to challenge and reconstruct conventional versions of history. The mythological dimensions of *Meridian* appear at the very beginning of the novel, in the story of Marilene O'Shay. The townspeople have gathered to watch her body, which her husband has displayed on a circus wagon:

"Marilene O'Shay, One of the Twelve Human Wonders of the World: Dead for Twenty-Five Years, Preserved in Life-Like Condition." Below this, a smaller legend was scrawled in red paint on four large stars: "Obedient Daughter" read one, "Devoted Wife" said another. The third was "Adoring Mother" and the fourth was "Gone Wrong." Over the fourth a vertical line of progressively flickering light bulbs moved continually downward like a perpetually cascading tear. (5)

Although the story of Marilene seems insignificant, it assumes symbolic importance later on when her roles as "Obedient Daughter", "Devoted Wife", "Adoring Mother" and someone who has "Gone Wrong" become apt descriptions of Meridian herself, as well as many other

young black women. Further, “the racial ambiguity signified by Marilene’s skin coloring signifies the cross-cultural oppression of women. Thus Marilene becomes a dialectical metaphor, subsuming the major arguments of the text.” (Gates Jr. 118)

Other myths are also inserted in the text. One concerns the myth behind a young abandoned child called Wile Chile who is often seen near Saxon College. Her mysterious and antisocial behavior marks her as the antithesis of society’s norms, especially when she becomes pregnant. She becomes a symbol of rebellion for the girls in the college. Another myth is that of the Sojourner Tree in the College campus, and the young slave girl, Louvinie. This myth forcefully underscores the power of narrative. Her art of storytelling proved fatal to one of her young wards and resulted in having her tongue cut out:

Louvinie’s tongue was clipped out at the root. Choking on blood, she saw her tongue ground under the heel of Master Saxon. Mutely, she pleaded for it, because she knew the curse of her native land: Without one’s tongue in one’s mouth or in a special spot of one’s choosing, the singer in one’s soul was lost forever, to grunt and snort through eternity like a pig.

...In her own cabin she smoked it until it was soft and pliable as leather. On a certain day, when the sun turned briefly black, she buried it under a scrawny magnolia tree on the Saxon plantation. (*Meridian* 33-34).

The tree was later known as The Sojourner, and more myths were added to its history. In short, it became a symbol for female freedom and expression as well as a refuge for non-conformist college students in later years. Ironically, the tree that they love so much is destroyed by the girls themselves in a fit of anger after the first riot in the “impeccable history” of Saxon College. These episodes are digressions from the larger struggles of the Civil Rights Movement, and they deliberately place the personal histories of women in the foreground. Moreover, the silencing of each of these mythical figures is symbolic of the disempowerment of black women.

Along with the validation of myths that are often rejected by official historiography, Walker also presents the demystification of existing myths, such as the myth of Black Matriarchy and romantic love. Meridian, contrary to popular notions advocated by her mother and Truman, is not enthusiastic about being a mother. This deconstruction of motherhood, a theme familiar in feminist ideology, is taken up by the contradictory impulses of Meridian and her mother. Both women see motherhood as something that debilitates their freedom, but the similarity ends there. Mrs. Hill becomes a silent sufferer because she embraces the role of black matriarch, a position reinforced by her religion as also the general social practice. Much as motherhood feels oppressive to her, she would consider it blasphemous to reject her role as a mother. Meridian, undergoing



similar feelings of resentment and suffocation, rejects motherhood, but not before her suffering borders on desperation. The conventional portrayal of a happy mother affectionately regarding her baby is defamiliarized in the depiction of Meridian and her baby :

She sat in the rocker Eddie had bought her and stroked her son's back, her fingers eager to scratch him out of her life. ... The thought of murdering her own child eventually frightened her. To suppress it, she conceived, quite consciously, of methods of killing herself. (*Meridian* 63)

Contrary to the assumptions that every woman revels in the role of motherhood, Meridian feels choked by it, and as readers, her position, if somewhat unusual, is one that we are able to come to terms with, and accept. As Eliot Butler-Evans puts it,

This joining of the motherhood myth with fantasies of murder and suicide heighten the argument against a romantic treatment of that institution and compel the reader to view it from a different angle. Thus, when Meridian decides to abandon her child in order to attend college, her mother's view of her as a "monster" for doing so is not sympathetically received by the reader. Inscribed in the text, then, is a historical examination of black women's changing views on motherhood: Mrs. Hill embodies the traditional position, largely self-effacing and destructive; and Meridian represents the emergence of a feminist dialectic. (Gates Jr. 120)

Similarly, glorified images of black revolutionaries and Civil Rights workers are questioned and re-examined. Meridian's earlier perception of Truman held as a "conquering prince" (*Meridian* 95) rapidly undergoes a change when he is shown to have serious shortcomings. He lacks a sense of responsibility, seen in his casual attitude towards both Lynne and Meridian, two women who love him very much. He seems incapable of seeing women as individuals, for he is fascinated by Lynne's "whiteness" just as he was fascinated by Meridian, whom he called "African woman" (113). The Civil Rights Movement itself is seen through the eyes of these young people, who actually participated and lived through the era. Along with the political struggles, the monotony and drudgery of trying to enlist black voters, and the arrests, the novel gives an account of the private heartaches and traumas faced by the activists within the Movement. Such portrayals would not be found in the official historical records of the Movement, but they were nevertheless, extremely real,

A crucial tool of Walker's womanist rendering of history is to utilize the techniques and themes of blues music, a vital aspect of the black tradition. It is interesting to note how Walker uses the blues techniques of contrast and juxtaposition to articulate discrepancies between appearance and reality, the contradictions and hypocrisies of the white material world. She also uses blues characters, forms, themes, images and linguistic techniques to convey the multi-

faceted nature of black reality. The conjunction with blues music is, of course, no coincidence. She has often credited blues singers such as Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Mamie Smith in her work.<sup>3</sup>

As the blues singer improvises on the situation and experiences she meets with, so do these characters that Walker presents. Celie, for instance, creates an “audience” or someone to listen to her by writing to an invisible presence that she calls “God” in the letters she writes in her notebook. She uses the linguistic techniques of blues music, directly transcribing her speech in her letters, as opposed to Nettie’s somewhat stilted and white-influenced use of language. Zora Neale Hurston had used African American English in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and thereby turned it into an art; Walker does the same, but by making Celie tell her own story, she shows her the art of the oral tradition is also one for “everyday use” and legitimizes it.

Walker’s stories celebrate the black woman’s tradition of creativity such as her needlework, her quilting, her storytelling and her music, both aesthetically pleasing as well as practically useful. In *The Color Purple*, these two strands of African American women’s artistic legacy come together as Celie, the seamstress, and Shug, the blues singer, join forces on their mutually healing and nurturing relationship.

Shug’s importance in the novel lies in the fact that she is the one who tells Celie about her ‘pleasure button’ and the

significance of the color purple in the fields. She is able to do this precisely because she is a freer spirit than Celie is. Essentially, Shug is a liberated woman, and it is her art which enables her to be so. For women like Shug, blues singing was a ticket out of the oppressed condition of black women’s domestic or sexual or industrial wage labor in the inter-war period. To quote Hortense Spiller, the blues singer

...celebrates, chides, embraces, inquires into, controls her womanhood through the eloquence of form that she both makes use of and brings into being. Black women have learned as much (probably more) that is positive about their sexuality through the practicing activity of the singer as they have from the polemicist. Bessie Smith, for instance. (Vance, 87)

The cultural significance of Shug’s occupation thus goes beyond its mere narrative importance, because Shug evokes a whole tradition of women’s cultural activity and self-assertion, laying down the laws for sexual and economic independence. In many, she is a mouthpiece for Walker’s womanist philosophy. Just as Celie’s role in the novel is to assert the value of ‘everyday use’, this is what she is to Albert: a doormat, nurse, nanny and cook combined. Michele Russel in ‘Black Eyed Blues Connections’ calls women’s blues a ‘coded language of resistance’ (Hull et al. 202) She also says in another essay: Blues, first and last, are a familiar, available idiom for black women, even a

staple of life. [...] We all know something about blues. Being with us, life is the only training we get to measure their truth. They talk to us, in our own language. They are the expression of a particular social process by which poor black women have commented on all the major theatrical, practical, and political questions facing us and have created a mass audience who listens to what we say, in that form. (Hull et al. 131)

Ultimately, much of Walker's writing, and especially *The Color Purple*, is a monument, not just to Bessie Smith and Zora Neale Hurston, but to the black victims and survivors of sexual abuse who historically have been silenced in white (and black male) literature, but who have nevertheless expressed their pain in the vernacular of the blues. It is also, crucially, 'a monument in which the Black English of the oral tradition is forever carved in stone'. (Lauret 120)

In *The Temple of My Familiar* (1989) a novel that will not be taken up here, Walker challenges history through memory and interrogates official historiography in several ways, most notably in its assured insistence that the study of ancient female-based religion is not some recent invention or simply a radical feminist idea. Scholarship, as Maria Lauret points out, "is not necessarily true and objective knowledge production, but rather a cultural practice invested with particular ideological interests" (131). As with Celie and Nettie in *The Color Purple*, history is revised and

presented in a way opposed to the received knowledge passed on through the white-sanctioned text books that has conditioned the minds of such people like Suwelo and Fanny. Celie's letters are written, as Valerie Babb says, "to undo what writing has done".<sup>4</sup>

This revisioning of history by fact and fantasy to offer a counter-history is often done through the oral tradition, the notion of history as storytelling, a practice that is particularly popular in the South. To quote Eudora Welty:

"As it happens, we in the South have grown up being narrators. We have lived in a place...where storytelling is a way of life. [...] We heard stories told by relatives and friends. A great many of them were family tales....If we weren't around when something happened, way back, at least we think we know what it was like simply because we've heard it so long". (Stephens 7)

Walker emphasizes on how the written word, appropriated by patriarchal forces, can be misleading and erroneous, history often failing to include the other version, herstory. Storytelling becomes a means of passing on submerged or discredited forms of knowledge, taking on the various forms of fantasizing, narration, entertainment, reminiscing, instruction and practical advice.

This is not to say that Walker discredits all forms of writing, for to do so would be to invalidate her own art. Alongside the validation of orality there are also passages in her novels which

emphasize the value of writing - academic as well as creative - because writing is also a way of preserving memory. Thus we see Celie and Nettie writing letters to record their experiences and memories, and Tashi symbolically breaking her silence and writing in huge, childlike letters at the end of *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. 'Scribbling my big letters as if I were a child. It had occurred to me on the plane that never would I be able to write a book about my life, nor even a pamphlet, but that write something I could and would' (*Possessing*103). Her sign says: 'If you lie about your own pain, you will be killed by those who will claim you enjoy it'. (102)

Like everything else that is characteristic of Walker's writing, even the value of orality does not escape questioning. Particularly in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, the much vaunted African oral tradition is not the medium of passing on a valuable cultural heritage, but the ideological instrument of what amounts to torture. In Olinka, mothers tell their daughters that they should comply with tradition, that to be 'bathed' - as the euphemism for female genital mutilation goes - will make them more valuable for their families, their future husbands and their people.

Maria Lauret observes that here, Walker breaks with two tenets of Afrocentric feminist thought at one stroke: first, that the oral tradition is a source of alternative knowledge which is to be revered, and second, that mothers always

have their daughters' best interests at heart (166). This female wisdom (that circumcision is necessary, or even desirable), Walker implies, is indeed, female folly. The fact that it is passed on orally in a tribal context lends it cultural authority against the ideological incursions of the West, but it also means that authority cannot be questioned from within African culture, for to question it equals betrayal of the heritage. As Walter Ong explains in *Orality and Literacy*, oral cultures by their very nature tend to be traditionalist or conservative:

"Since in a primary oral culture conceptualized knowledge that is not repeated aloud soon vanishes, oral societies must invest great energy in repeating over and over again what has been learned arduously over the ages. [...] By storing knowledge outside the mind, writing and even more, print, downgrade the figures of the old wise man and the wise old woman, repeaters of the past, in favor of younger discoverers of something new". (41)

Whether the revisiting and recounting of memory and history is presented through the oral tradition or the more formalized written discourse, what is important here is the necessity of recognizing and rediscovering the past, personal, as well as national. Over and over again, Walker implies that the attitude of "national amnesia" that America often adopts with regard to blacks as a race, and the complicity of blacks themselves in their efforts to deal with pain, is a deterrent

to self-knowledge and true healing. Frederic Jameson defines post-modernism's "one major theme" as;

"...the disappearance of a sense of history, the way in which our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past, has begun to live in a perpetual present and in a perpetual change that obliterates traditions of the kind which all earlier social formations have had in one way or another to preserve." (Foster 25)

Walker's artistic responsibility of the presentation, representation and preservation of history must be achieved by the acts of remembering and retelling. Pierre Nora states that certain incidents, objects, or people trigger our minds to remember things in the past, and these become *lieux de memoire* (sites of memory)<sup>5</sup>. What Walker does, in effect, is create such sites through her characters and the stories they live out. Sites of memory are landmarks of the past invested by an individual or a group with 'symbolic and political significance' as Genevieve Fabre and Richard O'Meally explain (Fabre 22). A site of memory can therefore be a monument, a photograph, a story, a book, a historical figure- indeed, almost anything which generates 'processes of imaginative recollection and the historical consciousness'. The study of material culture, of music (such as the blues), of vernacular language, of religious practices can therefore lead us, as sites of memory, into a forgotten, suppressed or even an unconscious past, but only if such sites

are invested by a group or by an individual with symbolic significance and with the intention to remember. As a critic notes, it may be worthwhile to point out the difference between Morrison and Walker in rewriting African American history here (Lauret 156). For both, sites of memory have a role to play in coming to terms with a traumatic past, but unlike Walker, Morrison's imaginative work in reconstructing the experience of slavery in *Beloved* cannot redeem the trauma of that experience. For Morrison, mourning remains necessary, and *Beloved's* story is therefore 'not a story to pass on', even if, paradoxically, it is passed on in the novel. Walker, on the other hand, seeks to dissolve such traumatic tension by creating a past to serve present needs (ibid).

Another crucial aspect of this revisiting of the past is forgiveness – the asking and granting of forgiveness. Celie then, forgives the wrongs done to her by various oppressors, especially Mr. \_\_\_\_\_/ Albert. It is by relinquishing her fear and anger that she is able to emerge superior to her circumstances and her oppressors, and harmony is finally restored at the end when we see both of them sitting side by side knitting companionably.

Thus, Walker's treatment of history is extremely different from one that focuses on a linear history. What is crucial is that in her womanist writing, it is the women who are at the heart of this revisioning and reinterpretation of memory, history, and the past. Implicitly

suggested here also is that women are more inclined to adjusting themselves to, and accepting change. With their intuitive knowledge and understanding of things that the logical mind rejects, they are better equipped to chart out an alternative history that will enable them to understand, forgive and reposition themselves in their journey towards a more meaningful, comprehensive existence.

### Endnotes & Works Cited

<sup>1</sup>Toni Morrison uses this term to signify the act of remembering or recalling, in her novel, *Beloved* (1987), London: Vintage, 1997. Print.

<sup>2</sup>Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire", *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7- 24.

<sup>3</sup>For a discussion of these women blues artists by Walker, see her essay, "Zora Neale Hurston" in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 83-92.

<sup>4</sup>Valerie Babb, "The Color Purple: Writing to Undo What Writing Has Done". *Phylon* XLVII:2 (June 1986) 107-16. Babb makes interesting observations regarding the power of the written word, and the appropriation and misuse of this tool by those who are in power. She states that throughout history, power has always resided in the hands of those who have control over the written word. Hence, the law against teaching blacks to read and write during times of Slavery. White people made the decisions as to who should be able to read and write, and in the same way, Celie's father decides who should have the benefit of schooling among her daughters. While Nettie is able to attend school, Celie can barely read and write because she has been made to stay home and help with the chores. This has far-reaching effects on the respective lives of the two sisters.

<sup>5</sup>Pierre Nora. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire". *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7- 24

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## Female Sexual Politics in Tattooed with Taboos

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### Abstract

*The discourse on female sexuality is closely studied in feminist studies as it can reveal much about cultural values, moral standards, and identities of women. Women's lives are often put under the scanner of culture and tradition which controls the female sexuality within the acceptability of the societal structure. Even the female sexual taboo like menstruation is hardly discussed explicitly. However with the emergence of new wave of feminism like the Free Bleeding movement, it has questioned the very ideology behind declaring the female blood as impure and unnatural. The evasiveness surrounding the discussion of female sexuality validates the conceited attitude of the patriarchal society. This paper will discuss the taboo surrounding the female sexuality in the context of three women poets—Chaoba Phuritshabam, Shreema Ningombam, and Soibum Haripriya in the collection **Tattooed with Taboos: An Anthology of Poetry by Three Women from North-East India**. This paper will address the pervasiveness of sexual taboos which circumscribe women through ages with the use of powerful symbol of phanek (wrap-around used by Meitei woman). Besides questioning the taboo imposed on women, it will accentuate how these female writers celebrate the sexual liberation by denouncing the taboos and their inhibitions. They also question the myth concerning the glorification of ideal womanhood which trample the woman's subjectivity under the weight of culture and tradition.*

**Keywords:** Manipur, Taboos, Women, Sexuality, Phanek, Menstruation

The discourse on female sexuality is closely studied in feminist studies as it can reveal much about cultural values, moral standards, and identities of women. Women's lives are often put under the scanner of culture and tradition which controls the female sexuality within the acceptability of the societal structure. Even the female sexual taboo like

menstruation is hardly discussed explicitly. However with the emergence of new wave of feminism like the Free Bleeding movement, it has questioned the very ideology behind declaring the female blood as impure and unnatural. The evasiveness surrounding the discussion of female sexuality validates the conceited attitude of the patriarchal society. In the



contemporary Manipuri poetry, poets like Shreema Ningombam, Soibam Haripriya, and Chaoba Phuritshabam with their usage of forceful and derisive poetic imageries has marked the emergence of new women writers who refuse to accept the taboos blatantly without any guilt and self-reproach. For them poetry is a rebellion that explodes in opposition to the gender construct that always censures them both in personal and public sphere.

The work *Tattooed with Taboos: An Anthology of Poetry by Three Women from North-East India (2011)*, which consists of seventy seven poems, encapsulates the repressed consciousness of three women Manipuri poets. Through this collection, they have explored the journey of womanhood through the explicit use of sexual metaphors which a conventional Manipuri culture will be bashful to confess in its wildest dreams. The intermingling of personal and political metaphors has entwined the growth of personal self with the political intensification which forms the historiography of Manipur society. They have broken the taboos which have for ages shaped the women's mentality. *(Henceforth, all quotations of poems will be taken from this anthology. Chief Editor).*

The collection has captured the varied moods of the poets from the first menstrual flow, the wedding night, the first consummation, the misconstrued womanhood, love, betrayal, anxiety, and hysteric state of female identity. This collection is divided into three sections -

“Tattooed with Taboos”, “Angst for Homeland”, and “Love and Longing” - depending upon the copious problems faced by women in their voyage into the subterranean space which is defined by tradition, modernity, and violence. The first section “Tattooed with Taboos” celebrates the sexual liberation by denouncing the taboos. The second section “Angst for Homeland”, expresses the disillusionment owing to the violence prevalent in the region. The last section “Love and Longing” expresses assorted emotions connected to love and yearnings. They talk about love without any strings attached to a person or object. Love to these poets is devoid of hope. This paper will make an effort to analyse the first section “Tattooed with Taboos” which exposes the myths of woman's hysterical position thereby exploring the pattern of woman's imprisonment, outrage, and insurgence towards their sexual captivity.

The sudden surge of women voices in contemporary India and elsewhere has made us question the position of women and the feminist discourse in general. The cyberspace has gradually intruded into our space and started grilling our feminist instincts to come out and see the shifting world where women in actuality are voicing their constrained emotions. Recently the hard hitting proclamations of “My Choice” in Vogue's Empower Campaign by a well-known actress of India and many other women from different walks of society have made us question woman's sexuality and what really is woman's empowerment?

Empowerment carries different connotations and it does carry class division. "My Choice" was too elitist for the Indian minds. To talk about sexual fantasy "to marry or not to marry, to have sex before marriage, to have sex outside of marriage, not to have sex, my choice" is accused of suggesting the adulterous nature and is not acceptable for any gender (Bawa 2015). The campaign has caught many feminists who gnawed at the social message which the video wanted to convey. Despite its remaining shreds from gnawing, one thing that catches women's psyche is the emergence of discourse on sexual taboos which for many years have been the dialogue carried on in hushed tones behind closed doors. The other movement that catches our attention is the recent sanitary pads movement started by Germany Elone Kastratia on Women's Day. It has swept the whole feminist discourse. It also reached many Indian universities which have shown strong detachment by the repugnant sight of pads in every recess of university. The protest by women has gone to the extent of showing the patriarchal culture which considered women's blood as impure. And coming out from the taboos which incarcerate women generation after generation is also an excruciating task in a traditionally rooted country like India. Such movement has dumfounded many and different opinions have also been generated on this issue. The discourse on Indian feminism has taken a new exterior with the growth of many female activists who have been campaigning for women's

rights. Through the evolution of new feminist concerns, we can also discern the growing anxieties and victimisation of men which will take its due course with time.

Coming back to North-east India, there is a general perception that women in this part of India do not face the curse of being born as female and its interrelated issues like dowry, female infanticide, child marriage, rape, female education, and other numerous problems. In a region like Manipur that has witnessed the two great women's wars (NupiLans of 1904 and 1939), many have denied the existence of patriarchy or male domination. Some also refute the claim of women's subjugation per se and have a strong belief that women enjoy better living standard as compared to the mainstream counterpart. There are many literatures available on the legacy of women's movement to show their prowess and their experiences in the conflict zone but feminist discourse on female sexuality is a relatively neglected area in the literature coming out from Manipur. The appalling disclosure of these three poets will expose the very mentality of the populace who are in denial mode that women are not victimized in this society.

