Chapter III
Exploring the Politics of Leadership in the Construction of Identity(ies)

In this Chapter, I use the word 'explore' in place of the more convenient word 'explain' precisely because 'to explain is almost to legitimise or to rationalise', whereas my aim is to identify the peculiar scenarios or relations in society that give rise to the building of strategies such as identifying targets, using historiography and memories for societal reconstruction, thereby hopefully, coming to a consensus on the issue of identity. I have explored the role of 'Leadership' in the construction of 'identities' in Mizoram and have shown how leadership became democratised and how the new leadership adopted different 'Markers' for 'Identity Construction'. Through prolonged interviews and discussions with Church leaders and politicians, grass-root workers cutting across party affiliations; and also detailed discussions with young Zo/Mizo Graduates and Post-Graduates of a size-able number, I gleaned their opinions on the vexing question of identities in the state.

3.1. Rise of 'New Elites': Democratisation of Leadership

The complex interrelationship between traditional Zo elements and Christianity and its far-reaching effects on its social power structure has been termed by McCall as 'Lushai Chrysalis'. McCall has attempted to trace the evolutionary aspects of power politics that is the domination and sub-ordination of different groups in the Zo/Mizo society. Proselytisation and western education birthed the middle class which was non-existent in the traditional Zo/Mizo society; and this new emergent class nurtured the emergent new leadership. The Middle Class politics in Mizoram harped on many tactics ranging from adoption of a unifying Zo Christian image to that of adopting first names rather than tribal names to that of Zo Reunification. Other prominent tactics for Zo reunification were 'historiography', literature and poetics. Further substantiating the argument, that Ethnic groups tend to use and select history as per-convenience in the process of self-definition. The rise of the ‘New

1 The emergence of the New Elites or the Middle class channelled the interest articulation of the majority. Yet erstwhile dormant sections in the 'Zo/Mizo society.

2 The Middle Class contributed tremendously to the growth and development of literature and arts in the Zo/Mizo society ever since its emergence in the colonial times. The songs with revivalist
Elites’ systematically dislocated the traditional leadership and provided space for the commoners to capture the power vacuum in the Zo society. The essence of democracy filtered into the realms of the commoners and thus, leadership changed its hands from the traditional to the commoners.

3.2. Leadership and the Politics of ‘Markers of Identity Construction’

The image of a leader as a legendary hero or as the ‘founding father’ provides an overwhelming support to the identity fan-following. Alternately this image of a leader or a hero may be contested by lesser dominant sub-groups within the group. Or a reverse strategy may occur where in the leader or hero of a particular group may be hijacked by other contesting groups. Leadership, and the trust, that it generates moulds and directs the movement of ethnic consciousness. Political leadership explores the various possibilities of identity and ethnicity to enhance their political ends.

The politics of leadership in Mizoram needs to be bulwarked against the silhouette of its complex imagery of a traditional hero, a leader, and the image of a Saviour, a redeemer as emitted through the pages of the Bible. In the traditional Mizo society, the Pasaltha was a man who showed great talent in hunting, courage warfare, prowess and vigour in sexual life (whether married or single). The Pasaltha was the knight in the shining armour, the chivalrous hero. Whatever he did was guided by the code of Tlawmgaihna which can be understood to refer to unconditioned service to people or community based on ‘good will’, sympathy, empathy, courage and honour. The code of ‘Tlawmgaihna’ can be equated to the code of ‘Pashtunwali’ practiced amongst the Pashtuns.\(^3\) Hero-worship being an inherent part overtones commonly referred to as “Fakna Hla” (Songs of Praises) were very much a product of the Middle Class consciousness. The growth of modern music and love songs in Mizoram was directionised by prominent faces of the Zo/Mizo Middle Class for instance, the Late Lalsangzuali Sailo and Vanlalruati. While women seem to dominate the arena of songs and music, men had their share in the arena of composing songs and poems. For instance, James Dokhuma’s ‘Chkaktiang Thlifim’ and Lalthankima’s ‘Sipai Tawngtaina’ echoed the growing aspirations for peace and harmony in the insurgency stricken region. The development of literature doubled as the evolution of ‘Duhlian dialect’, the lingua franca of Mizoram.

of the traditional Mizo life continues to reflect in every day Zo/Mizo life even in contemporary times.

The colonial encounter contributed towards the process of making an already patriarchal system more chauvinistic, manlier and the creation of the *Nexus of Patriarchy*. For instance, the British consciously or unconsciously helped in the construction of the image or the myth of the “Head-Hunters- the Looshais”. In the process creating ‘fear’ among outsiders about the Zo tribes and their barbaric nature. This external construction and internalisation of the same was that, the Zo tribes especially the ‘Lushai clans’, began to think of themselves as brutally heroic and thoroughly manly. The direct result of such misconceived perception about the ‘self’ was that the projection of the self (clan/tribes) in total was always in terms of manliness as evident in the casual use of the phrase ‘A Pa’, in everyday language in Mizoram. The ritualised everyday practice of coercing young teenage boys to talk in a manly (‘Pa’) manner/tone and public exhibition of the ‘Til Pawr Aw’ (the deep, broken tone of the voice that boys attain at puberty), is another instance of such display of manhood in the Zo society. The importance attached to the stage of ‘Til Pawr Aw’ can be understood from the fact that a boy with a ‘Til Pawr Aw’ is considered ‘hmeithai rai tham’ i.e. fit to impregnate a widow. The construction of the image of the ‘Pa’ (male, masculine) in the Zo society systematically degrades the image of the ‘Nu’ (female, feminine). The ‘Huaisen’, ‘Tlawngai’ were the attributes of the ideal Zo ‘Pasaltha’ in the traditional Zo society; and to this image was appended the attribute of ‘Pathian ring’ (believer in Jesus) in the post-colonial image of an ‘Ideal Zo/Mizo man’. Laldenga, through his activities during the Mautam famine and his bold acts of defying those in power fits well into the image of a *Tlawngai, Huaisen Zo Pasaltha* - the ideal ‘Zo Pa’ (Zo man/Zo Hero).⁴

‘Leadership’ and ‘Politics’ in the changed times relied heavily on the code of *Tlawmgaihna* and Social Welfare. At the same time, both these arenas remained the bastions of patriarchy due to the functioning of Christian Ethics and code of life. Interestingly, in the post-insurgency situation, leadership also began to mobilise identity consciousness around ‘memory’. Memory both individual and public began to be strategically converted to social

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memory of loss, hate and pride depending upon which could reap maximum benefits for the desired end. Temporalising and memory-making mediate the identity of people and heritage in space just as the representation and organisation of space mediates the identity of people and heritage through time. Indeed, as Boyarin (1992) points out, memory is associated with both time and space, and in France and Israel, for example, this link is “connected to the reinforcement of national identity, a process in which the ideological constructions of uniquely shared land, language, and memory become props for the threatened integrity of the nation-state”. In a similar vein, Harvey (1989) comments on the importance of time and space to remembering: ‘Immemorial spatial memory’ is so critical to the stable realisation of myths of community that the ‘spatial image...asserts an important power over history’. The spatial, temporal, and bodily matrices are conjoined in nationalism. As the state marks out frontiers, “it constitutes what is within (the people-nation) by homogenising the before and after of the content of this enclosure.” It can be said that every cultural organisation, going from the particular to the general, is built upon myths and myths being myths are valid for some time and intelligible to a certain context. Over time they need to be reformulated and reinterpreted so that they do not ‘loose their intelligibility’. For my study, I consider myths to include not just narratives but stories that unfold at multiple levels: the exchange of different cultural signs, and the passage of multiple idioms through each other. The structural analyses that Levi-Strauss uses tend to disengage a view of culture as systems of signs that are braided over time into myth. Each society projects its own “soul” onto that of a universe that is built with the same forces and patterns of human behaviour. Myths and mythic imaginations introduce into cultures an aesthetic side, a sense of pleasure that refuses to reduce human life to mundane functionality.