The writings of these three poets will unmask the age old deception and pretense which Manipuri society has been hiding. These new writers follow the trajectory of the themes which occupied the earlier women poets like the conceptualization of ideal Manipuri women through myths,

legends, religion, and so forth. Nevertheless, they discuss the women related issues in a more vociferous tone. They also concentrate on the other themes like love, betrayal, the question of morality, and female sexuality that render the creation of woman's identity. They challenge to escape from the superficial demands of the society which persistently entangle women in the jargons of ideal womanhood. With this collection of poetry, a new wave has emerged which revolutionizes the perspicacity of women advertency, their life, their aversions, their appetencies, and lastly their self-liberation. To articulate taboos itself, displays a sense of rebellion against the patriarchal culture that always criticizes topics related to female sexuality. Sexuality as a term is "a domain of restriction, repression, and danger" and simultaneously, it suggests "a domain of exploration, pleasure, and agency". The problem is if we focus on the pleasure and gratification it would mean to ignore "the patriarchal structure in which women act, yet to speak only of sexual violence and oppression ignores women's experience with sexual agency and choice and unwittingly increases the sexual terror and despair in which women live" (Vance 1984 :1). After all women have to compromise as they have been taught to act in this manner since their childhood.

*Tattooed with Taboos* will dismantle countless unspoken problems facing the women in the patrilineal culture. These three extremely spirited young poets

avowed in their introduction to the anthology that, "Womanhood is at all times projected as an image of an eternal mother, whereby the poems try to resurrect the other women, the fallen" (i). It puts forth the inhibited appetency of women in a precise manner without concealing anything. It also lays bare the stark reality of the concept connected to imagining prototype of femininity which preordains her to immanence. The surreptitious objectives of archetypal womanhood are exposed by penetrating into the taboos circumscribing women's existence. They show the uncensored part of women's lives by vocalizing about their bodies, pleasures, desires, and enormous bodily territories which have remained buried behind the closet for centuries. This section celebrates the profanity and filth of women's body as a sign of liberation. Helen Cixous once proclaimed, "Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth...." It is through the act of writing that "will not only 'realize' the decensored relation of women to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal" (Cixous 1976: 880). For the first time these women writers are writing their bodies, desires, and repressions thereby exploring their bodily territories.

Soibam Haripriya's "After the Wedding", "Five Days' Untouchable", "I Died a Little", and "Of Clothes and

Robes” encapsulate women’s struggle to survive amidst the taboos which make them sacrilegious since the time they have attained puberty and their flight as a woman. “After the Wedding” uncovers the bafflement surrounding the sanctimonious marriage and how a woman sees it. For the poet the act of marriage is ‘an eternal exile’ which coexists with sorrow, frustration, and sadness of leaving one’s home to live an ultimate exile which brings with it the sense of alienation, displacement, and negotiation of identity. Thus the poet declares, ‘*The strange courtyard of my eternal exile*’ (3). The understanding of exile gives details of a course which involves a woman’s level of approval and involvement to dominance. The courtyard of her new home is like a voyage on an unknown terrain where she will gobble up her own individuality with time. The poet despises the consummation of marriage as some kind of forceful invasion by the alien object or the invasion by the dominant man. The woman’s body is constructed as highly sensual and a natural object for male desire through which man shows his superiority. As a woman is an object, she has no right to show her desire as she is expected not to manifest the active qualities. She has to act as the situation demands. It is shown as some kind of deed that needs to be done urgently without any delay. She declares:

*The deed was done  
Emptiness succeeded  
After containing you in me  
Void of withdrawal*

*Tired bed sheets soaked with violent sweat.* (3)

As Beauvoir has argued in *The Second Sex*, a woman is expected to carry on the feminine functions in their generality after marriage. As far as her erotic fate is concerned, “she has no right to any sexual activity apart from marriage” but man can “enjoy contingent pleasures before marriage and extra-maritally” (1949, 1997: 454-455). The sexual frustration of woman is accepted by men as a natural process. Apart from this frustration, a woman has to bear the burden of pregnancy - “a heavy payment exacted from woman in exchange for a brief and uncertain pleasure.” It is like “Five minutes’ pleasure: nine months’ pain” (ibid). Every relation is formed not on the individuality of woman but her relation to others.

The imagery of ‘...the gray Tulsi/ Desiccated by the merciful sun’ (3) in “After the Wedding” also symbolizes the harshness of woman’s life or Tulsi (a symbol of woman) under the sun, a male god. Marriage would also mean the permanent acceptance of customary duties assigned to every woman. The institution of marriage is shown as a license to invade the female body. It is a destiny offered to woman without which woman does not become a complete woman. After marriage a woman not only gets married to a person, but she is bound to a subjugated role of being a wife, a mother, and a daughter-in-law. She is expected to participate in the cultural practices and

religions through which she should prove her capability of being a good housewife. The agitating body of the poet which is resisting the male incursion wishes to uproot the dried remains of Tulsi or the 'mute twigs' which are silently witnessing the established absolutism.

The poem "Five Days' Untouchable" is about the taboos associated with those five days of confinement due to menstrual flow which is seen as the impure blood. The myth regarding the impurity during these days is prevalent in many primitive societies. The girl during her puberty does not see her blood as impure but the feelings of shame surface when she is persistently reminded of her impurity. In many cultures, women are prohibited to narrate the menarche stories because "public display of menstruation and menarche are regulated by rules of secrecy and concealment, and in part because menstruation and menarche are seen as something that happens to women, not as something women do" (Locke. et al 2009:408). Although menstruation is a biological act for women, it is not devoid of culture. It is "surrounded with secrecy and shame" and menstrual taboos and rules are justified on religious grounds. The seclusion of menstrual women from the rest of the non-menstrual women is an act of repression (Ibid: 415). During the five days of menstrual flow, a woman is prohibited from doing any chore as she is considered untouchable. She is secluded from the rest of the family. She cannot enter the kitchen, perform any ritual, and touch or serve men's food. The poet says:

*For five days  
Quarantined from the rest  
By this unholy fluid  
Wrapped with untouchable phanek  
Phanek after phanek  
Carrying my untouchable-ness  
Accused piece of cloth  
Contaminated for a lifetime (4)*

The 'phanek' or wrap-around which a Manipuri woman wears is also a sign of taboo and no man can touch it as it is inauspicious for any man while going out from home. A man cannot take it off from the clothesline also. The poet has unequivocally revealed how phanek and menstrual flow are blended to form a taboo. She expresses:

*Neither nocturnal tryst nor daytime  
assault  
Defile the hands that tore it away  
Yet lying apart from me  
In the pale weather-beaten bamboo  
polangkhok  
He watched the muga fabric  
Soaked up the rain  
Droplets after droplets. (4)*

Man can lay a hand on the phanek during his nocturnal visit in the bedroom or can tear it during the act of raping a woman but to touch it in broad daylight shows the unmanly gesture. The social and religious convictions are shaped by irrational mechanisms which put female in the lower order. The stigmas attached to women's sexual activities are enforced by patriarchal traditions. In their interview with *The Gender Studies Journal*, the three poets said that they have

intentionally used the metaphor of phanek and the use of phanek on the cover page is also a conscious decision so that many men while reading the book will unconsciously touch the phanek. Shreema expresses, “From being a symbol of impurity to the symbol of resistance in nude protest, phanek is a marked signifier in women’s lives in Manipur.” Chaoba also questions why the phanek is a sign of impurity and why many men shy away from touching. Meiteis have this belief that a piece of mother’s phanek can ward off the evil spirits (Tattooed with Taboos: ‘Quietly and Unexpectedly Poetry came and Woke us up’: 2012). The cultural belief system has glorified the mother’s phanek in one way and demeans it in another.

“I Died a Little” is a poem that deals with the different stages of attainment of womanhood purely based on the stage of puberty, loss of virginity, and marriage. A girl is introduced to the myth of sexuality which shapes her individuality in her discovery of womanhood. The rite of passage to womanhood is constructed through her introduction to the set of beliefs and values inscribed only for women. The contradictory notion of menstrual blood which sometime acts as a taboo is being celebrated in this poem as it is attached to the fertility of woman. It is menstruation which reinstates the fecundity of woman. Woman without her monthly period is disdained in the society for her barrenness of womb. The poet states:

*I died a little  
Killed by impure little droplets*

*Though there were celebrations  
The stained cloth  
Became my flag  
I was congratulated  
For reasons I knew not  
My mother said  
I was now a complete woman. (7)*

The notion of impurity is equally heralded with splendour as a symbol of a complete woman. The poet shows how unconsciously the celebrated societal norms are being forced and internalized into the women’s state of mind to structure a dogma that female without a menstrual cycle is considered an incomplete woman. Next stage is when she loses her virginity as a maiden. Disregarding the virtue linked to the virginity, the poet poignantly addresses the event when he (may be a boyfriend) deflowers her, he celebrates for “*being the first/ that became his flag/ worn proudly around his neck*” (7). The defloration of women is a victorious thing for men. The next is her wedding night when her husband failing to see the little droplets which are the sign of being a virgin condemned her. The poet makes an effort to investigate how woman’s blood is interpreted differently carrying ambiguous symbolic meanings.

In the poem “Of Clothes and Robes”, Soibam Haripriya questions the violation of individuality and freedom of women by imposing a certain code of dressing especially on women. Gender differentiation is visible when a female is expected to follow the pre-defined aspect of activity, means of clothing, forms of

reverence, and anticipated behaviour. She inquires why such imposition is not applied to her brothers. She inquires:

*They did not ask me  
Whether I wanted to uphold 'culture'  
While my brother cycled to school  
In his grey trousers*

.....  
*It did not have a khamenchatpa border  
It was not tailored  
From a striped khudei  
But yet 'his' it was  
It was his trousers. (14-15)*

In androcentric societies, the culture, knowledge, and institution often echo the dominance of men. Every standard in the society is created keeping in mind the perception and interests of men. The dichotomy of masculine and feminine is often used to maintain a patriarchal structure of power and to create a perception among women that they are naturally inferior to men. If women accept the roles given to them, they are exalted and eulogized for being symbols of motherhood and if they fail to learn these norms they are loathed for not obeying the societal standards. The freedom and culture represent the polarization of ideologies which conveys both liberation and confinement.

The imagery of phanek reappears in the poems of Shreema Ningombam. She fearlessly articulates the sexual morality which has overburdened the conscience of women by talking about the sexual union before marriage. She is also eloquent about the forbidden phanek and menstruation which subjugate women in

different areas of life. The sexual politics associated with women's clothing emerges heavily in poems like "Unburdening Dead Spirits" and "To the Ema Lairembi". She celebrates the sordid messiness of blood and even questions why a woman is not allowed to worship the female gods who themselves menstruate. Her poems are rebellious and revolt against the societal norms that bind women into a state of immanence. She desires to break the taboos and prohibitions from the moral standards that define and expect women to persevere. "One Last Time" expresses her desire to break loose the values and norms for the one last time in her pursuit to liberation. She wants to liberate from sexuality and social taboos which become parameters for defining the virtue of women. In the poem "One Last time" she puts across her non-conformist attitude. She asks the society to let her be disgraced without any ignominy in front of a million eyes for one last time. She says:

*Let me be immoral that shames the  
immorality itself.*

.....  
*One last time,  
Let my body be tattooed with all taboos.  
One last time,  
Let me enjoy the most wanton of all  
dreams.  
One last time,  
Let me show my nakedness to the tempting  
tempest.  
One last time,  
Let me be a mother without wedlock ever  
locking me up.*

.....  
*One last time,  
Let me be sinfully free [...]. (23)*

Although sex and motherhood are related to each other, to talk about sex without the legality or the acceptance of society is unacceptable. The immorality is not tolerable within the general concept of womanliness. Subsequently a maiden cannot be a mother outside matrimony. A maiden is often a desire for male gaze. Literature and any art display “the experience of sexual union and motherhood within the terms of traditions that celebrate love and eroticism...” When we talk about eroticism it involves a woman, the other woman but not the ordinary one. She is the other woman as she does not fit in the universal parameters. The erotic love is extended to the women like courtesans, devadasis, and so on, and they exist outside the realm of the definition of ideal womanhood with no desire and pleasure of their own. They are branded as promiscuous and wanton. The appropriate femininity and inappropriate femininity are defined within the tradition that should not be crossed. The falsity within the classification of womanhood is that “in one instance, the chaste, obedient wife, the very image of patience and tolerance is upheld and in the opposite instance, the desiring, seductive ‘other’ woman is both simultaneously desired and denounced” (Geetha 2007: 134). Women are made to negotiate within these strictures so as to come out flawless within the sexual conformity.

In her poem “Unburdening Dead Spirits”, Shreema uses the images of khudei (lungi for men) and phanek to symbolize the sexual act with an unknown man who comes every night and infringes her maidenhood. She discloses that that night “the eternal locked doors of my maiden-room unlocked itself” (26). The moral yardstick like ‘prestige’ has deserted her. She starts unburdening herself through each piece of cloth through the act of disrobing. When his hands touch her bosom, she is accused of losing her shame and lost everything which is beyond irreparable. She alleges:

*Our blood merged  
I do not remember what covered our  
baredness.  
That night  
My phanek or his khudei(27)*

The sexual experience of women is mostly condemned by the repressive social order. Male sexuality is discussed openly without any taboo but female sexual activities are entrapped in the socially constructed standards. Reclaiming woman’s sexuality would reclaim women’s body as part of her identity. Despite his treachery she feels free in his betrayal as she avers:

*For the first time betrayal freed me  
From those dead spirits  
Named [...]  
Izzat  
Leirangi-leinam  
Chastity  
This ultimate union  
Made me lose everything. (27-28)*



The sexual liberation would mean to accept the intense and powerful part of nature which would no longer be suppressed in the essentialist models. Codes regulating the sexual decency are applied to women as she is seen as the upholder of culture. Silence and implicit words define the sexuality within the confinement of home. A poet like Shreema resists the sexual silence which is the norm of modern sexual repression. Michel Foucault holds that “sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden”. Power acts on the rule and power exercises on sex is maintained through language or through the act of discourse (1978: 83). The cycle of prohibition says:

Thou shalt not go near, thou shalt not touch, thou shalt not consume, thou shalt not experience pleasure, thou shalt not speak, thou shalt not show thyself; ultimately thou shalt not exist, except in darkness and secrecy. (1978: 83-84)

Foucault further argues that as far as sexual act is concerned power employs a law of prohibition (ibid). Through the law of prohibition, power is exercised on women to control their sexuality. It acts as a taboo and it is imposed only on women. They should obey it as obedience, submission, and repression are the ways through which power is implemented.

Simone de Beauvoir asseverates that the “anatomic destiny” is different in men and women, so do their moral and social situation. Patriarchal civilization dedicated “woman to chastity; it recognized more or less openly the right

of the male to sexual freedom, while woman was restricted to marriage”. She alleges if the sexual act should be sanctioned by the code or norm, by a sacrament. She is expected to defend “her virtue, her honour; if she ‘yields, if she ‘falls, she is scorned; whereas any blame visited upon her conqueror is mixed with admiration” (1997, 1949: 395). She feels free from the encumbrance of ideal womanhood which seeks for virtuous and chaste woman and through which women are seen as objects of disdain for crossing the barrier of taboo.

In the poem “To Ema Lairembi”, the poet inquires of EmaLairemba (Mother Goddess) why a woman is not allowed to worship at the temple during those five days of menstrual cycle. However, the goddess herself is a woman; and a girl or a woman in her menstrual days is banned from offering flowers. She says:

*Mother, in this laibung of yours*

*I am not allowed a floral offer*

*It is my third day*

*And your carnival will be over today*

*Mother, answer me once! (39)*

The set of laws are laid down for women as to what to wear, how to wear clothes and how to present themselves in public. A woman is considered polluted and unhygienic. Religious explanations of gender differentiation are commonly employed to rationalize every prejudice and inhumanity against women. She asks whether the goddess is freed from such woman’s cycle or from such exclusion as she herself is a woman and extolled by

the male-biased society. Therefore, she asks:

*Have you never felt that blood in your palm?  
That warmth; that scent  
You are a deity so are you free from this  
flow? (39)*

She inquires the goddess whether she is offended when she worships her or when she does not dress up in accordance with the conventions. She asks if she ceases to be her child when she goes beyond the customs. Although men do not have to undergo such strictures, women, married or unmarried, have different rules to follow as far as dressing is concerned. The poet puts across the view that:

*An unsolemnised wife  
Yet my mapanneibaphanek will not be  
waist up tonight.  
Mother, would you grudge my presence  
in your laibung?  
When you do not why would they? (39)*

The mapanneiba phanek (a striped wrap around) is especially worn by the Meitei women on varied occasions. The way to wear it is also different from a married woman to a maiden. A married woman usually tucks it around the bosom to take part in the rituals whereas a maiden wears it around the waist. The poet asks the goddess why the society has imposed such ban on the women and not allowed to take part in the religious ceremonies whereas there is no such rule for men. So she requests the goddess:

*Mother, tell them  
We are your children  
Neither pure nor impure. (39)*

As far as Chaoba Phuritsabam's poems in the section "Tattooed with Taboo" are concerned, they are not that rebellious as compared to Soibam Haripriya and Shreem Ningombam. Although she talks about the maiden by using the imageries of flowers that carry their own symbolic meanings in the poem "Maiden Mother". The poem like "Sati" deconstructs the myth surrounding the Manipuri legends Sati Khongnang and Meikibi Khongnang. The poem "Fruits of Your Taste", on the other, puts on show the varieties of female bodies by utilizing the imagery of different fruits which are displayed according to the taste of the male.

Sati Khongnang and Meikibi Khonang are shown as two dichotomous women. Sati stands for the woman who sacrifices her life for her beloved husband. Meikibi wishes to follow the footsteps of Sati but incapable of bearing the flames she attempted to escape the burning pyre and later on she was compelled to plunge into the funeral pyre of her husband. The purpose of legendary heroines is to reinforce the roles inscribed for women through generations. Myths reflect cultural element and often the mythical heroines are invoked time and again to construct feminine dispositions. Legends and myths create a female identity that is interpreted as natural. The symbolic meanings found in the myths and legends are used as instructions. The legendary heroines are the embodiment of sacrifices, submission, and revered as the role model for the subsequent generation. The feminine

qualities prescribed by the myths need to be dismantled so as to expose the gender politics ingrained in myths. The archetypal females in myths are often silent characters and they moulded their existence as society demanded from them. In the Hindu myth, Sati becomes one of the epitomes of female sacrificial spirit who ends her life for her husband. The myths cannot be an authentic voice as women are always mute spectators who submit to destiny. The poet here in the poem "Sati" gives voices to the fallen other. She laments:

*Following your footsteps  
Putting up with the judgemental eyes  
Many a woman endured the rage  
Of her husband's funeral pyre  
In the lineages to come  
Your fame shall remain  
You are after all a sati.*

*Your sister Meikibi trailed your path  
Defeated in the trail of flames  
Neither able to die  
Nor able to live  
Defamed and disgraced. (46)*

We always venerate Sati's valiant qualities which are the emblems of purity, self-sacrifice, courage, and dignity of women. But no one knows her story. Thus, Sati narrated her horrendous experiences and said:

*"I followed my slain husband  
I thought of leaving the world  
Overwhelmed by its oppression  
.....  
I am not sati*

.....  
*Am I glorified to make martyr of more women?"*  
.....  
*You traded my corpse with tradition?*  
.....  
*Why take my name to kill so many other women?*  
*I left this world for I could not bear the oppression. (47)*

The women in myths are victimized in the patriarchal society. Myths, folktales, and legends are used as instrument to teach the folks about the human situations. They are the manifestation of ethnicity and what culture has expected from us. The customs and beliefs enshrined in the myths have been imparted to the people to promote a standard of culture. Thus, women are persistently trained to have the values of the legendary women to uphold the culture in which they live.

In the poem "Fruits of Your Taste", the poet uses the metaphor of fruits to display the female bodies like curves, fair and attractive face to the choicest market of male desire. She says: "You have the choice to hold and weigh/ You can just lift and taste its juices" (50). The tone is expressed in a lighter vein but the symbolic meaning is the trading of female bodies in the market of male gaze which bargains for the superficial bodily attraction or the exteriority of the female bodies. It shows females as commodity which is available in the market. Consequently she proclaims:

*Welcome to the market of fruits  
Some are like your favourite apple  
Some look like your juicy orange  
You have choices in front of you*

.....

*Till the market is opened for you. (50)*

Going through their poems, it can be discerned that though their bodies are tattooed with taboos, their frenzied, bloody, angry, and crazy writings have liberated the silent women who are circumscribed in the superficial bodies. They represent a unique female tradition which has derailed the sexual prohibitions.

They negate the pure and virtuous woman that form the crux of the social fabric. Negating the pure heroines, they speak of the profane woman whom society disdains, to construct a female iconoclast where desires matter but not the tradition. They abjure the cultural elements which constitute the personal “self” that is often repressed and dominated. These poets attempt to unravel the politics of their bodies which has entrapped them for centuries, in their mission to search for their personal identities as well as sexual autonomy.

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## **An Analytical Study on the Relationship between Education and Economic Growth in Northeast India**

**J.V. Nunchunga\***

### **Abstract**

*The positive association between education and growth has been witnessed worldwide; the highest contribution of education to economic growth is in India. This paper tries to identify the nexus between education and growth in Northeast India. The paper concludes that education is neutral to economic growth for Northeast India. The main reason for neutrality of education towards economic growth is lack of skills.*

**Keyword:** Growth, Education, Correlation coefficients, Level of confidence, Skill development.

**1. Introduction:** There has been a revival of interest in the concept of investment in human capital which developed in the United States and the United Kingdom in the late 1950's and early 1960's that resulted into tremendous growth of research and publications concerning the question of the relationship between education and the economy. Denison (1962) who concluded his analysis that, increases in the level of education of the labour force accounted for as much as 23 percent of the annual rate of growth of GNP in the United States between 1930 and 1960. Russian economist Strumillin (1925) estimated that, education at primary and elementary level resulted in as much as 79 percent increase in the output and wage of labourers in the erstwhile Soviet Union. Schultz (1961) analysed the contribution of education to growth in national income in the United States from 1900 to 1956 and came to the conclusion that, investment in education contributed 3.5 times more to the increase in gross national income than investment in physical capital. A World Bank Study of 192 countries concluded that, "only 16 percent of the growth is explained by physical capital (machinery, buildings and physical infrastructure), while 20 percent comes from natural capital. But not less than 64 percent can be attributed to human and social capital (HDR, 1966). Thus, Blaug (1972) rightly observed that, "The universality of this positive association between education and earnings is one of the most striking findings of modern social science. It is indeed one of the few safe generalisations that one can make about labour markets in all countries whether capitalist or communist"

**2. Literacy, PCI & GDP growth:** The annexure 1 to 4 depicts the comparative picture of literacy, per capita income and GDP growth rate among various economies

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of the world at the outset of the twenty first century. There are four groups of economies classified according to the per capita income in US Dollars. These groups are- low income countries (LIC) with PCI \$875 or less, lower middle income countries (LMC) with PCI between \$876–3,465, upper middle income countries (UMC) with PCI between \$3,466–10,725 and high income countries with PCI \$10,726 or more. It is evident from these tables that there is a wide disparity in literacy level, PCI and economic growth among the various groups. The high income countries with very high per capita income and high literacy rate ie 99 percent (annexure 1) shows low GDP growth rate. The developed economies are required to maintain their high growth but latest data (2008-09) reveals the negative growth rate. This may be partly due to the recent global economic recession faced by the world economy. The upper middle income countries shows low literacy rate of around 90 percent (annexure 2) as compared to the lower middle income countries with literacy rate above 90 percent (annexure 3) while the third world countries of ours with very meager income has literacy rate around 50 percent has smooth growth rate (annexure 4)

**3. Objectives of the study:**

1)To identify the link between education represented by literacy, and growth, represented by per capita Net State Domestic Product (NSDP)for India in general and the northeast in particular.

2)To identify the plausible cause of the neutrality of education towards economic growth in Northeast.

3)To arrive at a feasible policy prescriptions.

**4. Tools and limitations:** Karl Pearson’s correlation coefficient(r) using SPSS package, student’s t- test etcare employed with confidence level 95%. The data are secondary in nature.

**5. Contribution of education to economic growth:** Estimates of the contribution of education to economic growth in various regions and countries can be seen from table 1.

Table 1: Contribution of Education to Economic growth

Country/Region	Growth rate explained by Education
<b>Country</b>	
Canada	25
Ghana	23.3
India	27

Argentina	16.5
Nigeria	16
United states	15
Belgium	14
Kenya	12.4
<b>Region</b>	
Africa	17.2
Asia	11.1
North America & Europe	8.6
Latin America	5.1

Source: Mahbubul Haq and Khadija Haq (1998)

It may be noted from the table that the highest contribution of education to economic growth is in India. As to the Indian experience, a positive correlation between education and earnings was brought out by VKRB. Rao (1966), in his socio-economic survey of Delhi came to the conclusion that income differentials are found to exist between people with different levels of education. Such differentials are also found in the level of earnings of technical and non-technical personnel.

**6. Indian Scenario:** As stated earlier the highest contribution of education to economic growth is in India. The linkage of education (represented by literacy rate) and economic growth (per capita Net state Domestic Product) are presented in table 2. The Correlation coefficients are 0.588, 0.592 and 0.547 for all persons, male and female respectively which are all significant at 1%. The linkage is more robust in male (0.592) than female (0.547).

Table 2 (Linkage between Education and growth in India for 2011 census)

Correlations					
		Per Capita NSDP	Overall Literacy rate	Female Literacy rate	Male Literacy rate
Per Capita NSDP	Pearson Correlation	1	.588**	.592**	.547**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0	0	0.001
	N	32	32	32	32
Overall Literacy rate	Pearson Correlation	.588**	1	.953**	.981**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0		0	0
	N	32	32	32	32

Female Literacy rate	Pearson Correlation	.592**	.953**	1	.878**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0		0
	N	32	32	32	32
Male Literacy rate	Pearson Correlation	.547**	.981**	.878**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0	0	
	N	32	32	32	32

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Generated by SPSS 16.0 version

**7. Northeast India Scenario:** Northeast India primarily comprises of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura, and Sikkim is included of late. This paper also includes Sikkim in the analysis. Table 3 depicts the nexus between education and economic growth for the Northeast India. Surprisingly it was found that no relation exist between the two variables. The Correlation coefficients for all persons, male and female are close to 0. This illustrates that education is neutral to economic growth in Northeast India.

Table 3 (Education and growth in Northeast India for 2011 census)

Correlations					
		Per Capita NSDP	Overall Literacy rate	Female Literacy rate	Male Literacy rate
Per Capita NSDP	Pearson Correlation	1	0.075	0.075	0.045
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.859	0.861	0.915
	N	8	8	8	8
Overall Literacy rate	Pearson Correlation	0.075	1	.971**	.981**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.859		0	0
	N	8	8	8	8
Female Literacy rate	Pearson Correlation	0.075	.971**	1	.907**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.861	0		0.002
	N	8	8	8	8
Male Literacy rate	Pearson Correlation	0.045	.981**	.907**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.915	0	0.002	
	N	8	8	8	8

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Generated by SPSS 16.0 version



**8. India without her Northeast:** Correlation coefficients for India excluding the 8 northeast states are presented in table 4. The result shows that the relation for India excluding the 8 northeast states is stronger than including the 8 states for all persons, male and female. It is 0.747, 0.739 and 0.727 for all persons, male and female respectively, which are all significant as seen in the table.

Table 4 (Education and growth in India excluding Northeast India for 2011 census)

Correlations					
		Per Capita NSDP	Overall Literacy rate	Female Literacy rate	Male Literacy rate
Per Capita NSDP	Pearson Correlation	1	.747**	.739**	.727**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0	0	0
	N	24	24	24	24
Overall Literacy rate	Pearson Correlation	.747**	1	.973**	.991**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0		0	0
	N	24	24	24	24
Female Literacy rate	Pearson Correlation	.739**	.973**	1	.933**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0		0
	N	24	24	24	24
Male Literacy rate	Pearson Correlation	.727**	.991**	.933**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0	0	
	N	24	24	24	24

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Generated by SPSS 16.0 version

**9. The once upon a time ‘blooming Northeastern region’:** During the British regime, the Northeastern region was prospered economically. The Assam per capita income was the 5<sup>th</sup> highest all over British- India, there was tea industry in 1833, one of the firsts in the country; Coal was discovered in Assam in 1825 and Coal industry was established, there was a Water way (Brahmaputra) in 1847, timber were exported in 1850’s, there was a train route by 1860’s to China etc, Oil was discovered in 1825 and the first oil refinery in Asia was set up in 1901 at Digboi. Apart from these, the crop productivity of northeast was higher than the national average, the region was famous for handloom & handy crafts and silk was exported to Burma, UK etc. However, such prosperity has become history now. The once upon a time’s ‘blooming region’ has become one of the most undermanaged regions of the country.

**10. Findings and suggestions:** From the analysis of the two variables, it was found that:

1) For all India, education and economic growth are positively correlated. The correlation coefficients are statistically significant. They are 0.588, 0.592 and 0.547 respectively for all persons, male and female.

2) The same is true for all India when northeast India is excluded. The relationship is stronger when Northeastern states are excluded from all India data. The correlation coefficients are 0.747, 0.739 and 0.727 respectively for all persons, male and female.

3) The correlation coefficients between the two variables for Northeastern states are insignificant. They are respectively 0.075, 0.075 and 0.045 for all persons, male and female. This proves that there is no linkage between education and growth in Northeast India. In other words, education has no role in raising income in the Northeastern states.

4) The main reason for this neutrality is lack of skills.

From the result derived at, the following suggestions are made for the region to recuperate her lost fortune.

1) It calls for immediate education reforms to translate education into benefiting returns

2) Proper taming of human resources through Skill development is a pre-condition along with adequate economic overhead

3) Encouragement of HV-SV (High in value - small in quantity) commodities is now the feasible option to increase the region's income.

4) More Polytechnics, technical and management institutions may be opened.

5) Adapt PPP models in education

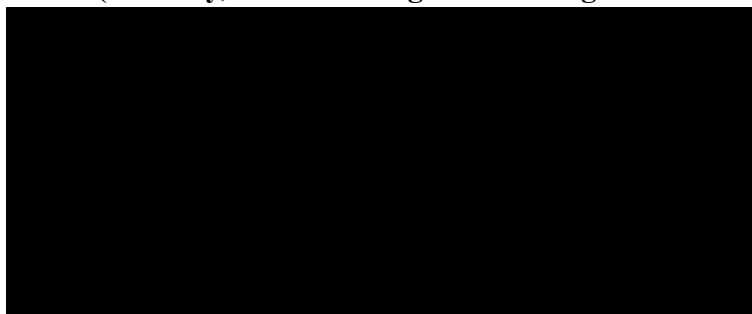
Discard the conventional subjects and encourage vocationalisation of education.

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**Annexure 1 : (Literacy, PCI & GDP growth of High income countries)**



Source: World Development Report, 2007. # CIA World fact book, 2009

**Annexure 2: (Literacy, PCI & GDP growth of Upper middle income countries)**

Sl. No	Countries	Literacy rate (in %)	PCI (in US \$)	GDP Growth rate (in %)	
		2004-05	2004-05	2004-05	2008-09 <sup>#</sup>
1	Malaysia	89	4,960	3.4	-2.8
2	Mexico	91	7,310	1.9	-7.1
3	Lebanon	89	6,180	0	3
4	Russia	99	4,460	6.9	-7.9
5	South Africa	82	4,960	5.6	-1.9

Source: World Development Report, 2007. # CIA World fact book, 2009

**Annexure 3: (Literacy, PCI & GDP growth of Lower middle income countries)**

Sl. no	Countries	Literacy rate (in %)	PCI (in US \$)	GDP Growth rate	
		2004-05	2004-05	2004-05	2008-09 <sup>#</sup>
1	China	91	1,740	9.2	8.7
2	Indonesia	90	1,280	4.2	4.4
3	Maldives	96	2,390	-6	-4
4	Sri Lanka	91	1,160	4.4	3.9
5	Thailand	93	2,750	3.6	-3.5

Source: World Development Report, 2007. # CIA World fact book, 2009

**Annexure 4: (Literacy, PCI & GDP growth of Lower income countries)**

Sl. No	Countries	Literacy rate (in %)	PCI (in US \$)	GDP Growth rate	
		2004-05	2004-05	2004-05	2008-09 <sup>#</sup>
1	Bangladesh	47.5	470	3.5	5.7
2	Bhutan	47	870	3.3	5
3	India	61	720	7.1	6.1
4	Nepal	49	270	0.3	4.7
5	Pakistan	50	690	5.2	2.7

Source: World Development Report, 2007. # CIA World fact book, 2009

**Annexure 5: Per Capita Net State Domestic Product for 2010-11 at Current Prices (2004-05 Series) and Literacy rate (2011)**

Sl. No	States/UTs	Per Capita NSDP (in Rs)	Overall Literacy rate	Male Literacy	Female Literacy
1	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	80558	86.30%	90.10%	81.84%
2	Andra Pradesh	62148	67.66%	75.56%	59.74%
3	Arunachal Pradesh	60935	66.95%	73.69%	59.57%
4	Assam	33087	73.18%	78.81%	67.27%
5	Bihar	19111	63.81%	73.39%	53.33%
6	Chandigarh	126651	86.43%	90.54%	81.38%
7	Chhattisgarh	41165	71.04%	81.45%	60.59%
8	Delhi	145129	86.34%	91.03%	80.93%
9	Goa	168024	87.40%	92.81%	81.84%
10	Gujarat	77485	79.31%	87.23%	70.73%
11	Haryana	93852	76.64%	85.38%	66.77%
12	Himachal Pradesh	68297	83.78%	90.83%	76.60%
13	Jammu & Kashmir	40089	68.74%	78.26%	58.01%
14	Jharkhand	34721	67.63%	78.45%	56.21%
15	Karnataka	62251	75.60%	82.85%	68.03%
16	Kerala	67652	93.91%	96.02%	91.98%
17	Madhya Pradesh	32453	70.63%	80.53%	60.02%
18	Maharashtra	84858	82.91%	89.82%	75.48%
19	Manipur	28931	79.85%	86.49%	73.48%
20	Meghalaya	49261	75.48%	77.17%	73.78%
21	Mizoram	50956	91.58%	93.72%	89.40%
22	Nagaland	55582	80.11%	83.29%	76.69%
23	Odisha	39537	73.45%	82.40%	64.36%
24	Puducherry	101072	86.55%	92.12%	81.22%
25	Punjab	69582	76.68%	81.48%	71.34%
26	Rajasthan	44644	67.06%	80.51%	52.66%
27	Sikkim	108972	82.20%	87.29%	76.43%
28	Tamil Nadu	78473	80.33%	86.81%	73.86%
29	Tripura	46050	87.75%	92.18%	83.15%
30	Uttar Pradesh	26698	69.72%	79.24%	59.26%
31	Uttarakhand	73819	79.63%	88.33%	70.70%
32	West Bengal	47245	77.08%	82.67%	71.16%

Source: Statistical Handbook Mizoram 2012 and Central Statistics Office.

## Customer Perceptions of Public Distribution System in Chhattisgarh and Mizoram

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### Abstract

*Public Distribution System (PDS) is viewed as the most important food security network in India in terms of its coverage and public expenditure yet it is not without its limitations. The government spends around Rs.750 billion per year on food grains, however, over 20% of the population remains undernourished in the country. The present study focuses on the performance of PDS in the states of Chhattisgarh and Mizoram by analyzing the household customer perceptions. For this purpose, 300 households were surveyed from the two states. The purposive sampling method was followed in choosing the respondents from the capital cities of Raipur (Chhattisgarh) and Aizawl (Mizoram). The study found that more than three-fourth of the customers in both the states were satisfied with the performance of PDS. The Fair Price Shops in Chhattisgarh were perceived to be faring better in terms of number of working days compared with their counterparts in Mizoram. However, the respondents in Chhattisgarh have to travel more than the respondents in Mizoram to reach the ration shop. Almost all the respondents acknowledged the important role being played by PDS in the well-being of their family. In respect of the replacement of PDS over cash transfer system, over 70% of the respondents in Mizoram and nearly 89% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh did not want cash transfer. The findings suggest the need to support and strengthen the existing policy of supplying the commodities at subsidized prices.*

**Keywords:** Public distribution system, Fair price shops, Ration cards, Customer perceptions.

### Introduction

Evidences provided by Jacob (1999); Choudhari (2003); Rao (2007) and Parmod Kumar (2010) and Chivate (2014) indicate that the origin of Public Distribution System (PDS) can be traced back to the period of Second World War

in India. PDS till 1992 was a general entitlement scheme in the country for all consumers without any specific target. The Revamped Public Distribution System (RPDS) was launched in June 1992 in 1775 blocks throughout the country with a view to strengthen and streamline the PDS as well as to improve its reach in the

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far-flung, hilly, remote and inaccessible areas where a substantial sections of the poor live (Parmod Kumar, 2010). However, PDS was criticized for its urban bias and its failure to serve effectively the poorer sections of the population, a need was then felt to review the PDS and make it more focused. Consequently, the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) replaced the erstwhile PDS from June 1997.

Thereafter, the PDS has become a popular food security system in the country which is managed jointly by the central government and state governments. It has been distributing subsidized food and non-food to the targeted beneficiaries including the poor. Major commodities distributed include staple food grains such as wheat, rice, sugar and kerosene through a network of public distribution shops, popularly known as Fair Price Shops (FPSs) in academic literature. These are known as Ration Shops in general public which were established in different states across the country. The Food Corporation of India (FCI), a central government undertaking, procures and maintains the public distribution system. PDS is considered to be the most important food security network. However, the food grains supplied by the ration shops are not enough to meet the consumption needs of the poor and they are in general of low quality.

Chhattisgarh state which was formed on November 16, 2000 with the 16 Chhattisgarhi speaking southeastern

districts of Madhya Pradesh, is known for its successful implementation of PDS in the country. Armed with the slogan 'bread and employment for all', nearly 35 lakh Below Poverty Line (BPL) people have been supplied with subsidized Rs.2 per kg rice in Chhattisgarh. So strong and efficient is the PDS in Chhattisgarh that it has become the lifeline for its 35 lakh recipients or roughly 65% of the state's population. However, in Mizoram, a small state of North East Region (NER), certain irregularities in management of public distribution system such as leakages and the existence of a large number of bogus ration cards have been observed. This paper attempts to study the performance of PDS as perceived by the customers of both the states.

### **Review of Literature**

A few studies have been reviewed in brief relating to the functioning, performance and impact of PDS in the country.

Ananda (2008) in his study on state response to food security in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh observed that the main weakness found out in the PDS has been its inability to reach the poor effectively. Cardholders face problems of irregular and inadequate supplies and lack of information about when the ration would be available. The villagers were poorly informed, and certainly not in advance. No respondent was happy with quantity of rice supplied.

Parmod Kumar (2010) analysed the performance and inefficiencies of

Targetted Public Distribution System in the states of Ashom, Mizoram, Rajasthan, Chattisgarh, Bihar and UP during 2006 - 2007. Majority of the households in the six states opined that the shop owners were indulging in delivering food items to the open market or they were involved in black marketing of PDS food items. Around 35% to 40% households were not happy with PDS quality of rice. But among the two states of Ashom and Mizoram, majority did not prefer local variety over the PDS variety.

Alamu R (2011) observed that PDS is working quite successfully in Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu has a universal PDS where all households are entitled to food rations, including upto 20 kg of rice per month. People are aware of their entitlements. At least one person in every household is aware of the details of PDS ration shops and prices. The dissemination of information is impressive. Awareness amongst the masses reduces corruption. Moreover, it is not just awareness amongst people but also politics that makes the PDS perform.

Khera (2011) found that between 2004-05 and 2007-08, the proportion of households getting any grains from the PDS has progressively risen, from about a quarter of rural households (27%) to just over one third (35%). In different states the proportion of households that the government is willing to subsidize .i.e. BPL households has increased by more than 10% points i.e. 6% to 18% in UP 22% to 36% in Orissa, 25% to 47% in

Chhattisgarh, 40% to 59% in Kerala. In addition, in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Tamil Nadu access was high to start with - 81%, 69% and 88% respectively.

Himanshu & Sen (2013) observed that there is a significant increase in the contribution of in-kind food transfers to both poverty reduction and nutrition. The authors also highlight that a 12 state NCAER study by Parmod Kumar (2010) reports high satisfaction level except in Bihar. Khera (2011) reports similar results from a nine state study, noting further that 80% of respondents considered PDS “very important” in their lives and 98% at least “quite important” and that a large majority prefer in-kind food to cash transfers, again except in Bihar.

Dreze & Khera (2013) highlighted the impact of PDS in poverty reduction in the state of Chhattisgarh where PDS was successfully implemented. In Chhattisgarh (2009-10), 73% households purchased PDS and the poverty gap index was reduced by 39%. In Bihar, only 18% of the BPL households did not get their full PDS entitlement while 97% BPL households in Chhattisgarh got their full entitlement under PDS. The authors concluded that India’s PDS has a significant impact on rural poverty. The impact is particularly large in states with a well functioning PDS.

### **Objectives and Methodology**

This paper aims at evaluating the performance of PDS in the select states



of Chhattisgarh and Mizoram from the angle of the customers of the targeted groups of PDS. In other words, it is attempted to study the perceptions of the household customers of PDS in respect of its functioning.

Further, this study makes an attempt to test the following hypotheses:

H1: There is significant difference between the respondents belonging to the two select states in respect of their preference of PDS over cash transfer.

H2: There is significant difference between the respondents belonging to the two select states in respect of their satisfaction of performance of FPS in their own state.

H3: There is significant difference between the respondents belonging to the two select states in respect of importance of PDS for their family's welfare.

The data were collected by administering a structured schedule meant for the beneficiaries of PDS in select states. A total number of 150 households were surveyed from each of two states. For the purpose of conducting survey, a

purposive sampling method was adopted in selecting the respondents from the capital cities of Raipur (Chhattisgarh) and Aizawl (Mizoram). At the time of field study conducted in January - June 2014, the proportion of BPL and Above Poverty Line (APL) households were in the ratio of 80 and 20 in the country. Accordingly, out of 300 selected households, 240 were selected from BPL category and the remaining 60 from APL category. In addition, among the beneficiaries belonging to BPL category, the poorest of the poor, come under the scheme of Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY). The proportion of BPL and AAY was in the ratio of 77 and 23 (as this is the ratio of total existing number of BPL and AAY card holders) in the country. Hence, the numbers of the respondents are BPL: 185, AAY: 55 and APL: 60, totaling to 300.

The hypotheses were tested by using Mann Whitney U test.

## Results and Discussion

An attempt is made to study the preferences and the satisfactions of the respondents in two select states in respect of the functioning and performances of PDS.

**Table 1: Type of Ration Cards possessed by the Respondents**

State	No. of respondents				
	Parameters	AAY	BPL	Others ( APL)	Total
Mizoram	No. of families	28	92	30	150
	Percentage	18.7	61.3	20	100
Chhattisgarh	No. of families	28	92	30	150
	Percentage	18.7	61.3	20	100
Total	No. of families	56	184	60	300

Source: Field Survey

Table 1 shows the type of ration cards possessed by the respondents in Mizoram and Chhattisgarh. As seen from the table, the category of respondents is same in both the states since they were purposively selected for the study. Thus, over 60% of the respondents have BPL cards and 20% of the respondents have APL card while about 19% of the respondents have AAY card.

**Table 2: No. of Days Opening of the Fair Price Shops**

State	No. of respondents						
	Parameters	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	Other response	Total
Mizoram	No. of families	15	74	-	47	14	150
	Percentage	10	49.3	-	31.3	9.3	100
Chhattisgarh	No. of families	4	1	9	1	135	150
	Percentage	2.7	0.7	6	0.7	90	100
Total	No. of families	19	75	9	48	149	300
	Percentage	6.3	25	3	16	49.7	100

Source: Field Survey

Table 2 shows the number of days opening of the fair price shops in Mizoram and Chhattisgarh. In Chhattisgarh, over 90% of the respondents have stated that the ration shops were opened throughout the week (except Sunday), however, only 40.6% of the respondents in Mizoram stated the ration shops were opened throughout the week. Nearly 50% of the respondents in Mizoram stated that the ration shops were opened only three days a week according to the convenience of the dealers.