The nationalist programme interpreted texts and history to depict the same events in different ways for sustaining a particular line of thinking as purported by the interpreters. The process initiated what Giddens (1984) calls “double hermeneutics” into the Zo/Mizo politics. Print media or print rationalism (for instance, Newspapers, school text books etc.) in local language Mizo (Duhlian) became a means through which nationalist discourse began to filter into the young minds. The nationalist programme once converted into print, became effective weapons to naturalise the claim to a particular territory, over a particular population and once
'internalised', such texts became the repository of "truth" and were taken-for-reality. 'In any such exploration of the study of the past, the aspects we choose to illuminate are determined not only by the present we live in, but the future we wish to work towards'.5

3.2. A. 'The Politics of ‘Tlawmgaihna’ and Social Welfare

The nostalgia of the bygone days and the mythical construction of the ‘Tlawmgai’, ‘Huaisen’- ‘Pasaltha’ began to be eulogised as social standards to be met by all men in the Zo/Mizo society. In the changed situation, however, these notions began to be specifically associated with notions of ‘Social Welfare’ led by the Church and its agencies namely the Y.M.A., the K.T.P. and also the youth organisations. Post-independence politics in Mizoram harps strongly on the dream of a ‘Greater Mizoram’ and the construction of an ‘Ideal Zo Christian State’. These political callings persist in varying degrees and are deliberately nursed by all political parties in the state, more for political mileage. The Zo/Mizo identity is undergoing an intense introspection. The nostalgia for a romanticised past, crowded by visions of a once brave and honourable people, who practiced the code of ‘tlawmgaihna’ in letter and spirit, is strongly nurtured, alongside the notion of a progressive and enlightened Christian society. Thus, the desire to create an Ideal Zo Christian State has been strongly portrayed and at times has led to the voyeuristic intervention of the church and its agencies in both the private and public arena. The dual operation of Proselytisation and Colonialism introduced marked structural and functional changes in the Zo/Mizo society.6 The loss of the indigenous the Zo way of life and the fear of being usurped by alien cultures compelled the Zo/Mizo to live under the spectre of the pan-optics7 through the watchful eyes of the State, the Church and its agencies. The code of ‘tlawmgaihna’ much celebrated ‘as the living


7 The Mizo society serves as the best example for Bentham’s Panoptic Society, where all persons are fearful of being watched by the church and the moral agencies. The only difference being that in the case of the Mizo society the observer can be seen and sometimes partially invisible.
principle of the Zo/Mizo society’ has also undergone hybridization over the years (refer to Chapter VI).

3.2. B. ‘Memory of the Lost Territory, Lost Space’

‘Places have multiple meanings for their inhabitants. They are constructed spatiality... (and) need to be understood apart from their creation as the locales of ethnography... (More crucial is to) raise questions about how the anthropological study of place relates to experiences of living in places.’ Maliki (1990; 1992) shows how an identity between people and territory is created and naturalised through the visual device of the map, which represents the world of nations “as a discrete spatial partitioning of territory” with no “bleeding boundaries”: Each nation is sovereign and limited in its membership. The enclosure, measurement, and commodification of space have been key for the production of the modern notion of a national territory bounded by frontiers that sharply distinguish inside from outside: Baptised with a proper name, space becomes national property, a sovereign patrimony fusing place, property, and heritage, whose perpetuation is secured by the state.

This identity between people, heritage, territory, and state is also brought about by the use of botanical metaphors that ‘suggest that each nation is a grand genealogical tree, rooted in the soil that nourishes it’. The Zo/Mizo or Zomi also use the metaphor of a tree to link up their rooted-ness with the claimed territory; the Zo/Mizo claim that their folksongs and folklories speaks of a grand tree planted by their fore-fathers before they migrated from ‘Zopui’, west of Tiau valley. For instance, the Kuki-Chin-Zo-Mizo Folklore suggests that their ‘family tree’ is at ‘Khampat Bungpui’ and that when the ariel roots of the great ‘Bung’ (Banyan tree) will touch the ground the children of Zo will return to the mother village ‘Zopui’ and the dispersed Zo clans will be re-united. The memory of the ever blessed village ‘Zopui’ symbolic of the grandeur of Zo history serves a purpose: a purpose of providing a