**Table 3: Distance between the Respondents' Residence and Fair Price Shop**

State	No. of respondents					
	Parameters	upto 0.5 km	1 km	1.5 km	2 km and above	Total
Mizoram	No. of families	118	31	1	-	150
	Percentage	78.7	20.7	0.7	-	100
Chhattisgarh	No. of families	48	20	1	81	150
	Percentage	32	13.3	0.7	54	100
Total	No. of families	166	51	2	81	300
	Percentage	55.3	17	0.7	27	100

Source: Field Survey

In the field study it was observed that the ration shops, in general, were placed at every locality in Mizoram while in Chhattisgarh they were found at a distant location. The finding mentioned below also corroborates this observation.

Table 3 shows the distance between the residences of the respondents and their fair price shop in Mizoram and Chhattisgarh. As already mentioned above, over 50% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh have to travel 2km and above to get their ration while such incidents were not found in Mizoram. Nearly 80% of the respondents in Mizoram need not travel more than half a kilometer to reach the ration shop while only 32% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh have such convenience. Nearly 21% of the respondents in Mizoram have to travel 1km to get the ration while 13.3% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh have to travel the same distance to get the ration.

**Table 4: Time Spent for Purchase of Commodities at Ration Shop**

State	No. of respondents						Total
	Parameters	less than 1/2 hour	1/2 - 1 hour	1-2 hours	more than 2 hours	Can't say	
Mizoram	Parameters	77	72	1	-	-	150
	No. of families	51.3	48	0.7	-	-	100
Chhattisgarh	Percentage	-	3	18	80	49	150
	No. of families	-	2	12	53.3	32.7	100
Total	Percentage	77	75	19	80	49	300
	No. of families	25.7	25	6.3	26.7	16.3	100
	Percentage						

*Source: Field Survey*

Time spent by the respondents in Mizoram and Chhattisgarh for purchase of commodities at a ration shop is shown in Table 4. In Chhattisgarh, over 53% of the respondents spend more than two hours to get commodities at ration shop while no respondent need to spend that much time in Mizoram. 12% of the respondents spend 1-2 hours time for purchase of commodities in Chhattisgarh. In case of Mizoram, over 50% of the respondents spend less than 30 minutes and 48% of the respondents in the state spend ½ - 1 hour time for the purpose.

**Table 5: Are you satisfied with the Performance of Fair Price Shops?**

State	No. of respondents					
	Parameters	Yes	No	Can't Say	No answer	Total
Mizoram	No. of families	133	10	7	-	150
	Percentage	88.7	6.7	4.7	0	100
Chhattisgarh	No. of families	111	18	21	-	150
	Percentage	74	12	14	0	100
Total	No. of families	244	28	28	-	300
	Percentage	81.3	9.3	9.3	0	100

*Source: Field Survey*

The respondents were asked whether they are satisfied with the overall performance of fair price shops. As shown by Table 5, nearly 89% of the respondents in Mizoram and 74% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh were satisfied with the performance of fair price shops. Only about 7% of the respondents in Mizoram and 12% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh were not happy with the performance of ration shops.

**Table 6: Have you filed any Complaint regarding the Service of the FPS?**

State	No. of respondents					Total
	Parameters	Yes	No	Can't say	No answer	
Mizoram	No. of families	4	129	15	2	150
	Percentage	2.7	86	10	1.3	100
Chhattisgarh	No. of families	6	142	2	-	150
	Percentage	4	94.7	1.3	-	100
Total	No. of families	10	271	17	2	300
	Percentage	3.3	90.3	5.7	0.7	100

*Source: Field Survey*

Table 6 shows that 86% of the respondents in Mizoram and nearly 95% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh have never filed any complaint relating to the services of FPS. This finding corroborates with the overall satisfaction of the respondents in both the states (88.7% and 74% of the respondents in Mizoram and Chhattisgarh respectively) as shown in Table 5.

**Table 7: Price of Food items under PDS is Reasonable**

State	No. of respondents						Total
	Parameters	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Mizoram	No. of families	1	1	47	100	1	150
	Percentage	0.7	0.7	31.3	66.7	0.7	100
Chhattisgarh	No. of families	2	0	5	98	45	150
	Percentage	1.3	-	3.3	65.3	30	100
Total	No. of families	3	1	52	198	46	300
	Percentage	1	0.3	17.3	66	15.3	100

*Source: Field Survey*

Table 7 shows the satisfaction level of the respondents on the reasonability of prices under PDS items in Chhattisgarh and Mizoram. Over 67% of the respondents in Mizoram and over 95% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh said the prices of the ration items charged items were reasonable. Only negligible percent of the respondents expressed their dissatisfaction in this respect. But, in Mizoram, over 30% of the respondents have no definite opinion.

**Table 8: PDS plays an Important Role in our Family's Welfare**

State	No. of respondents						Total
	Parameters	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Mizoram	No. of families	-	-	1	73	76	150
	Percentage	0	-	0.7	48.7	50.7	100
Chhattisgarh	No. of families	-	3	10	92	45	150
	Percentage	0	2	6.7	61.3	30	100
Total	No. of families	-	3	11	165	121	300
	Percentage	0	1	3.7	55	40.3	100

*Source: Field Survey*

Table 8 shows that over half of the respondents in Mizoram and 30% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh were strongly agreed with the statement. Overall, 99% of the respondents in Mizoram and over 90% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh felt the importance of PDS for their family's welfare.

**Table 9: The Govt. had rightly set the criteria in Identifying entitled Beneficiaries**

State	No. of respondents						Total
	Parameters	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Mizoram	No. of families	1	6	91	51	1	150
	Percentage	0.7	4	60.7	34	0.7	100
Chhattisgarh	No. of families	10	32	93	15	-	150
	Percentage	6.7	21.3	62	10	-	100
Total	No. of families	11	38	184	66	1	300
	Percentage	3.7	12.7	61.3	22	0.3	100

*Source: Field Survey*

A question was asked to know whether the respondents were satisfied with the criteria set by their respective government in identifying the beneficiaries correctly.

Table 9 shows that over 60% of the respondents in both the states were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the soundness of the criteria followed by the govt. in identifying the beneficiaries. However, nearly 35% of the respondents in Mizoram and only 10% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh thought the criteria followed by the govt. were right. But about 5% of the respondents in Mizoram and 28% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh were not happy with the criteria set by the government.

**Table 10: The Govt. does not Inspect and Cancel Bogus Ration Cards**

State	No. of respondents						Total
	Parameters	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Mizoram	No. of families	2	62	84	2	-	150
	Percentage	1.3	41.3	56	1.3	0	100
Chhattisgarh	No. of families	7	76	59	8	-	150
	Percentage	4.7	50.7	39.3	5.3	0	100
Total	No. of families	9	138	143	10	-	300
	Percentage	3	46	47.7	3.3	0	100

*Source: Field Survey*

Table 10 shows over 42% of the respondents in Mizoram and nearly 56% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh agreed with the statement. Only very few respondents have disagreed with the statement. 56% of the respondents in Mizoram and nearly 40% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh expressed no definite opinion in this regard.

This finding implies that the respective state governments were not playing an effective role in monitoring and cancelling the bogus ration cards as perceived by the respondents.

**Table 11: There is a huge Diversion of PDS in the State**

State	No. of respondents						Total
	Parameters	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Mizoram	No. of families	2	77	64	7	-	150
	Percentage	1.3	51.3	42.7	4.7	-	100
Chhattisgarh	No. of families	2	31	109	7	1	150
	Percentage	1.3	20.7	72.7	4.7	0.7	100
Total	No. of families	4	108	173	14	1	300
	Percentage	1.3	36	57.7	4.7	0.3	100

*Source: Field Survey*

Table 11 shows the significant difference in the opinion of the respondents of Chhattisgarh and Mizoram. More than half of the respondents in Mizoram and only 22% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh stated that there were huge diversions of PDS items in their state thereby not reaching the beneficiaries to the full extent. However, only about 5% of the respondents in both the states felt the other way. Over 42% of the respondents in Mizoram and nearly 73% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh expressed no definite opinion.

**Table 12: There is no proper inspection of FPS in the State**

State	No. of respondents						Total
	Parameters	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Mizoram	No. of families	5	60	81	4	-	150
	Percentage	3.30%	40	54	2.7	0	100
Chhattisgarh	No. of families	4	66	73	7	-	150
	Percentage	2.7	44	48.7	4.7	0	100
Total	No. of families	9	126	154	11	-	300
	Percentage	3	42	51.3	3.7	0	100

*Source: Field Survey*

As shown by Table 12, 40% of the respondents in Mizoram and 44% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh agreed with the statement, "There is no proper monitoring

of FPS by the state govt.”.But only about 3% of the respondents in Mizoram and nearly 5% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh did not agree with the statement. In this regard also, many of the respondents took a neutral stand (54% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh and nearly 49% of the respondents in Mizoram).

**Table 13: Cash Transfer is a Better Option than PDS**

State	No. of respondents						
	Parameters	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Mizoram	No. of families	2	2	36	105	5	150
	Percentage	1.3	1.3	24	70	3.3	100
Chhattisgarh	No. of families	13	-	4	-	133	150
	Percentage	8.7	-	2.7	-	88.7	100
Total	No. of families	15	2	40	105	138	300
	Percentage	5	0.7	13.3	35	46	100

*Source: Field Survey*

It is attempted to know the perception of the respondents in both the states, they were asked to indicate their opinion on whether cash transfer is a better option than PDS on a five point rating scale as shown in Table 13. The table shows that over 70% of the respondents in Mizoram and nearly 89% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh did not want to replace PDS to cash transfer. Only 2.6% of the respondents in Mizoram and nearly 9% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh felt cash transfer as a better option. But, 24% of the respondents in Mizoram and only 3% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh expressed no definite opinion in this regard.

### Testing of Hypotheses

The hypotheses framed for the present study were tested using Mann Whitney U test to determine whether significant differences existed between variables.

**Table 14: Mann Whitney U –test Summary table showing their Preference of PDS over Cash Transfer**

State	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U-value	Remarks
Mizoram	150	94.04	14106.5	2781.5	P<0.05
Chhattisgarh	150	206.96	31043.5		
Total	300				

From Table 14, it may be observed that the Mann Whitney U- value is 2781.500 with a p value of 0.000 which shows that there is significant difference in their preference



of PDS over cash between Mizoram with sum of the ranks score of 14106.50 and Chhattisgarh with sum of the ranks score of 31043.50.

**Table 15: Mann Whitney U-test table Summary showing the Respondent's Satisfaction on Performance of FPS**

State	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U-value	Remarks
Mizoram	150	139.22	20883	9558.5	P<0.05
Chhattisgarh	150	161.78	24267		
Total	300				

From Table 15, it may be observed that the Mann Whitney U- value is 9558.500 with a p value of 0.001 which shows that there is significant difference in their satisfaction on the performance of FPS between Mizoram with sum of the ranks score of 20883.00 and Chhattisgarh with sum of the ranks score of 24267.00.

**Table 16: Mann Whitney U-test Summary table showing the Perception of Importance of PDS in their family's welfare**

State	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U- value	Remarks
Mizoram	150	168.87	25330	8495	P<0.05
Chhattisgarh	150	132.13	19820		
Total	300				

From Table 16, it can be observed that the Mann Whitney U- value is 8495.000 with a p value of 0.000 which shows that there is significant difference in their opinion on importance of PDS for their family's welfare between Mizoram with sum of the ranks score of 25330.00 and Chhattisgarh with sum of the ranks score of 19820.00

### Major Findings

The following are the major findings of the study:

- The Fair Price Shops in Chhattisgarh were perceived to be faring better in terms of number of working days compared with their counterparts in Mizoram.
- Respondents in Chhattisgarh have to travel more than the respondents in Mizoram to reach the ration shop.
- In Chhattisgarh, respondents spend more than two hours to get commodities at ration shop while the respondents in Mizoram need not spend that much time.
- Nearly 89% of the respondents in Mizoram and 74% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh were satisfied with the overall performance of fair price shops.

- In Mizoram, 86% of the respondents and nearly 95% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh have never filed any complaint relating to the services of FPS.
- Majority of the respondents in Mizoram and almost all of the respondents in Chhattisgarh felt that the prices charged for the ration items were reasonable.
- Almost all the respondents in Mizoram and over 90% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh felt that the PDS plays an important role in their family's welfare.
- Majority of the respondents in both the states were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the soundness of the criteria followed by the govt. in identifying the beneficiaries.
- The respective state governments were not playing an effective role in monitoring and cancelling the bogus ration cards as perceived by the respondents.
- Over 70% of the respondents in Mizoram and nearly 89% of the respondents in Chhattisgarh did not want to replace PDS to cash transfer.

### **Conclusions**

PDS has been an important food security measure meant for vulnerable sections of the society, especially in underdeveloped states such as Chhattisgarh and Mizoram. The customers of the two states were satisfied with the performance of PDS although significant differences exist in their perception in respect of some issues. The study also highlights the need to eliminate the bogus ration cards to avoid the wastage of resources and to strengthen the existing system. The Chhattisgarh government may consider opening of more FPSs for the convenience of the customer. The overall analysis indicates that the vast majority of the respondents in the select states of Chhattisgarh and Mizoram were satisfied with the functioning of PDS in their respective states. They were particularly satisfied with the reasonable prices of the goods distributed through the PDS, and the role being played by PDS in their well-being. Almost all the respondents in both the states still prefer PDS over cash transfer which would imply the need to support and strengthen the existing policy of supplying the commodities at subsidized prices through PDS.

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## India – A Unity in Variety: Exploring Nation Building and Nationalism

Srinibas Pathi\*

### Abstract

*India is a unity in variety. Our country stands for multiculturalism and plurality that have been wrongly (rather deliberately) depicted by many as symbolic of unity in diversity. While the term diversity has a perceptible negative connotation, variety stands for things positive, constructive and accommodative. The elements, factors, forces, actors, and ideas that stand for the traditional notion of nation or nationalism are very much present in India. But they go beyond their classical meaning and implications and they even defy many of the stereotypical interpretations. For instance, an ideal nation should have commonness in terms of language, religion, geographical compactness, economic uniqueness etc. When juxtaposed to the situation in India, critics often fail to justify the traditional notion of a nation vis-à-vis that in our country. But what many of them overlook is the uniqueness of India in terms of presence of myriad languages, dialects, religions, sects, geographical regions, custom, heritage, dress patterns, food habits, climatic zones etc that exhibit the pan-Indian features and a latent virtue called Indianness that binds all these factors and forces through a thread that is too subtle to perceive.*

**Key Words:** Nation, Nation Building, Nationalism, Indianness, Multiculturalism

India's history, culture, tradition and heritage represent a continuum that binds the past, present and future. We cherish an intricate mosaic of multiple identities such as personal, individual, group, community, state specific, regional and national that go beyond our geographical boundary and merge with a universal and international way of life. Our nation not only stands for a peaceful and steady nation building process, but also an international order that proclaims peace and harmony for humankind and global ecology.

One of the most pertinent queries that is often raised in this context is whether India is a nation, a nation state, a multi-national state, a civilizational state, or just a convenient and practical geographical entity. A number of keen observers and critics describe large issues, problems, and challenges confronting India during the process of nation-building. Even some of the skeptics are of the view that the creation of the New Indian Nation as well as the aspirations

and objectives of nation-building face challenges from various ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic, caste, class, and regional groups. One of the major challenges before the Indian state is whether her democratic, secular and republican objectives would be able to build an inclusive and incorporated social and political system. It is also a matter of great concern that citizens belonging to different sections like religious and linguistic minorities, deprived castes, tribal groups and women still feel estranged and isolated from the so called mainstream and the majority groups. The major issue and challenge is the integration of all these groups into the national life.

The primary foundation of any nation lies on its unity and integrity. It is the national unity that acts as safeguard against the forces of domination, discrimination, and maltreatment. It also promises peace, prosperity and development. India is a country with the geographical expansion of a sub- continent. Many of the issues, factors, and problems need not affect the citizens as long as they abide by the prescribed norms and values and are devoted to broader identity of the nation. India is a nation in the making with the dynamics that are seldom found elsewhere in the world. Rajni Kothari was of the view that the problem of national integration in India is the fundamental problem of political development.

India continues to grapple with the idea, adventure and ramifications of

communalism. A number of forces and groups in the country have been at work since the dawn of India's Independence to play with the idea and they have also become successful in implanting the seeds of distrust and deceit in the minds of a section of our countrymen. Occasionally we have witnessed the communal frenzy in different parts of the country. It continues to be one of the main stumbling blocks in achieving national integration. The spurious and mischievous policy of 'divide and rule' as practiced by the British to serve their colonial agenda, continues to be a part and parcel of the Indian psyche even as more and more Indians stand and raise their voice in support of religious tolerance and coexistence.

As India is a vast land with a large number of geographical regions and sub-regions, regionalism and sub-regionalism are the realities of our existence. For instance, we have the regional identities like east, west, north, south and north east. Again, we have plain areas, hills, forest covers, islands etc which make India one of the most complicated geographical and geological entities of the world. Such differences along with wide variations in climate, weather, flora and fauna etc have led to a number of regions and sub-regions in the country that in turn have contributed to different life styles, food habits, dress patterns, thinking processes and approaches to life and living. However, the processes of nation building, education, mass media, democratic system of administration and governance etc have

also added positive angles to make India a dynamic nation wherein a vast majority of the citizens believe in many common ideas and viewpoints that give a sense of uniqueness to our nation.

Most of the major political parties in India including national, regional, state level and minor ones practice the politics of populism that take advantage of the intrinsic structural variations of the Indian Society. These parties utilize religion, caste, region, gender etc as the contrivance to garner votes during the elections - be it national, state level or local. Again we all know that poverty, illiteracy and under development continue to be the major problems that have created deep divides in the country. The critics of our model of development believe that such gaps have led to the rise of extremism like ultra left activities in various parts of the country.

Tribal uprising in different states of India and the rise of naxalism and such other elements are the instances which are also related to lack of proper development in different parts of India which has led to regional imbalance which in turn has ignited the fire that has led to law and order problems. Some of the writers like Amartya Sen are of the view that development, welfare of the marginalized and democratic system have to go hand in hand. Coupled with this, we need to concentrate on a few other issues like curbing administrative corruption, apathy, circulation of black money in the economy, prioritizing developmental agenda in tune with the traditional and

cultural philosophy that is found in different parts of the country.

A number of thinkers including Mahatma Gandhi have emphasized on developing a discourse of civilization which is befitting to the Indian situation. Such a discourse revolves around the process of nation building. It also appeals to a civilizational unity which is a reality. The discourse of civilization has compelled the citizens of India to think about nationhood. Gandhi's ideas on civilization may be identified with an Indian way of thinking. He branded the western civilization with industrialization, competition, greed, and violence. He presented a construct encircling his ideas of non-violence, self-sufficiency and village republics. He valued Indian civilization while acknowledging that we have to open our windows so that we can get the ideas from all other cultures. But at the same time, he also emphasized on the view that our feet should be firmly rooted on the ground. Rabindra Nath Tagore was the pioneering thinker who developed the concept of society centric civilization rather than state centric.

Some of the major factors that have contributed to the emergence of Indian nationalism include political and administrative unity both during and after the British regime. The colonial administrators have brought about some semblance of unity while trying their level best to exploit the society, economy and resources of India. However, the leaders of free India including Sardar Patel

consolidated the Indian state by amalgamating a large number of former princely states into the Indian Union just at the dawn of Independence. The civil services that still bear the legacy of the colonial rule, with reforms, have contributed to administrative unification of the Indian state. However, the quasi-federal nature of the state, presence of the provinces, local self government institutions including rural and urban bodies within the parameters of the Constitution of India indicate the dynamic nature of our polity. In this context, the legacy of the freedom struggle and a number of the socio-religious and cultural movements that our country has witnessed during so many past centuries can hardly be ignored.

Western education was another significant factor that paved the way for liberal thinking and debate that contributed towards the growth of nationalism. But in this case also we had to receive the brunt of mistrust of everything Indian including our tradition, heritage, culture and indigenous knowledge and practices which can hardly be discarded or rejected out rightly. So, a number of thinkers and public opinion leaders of India propagated a system of basic education that could instill the spirit of nationalism in the minds of young Indians. Pandit Gopabandhu Das of Odisha was the pioneer in this field who started the first open school in colonial India called Satyavadi Vana Vidyalaya. Later on Tagore, Gandhiji, Thakkar and many others joined this movement. This

experiment reminds us of the traditional Gurukul Ashram. Same is the case of English language that is touted as the link language that binds us. But the fact remains that it is only one of the languages of India. It opened up the doors to western ideas and studies. It rather contributed negatively to the unity and integrity of our country wherein a few English speaking people display superiority complex over the vast majority of Indians who speak a large number of very rich languages and dialects which are in no way inferior to English.

Developmental initiatives in free India including growth of education, literacy, health care facilities, transport and communication, agriculture and industrial infrastructure, and expansion of science and technology etc have contributed a lot towards the growth of national spirit and oneness. But again this process is not without its flip side. While adopting modern and progressive ideas and institutions, we have also been subjected to some negative and retrograde notions like regionalism, parochialism and self-seeking behavior patterns that can be ascribed as the facts of life.

The emergence of mass media including the social media and internet based communication as well as a vibrant and vigilant civil society in India have been playing a significant role in consolidating and promoting national spirit, nationalism while contributing to the process of nation building. But here also it has to be viewed critically as some

of the forces both within and outside the country try to break the mosaic and secular fabric of India. Social media are misused by some forces to spread falsehood and misunderstanding. A section of the print and electronic media is also responsible for propagating trivial issues at the cost of genuine news and views. Another angle of digitization or digital media which needs a special mention here is that the vast treasure of our tradition, heritage, culture, dance, drama, music, traditional healing system etc is being documented and preserved that would have been impossible otherwise. It gives a new meaning to our nation and nationalism.

During the last few decades, it has been observed that there is a gradual shift of focus from government to governance in our country. This is the result of a global trend due to the advent of new world economic order, new public management, public choice theory, media revolution including phenomenal growth of information and communication technology and last but not least emphasis on good governance. The factors that are discussed in the context of good governance include, among others, rule of law, responsiveness, transparency, equity, economy, efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, participation and empowerment. The concept of e-Governance assumes significance in relation to good governance that also empowers the citizens and provides greater accessibility to them in the matters of governance. This process started with the notion of e-Government of structural

changes and use of ICT in governmental activities. Gradually, it has led to e-Governance which is the outcome of e-Government that ensures stakeholder participation, consultation, and engagement that ultimately results in good governance. This process has given rise to new opportunities to the citizens of India to participate in governance and nation building activities by contributing directly to the decision making as well as implementation of public policies and the evaluation thereof.

The discourse regarding what is more important between government and governance has dominated the academic debate for quite some time. While government is related to structures, processes, personnel, laws, rules, implementation and outputs; governance is equated with functions, objectives, performance, and outcomes. Some critics are of the view that government is all about procedures and governance is the substance. During the 1990s, in the wake of the new world economic order, new public management, public choice theory, information and communication technology, the notion of good governance gained momentum and wide acceptability throughout the world. It mainly focused on the elements of rule of law, responsiveness, transparency, equity, economy, efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, participation and empowerment. Next comes the issue of difference between e-Government and e-Governance. E-Government primarily refers to the use of ICT including internet



and intranet by the government. And e-Governance is the outcome of e-Government which ensures stakeholder participation, consultation and engagement that improves the quality of performance.

A United Nations Survey has suggested in the year 2008 that a Five-Stage Evolution model should be adopted by all the UN member states in relation to e-Governance. The first stage is emergence or the primary stage of creation of online database and official web sites etc by the government ministries, departments, and other agencies. The second stage is enhancement which means that governments may provide more information with links so that the citizens can access laws, reports, forms, and documents. The third stage is interaction which enables the citizens to have some interactions with the government like payment of taxes etc online. The fourth stage is transaction which ensures two-way interactions between the citizens and the government with the help of uninterrupted online portals and services. And the fifth and the final stage is connection which is managed by the government through integrated back office infrastructure that includes, among others, horizontal connections among government agencies; infrastructure connections; and multiple connections

among various stakeholders including government agencies, citizens, civil society, private sector, mass media, academic and research institutions etc. This intricate process has a direct impact on the nature of citizen participation and the quality of nation building in India. Besides providing an opportunity to participate in the decision making process and the implementation of policies, now the pro-active citizens can point out the loop holes in the administrative system and unearth the corrupt practices and personnel. Such a participation adds meaning to the traditional notion of democratic duties and responsibilities.

India has emerged as one of the fastest growing economies of the world. It now plays a decisive role in the field of diplomacy in general and in the United Nations in particular. It is one of the pioneers of the developing nations across the globe. It is the champion of peace, prosperity and friendship among the countries far and near. But at the same time there are formidable internal as well as external challenges to our country which come in the form of poverty, illiteracy, under development, extremism, cross-border terrorism etc that have to be faced both by the powers that be and the citizens at large in the true spirit of nationalism and fellow feeling that is compatible with the international peace and sustainability.

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## Good Governance Challenges in India

David V. Khiangte\*

### Abstract

*The criminalization of politics and corruption are two major challenges of good governance in India which need to be addressed on urgent basis. The Gandhian values of simple living and self-less service to public causes are rapidly vanishing. The dictum that 'howsoever high, the law is above you' is sought to be replaced by rule of men. To tackle the process of Good Governance the educated youngsters should be encouraged to enter into Indian politics and these young leaders should be properly nourished by the patriotic commitments and abide by the core principles of democratic governance. The citizens are ready to pay the price for good services offered by the state, but what is required is transparent, accountable and intelligible governance system absolutely free from bias and prejudices. In the present era when India is progressively moving towards development and prosperity, there is a need is to reformulate our national strategy of good governance in the country. It is being widely appreciated that good governance is dependant not merely upon good policy advice but more importantly on the processes and incentives to design and implement good policies themselves.*

**Key words:** Good governance, civil society, Right to Information, efficient, corruption, transparent, accountable

***“The Punishment suffered by the wise that refuse to take part in the government, is to suffer under the government of bad men”. - Plato***

The most significant political change in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been the emergence of the welfare state and the end of the colonial rule. This change took place particularly after the Second World War. Poverty and poor countries were unknown before the war. Backward and under developed countries, previously unknown, came into headlines as the theatres of war.

These countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America faced the heavy burden of tackling the complex problems of poverty, hunger, ignorance, inequality, and so on. No single word can cope with the diversities of such desperate nations as Afghanistan, Ghana, India and Mexico, to mention only a few that do not represent the extremes of contrasts but do suggest

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the variety that exists in their location, resources, population, history, culture, religion and other factors. Despite all their difference, all these countries can be called 'developing' because of what they do have in common - all are caught up in the process of a social change. They are moving from traditional towards the modern type from what *Riggs* calls 'Agraria' towards 'Industria', from agricultural society to industrialized society. They are in transitional stage, no longer traditional but not yet modern or developed.

Soon after Independence, there was widespread belief that without the role of the state, it was not possible either to accelerate the process of growth or to create an industrial base for sustained economic development of the country. The Second Five Year Plan stated in unequivocal terms, "The adoption of the Socialist pattern of society as the national objective, as well as the need for planned and rapid development require that all industries of basic and strategic importance, or in the nature of public utility services, should be in the public sector. Other industries which are essential and require investment on a scale which only the State, in the present circumstances, could provide have also to be in the public sector. The State has, therefore, to assume direct responsibility for the future development over a wider area."<sup>1</sup> The Second plan further emphasized, "The public sector has to expand rapidly. It has not only to initiate developments which the private sector is either unwilling or unable to undertake,

it has to play the dominant role in shaping the entire pattern of investment in the economy, whether it makes the investment directly or whether these are made by the private sector. The private sector has to play its part within the framework of comprehensive plan accepted by the community."<sup>2</sup> Outlining then strategy of development, the Second plan further opined, "The use of Modern technology requires large scale production and a unified control and allocation of resources in certain major line of activity. These include exploitations of mineral and basic and capital good industries which are major determinants of the rate of growth of the economy. The responsibility of new development in these fields must be undertaken in the main by the State, and existing units have to fall in line with emerging pattern....In a growing economy, which gets increasingly diversified there is scope for both the public and the private sectors to expand simultaneously, but it is inevitable, if development is to proceed at the pace envisaged and to contribute effectively to the attainment of the larger social ends in view, that the public sector must grow only absolutely but also relatively to private sector."<sup>3</sup> This clearly indicates that India, as an under developed country is faced with major problems such as:

1. Low standard of National wealth and consequently few resources of investment.

2. Uneven distribution of income.
3. Weak monetary and fiscal policies.
4. Low general standard of education.
5. Rapid population growth.
6. Production oriented towards primary goods, with slight possibility of profit and subject to market fluctuations.
7. No pressure groups which might be able to fight for greater social justice.
8. Weak public administration, bedeviled by corruption.
9. Lack of public spirit and national loyalty.
10. Environmental problems...and so on.

The preamble of the Indian Constitution reflects the goals and ideals the Indian state should pursue for the well-being of its people, that is, to secure to all its citizens justice-social, economic and political. The test of good governance lies in the goals and objectives of a government, in its policies and programmes in the manner of their execution, in the results achieved and above all in the general perception of the people about the quality of functioning of its various agencies, their attitudes and behavior towards the public, their sincerity, honesty and commitment towards public duties.

With this, the concept and role of the government has undergone a substantial change. Its traditional role of being merely the custodian of law and order has expanded considerably to include many

other responsibilities. The heavy burden of tackling the complex problems of underdevelopment has fallen mostly on the new and inexperienced governments. The instrument of socio-economic change is mainly the bureaucracy. Its role is no more confined to merely the maintenance of law and order and collection of revenue but has extended to bring about wide spread socio-economic transformations. Political parties and interest groups are still inadequately organized and do not provide effective liaison between the different interests and administrative agencies in shaping and carrying out policy. Public Administration is thus involved in multifarious activities, ranging from planning of economic resources and managing State enterprises to the looking after of health, education, social welfare, etc.

The notion of Governance and Good governance has become matters of global concern in the present context. The practices of good governance are presented as the prerequisites of democracy and development. Governance refers to the forms of political system. In a democratic setup, policies are formulated keeping people's welfare in mind. Good governance in such a system is based on rule of law and stands for a clean, honest, impartial, transparent efficient accountable and open administrative system. In other words, it is a citizen caring, citizen friendly and responsive administration. The prime duty of such administration is to preserve, promote and protect the rights of the citizens, as provided by the constitution;

so that they may attain the goals of development aspired by them.

Thus, good governance should constitute welfare of the people, without any discrimination based on class, creed, sex, religion etc. there should be special emphasis on the down trodden weaker section of society, physically and mentally challenged people. It should give right to information to the public, enforce accountability and increase transparency in the public dealings and strengthen the grievances redressal mechanism.

The wellbeing of a community depends upon the choices made by the people and granted by the authority. The whole idea of good governance is the participative system of governance in which those who are called upon to govern on behalf of the people are motivated with a will to give their best, serving and doing well to the people, solving their problems and making their lives more livable, satisfying and enjoyable. The essential prerequisites for quality governance are that, the system should be good and suited to the needs, aspirations, background and ethos of the people concerned and those selected for operating the system should be endowed with the character and competence and motivated by the spirit of public service.

Good Governance is confined to “surveillance over macroeconomic policies, transparency of Government Accounts, effectiveness of public resources management and the stability and transparency of the economic and

regulatory environment for Private Sector activity”<sup>4</sup>.

### **Good Governance in India**

The notion of governance was also used for the first time in 1992 by the World Bank. The World Bank has underlined the need of good governance which leads to economic, human and institutional development.

The World Bank has identified the following characteristics of good governance. These are:

- 1. Participation of people in the process of Government:** The active participation of people is necessary for the practice of good governance. This requires freedom of expression and association and decentralization of government and its structures and processes. In India while people’s participation is ensured through representative democracy and political power is decentralized through the local self government agencies, citizens’ active association at decision-making is not strong as civil society organisations are in nascent stage.
- 2. Political Accountability:** It means not only the government institutions and public officials but also the private sector and civil service organization should be accountable to people for their activities. It has been observed that the lines of political and administrative accountability are weak in India.
- 3. Legal Framework based on Rule of Law and Independence of Judiciary:** While India has adopted both rule of law

and independence of judiciary, in actual practice there is biased implementation of rules. Also, the judicial process is delayed and costly, which does not go well with the protection of human rights, social justice and guard against exploitation of marginalized sections of society.

**4. Transparency and responsiveness in the Administration:** India has inherited the British system of Bureaucracy which was tuned to exclusiveness and secrecy. However, with changing requirement, the administration is gradually being made responsive to the needs and aspirations of people. Also, in order to bring transparency in the administration, the Right to Information Act was passed in 2005 in which, every public authority is obliged to provide public information to an applicant within a period of one month. The effective implementation of the provisions of this Act is required to bring about desired level of transparency in the administration.

**5. Efficiency and Effectiveness of Administrative and Political system:** It means that the government processes and institutions should produce results which meet the needs of society and citizens. This requires the effective management and use of various resources to achieve desired goals. On this count, India lacks far behind. The public policies are slow in implementation leading to overrun of costs and failure to achieve the desired objectives. The process of decision-making is also not efficient and

rationalized with multiple of agencies and overlapping roles.

**6. Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society Organisation:** In India the growth of Civil Society Organizations is at nascent stage, leaving little scope for effective cooperation between the two. The culture of such cooperation is yet to evolve. However, the government has taken some steps to strengthen and involve civil society organisation in the process of governance. The success of Bhagidari movement in Delhi is a case in point.

**7. Equity and Inclusiveness:** This means that the governance should aim at incorporating the weaker sections of the society in the mainstream of development process. The gap between the rich and poor should be reduced to the minimum. Though the planned development strategy in India has always aimed at the goal of 'growth with equity', the gap between the rich and poor is still high and about one-third (1/3) of Indian people are still below poverty line.

**8. Consensus oriented:** There are several actors and different view-points in the society. Good governance requires the mediation of different, sometimes conflicting interests to reach a broad consensus about the fundamental goals and methods of governance. In India, while we find a reasonable amount of political consensus on external front, the internal policies and development strategy suffers from lack of political consensus. The lack of political consensus mars the

effective implementation of the policies and programmes.

**Major Initiatives:** The two major initiatives that have been taken up in India for empowering the common man and effective functioning of governance include Right to Information and E-Governance.

**Right to Information:** James Madison in 1822 gave eloquent expression to the urgent need for 'popular information' in a democracy. As he said, "A popular government without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to Farce or a Tragedy, or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance. And people, who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge's gives." Implicit in Madison's remark is the essence of democracy which is rule by the people. The citizens are the center of democratic governance. Every citizen has the right to participate in public life, governance and society. The Right to Information is a product of both Institutions and Culture. Institutions are shaped by the laws and the structure of government. Culture is rooted in the history and practice of government as well as in the broader traditional understandings of the accountability of leaders and of what constitutes representation.<sup>5</sup> Right to Information is derived from the fundamental right of freedom of speech and expression under Article 19 of the Indian Constitution which says that "All the citizens shall have

the right to freedom of speech and expression. As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), India is under an international obligation to effectively guarantee to citizens the Right to Information as per Article 19 of the ICCPR. The Right to Information Act was enacted on 12th October, 2005 which marks a significant shift in the Indian democracy and ushered a new era of empowerment of the common man in India. Through this Act one can examine, audit, review and assess the government works and decisions to ensure that these are consistent with the principles of public interest, integrity and justice. The greater the access of the citizen to information, the greater would be the responsiveness of the government to community needs. Right to information therefore promotes openness, transparency and accountability in administration by making the government more open to public scrutiny. Without information, the common man cannot adequately exercise his rights and responsibilities or make informed choices. So Right to Information is the most effective instrument to check corruption where the citizen has the right to take the initiatives to seek information from the state and thereby enforce transparency and accountability.

**E-Governance:** E-Governance refers to the use by Government agencies of information technologies that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of



different ends; better delivery of government services, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefit can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth and cost reduction. Traditionally, the interaction between a citizen or business and government agency took place in a government office. With emerging information and communication technologies it is possible to locate service centers closer to the clients. E-Government aims to make the interactions between the government and citizens, government and business enterprises and inter agency relationships more friendly convenient, transparent and inexpensive.

E-Governance effectively delivers better programming and services in the era of newly emerging information and communication technologies (ICTs), which herald new opportunities for rapid social and economic transformation worldwide. The governments at the national and state level seek to harness their potential and create new dimension of economic and social progress through bringing change in traditional governance structure to e-governance system. E - Governance has direct impact on its citizens who derive benefits through direct transactions with the services offered by the government. It explores new facet of leadership approach, skill and mindset of the citizens of the country. However, the process of e-governance requires

sustained commitment, political will; adequate resources which can develop a system of e-governance in order to make the current policies and practices of government more efficient and effective. E-Governance can renovate the relationship between public, private sector and government and enables better policy outcomes, high quality services and greater engagements with the citizens of the country.

#### **Challenges to Good Governance in India:**

While evaluating India's stand amongst other countries of the world, it is revealed that India is compared favorably with many developing countries though it has a long way to go to attain the level of developed countries. **The criminalization of politics and corruption** are two major challenges of good governance in India which need to be addressed on urgent basis. The Criminalization of the political process and the unholy nexus between politicians, civil servants, and business houses are having a baneful influence on public policy formulation and governance. Political class as such is losing respect.

The threat to India's democratic governance is from criminals and musclemen who are entering into state legislative assemblies and national Parliament in sizeable numbers. A political culture seems to be taking roots in which membership of state legislatures and Parliament are viewed as offices for seeking private gain and for making

money. Such elements have also found place in Council of Ministers and a Prime Minister or a Chief Minister in an era of coalition politics cannot take strong action for that might lead to the fall of the government itself. The Gandhian values of simple living and self-less service to public causes are rapidly vanishing. The dictum that 'howsoever high, the law is above you' is sought to be replaced by rule of men.

It is true that public is not a mute spectator to this phenomenon nor is the media. The process of judicial accountability has succeeded in sending several legislators and ministers to jail. But new methods have also been devised to fiddle away with the processes of law. Criminals facing prosecution get out on bail and even go scot-free. During the period of consideration of their bail petition as well as trial, the doctor invariably finds a serious ailment that enables the accused to escape discomforts of jail by admitting himself in a 5-star hospital. The question staring at all of us is how to close the gate of the portals of democracy for criminals. At the behest of the Election Commission, the Indian Parliament has enacted certain laws that makes it obligatory on the candidate contesting an election for Parliament or State Assembly to declare as to whether he is accused for any offence punishable under law for two years or more, for which charges have been framed. Candidates would also have to disclose whether he has been convicted for any offence in which the punishment has been awarded

for one year or more for the information of the voter. All these have created a favorable environment for curbing criminalization of politics. But it is necessary to move further to debar criminals from contesting elections. However, the nexus of crime and politics is so strong that the common citizens of the country have no stand to say or exert their rights. In order to prevent such misuses on May 2, 2002, the Supreme Court of India has given a historic judgement following the public interest litigation (PIL) led by an NGO that, every candidate contesting an election to Parliament, State Legislatures or Municipal Corporations has to give true declarations of candidate's educational qualifications, criminal charges and financial records. Though many commissions and committees have been framed to bring improvement in the situation, these reformative measures are just a drop in the ocean. So a new beginning is necessary to ameliorate criminalization from politics and the seriousness of the matter should be properly worked out. **The educated youngsters** should be encouraged to enter into Indian politics and these young leaders should be properly nourished by the patriotic commitments and abide by the core principles of democratic governance.

While corruption has virtually spread in almost all aspects of public life the person lying on the street is left to struggle incessantly with corruption throughout his life. Corruption is

relatively inherent in terms of client public puzzle, harassed by opaque rules and procedures, excessive delay in disposal of public matters. It not only averts the benefits of globalization to reach the common men but also denies transparency, accessibility and accountability, confuses rules and procedures, proliferates mindless control and poor commitments at all levels. Hence, there is foremost need to check corruption at all levels through raising public consciousness and strong commitments not to make dishonest compromises which would put down the moral values and ethics of life. India being the largest democratic country in the world is struggling hard to emerge as world class leader in the fields of social and economic development. The high level of corruption in India has been widely perceived as a major obstacle in improving the quality of governance. While human greed is obviously a driver of corruption, it is the structural incentives and poor enforcement system to punish the corrupt that have contributed to the rising curve of graft in India. The complex and nontransparent system of command and control, monopoly of the government as a service provider, underdeveloped legal framework, and lack of information and weak notion of citizens' rights have provided incentives for corruption in India. A conscious programme for strengthening of public awareness and also empowering the existing anti-corruption agencies would be required. The statutory right to information has been

one of the most significant reforms in public administration. The Right to Information Act provides a strong national framework within which public awareness programmes could take place. Corruption takes place within a frame. Accordingly, basic reforms in file management, government rules and regulations, provision of public expenditure review could provide the concerned citizens the relevant knowledge to hold service providers accountable. This would ensure that the resources that belong to people are used in the right way.

### **Conclusion**

In today's complex world of governing, government alone is not capable of coping with myriad problems. A degree of networking with other societal organizations will enhance the capacity of governance in the society as a whole. Also, this will facilitate development of social capital in terms of social groups agreed involvement and co-sharing of problem solving. The effective functioning of governance is the prime concern of every citizen of the country. The citizens are ready to pay the price for good services offered by the state, but what is required is transparent, accountable and intelligible governance system absolutely free from bias and prejudices. In the present era when India is progressively moving towards development and prosperity, there is a need is to reformulate our national strategy of good governance in the country. It is being widely appreciated that good governance is dependant not merely

upon good policy advises but more importantly on the processes and incentives to design and implement good policies themselves. Dysfunctional and ineffective public institutions are increasingly seen to be at the heart of the economic development challenge. Misguided resource allocations, excessive government interventions, and widespread corruption have helped in perpetuation of poverty. The weak institutions of governance make an adverse impact on service delivery. Poverty reduction depends on improvements in the quality and timely delivery of services to poor people on basic education, health, potable water and other social and infrastructure requirements. The major challenge is to put in place institutional arrangements for service delivery that are workable in a particular district or a region and are made to function in a manner that are intelligible to the local people and that also encourages them to participate. Such institutions would be responsive to the citizenry and reasonably efficient in the delivery of public services.

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## Reporting for Human Rights : Issues & Challenges

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### Abstract

*The main aim of this paper is to highlight role of media in vocalizing the important issues and challenges on Human rights. The paper will focus on the important themes such as, importance of media in representing Human rights issues in the society. It will proceed on to highlight the problem of sources pertaining to NGOs, Association and Churches etc which even confuses the audience in defining the exact demarcation of Human rights and also the existence of politics of representation from every angle of agencies. Lastly an attempt will be made on how these different agencies have to understand the concept and to bring forth effective recommendation for a better reporting of human rights issues by the media.*

**Keywords:** Media, News, Newspaper, Newsworthy, Technology, Journalism, Human Rights, Mizoram.

### Introduction

In this Global village - a world of media, where different mediums play an important role in each and every issue, reporting for human rights is becoming a challenge and of course it is the selling point for every news media, whether it be print, visual or the news media. The media appears to give more attention to human rights issues than they did (however insufficient their coverage may seem to some observers), but the reasons may be deceptively complex. Like all other places, in Mizoram, added coverage is due partly to the fact that governments and political leaders refer to human rights more often than they did even ten years ago, both in

their formal statements of policy and in political rhetoric. Public opinion has similarly evolved. For these reasons, the amount of coverage of human rights issues in the media is likely to continue to rise. For similar reasons, there may be higher expectations about the precision of that coverage and the quality of that transmission.