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unifying thread for the great collection of ethnic tribes living in and around present day Mizoram, Chittagong Hills Tracts, the Chin Hills in Burma to the areas around Tripura, Cachar (Assam) and Manipur. The memory of the lost village, lost territory directs the urgency to re-claim the lost land and re-establish the lost Zo heritage and ‘Honour’ of the once brave and powerful, head-hunting, Pasaltha that rode through the hills and valleys of the region of Zoram. The metaphor of a grand genealogical tree limits the membership of the shared memory to the Zo people alone and by the same logic serves the purpose of delimiting the membership or proximity of the other tribal groups in the region. ‘Myth-making’/‘Myth-building’ forms an important part of the ethnic-national identity building process as evident from the several theories of the origin and history of Zo/Mizo tribes.

The above metaphors like a map also configure the nation as limited in its membership, sovereign, and continuous in time. Maps are critical for conceptualising the state as ‘a compulsory organisation with a territorial basis’, as ‘the stable centre...of [national] societies and spaces’. The partition of the ‘Zo territory’ and the memory and mythification of Zoram/Zopui became embedded in the collective imagination systematically entering into the debates and discourses of nation-building, identity, statecraft, insider-outsider, inclusion-exclusion, migration/trans-border movement and the whole process of ‘Othering’. The issue of a territory, a boundary thus remained highly contested: ‘A boundary does not only exist in the border area, but manifests itself in many institutions such as education, the media, memorials, ceremonies and spectacles.

These are effective expressions of narratives linked with boundaries and border conflicts and serve as reference to the other.¹⁰ The spatial matrix materialised in the operation of the state system shapes the imagining of personhood as well as place. The bounding of the nation as a collective subject, as a super-organism with a unique biological-cultural essence, replicates the enclosure of national territory. Tropes of territorialised space are articulated with tropes of substance in the imagining of collective and individual national bodies. The Botanical metaphor that is the ‘family tree’ becomes symbolic of the

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cohesiveness of the group; it's imagined commonness and lived in memory. The idiom of kinship, Brown (2000) comments, has a 'special potency as a basis of community' because 'it can draw upon the past not simply to posit a common origin but also to claim substantial identity in the present.' The solidarity of kinship rests on reproduction of memory, a distant past: a history (usually of loss or pride), “shared substance” (biogenetic and psychic), and “codes for conduct”.

How the identity of a place and its people get shaped and reaffirmed in the midst of the growing encapsulating homogeneity and the fragmentation of space. How the concreteness of the territory and its visual markers is secured through material forms in everyday life and language and as well as in scholarship are the pertinent issues that I attempt to explore in this sub-section. What really makes the Zo/Mizo construction of a ‘Memory of the Lost Territory, Lost Space’ even more interesting is the convenient hybridization of the ‘Memory of Zopui and Chhinlung’ with that of the ‘Lost Tribe of Israel’.

3.2. B.1. Tracing the Fossils of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel

A small group of people living between Myanmar and Bangladesh have been practicing Judaism for more than 25 years. They call themselves Bene Menashe, descendants of the Tribe of Menashe, one of the ten lost tribes.11 Also known as the ‘Chhinlung-Israel’, the Bene Menashe relates their history of exile from the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C. across the silk route finally ending up in India and Myanmar.12 The oral traditions of the Zo/Mizo tribes in special the Hmar oral sources appear to indicate their Jewish origin and on the basis of these sources, some writers even go to the extent of saying that Hmar and their brethrens, Kuki and Mizo could perhaps be one of the ten lost tribes of ancient Israel.13


Interestingly the beliefs disseminated by European travellers, Jews and Christians, have been internalised by some of the ethnic communities in the region to such an extent that the ‘myth’ became an integral part of their ethos and identity.