### Human rights as news topic

In recent years, it has become apparent to observers as well as practitioners of Mass Communications that human rights are more newsworthy than it was. The media have become interested not only in violations of human

rights, but in the institutional apparatus that has been designed to promote and protect human rights (Stanley Cohen, 1995). This is partly due to the fact that many governments, NGO'S, political parties, state, national and international institutions have integrated human rights principles into their policy frameworks. For eg – All the political parties namely Indian National Congress of Mizoram (INC), Mizo National Front (MNF), Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP), Mizoram People's Conference (MPC) etc, and NGOs like Young Mizo Association (YMA), Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), Mizoram Upa Pawl (MUP), Church Youth Organisations like Kristian Thalai Pawl (KTP), Thalai Kristian Pawl (TKP), Catholic Thalai Pawl (CTP), Salvation Army Youth (SAY), Pentecostal Youth Department (PYD) etc and many other organisations, association which exist today, have one way or the other in their manifesto, policy, rules & regulation or objectives in protecting the so called rights of their members and association.

### **Covering Human Rights Issues**

From the media's point of view, is human rights issue news in their own right, or are they news only when they are associated with other news? It should be stated at the outset that news organisations and the media collectively can say a great deal about human rights, but they have no inherent obligation to say everything. They have to select and have no duty to privilege human rights stories over others (United Nations, 1997)

According to a study done in 2002 in London, United Kingdom the report shows that though journalists have expanded coverage of human rights issues into new areas, many human rights issues are under-reported. Issues that are less visible, or slow processes, are covered rarely. Human rights are still taken largely to mean political and civil rights, and the importance of economic, social and cultural rights is ignored widely by the media in their coverage of economic issues, including the international economy, poverty, inequity and social and economic discrimination.

### **The media and human rights**

There are two main points of intersection between the worlds of the media and human rights. One is the considerable degree of overlap of subject matter between the two areas. Many reporting directly or indirectly have human rights content. The other is the fact that freedom of the media is itself a human right. The media are regarded conventionally as one of the mechanisms by which citizens hold their governments to account. To take the second point of intersection first: the emergence of the first widely circulated newspapers coincided almost exactly with the development of Enlightenment ideas of human rights. (International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2002). In Democracy, like our very own set up here at our state Mizoram, the Press is the fourth Pillar next to executive, legislature and judiciary. At stake are two sets of rights: that of the media to report

and express opinions as they see fit, and that of the people to get accurate and critical information regarding the actions of those in power. Other rights may be involved too — for example, those of opposition politicians who need the media to disseminate their opinions. In theory and to a large extent in practice the freedom of the media to go about their business without interference is held to guarantee all these interlocking rights.

The media industry is growing in leaps and bounds. It has gathered an unbelievable momentum and the credit goes to all pillars – media, advertising, public relations, corporate communication etc. Of late, media is focusing more into sensation. It's all about hype and circulation figures. It has become a commercial tool to make money, earn huge profits and influence people and government.

### **The communication revolution**

Recent political, social and economic changes have made human rights issues more complex to frame in media terms. Previously, information on human rights was news in the sense that systemic problems could be presented in individual terms, and action (appeals, intervention, and so on) could be advocated or reported. (David Held, 1997)

The communications revolution is affecting lifestyles and the organisation of social life globally. It is also changing the way human rights are perceived and reported. Newspaper coverage of some

recent event— like the Bru problems in Mizoram seemed to lead and influence the responses of the national public and even the central government. Yet human rights violations have been stories since the early age of the mass media. These reports have often been difficult to separate from propaganda, which has an even longer history. News of abuses and its use to influence and manipulate policy and public opinion has a long past, and news organisations have always accepted that information about many issues now called human rights are 'newsworthy'.

### **The impact of technology**

Technology is a tool that, in itself, is neither good nor bad. However, it can be put to positive or harmful use, and changes in technology have consistently generated widespread political, economic and social consequences that were never foreseen and that political authorities were not able to control. The impact of technology on the communications industries in recent decades has been far reaching. After mass production of the book (1400) came railways (1800), the telegraph (1850), the telephone (1900), radio (1910), the aeroplane (1920s), the motor vehicle and moving pictures (1930s), television (1950s) and computers (1960s). Each invention (and others might be listed) transformed the production or communication of information. Computers have already passed through several phases of innovation. The Internet emerged in the 1970s and is now sweeping



the world which has reached even our state, one of the remotest places from Central India. Satellite communications are transforming private and business communication (cellular telephones, satellite television and so on) and have profoundly altered the reporting of news. The introduction of fibre-optic cables in the 1980s multiplied exponentially the amounts of information that can be transmitted down telephone lines. The introduction of digital broadcasting (radio and TV) will greatly expand the number of television and radio channels that consumers can receive. Technological change and its impact on communications are set to continue. The advent of audiovisual educational materials will change education. Students are likely to read fewer books and absorb more information audio visually or today even through internet. By and large, most innovations in the field of communication have had positive effects overall because they have increased access to information — and this is almost always beneficial. (International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2002).

In the coming years, the highest need will not be to find information but to make good judgements about what information is useful and what conclusions may be drawn from it. Likewise, because of technology the excess of information on human rights issues become doubtful and we find it difficult to understand and perceive it in a right and correct manner.

### **Ignorance of what human rights are**

Within journalism there is a serious lack of knowledge of what human rights are. Many journalists like many politicians and others working in civil society are not familiar with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the international human rights treaties and mechanisms. Often they do not understand the difference between human rights law and the laws of war. As a result, human rights are often erroneously regarded as relevant only to reporting of conflict. Lack of familiarity with human rights standards leads some journalists to fear that, if they integrate human rights into their report, these may become politically biased. In fact, the contrary is likely to be true: knowledge of human rights will make most reports fairer. Given that human rights have become to such a large degree a language of international relations, the media have a professional obligation to understand what these rights are, in order to be able to portray and better explain the world to their audience.

In recent times, in our state Mizoram, we had issues where the biggest NGO the Young Mizo Association (YMA) fought to demolish liquor and drug trafficking. According to the YMA it is their right and duty to punish the people involved in it, whereas the victims, considered it their right to appeal to the court for judgement. This has many a time caused confusion for the media about which, where and what to cover as human right stories.

## **Recommendations**

The International Council on Human Rights have made some points of recommendation which can be followed all over the world for a better reporting of human rights issues.

### **To journalists, editors and media organisations**

1. Journalists should be given opportunities to become better informed about international human rights instruments. This can best be done through a range of awareness raising activities including:

a) specific pre-entry courses on human rights issues for individuals attending journalism schools (as part of the curriculum);

b) mid-career and in-house training on international human rights standards, including national perspectives on human rights law and policy;

c) internal editorial programmes to review coverage of human rights issues; e.g, refugee and asylum matters, rights of children, racism and racial discrimination, gender policy, health issues; and

d) Actions to promote exchanges of views between journalists and human rights organisations at national, regional and international level. Such meetings, briefings and seminars should be organised by journalism schools, media organisations and journalists' professional groups.

2. Media organisations and journalist groups should promote higher standards

of diversity within the newsroom while strengthening the capacity of journalists to work professionally and in secure conditions. Media should build public confidence in the quality of information they circulate. Practical steps could include:

a) the adoption of employment and recruitment policies that promote ethnic and gender balance in the newsroom;

b) actions by media organisations to improve the safety of media staff, including freelance employees, through appropriate forms of hostile environment and risk-awareness training and provision of appropriate technical equipment;

c) Regular updating of editorial reporting, editing and style handbooks and materials to familiarise journalists and editing staff with human rights terminology and to reinforce ethical principles in reporting human rights issues. These should take account of guidelines from journalists' professional groups on rights issues, such as reporting on children, intolerance and hate speech;

d) encouragement of professional co-operation between reporters and correspondents working for different media in different regions to better understand local conditions and to develop a more informed, diverse and reliable network of information sources;

e) Forms of self-regulation strengthened to build public confidence and to help journalists to examine critically their practices and frameworks

for covering human rights. Structures for self-regulation must be independent and must provide an accessible bridge between media, journalists and the people they serve.

### **To governments and international organisations**

1. Governments should commit themselves to eliminating all forms of official interference in the work of journalists and should remove all obstacles to the exercise of free media.
2. Where public funding of media exists — for instance, in state or public broadcasting or through the printed press — safeguards should be incorporated into regulations to ensure that there is no political interference or conflicts of interest and that the editorial independence of journalists is guaranteed.
3. Governments should provide open access to official information and should train official spokespersons on the need to provide media with up-to-date and reliable information relating to human rights obligations.
4. The right of journalists to act ethically should be protected and enhanced through, for instance, recognition of the right of journalists to protect their sources and protection from dismissal or disciplinary action for acting according to professional conscience.
5. Intergovernmental organisations should develop more effective and more integrated programmes of assistance to encourage media excellence in the

reporting of human rights issues, particularly through co-ordinated assistance programmes to media in developing countries;

6. Confidence-building measures to promote high standards through, for example, the sponsorship of research activities, journalism prizes and liaison between international media and local media outlets.

### **To human rights organisations**

1. Journalists, the media and human rights organisations play distinct and different, but equally, vital roles in creating open societies that are able to defend and promote fundamental rights. To play their parts effectively, journalist groups, media and human rights organisations need to better understand their different roles and responsibilities. Human rights organisations can contribute to this process by:
  - a) promoting internal discussion among human rights activists on the work of media and journalists;
  - b) establishing direct contact with journalists' groups and media organisations to discuss media-related rights issues and ways in which both groups can co-operate to create better legal, political and social conditions for the exercise of journalism;
  - c) organising joint meetings with media organisations and journalists to discuss concerns about human rights coverage and how to co-operate in

providing accurate and reliable information on human rights questions;

d) Suggesting confidence-building measures to promote better understanding of the human rights agenda through, for example, the sponsorship of national journalism prizes and research grants to journalists working on human rights stories.

(International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2002).

### Conclusion

The importance of media and its effect cannot be neglected today. Media is omnipresent in our world. As the increase of media reporting various issues such as reporting for human rights issue, it becomes an alarming call for media agencies to have proper and professional training to understand the concept and to bring forth effective recommendation for a better reporting.

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## Choice Based Credit System: An Opinion Survey of Students of Mizoram University

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### Abstract

*Many of the higher education institutions in India, in the recent past, have introduced the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) in their UG or/and PG level courses. The CBCS provides a 'cafeteria' type approach in which the students can take courses of their choice, learn at their own pace, undergo additional courses and acquire more than the required credits, and adopt an interdisciplinary approach to learning. The credit based semester system provides flexibility in designing curriculum and assigning credits based on the course content and hours of teaching. The Mizoram University has implemented the CBCS system in its PG Programmes from 2012 and has already produced two batches of students under CBCS. This paper highlights the opinions of students of Mizoram University regarding different issues relating to Choice Based Credit System which have been practiced in Mizoram University for almost 5 years now. The paper deals with the important issues like impact of CBCS on quality of education, adequacy of choice in selecting papers on open electives, factors affecting students' choice of open electives, impact of CBCS on the work load of students, difficulties encountered by students under CBCS and their suggestions for effective implementation of CBCS.*

**Keywords:** Choice Based Credit System, Open Electives, Soft Courses

### Introduction

University Grants Commission has come up with the Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) programme in which the students have a choice to choose from the prescribed courses, which are referred to as core, elective or minor or soft skill courses, and they can learn at their own pace and the entire assessment is grade-based on a credit system. The basic idea

is to look into the needs of the students so as to keep up-to-date with development of higher education in India and abroad. CBCS aims to redefine the curriculum keeping pace with the liberalization and globalization in education. CBCS allows students an easy mode of mobility to various educational institutions spread across the world along with the facility of transfer of credits earned by students. The

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CBCS imminently fits into the emerging socio-economic situations, and could effectively respond to the educational and occupational aspirations of the upcoming generations. Aided by modern communication and information technology, CBCS has a high probability to be operated efficiently and effectively - elevating students, institutions and higher education.

There have been many debates and deliberations regarding the implementation of CBCS all over the country, CBCS is implemented in such haste in many universities, so without clear guidelines or without proper training/ orientation it has been implemented. It may be too early to jump into conclusions as it has been practiced only for a few years now. As CBCS is a process of evolution of educational reforms that would yield the result in subsequent years and after a few cycles of its implementation.

Mizoram University, in view of the aforesaid recommendations, has implemented Choice Based Credit System in its PG Programs from 2012-2013 academic session, and has already produced two batches of students. Mizoram University has drafted two regulations for Post Graduate programmes under CBCS, the first one in 2012 and the second one in the year 2015. There have been various modifications and changes in the second regulation; there has been a change in the course structure, modifications have been made. However,

the present study has been confined to the students' opinions on the various provisions under CBCS Regulation-2012 of Mizoram University.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To study the opinions of students on different aspects of CBCS.
2. To examine the problems and challenges faced by students in pursuing their education under CBCS.
3. To study the perceptions of students with regard to the benefits of CBCS.
4. To enlist problems faced by students in pursuing their course under CBCS.
5. To seek suggestions of students on effective implementation of CBCS in Mizoram University.

### **Population and Sample**

All of the Post-graduate students of 2012-14, and 2013-15 batches from all academic departments of Mizoram University constituted the population of this study. The sample of the present study consisted of 697 students of 2 batches of 4<sup>th</sup> semester (i.e. 2012-14 and 2013-15) from 24 Post graduate departments of Mizoram University.

### **Tools Used for Data Collection**

An opinionnaire consisting of 20 statements on different issues relating to CBCS was developed by the investigators.

### **Findings and Discussions**

Findings and discussions of the study have been presented under the following sections:

1. Opinions on Issues relating to CBCS
2. Perceived Benefits of CBCS
3. Problems faced in Pursuing their Courses under CBCS
4. Suggestions for Effective Implementation of CBCS.

**Opinions on Various Issues Relating to CBCS**

**a) Impact of CBCS on Improvement in Quality of Education:**

From Table-1 we can see that 84 percent of the students agreed that quality of education has improved with the introduction of CBCS, whereas the remaining 16 percent did not think so. When asked the degree of its impact on quality improvement, 28 percent reported that it has been improved to a great extent, 71 percent opined to some extent, whereas 1 percent of them are of the view that the introduction of CBCS has no impact on the improvement of quality of education.

**Table No. 1  
Impact of CBCS on Improvement in Quality of Education**

Statement	Response	N	%
Has the quality of education improved with the introduction of CBCS?	Yes	587	84%
	No	112	16%
	If yes, to what extent	162	28%
	(a) To great extent		
	(b) To some extent		
(c) Not at all	7	1%	

**Note:** Out of 587 students who reported the positive impact of CBCS on quality of education, 11 did not give response to the question on degree of its impact on quality.

**b) Impact of CBCS on Students' Work-load:**

Under CBCS system 40 percent marks in each paper have been assigned for internal assessment for which departments are expected to undertake class tests, assignments and seminars etc. on regular basis throughout the semester. While answering to the question of impact

of such exercises on students' work load, 65 percent of the students reported that CBCS has overburdened students with too many tests and other evaluative exercises. On the contrary, 35 percent of them reported that CBCS has not overburdened students. When asked about the degree of such overburdening, 21 percent of students reported it to a great extent, 72 percent said to some extent.

**Table No. 2**  
**Impact of CBCS on Students Work-load**

Statement	Response	N	%
Does CBCS overburden students with too many tests and other evaluative exercises?	Yes	447	65%
	No	236	35%
	If yes, to what extent	95	22%
	(a) To a great extent		
	(b) To some extent	322	76%
	(c) Not at all	8	2%

*Note: Out of 447 students who reported CBCS overburdens the students, 22 did not respond to the question on degree to what extent.*

**c) Job-Oriented Courses under CBCS:** One of the prime objectives of CBCS is to offer skill based and job oriented course under open electives. We can see from the table-3 that 66 percent of students think that CBCS is more jobs oriented than the old system, while 34 percent of students do not think so.

**d) Impact of CBCS on transforming the Teacher-Centric System to Student-Centric System:** One of the basic assumptions of introduction of CBCS is that it will result into a paradigm shift from a teacher-centric system to student-centric system. However, when asked whether CBCS is more student-centric than the

traditional system, 73 percent of them reported positively on this issue, whereas the remaining 27 percent did not agree with this proposition (See Table-3).

**e) Problems Faced by Students in Attending Open Elective Classes:** From Table-3 we can clearly see that 90 percent of students, who participated in this study, reported that they faced problems in attending Open Elective classes due to the long distance between their parental department and department offering their selected open elective. Only 10 percent of them were of the view that they did not face such problem. May be they had selected their open electives from nearby departments.

**Table No. 3**  
**Opinions of Students on Various Paradigm Shifts under CBCS**

Statement	Response	N	%
Is CBCS more jobs oriented than the old system?	Yes	455	66%
	No	238	34%
Is CBCS more students-centric?	Yes	503	73%
	No	182	27%
Do students face problems in attending Open Electives classes due to the long	Yes	633	90%
	No	68	10%



**f) Factors Affecting the Students Selection of Open Electives:**

A quick glance at data vide Table-4 shows that 24 percent of the students opted for open electives (OEs) due to short distance of the department, 3 percent selected their open electives because these were opted by their close friends, 2 percent of the students selected their OEs due to the popularity of the teacher in-charge of the open elective, and 5 percent of the

students select their open elective in view of the advice given by Head/Senior teacher/Academic adviser. It is pleasing to report that 41 percent and 14 percent of students selected their OEs on the basis of their personal interest, and relevance of open elective respectively, whereas, 11 percent of the students did not have freedom in selecting as they were compelled to take certain OEs due to non-availability of seats.

**Table No. 4  
Factors Affecting the Students Selection of Open Electives**

Statement	Factors Affecting Choice of Open Electives	N	%
Which of the following factor(s) influenced your selection of Open Electives?	● Short distance of the department	214	24%
	● My personal interest	357	41%
	● Relevance of the Open Elective	127	14%
	● Selection of Open Elective by close friends	29	3%
	● Advice given by the Head/Senior teacher/Academic adviser of department.	40	5%
	● Popularity of the teacher.	20	2%
	● I was compelled to take certain Open Electives due to non-availability of seats.	92	11%

**g) Removal of all Restrictions Imposed on Selection of Open Electives:**

A quick glance on data vide Table-5 shows that 85 percent of students agreed that all restrictions imposed on selection of Open Electives be removed and students be given complete freedom in the selection of their open electives, however, 15 percent of think otherwise, may be they

are the one who could select their Open Elective course of their choice in both 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> semester, and hence don't mind the continuation of existing restrictions.

**h) Availability of Academic Adviser for Students:**

As per the provisions under CBCS Regulation of MZU, each of the academic departments is expected to appoint an

Academic Adviser to facilitate students' decision in the selection of open electives and soft courses. While responding to this issue 41 percent of the students reported that their department did not appoint any Academic Adviser, while 59 percent reported the availability of Academic Adviser in their respective departments.

**Table No. 5**

**Removal of all Restrictions Imposed on Selection of Open Electives and Availability of Academic Advisors**

Statement	Response	N	%
Whether students be given complete freedom in the selection of their open electives?	Yes	587	85%
	No	100	15%
Has your department appointed Academic Adviser to assist students in the selection of their Open Electives and Soft Courses?	Yes	277	41%
	No	403	59%

**i) Availability of help in the Selection of Soft Course:**

While responding to this issue 21 percent of the students said that the head of department himself/herself helped them in selecting their open electives and soft course, 8 percent reported that academic

adviser assisted them in their selection of open electives, 14 percent said that senior teachers helped them in their selection. However, 57 percent of them had to take this decision at their own as no one in their department helped them in taking such an important decision.

**Table No. 6**

**Availability of Help in the Selection of Soft Course (SCs) and Open Electives (OEs)**

Statement	Response	Soft Courses		Open Electives	
		N	%	N	%
Who helped you in selecting your soft courses and open electives?	Head of Dept.	181	26%	143	21%
	Academic Adviser	61	9%	58	8%
	Senior Teachers	103	15%	99	14%
	No one	349	50%	390	57%

**j) Selection of Soft Courses of Their Choice:**

With regard to the selection of Soft Courses, it was shocking to know

that only 54 percent students in 2<sup>nd</sup> semester, and 49 percent in 3<sup>rd</sup> semester could select the Soft course of their choice, whereas the remaining 46

percent in 2<sup>nd</sup> semester, and 51 percent in 3<sup>rd</sup> semester could not select the Soft Courses of their choice. It may be due to the fact that many academic

departments include many papers in the list of soft courses but due to the shortage of faculty are not able to offer all these courses.

**Table No. 7**  
**Selection of Soft Courses of Their Choice/Interest in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Semesters**

Statement	Response	In 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester		In 3 <sup>rd</sup> Semester	
		N	%	N	%
Could you select the Soft Courses of your choice in 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester and 3 <sup>rd</sup> Semester?	Yes	365	54%	337	49%
	No	315	46%	348	51%

**k) Regularity of Classes in Open Elective:**

As per the arrangement under CBCS, students, during their 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> semester, are expected to attend first two classes on Monday and Tuesday in other departments on their open electives. When asked on

the regularity of their open elective classes, it is pleasing to report that 86 to 90 percent of students opined that their OE classes in both 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> semesters were quite regular; however, 10 to 14 percent reported such classes to be irregular.

**Table No. 8**  
**Regularity of Classes in Open Elective Papers in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Semesters**

Statement	Response	2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester		3 <sup>rd</sup> Semester	
		N	%	N	%
How regular were your classes in Open Electives in 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> semester?	a) Very regular	145	21%	111	16%
	b) Regular	482	69%	486	70%
	c) Irregular	70	10%	93	13%
	d) Very irregular	-	-	7	1%

**l) Freedom in Exercising the Selection of Open Electives:**

One of the core features of the CBCS is freedom in choosing their open as well as soft electives. As shown in table-9 only 65 percent of the students in second semester and 52 percent in second

semester could exercise their freedom in selecting both of their open electives, which implies that the remaining 35 percent of students of 2<sup>nd</sup> semester, and 48 percent students of 3<sup>rd</sup> semester were not that fortunate. Out of 35 percent students of 2<sup>nd</sup> semester that could not

select both electives of their choice, 26 percent could exercise their freedom in selecting at least one open elective, whereas the remaining 9 percent had no choice in selecting both of their open electives. Likewise, out of 48 percent students of 3<sup>rd</sup>

semester that could not select both electives of their choice, 34 percent could exercise their freedom in selecting at least one open elective, whereas the remaining 14 percent had no choice in selecting both of their open electives.