3.2. B.2. Hybridization of the Memory: ‘Zopui- Chhinlung’ to ‘Chhinlung-Israel’

In 1951, during a Revivalist Movement in an obscure village ‘Buallawn’, a local headman fell into a trance, and had a vision that persuaded him that the Zo/Mizo were Jews and descendants of one of the lost tribes of Israel.14 A group of believers then set off on foot for the Promised Land, thinking it might be just over the horizon. Some went north, to see a train for the first time and got as far as Assam the neighbouring Indian state. Others went northeast and reached Nagaland. No one made it to Israel, but the story of the vision and the abortive journey to ‘Zion’ continues to inspire believers. The belief in the vision eventually led to the formation of a Mizo Israel Zionist Organisation (MIZO) in 1974 which sought the Israeli Premier to recognise their ‘new-found identity’. Eversince, there has been a substantial following of the new found identity. The 1991 Census records 792 Jews in Mizoram and 373 in Manipur, and lists another 497 persons under “Enoka Israel” living in the area aptly named ‘Salem Veng’. What is interesting about this is the “socio-political manifestation of the Zo/Mizo search for identity which reinforces their regional feeling to a great extent”.15

The Zo Re-unification Organization (ZORO) demanded recognition of the Zo/Mizo scattered in various states of India and neighbouring countries as one ‘ethnic race’ and unite all Zo/Mizo under one umbrella. The demand was supported by the ‘Mizo National Front’ and the ‘People’s Conference Party’ at different times.16 This Zo-Reunification movement


was paralleled by a movement to unite the Zo/Mizo with the state of Israel. Controversy exists, however, as to when exactly the Zo/Mizo first claimed ancestry from a lost tribe of Israel. What is known is that in the 50s, a villager in Northern Mizoram named Kawla visioned that ‘an angel revealed to him that the Zo/Mizo were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel and should return to the land of their forefathers.’ Kawla developed a following and gradually the belief evolved among some of his followers that the Mizo should not only return to their ancestral land, but also practice their ancestral faith of Judaism.

The Zo/Mizo attracted special attention of a Jewish Rabbi, Eliyahu Avichail of Jerusalem, who had set up an organisation in 1975 called Amishav, to seek the return of the descendants of the lost tribes to Israel. Upon hearing the claim of the Zo/Mizo, the Rabbi began to teach them the rudiments of the Jewish faith, and prepare them for their return to Israel. Gradually a movement towards embracing Jewish practices grew and by 2003, thousands of Zo/Mizo had embraced the Jewish faith and/or had moved to Israel.17

The Chhinlung Israel People’s Convention (CIPC)18 founded by Lalchanhima Sailo19 in 1994 uniquely combined two claims: one that the Zo/Mizo were the ‘Lost Tribes of Israel’

17 Despite the lack of scientific evidences Israel is keen to bring Bene Menashe back to Israel. One of the evident reasons being that Israel is facing crisis of human resources and declining birth rate has raised its difficulties. The current birth rate in Israel is far below that of Palestine which has the highest birth rate in the world. It means Israelis fear to be dominated by growing Palestinian population in the coming decades. The Zo/Mizo are also suffering from an identity crisis in India. The protracted insurgency and the disgrunted-ness over the post-Peace situation made it a breeding ground for spiritual adventurers offering salvation, identity and the prospect of emigration and riches abroad. Given all these facts, it cannot be refuted that Israel is expanding its occupation, and involving other nations also in this game. New Delhi’s ‘don’t disturb them’ policy unfortunately fails to see the hidden agenda of the Zionists.

18 The Chhinlung-Israel Peoples Convention is campaigning across the state to change the name of the Mizo tribe to Chhinlung-Israel. It also talks of a greater Chhinlung-Israel state that would include the Mizos of neighbouring Burma and Bangladesh.

19 Lalchanhima Sailo a Shillong born, descendant of a Mizo chief, former employee of the Food Services Corporation of India, and holder of law and history degrees from JNU in Delhi and Osmania University in Hyderabad joined the Mizo People’s Conference Party in 1990 (Brigadier T. Sailo’s Party). In 1992, while attending an International Seminar on ‘Studies on the Minority Nationalities of North-East India: the Mizos’ (7th-9th April) at Aizawl, he argued against efforts by Indian intellectuals to assimilate Mizo identity with that of the Assamese. In 1993, he was initially projected as a
and the second, a call for independence. In 1994, the Centenary year of the first Christian Missionary visit to Mizoram, Lalchanhima Sailo met an old Mizo Sabbath observer Sanzoa, who strongly believed in the 'Israel Theory' and had always, preached that the children of Israel should be unified. Under his inspiration, Sailo decided to publish an advertisement in the newspaper calling all Zo/Mizo who believed they were the children of Israel to gather together.