**Table No. 9**  
**Freedom in Exercising the Selection of Open Electives (OEs)**

Statement	Response	N	%
Number of OEs you could select as per your choice in 2 <sup>nd</sup> Semester.	Both	447	65%
	One	179	26%
	None	60	9%
Number of OEs you could select as per your choice in 3 <sup>rd</sup> Semester.	Both	356	52%
	One	231	34%
	None	98	14%

**m) Missing of Classes in Parental Department:**

While responding to the question, whether they had ever missed their classes in their parental department due to non-availability of buses in time after attending

open elective classes in other departments, 64 percent of students reported to have missed their class, whereas the remaining 36 percent did not report so. When asked how often it happened, 21 percent said many times and 79 percent said sometimes.

**Table No. 10**  
**Missing of Classes in Parental Department due to Non-availability**

Statement	Response	N	%
Did you ever miss your class in your own (parental) department in view non-availability of buses in time?	Yes	445	64%
	No	252	36%
	If yes, how often		
	(a) Many times	93	21%
	(b) Sometimes	352	79%

**n) Selection of Open Electives from within the Department and School:**

The CBCS system, in order to give multidisciplinary flavor to students'

learning, does not allow students to choose open electives from their parental department, and at the same time makes provision to allow students to select their

OEs from any academic department in the university. When asked their opinion on this issue of not allowing students to select their OEs from parental department, it was interesting to find that 31 percent of students expressed their agreement with this restriction, however, 69 percent of students were against this

restriction, and wanted that university should do rethinking on this restriction. Further, when asked about the selection of OEs only from within the school, 88 percent of students expressed their agreement, whereas only 12 percent of them wanted the present provision to be continued.

**Table No. 11**  
**Selection of Open Electives from within the Department, and School**

Statement	Response	N	%
Do you agree that students should not be allowed to select Open Electives from their own department?	Yes	213	31%
	No	472	69%
Do you think that students be allowed to choose Open Electives only from within their school?	Yes	602	88%
	No	86	12%
Do you believe that CBCS has transformed the traditional teacher centered education to a student-centered education?	Yes	472	69%
	No	215	31%

***o) CBCS and Student Centric System:***

One of the serious criticisms against the traditional system of education is teacher centrism. It is presumed that adoption of CBCS will bring a paradigm shift from teacher centered system to student centered system. When asked on this issue 69 percent of the students reported that CBCS has transformed the traditional teacher-centered education to a student-centered education; whereas 31 percent of the students do not think so.

**Students' Perceptions on Benefits of CBCS:**

Some of the prominent benefits of CBCS, as reported by the sample students to an open ended question are given as under:

1. It reduces monotony.
2. Gives chance to listen to more experienced and popular teachers of other departments.
3. Punctuality in submission assignments.
4. Frequent seminar creates confidence in the students.
5. It gives quality education.
6. Provides scope for social interaction with students from other disciplines.
7. It improves students' attendance in classes.
8. It helps them to score more marks.
9. It gives them knowledge about other disciplines.
10. Makes students to be more competitive.
11. It motivates students to do better in their studies.

12. They can select the open electives according to their interests.
13. Provision of regular feedback helps students to know where they stand.
14. Frequent tests make students alert and active.
9. No time for social activities.
10. Lots of choices, but getting the open electives of one's choice depends on luck.
11. Makes lots of stress on students.
12. No uniform system in marking for Open Electives in various academic departments.

### **Problems Faced by Students with Regard to CBCS:**

When asked about the problems encountered by them while pursuing their courses under CBCS, they reported the following difficulties and concerns:

1. Due to long distance of the department students have no time for eating Tiffin and going to the bathroom.
2. Seriousness of students will go away from the examination as much weightage is given to continuous or internal assessment and evaluation.
3. Grading system is not satisfying. It should be replaced by marks.
4. No leisure time under CBCS.
5. Reduction in differentiation of students' performance by grading system under CBCS may discourage the gifted and talented students.
6. Teachers are not interested enough in open elective subject.
7. Unavailability of study materials.
8. Departments offer only selected not all soft courses included in the syllabi. This restricts students' choice of soft courses.

13. Sudden implementation of CBCS without proper training and orientation creates confusion among teachers and students.
14. Long distance of the department makes students miss their class in parental department.
15. Lots of tests and assignments etc. overburden the students.

### **Suggestions given by students to overcome the problems in successful implementation of CBCS in Mizoram University:**

1. Students should be allowed to see their end semester answer scripts.
2. The teachers should give feedback at the earliest.
3. The number of tests in one day should be reduced.
4. Students should be allowed to choose OE from parental department.
5. The teachers should be more regular in classes.
6. Diploma/Certificate should be awarded on OE papers.

7. OEs should be stopped as they dilute the core courses.
  8. Syllabus should be adjusted as it is too vast to finish within a stipulated time.
  9. Every department should follow uniform system in giving marks in OEs.
  10. OEs should be clearly described in the syllabus.
  11. Number of OE papers should be reduced.
  12. There should be proper time table for internal tests and it should be informed to the students in advance.
  13. Due to lack of infrastructure and less number of teachers Mizoram University is not yet in position for the proper implementation CBCS.
  14. Number of tests/assignments/seminars should be reduced.
  15. Orientation programmes and workshops should be organized for teachers to understand the details about grading, semester, credit system, credit transfer etc. by inviting and involving resource persons with appropriate expertise.
  16. The students should be allowed and given complete freedom in their selection of open electives.
- for almost five years now, from the above study we can see that majority of the students opine that quality of education has improved with the introduction of CBCS and are of the view that this is the right step to quality education. But at the same time they also feel that the Mizoram University has not yet been able to successfully implement the CBCS in its full form due to various reasons like lack of infrastructure, shortage in number of teachers, long distance of the departments and no uniformity in open electives. Beside, the students feel that the CBCS has been implemented by the university hurriedly without proper training and orientation of teachers, students as well as the office staff of academic departments and examination branch. Consequently, there is much diversity in academic departments with regard to the implementation of various provisions of CBCS.

### **Conclusion**

Choice Based Credit System has been in practice in Mizoram University

The most important features of Choice Based Credit System implemented by the Mizoram University in 2012 is the concept of choice to be exercised by students in selection of their papers on Open Electives in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> semesters. However, the findings of the study suggest that a considerable percentage of students are not able to select the open electives of their 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> choice in both semesters which negates the basic principle/philosophy of CBCS. The restriction on the selection of open electives is largely because of the limited number of seats available in the open electives of their choice. Another major problems faced by

students is the non-availability of transport for their to and fro movement to other academic departments for attending their open elective classes. In the absence of the transport many of the students miss their classes in their respective parental departments

Too much of testing and evaluation is another inherent feature of CBCS, the majority of students opine that the whole semester is occupied with tests, assignments, seminars etc; there is hardly any time left for the course in-charge to finish the course, which in many papers is too heavy. Besides, the students also do not have much time under the CBCS for their self and in-depth study. So, majority of the students wanted to reduce the number of tests and assignments.

There have been many criticisms on the implementation of CBCS, like lack of faculty, lack of infrastructure, unclear

guidelines, top down approach, difficulty in implementation etc, though some criticisms are genuine some are unjustified. So, for effective implementation of CBCS these criticisms have to be addressed and necessary modifications in the various provisions in CBCS regulation, as suggested by students, need to be effected.

The UGC has always initiated measures to bring efficiency and excellence in the higher education system in India, right from the curriculum to the teaching-learning process, to examination and evaluation systems. However, looking at the present scenario of Mizoram University, it is still in the process of adjusting and experimenting with CBCS. Thus, it may be too early to make final judgment whether CBCS is the right step to address the quality issues in higher education.

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## Problems Faced by Students of Vocational Stream in Higher Secondary Schools in Mizoram

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### Abstract

*Vocational stream means the stream of education at higher secondary stage where vocational subjects are offered. There are 14 higher secondary schools offering 8 vocational courses in Mizoram. In 2014-2015 there are 774 students enrolled in different courses. These students constitute the population and 618 students of vocational courses present on the day of data collection formed the sample. Primary data were collected by using Questionnaire constructed for students of vocational courses by the investigators. Problems of the students related to courses pursued, facilities, practical work, textbooks, contents of the textbooks, teachers, on-the-job-training, test and examination and methods of teaching were studied. The study found that 'worried about college admission, insufficient equipments, insufficient number of practical classes, not enough time allotted for practical classes and worried about job placement' were the top five problems of the vocational students.*

**Key words:** Problems, Students, Vocational Stream, Higher Secondary Schools.

### Introduction

Secondary and higher secondary stages of education are important terminal stages in the system of general education because it is at these points that options are exercised by the youths to enter the world of employment or to go for technical training or pursue higher education. Educationists and experts have consistently recommended that education at these stages should be given a vocational bias to link it with the world of work. The Kothari Commission (1964-66) was of the view that for a majority of

occupations, university degrees were not necessary; and these jobs could be completely performed by trained higher secondary students. The Commission felt that it should be possible to divert at least 50 per cent of students completing 10 years of education to the vocational stream, reducing the pressure on the universities and also preparing students for gainful employment. Despite the priority accorded to this programme in the report of the Kothari Commission, the erstwhile National Policy on Education (1986) as well as in successive Five Year

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Plans, the implementation of the programme has remained weak. Many State Governments have started vocational programmes. However, because of inadequate resources, lack of proper management structures, technical expertise and inadequate teacher preparation, the results have not been commensurate with expectations. (Scheme of Vocationalisation of Secondary Education, 2009).

In Mizoram, the first phase of vocational education was launched in the year 1988. It has been two decades since the implementation of Vocationalisation of Secondary Schools in Mizoram but still, no research has yet been conducted. To identify the problems of the students and to suggest measures for solving the problems and for the improvement of vocational education in Mizoram, an intensive research needs to be undertaken. The present study is a meager attempt to fulfill such needs.

#### **Operational Definitions of the Terms Used**

The following are the operational definitions of the different terms used in the present study:

**a) Vocational Stream:** The term 'vocational stream' in the present study means the stream of education at higher secondary stage where vocational subjects are offered.

**b) Higher secondary stage of education:** This implies the stage of education that comprises of classes XI and XII.

#### **Objectives of the Study:**

Objectives of the present study are:

1. To study the problems faced by students of vocational stream at the higher secondary stage of education in Mizoram.
2. To suggest certain measures for improvement of vocational education in Mizoram.

#### **Methodology of the Study:**

**(a) Research approach:** A descriptive survey approach was used to conduct the present study.

**(b) Population of the study:** The total number of 774 students enrolled in different courses during 2014-2015 constituted the population of the present study

**(c) Sample of the study:** Sample selection was not done as the number of students enrolled in vocational courses at higher secondary level was not large. All the higher secondary schools offering vocational courses in the State were visited and all the students of vocational subjects present on the day of data collection formed the sample. As such, the sample of the present study came to be 618 students.

**(d) Tool used:** Questionnaire for students of vocational courses constructed by the investigators was used for collection of data.

**(e) Data collection:** The required data for the present study were collected from students of Higher Secondary Schools offering Vocational Courses by

administering the tool mentioned above. Secondary data were collected from books and annual reports of SCERT.

**(f) Statistical treatment of data:** Descriptive statistics i.e., percentages were applied for treatment of data.

**Analysis and Interpretation of Data**

Data on problems of students pursuing vocational courses in higher secondary schools in Mizoram were presented in tabular form, analyzed and interpreted as follow:

**Table 1: Problems of Students Relating to Courses Pursued**

Sl. No.	Problems faced:	No. of Respondent N = 618	Percentage
1	Not interested in the course	33	5.34
2	The course is not of my first choice	128	20.71
3	Worried about college admission and further studies	305	49.35
4	Worried about job placement	220	35.6
5	Thinking of changing my subject into general (Arts, Science, Commerce) stream	69	11.16
6	Other streams look down upon us	35	5.66
7	High admission fees	31	5.01
8	General Foundation Course subject is difficult	22	3.56

A cursory glance at table 1 shows that, 49.35 per cent of the vocational course students are worried about their further studies, 35.60 per cent about job placement and for 20.71 per cent, the courses they choose are not their first choice. 11.16 per cent thought about changing their subjects into arts, science or commerce and 5.34 per cent of the students are not interested in the courses they study.

Minor problems are ‘students from other stream look down upon them’ in the case of 5.66 per cent students, ‘high admission fee’ for 5.01 per cent and ‘General Foundation Course subject is too difficult’ for 3.56 per cent of the students.

**Table 2: Problems of Students Related to Facilities**

Sl.No.	Problems faced related to facilities:	No. of respondent N = 618	Percentage
1	Irregular power supply	200	32.36
2	Congested classrooms	180	29.12
3	Insufficient equipments	246	39.8
4	Insufficient furniture for all the students	84	13.59

Regarding the problems faced related to facilities, the above table shows that 39.80 per cent of the students have problems as equipments for their practical are insufficient and 32.36 per cent of the students face problems because of irregular power supply. For 29.12 per cent of the students, congested classrooms and for 13.59 per cent, insufficient furniture, are problems for them.

**Table 3: Problems of Students Related to Practical Work**

Sl.No.	Problems Faced:	No. of respondent N = 618	Percentage
1	Too congested practical rooms/ workshop/ laboratories	140	22.65
2	Lack of required space for doing practical work	128	20.71
3	Insufficient no. of practical classes conducted	235	38.02
4	Irregular supply of electricity	163	26.37
5	Insufficient number of computer	19	3.07
6	Absence of study tour	13	2.1

Table 3 illustrates that 38.02 per cent of the respondents have problems as sufficient number of practical classes are not conducted. Due to irregular supply of electricity 26.37 per cent of the students face problem in doing practical work. As stated by 22.65 per cent of the students, their practical rooms, workshop and laboratories are too congested. Lack of required space for doing practical work is one of the problems that 20.71 per cent students face.

Due to insufficient number of computer, 3.07 per cent respondents face trouble in doing their practical work. A few percentages of students i.e., 2.10 also feel that absence of study tour is a problem.

**Table 4: Problems of Students Regarding Textbook**

Sl.No	Problems Faced:	No. of respondent N = 618	Percentage
1	Costly textbooks	202	32.69
2	Textbooks not available in time	146	23.62
3	Textbooks for all subjects not available	190	30.74
4	Textbooks not available in the local market	165	26.7
5	Textbooks need to be procured from outside Mizoram	149	24.11

A look at the above table 4 reveals the problems that the students of vocational courses face regarding textbooks. 32.69 per cent students have problem as textbooks are costly. Unavailability of textbooks for all subjects creates problems for 30.74 per cent students. 26.70 per cent respondents consider that textbooks are not available in the local market. It further states that textbook which are needed to be procured from outside Mizoram is a problem for 24.11 per cent students. 23.62 per cent respondents have problems because textbooks are not available in time.

**Table 5: Problems of Students Regarding Contents of the Textbooks**

Sl.No.	Problem Faced	No. of respondent N = 618	Percentage
1	Contents do not help in developing my/our skills	21	3.39
2	Most of the contents are not related to the syllabus	23	3.72
3	Contents are difficult to understand	198	32.04
4	Unavailability of textbooks written in Mizo	196	31.71
5	Textbooks do not cover the whole syllabus	36	5.82

Regarding contents of the textbooks, the most frequently cited problems are: (i) Contents are difficult to understand and (ii) Unavailability of textbooks written in Mizo. Only 5.82 per cent students consider that textbooks do not cover the whole syllabus. A few students i.e., 3.39 and 3.72 per cent point out that content of the textbooks do not help in developing their skills and contents are not related to the syllabus respectively.

**Table 6: Problems of Students Related to Teacher**

Sl. No.	Problems faced related to teacher	No. of respondent N = 618	Percentage
1	Irregularity of teacher in taking class	121	19.58
2	Unfriendly attitude of teachers towards students	134	21.68
3	Insufficient number of teachers	59	9.55
4	Have only 1 Sericulture teacher	15	2.43
5	Do not have GFC teacher	11	1.78

Among the problems that the respondents faced, ‘unfriendly attitude towards students’ is the biggest ones stated by 21.68 per cent followed by ‘irregularity of teacher in taking class’ pointed out by 9.58 per cent. Insufficient numbers of teachers is a problem for 9.55 percent. Others problems for few students are availability of only one Sericulture teacher mentioned by 2.43 per cent and unavailability of General Foundation Course teacher pointed out by only 1.78 percent of the students.

**Table 7: Problems of Students Related to On-The-Job Training:**

Sl. No.	Problems faced:	No. of respondent N = 618	Percentage
1	The training centre is not well equipped	85	13.75
2	The centre is too far from school	91	14.72

The problems related to on-the-job training faced by students are that the training centre too far from the schools as stated by 14.72 per cent and the training centre not well equipped pointed out by 13.75 percent of the students pursuing vocational courses.

**Table 8: Problems of Students Related to Methods of Teaching**

Sl. No.	Problems faced regarding methods of teaching:	No. of Respondent N = 618	Percentage
1	The methods of teaching adopted by the teachers are not helpful/ effective enough	51	8.25
2	Difficult to understand the way the teachers teach us	133	21.52

3	Theory class is not helpful enough to understand the concept	105	16.99
4	Practical class is not helpful enough to develop skills	58	9.38
5	Time allocated for theory class is not enough	55	8.9
6	Time allocated for practical class is not enough	224	36.24
7	Textbook is not available, sometimes spent the whole class taking notes	25	4.04

Analyzing the above table 8, it is clear that the time allocated for practical class is not enough as mentioned by 36.24 per cent of the students studying vocational courses. 21.52 per cent students find it difficult to understand the way their teachers teach them. 16.99 per cent respondents find that the theory class is not helpful to understand the concept. Practical class is not helpful for developing skills for 9.38 per cent students. Time allotted for theory class is not enough for 8.90 per cent students. The methods of teaching adopted by the teachers are not helpful and effective for 8.25 per cent students. As textbook is not available and sometimes they spent the whole class taking notes, 4.04 percent of the students face problem.

**Table 9: Problems of Students Relating to Test and Examination**

Sl. No.	Problems Faced	No. of respondent N = 618	Percentage
1	Rarely have class test	39	6.31
2	Less gap during examination	15	2.43
3	Too many test topics at one time	13	2.1

Among a few students who have problems relating to test and examination, 6.31 percent students faced the problem as they rarely have class test. Besides, 2.43 per cent students face problem due to fewer gaps between each subject at examination and 2.10 per cent find it difficult to study too many test topics at one time.

**Findings of the Study:**

Problems of students regarding the vocational courses they pursue

- a) 49.35 per cent of the vocational course students were worried about further studies
- b) 35.60 per cent were worried about job placement
- c) 20.71 per cent said that the courses they chose were not their first choice
- d) 11.16 per cent thought about changing their subject into arts, science or commerce



#### Problems Faced by Students of Vocational Stream in Higher Secondary Schools in Mizoram

- e) 5.34 per cent of the students were not interested in the course they studied
- f) High admission fees was a big problem of students for 5.01 per cent
- g) General Foundation Course subject was difficult for 3.56 per cent of students.

#### Problems related to facilities for the students:

- a) Insufficient equipments was a problem for 39.80 per cent of students pursuing vocational course
- b) Irregular power supply was a problem for 32.36 per cent of students studying vocational courses.
- c) Congested classrooms created problem for 29.12 per cent of students pursuing vocational course.
- d) Insufficient furniture for all the students was a problem for 13.59 percent of vocational courses students.

#### Problems of students related to practical work:

- a) Number of practical classes conducted was insufficient for 38.02 per cent of students
- b) 26.37 per cent of students stated that supply of electricity was irregular.
- c) Too congested practical rooms/workshop/ laboratories was a problem for 22.65 per cent of students.
- d) Lack of required space for doing practical work was a problem for 20.71 per cent
- e) Insufficient number of computer created a problem for 3.07 per cent students.

#### Problems of students related with textbooks:

- a) Textbooks were costly for 32.69 per cent of students pursuing vocational course.
- b) 30.74 per cent students of vocational course had problem due to unavailability of textbooks for all subjects
- c) Unavailability of textbooks in the local market was a problem for 26.70 per cent of students studying vocational course
- d) 24.11 per cent faced trouble as textbooks were needed to be procured from outside Mizoram.
- e) Unavailability of textbooks in time brought about a problem for 23.62 per cent of students.

#### Problems of students related to contents of the textbooks:

- a) Contents were difficult to understand as 32.04 per cent of the students.
- b) Unavailability of textbooks written in Mizo was also one of the major problems regarding contents of the textbooks for 31.71 per cent students.

- c) For 5.82 per cent of the vocational students, textbook not covering the whole syllabus was a problem
- d) Most of the contents not related to the syllabus became a problem for 3.72 per cent students of vocational course.
- e) Contents not helpful enough in developing their skills came to be a problem for 3.40 per cent of the students.

Problem of students related to teacher:

- a) Unfriendly attitude of teachers towards students was a problem for 21.68 per cent of vocational students
- b) Irregularity of teacher in taking class was also a problem for 19.58 per cent students of vocational courses/
- c) 9.55 per cent of students stated that the number of teachers was insufficient.
- d) For 2.43 per cent students of Sericulture course, availability of only one teacher was a problem.
- e) Unavailability of General Foundation Course teacher was a problem stated by 1.78 per cent of the students.

Problems of students related to on-the-job training:

- a) The training centres were too far from the schools for 14.72 per cent of the students
- b) The training centres were not well equipped as pointed out by 13.75 per cent of the students.

Problems of students regarding the methods of teaching:

- a) Time allocated for practical class was not enough for 36.7 per cent of students
- b) 21.52 per cent students found it difficult to understand the way their teachers teach them.
- c) For 16.99 per cent respondents, the theory class was not helpful to understand the concept.
- d) Practical class was not helpful enough to develop skills for 9.38 per cent of students
- e) Time allocated for theory class was not enough for 8.90 per cent of students.
- f) The methods of teaching adopted by the teachers were not helpful and effective enough for 8.25 per cent students.
- g) Spending the whole class for taking notes a number of times was a problem mentioned by 4.04 percent of students

Problems of students relating to test and examination

- a) 'Rarely have class test' was stated as a problem by 6.31 per cent of the students.
- b) Less gap during examination was a problem for 2.43 per cent students.

- c) For 2.10 per cent of students having to study too many test topics at one time was a problem.

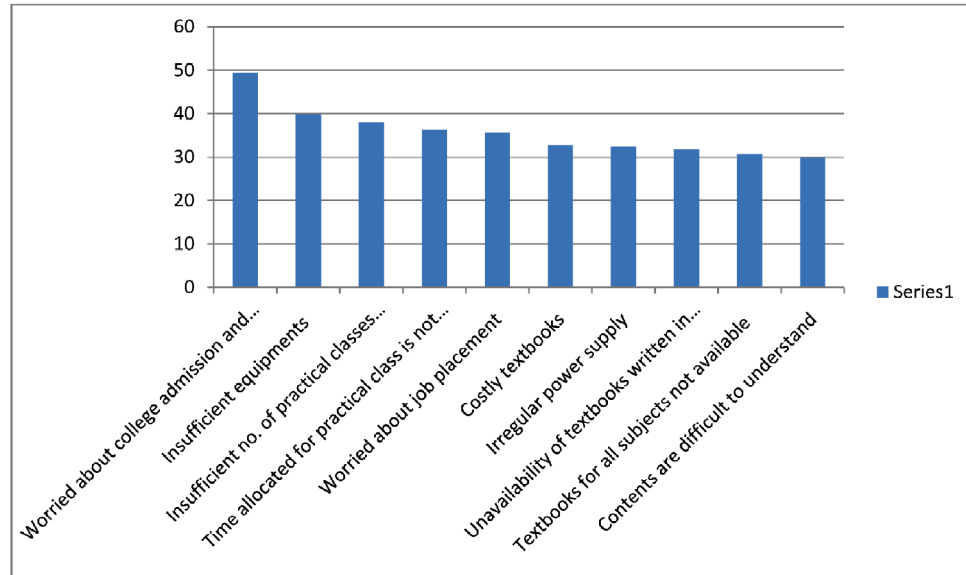


Fig. Top ten problems faced by students of vocational courses

**Conclusion:**

Almost 50 per cent students of vocational course are worried about college admission and further studies which shows that they have no confidence to earn their livelihood after completing higher secondary education and still chose to continue their studies. As most of the colleges could not give admission to students of vocational stream due to limited seats even for Arts subject, many students who want to change their subjects face problems. Insufficient number of equipment is the second highest problem. The curricula developed by the Pandit Sunderlal Sharma Central Institute of Vocational Education (PSSCIVE) had listed the entire range of equipment required for each course. It is the

responsibility of the state agencies to assess the minimum requirement of equipment for the development of basic skills and to provide this to the institutions. Maintenance of equipment is also the responsibility of the State Government.

The fourth highest problem of the students is insufficient number of practical class. The National Review Committee (1978) recommended that for making vocationalisation of education successful, learning must be based on work. Thus, schools that do not allot the required total instructional time for practical and theory should make new routine. The fifth highest problem is about job placement. In the case of students of Computer Technique, even though they study for a duration of two years and are supposed to

have enough skills, the employers prefer to hire those who have certificate in three months diploma course in Computer Application. They suggest that if separate certificates could be provided, they would be able to get job immediately after completing HSSLC. Lastly, it is important for the authorities to look into the problems faced by the students and to take necessary actions.

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Translation Section

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## Sampling an Old Mizo Play Song and Lullaby in Translation

Translated from Mizo by Kristina Z. Zama\*

### Abstract

*Play songs and lullabies for young children are an integral component of the oral traditions of any human culture, containing narratives seemingly innocent yet often subversive, sometimes even dark. It is possible that they may convey the worries and angst of an adult world but of which the child may be blissfully unaware of because it is cloaked in the playful and innocent language of childhood. Play songs and lullabies are also the first conveyers of storytelling sung to a young child by a mother, grandmother or caregiver. Such songs transmit to a child a harmonious tone that may be culture specific and which establishes the memories and roots of days gone by. A soft lullaby sung while a child is rocked to sleep in its mother's bosom or the back, provides a sense of comfort and security in the child. Likewise, play songs too reflect, although culture specific in terms of subject matter, communication that encourages language development, social skills, cohesion and belongingness. The Mizo oral tradition is a rich repository of such play songs and lullabies which continue to be a part of the Mizo way of life but now requiring a conscious effort to preserve this oral heritage for future generations.*

**Key words:** oral tradition, culture, children, song, repository, memories

### ***Tho hmasa hla***

*Lungte a tho hmasa ber a,  
Lungte in hnantawm a delh a.  
Hnantawmin uihli a delh a,  
Uihli in vawkpui a seh a.  
Vawkpui banah a innawt ri,  
Arin a hria a, an khuang a.  
Mihringin an hria a,  
Tlaiberh a tho hnukung ber a!  
Tlaiberh a tho hnukung ber a!  
Tlaiberh a kuaikinlut chhungin,  
Ni chu tlangsang tak a lo ni!*



Translated from Mizo by Kristina Z. Zama

*Tlaiberh a tho hnuhung ber a,  
Mikhual vai dawr buan ka cho.  
Phaitual bawngthi ri rel rel...  
Awi ka nu! Thangchina vanram fang chhuak!  
Tuilian khangbung sepin an sep;  
A tawpah erawh chuan, thingpui sen kan in a!*

**(translation) The Early Riser**

The pebble is first to rise!  
The pebble weighs down on trimmings of bamboo  
Whose trimmings weigh on the flea!  
The flea nibbles the mother pig!  
Its itchy itch scratched against a pole...  
The noisy noise caused the cock to crow!  
Awakening thus, the human world!  
The bulbul last to stir  
The bulbul last to stir!  
And when it stretches,  
The sun is mountain high!  
The bulbul last to stir  
Challenge me a *vai*<sup>1</sup> to wrestle!  
Cowbells ring in distant plains  
Oh mother! Thangchina travels entire heavens,  
While floods toss the tendrilled tree  
And in the end, we drink red tea!

<sup>1</sup>*Vai*- a non-mizo, usually referred to people from the plains.

***Nau Awih Hla***

*Ka nu, ka pa, lo haw thuai thuai  
Tlangah ruahpui a sur e  
Sakhi lampeng rawn zawh la  
Lo zangphar der der ang che.  
Chhingmiti a tap e  
Rolenga a tap e  
Ka mumang mang chu ni sela  
Ka zuk au na ral ral tur a ni.*

**(translation) A Lullaby**

*Ka nu, ka pa*<sup>2</sup> Hasten home to me!  
Rainstorm over mountains I see  
Hasten home to me!  
Follow the path of the barking deer  
...its hoofs guide you home to me!  
Wave! Wave your arms so I can see!  
Hasten home to me...  
Tearful Rolenga and Chhingmiti!  
If wishful dreams were granted me  
I'd call aloud... ...my echoes guide you home to me!

<sup>2</sup>Ka nu, ka pa - mother, father

**Source**

*Mizo Hla Hlui (Mizo Folk Songs)*, R.L. Thanmawia. Aizawl, Din Din Heaven, 2012

**R.L. Thanmawia** is a well known Mizo poet and writer with several published works to his credit. He is a Professor of the Department of Mizo, Mizoram University.

## Sunflower

By Vanneihluanga

Translated from Mizo by K.C. Lalthlamuani\*

### Abstract

*This is an essay in which the narrator ruminates on the depravity of this world. He becomes cynical and unenthusiastic of life. Confused with the loss of honesty and integrity he starts running away from the city. Attracted by a steep and unkempt route, he excitedly presses on. The tiresome climb makes him question his stupidity as there are numerous other more inviting choices. Upon reaching a spot of scenic beauty, with greens and flowers and the chirping of birds he realizes that only the opening seemed daunting and ventures to reach the top. Finally arriving at the top of the mountain, he is demoralized by the barrenness. It was extremely sunny, everything was dry and his throat was parched. The hope of a bright future had made him unaware of his tiredness. Sighting a shriveled sunflower, the narrator ponders on his Self. Despite its inadequate nourishment, the flower patiently perseveres to accomplish the Creator's intention and blooms; whilst he, suffocated and vexed by the hypocritical world, attempted to distance himself. While thus realizing his wantonness and confessing his sins, he saw a ruffled man who told him of the voracious nature of the sunflower in its attempt to preserve and germinate the seeds itself crushed other living object in the vicinity. In despair the narrator makes a resolution and descends. Turning his back on the mountain and the flower, he proceeds towards the valley.*

**Keywords:** pessimist, mystifying machine, hope, nothingness, depravity.

If I were to be measured according to the world's scale, and supposing this scale is accurate, then it would be found that I am too small even to measure up to it. I am just smart enough to know that I am a failure, well know enough for easy humiliation, rich enough to know the richness of others, I earn enough just to know the benefits of rest, and the things they call blessings which I have been bestowed with, instead of showing me my

fortune against those poorer than me, it has merely led me to aspire for things beyond my reach. Wanting and needing are part of my existence, and I along with my common sense are now drowning in the tide of desire and greed, losing my humanity and, so it seems, gradually turning into a wanting machine.

Because of this, I enjoy being a pessimist like one suffering from an

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addiction. The things others call white seem black to me, like the slow-paced lemur I battle the light, beautiful colours anger me, darkness and I suit each other, and it is in darkness that I search food for my mind and soul.

I went to a place of worship in search of insouciance, but ended up being called 'a sinner' from a place I dare not reply to. On Mondays, I go for work along with others, albeit diffidently, in a large vehicle, only to be told to 'push back!', when I am already at my last ditch. And after a hard day's labour, I get back in the same vehicle where it is impossible to reach home without hearing again the order to 'push back!' While everyone moves forward, I keep going backwards, to the extent that sometimes, if possible, I wish I could back all the way out of this world of regression. However, when one is fit and fine, and breathes the same air as others, with obligations entrusted upon me whilst I am busy counting the days of life, to back out of life on one's own accord would, according to the world's opinion, not only be humiliating, but also mortifying for one's relatives. And since I am a child of that same world, I am still alive to write this.

Like others, I have been spending years thinking I had a bright future. I studied what others studied, taught by teachers who taught the same way. Instead of wisdom I learnt how to give the right answers, my accomplishments written down instead of being tested in reality. Instead of knowledge I earned a certificate. I did not understand what I studied, why I studied it, and what exactly I would reach by studying.

### **The Mystifying Machine**

So I soon absorbed that knowledge. Used the certificate which measured my knowledge to get a government job, and since the day I began working, my mind started becoming weak believing that it could only contemplate soft gruel for meals. There is no hard labour in my place of work because here physical labour is considered extremely revolting. Work merely involves following the order 'do it' by a lower rank from a higher rank. Instead of being a place where skills and practicality are used to formulate great plans, it is where everyone competes at indulging their self-interest using government's funds. A sincere worker is ridiculed instead of praised, when there is money there is no moral, and where salary is earned by position instead of labour. Some days involve a tiring effort to conceal a lie let loose by a higher rank, and on other days one is forced to sit back and watch like one with cramps unable to do anything, while seeing the wrong done by others. If all your youth is spent being brainwashed in such a place, even someone as normal as you will inevitably come out light headed.

And so, that mystifying machine, despite it being invented to narrow the gap between the rich and poor in fact widens it. Instead of it being the defender of the unfortunate, it robs them of their share, instead of protecting others' freedom, it suppresses their rights. But we are not allowed to speak up against it, to the extent that you would be digging your own grave

if you spelt out the names of the corrupt, and the most courageous thing we dare do is content ourselves with gossip about the injustice.

When I look at the other professions including business and the market place, there is no hesitation for duplicity and trickery, where nobody has any qualms in employing any method to outdo one another. Then I look at religious places, and I see quantity being put above depth and sincerity, where the claim of being the true congregation is put above spiritual freedom, where the pursuit of self projection play a more prominent role than God, and where one goes against the very scriptures that they preach by amassing their fortunes on earth. I do not feel safe within such boundaries.

### **The wise man exposed**

Since this place we live in is claimed and ruled over by such people, the voice of the ones who want justice and wisdom can no longer be heard by the human ears. The ones who want a change of system have lost all hope, but they know such despair will reach a bursting point, and are now merely waiting for the explosion so they may watch the flames from a safe distance. Some still cling onto hope and look upon social organisations to lead the way. But even such organisations have lost their main objective to promote public good and instead use their positions to exercise power for personal gain. While they believe themselves to be doing salutary work, they are in fact destroying the very foundation of our culture. Instead

of working out a meaningful role to the end, they only manage to add to damage and problems by interfering.

The ones in power are the first to recognise such situations. But instead of striving to fix it, they hastily cover it up before others detect it and demand change. What they fear most is that the eyes of the people who put them in power, namely the common mass, might be opened one day and they will strive towards a better life. The power group need a vote base of the poor common man whom they can satisfy with the gift of a new vest just prior to an election, people just smart enough to hope for a brighter future, believing their vote will bring salvation, but in truth gullible enough to not know the real mechanisms of politics. Indeed, what such power groups require is a mass base of such people they can entice with empty promises, food and a white lie.

Such persons utilise any means and method to stay in power. Lying is their most effective weapon, followed by religion and denomination. With no regard for propriety, they employ select verses from the Holy Scriptures to justify themselves; they are seasonal born again Christians, who can be emulate deep spirituality when occasion demands, yet their sins remain firmly intact. They do not fear their fellow humans, indeed, they do not fear God himself.

### **Towards the hill**

What am I doing in such a world? At first I wanted to work for its solution. But every ray of hope is continually

shadowed by a cloud of despair. When every untruth is considered 'in vogue' by everyone, I begin to find myself out of touch. So I tried in vain to accept the untrue as true, increasingly regard the bad as good. From the top of the mountain of desire I take the leap to become a slave of carelessness, which makes me knock on the door of self promotion, disregarding my common sense, but my common sense will not allow it. My mind becomes confused, making me stand on the threshold of indecision, and like I mentioned in the beginning, to the point of no longer wishing to live.

I look around me and find injustice in every corner, and I suspect everyone of siding with it, and there is no use if only I alone speak against it. 'What the majority accepts is the right opinion' becomes the norm whose sound is becoming louder and louder, and you can no longer block your ears against it. I know that just because they are more in number does not make them right, but I can no longer bear to stand alone against them.

So I run around, covering my ears, not knowing where to run to. There is a crowd around me, going about their business, their steps unfaltering. No one pays me any attention. Suppose I stop, and start agreeing with what is wrong, doing what is 'in vogue', I could comfortably wait for my dying day and be considered a wise man. But still I run, not knowing what I am afraid of, not because I am wiser than others, but simply because I am troubled by the world around me.

I am not an athlete, and I do not think I am a fast runner. But I believe I ran fast enough, because the sound of the people soon faded, and before long I left the city and reached a crossroad with several routes.

### **By leaps and bounds**

In the midst of a thick fog, among cobwebs and narrow lanes, I reach a steep route going uphill. I do not know where this road leads. So I look around more intently and questioned myself on the reason as to why the most unkempt route attracts me when there are numerous other more inviting choices. I start to feel stupid for not only running away but choosing such a tiring road when there are better choices, while back in the city, people are picking on the crumbs dropped from the table of the royal family. But for a grown man to be as desperate as me, nothing is crazy or inappropriate anymore. Since my desire to continue my climb is far greater than my desire to go back, and because my desire to tread the narrow road is immense, I began walking on that path.

As I start walking, I realise I am excited, and the road is better than I imagined it to be, and it dawned on me that only the beginning had seemed daunting. I continue to climb up, realizing that the higher I reached, the clearer my vision, till I find myself reaching a place of scenic beauty, with greenery and flowers all around. All those years I saw only humans and their surroundings, trying to quench my thirst in it, but now I have breathed fresh air in a place

untouched by men. I experience peaceful release, so I continue climbing excitedly.

There's not a sound of man to be heard, only the chirping of birds. Though I could not actually see it, as I climbed higher, I could tell that the top of the hill was covered by clouds. And the feeling that that place would even be more pleasant made me climb even more excitedly.

I finally reached the place covered by clouds. But here, flowers and greenery had no place. What I thought were clouds turned out to be smoke, like those rising from a recently burned jhum. There was no beauty to admire, nothing to pull at one's heartstrings, everything that made me eager to climb have all been but thrown away.

But, I had the belief that beyond the smoke, there exists a place so pleasant, a place from which one could see the whole world. I have climbed this far, it would be wrong to go back without reaching the place I long for. My heart's desire that preoccupies me is beyond the smoke, it would be a crime to not proceed towards it.

Climbing is a tiring task. However, the belief in the existence of a bright new world ahead of me made me unaware of my tired body and fatigued soul, and I climbed on. Beyond the smoke, the air cleared. It was extremely hot and sunny, and everything was dry. My throat was parched. There was nothing that caught my eye which would make me want to climb here, nothing to long for. Except for the peak of the hill.

Yes, neither was the surrounding pleasant nor the road easy, yet I climbed on because of the hope that there's something at the top which would answer all my questions and quench my thirst. I finally made it to the top, barely alive, and looked around with great hope.

### **The hill top**

Nothing! No nothing! There is nothing to be found here but nothingness. Everything is as dry as can be. I fell down, panting with panic and thirst. Just when I believed that I was on the verge of unearthing the answer to everything, I face utter emptiness. How disheartening! How very painful it all was!

So it is here that I, one no longer content with the universe, who can no longer count any fellow-man an accomplice, who considers himself righteous enough to even condemn the heavens, confronts the Creator, my shout echoing across the surrounding hills and valleys, "God, you made me climb this mountain despite many risks, only so you can drag me into complete despair? What kind of God are you? I challenge you to come down here, and better fight me then!"

### **Lo! Behold!**

My voice dwindles, my helplessness deepens. Looking around, my eyes fall upon a small desiccated Sunflower in the middle of the hill on which I was standing. Making my way towards it, I saw that it did not have sufficient nutrients like soil, water, air and sunshine and was feebly

## Sunflower

hanging on for dear life in this desolate place.

But then, I contemplate on myself – I am educated, a capable leader able to influence and regulate people’s opinions. I live a systematically organized life, fulfilling my obligations as head of the family. Being conspicuous wherever I go, people look up to me for guidance and counsel. What would a withered Sunflower teach an astute man like me? I ruminated.

Suddenly, I was infuriated, and wilfully confronted not the flower but the Creator, “Am I, created in the image of the Creator to be despised atop this mount? Why have you done this to me?” Getting no response, I reluctantly force myself to look again at the sunflower.

Yes! The sunflower does not need anybody’s compliment to sprout and flower, neither will it be more beautiful with people’s acclamations. It requires a lot of patience and endurance to bloom. It strives to accomplish the Creator’s intention without ample sustenance and is not disheartened amidst the storms and bugs that plague it. Though not as huge and big as saucers like other sunflowers, the mere fact that it blooms even draws bees to it. Therefore, to me this sunflower is akin to the most beautiful flowers. I admired its humility and frankness, and longed to linger by its side for good.

Despite its miserable location, this sunflower incessantly seeks to accomplish the Creator’s motive without complaints. Not distraught by the wretchedness of its

condition, the manifold problems in its habitat, it seeks no solution nor does it try to abscond. This sunflower patiently perseveres to look up at the scorching sun. Though the initiator of its misery especially during the dry seasons when it is parched with thirst, the sunflower neither blames, nor betrays the sun for its disagreeable condition. It does not desist from looking up at the heated sun and compliantly acknowledges it as its benefactor, its source of strength.

As for me, with the belief that this is a hypocritical world, and not worth living in, I strove to find a solution but could not, I attempted to distance myself but didn’t know how, and yet dared not efface myself. Disinclined to live, I am suffocated in a duplicitous world, preoccupied with the sins of others around me. This restrains me from praising my Creator, represses my abilities, and my life tapers into nothingness. This is my depravity.

### **To end in Smoke!**

Whilst confessing my sins at this high altar, I turn towards the west below and see a ruffled man, one whom people would deem a scientist excitedly clambering up the hill towards me, showing no signs of exhaustion. On seeing me he burst into laughter while I had the presumption that we would shake hands and exchange salutations. At length he stopped for a moment and said, “Friend, I was going to blame you but I am at fault. I should have reached this mountain top before you to inform you of the true nature



of this sunflower. But, you preceded me and just as I feared, this sunflower has already deceived you.”

When I asked him why, he waved his arms and replied “There is nothing to admire in this sunflower. It is just a gadget joined together for the pollination of seeds. A beautiful flower is merely a capricious woman trying to entice a man with her red lips while the leaves and stems are akin to the bed of fornication. This frivolous flower does not have a particular lover, and does not object to enjoying the pleasures with whomever she is able to lure with her red lips and perfumes. This scrawny sunflower in particular, proud of its bloom, prominently exposes its sexuality on its head for all the world to see. So, you are wasted in confessing your sins before such an abominable and shameless thing,” he harshly stated.

Astounded and overwhelmed, I made an effort replying with difficulty, “I don’t believe.”

As if he had great forbearance, the man lowering his tone resumed “Evidence is necessary to prove that something is

right. Look here, let us use this sunflower as justification. Examine closely its vibrant colour”. Snapping the flower, he carried on “Look closely, where does its beauty lie? The thing which you have known as beautiful is only one part of its pollinating process; that which is inside is merely where its seeds are collected. Voraciously, it preserves the seeds attempting to germinate them itself. It ravenously partakes of the water, fertility of the soil and the air around it to make this materialize. It cannot tolerate any other living object in the vicinity and strives to crush them. This being its nature is justified by its very bloom.”

Were I to believe this man, my life would be spent in despondency. But I cannot be sceptical as he could prove the truth of his words. Therefore, I do not know what to say or how to respond to him.

For some reason or other, I was humiliated, unable to face the world. Looking to the ground, I made a resolution to descend and turning my back on the mountain and the flower, I despairingly proceeded towards the valley.

### Source

“Nihawi Par” from *Keimah leh Keimah*, Vanneihluanga, LV Art, Aizawl, 2002

**Vanneihluanga** is a prolific Mizo writer, who has written several short stories, plays, articles and essays whose eccentrically witty expression has received wide acclaim for their social criticism.

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1. Paper size A4 (margin 1" on all four sides)
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