Initially the CIPC called for establishing a 'State Human Rights Commission' in Mizoram and distributed magnetic cassettes purporting the claim of the Zo/Mizo as the 'Lost Tribe of Israel'. It campaigned against the Indian government on several economic issues and demanded waiver on loans made to the state of Mizoram. It protested against the inundation of Zo/Mizo territory by dams built across the border in Bangladesh and asked the Indian government to demand compensation. It helped refugees from Myanmar settle in Mizoram and in the rest of India and Zo/Mizo who wanted to move to Israel. The CIPC in 1994 submitted a thirty-page memorandum to the United Nations, India, Israel and a number of other countries. The memorandum demanded recognition of the Zo/Mizo as a lost tribe of Israel, on the basis of oral history, and political independence and unification of all Mizo areas in India and neighbouring countries. It also claimed that the Mizo were never part of British India or Burma as they had lived in a legally defined, 'excluded area' divided arbitrarily by the British and that as a separate administrative area it had a right to independence when the British de-colonised the South Asia region. The popularity of the CIPC surged after 1998, when the CIPC organised its 'identity referendum' in which thousands of Zo/Mizo from the adjoining areas voted in favour of the CIPCs 'Lost Tribe' identity and the call for independence and unification of the Zo hnahhlak.

As the CIPC grew, a nexus developed between its belief in descent from a lost tribe of Israel and Jewish movements. Lalchanhima Sailo maintained a warm relationship with candidate for the state legislature but the People's Conference withdrew its support, disgruntled, he was forced to run as an independent.

20 This became evident when Lalchanhima Sailo decided to adopt the faith of the Bet-Israel sect (a Jewish sect was founded by Jonathan Kahn an American Jew, who believed in the restoration of Israel and Jesus Christ). In 2000, an Indian Christian preacher, P.P. Job spoke in Mizoram on an
Rabbi Avichail and the Israeli embassy which eased the process of immigration for the Mizo to Israel. Individuals like Lalchanhima and researchers like Zaithanchhungi continue to defend the lost tribes' theory, so much so that the 'Zo-Israel-Chhinlung Identity' movement has mass appeal and is steadily contesting though not directly confronting the 'Zo-Christian-Chhinlung Identity'.

The Presbyterian Church’s concern was not only that Zo/Mizo were adopting an Israeliite and Jewish identity in large numbers. There was the fear that the Israeliite identity movement would upset the status quo of peace and prosperity in Mizoram in the changed times. For instance, life in the post-Peace Accord Mizoram under India was good with large flow of finances into the state from the Central Government making Mizoram one of the wealthiest states in India. The multifold development in and around the capital Aizawl, and its elevation from a small town to a ‘City’ connected by air within a short span of the Peace Accord, impressed upon the Zo/Mizo people the positives of living with India.

invitation by Jonathan Kahn. Kahn blew the ‘shofar’ (the traditional Jewish ceremonial ram horn) in the Assam Rifles field of Aizawl. He said that, ‘the stick of Ephraim and Judah should stick together’, suggesting a connection between the Jews and Mizo. Sailo, who was till then a nominal member of the Presbyterian Church felt that Jonathan Kahn’s talk on the restoration of Israel could be understood to mean the restoration of a lost tribe of Israel, the Zo/Mizo, in an independent Israeli state in South East Asia. The connection between Lalchanhima Sailo and the CIPC with Jewish movements was not limited to Jewish-Christians.

Although Lalchanhima Sailo himself did not convert to Judaism, he did not deny that there was a possibility of him doing so in the future, saying, ‘Let time tell who I am’. He admitted that his movement was a stepping stone for Zos/Mizos to convert to Judaism ‘as our movement grew more and more people became Jewish or started to follow Judaism.

Zaithanchhungi was a relative of one of the members of the original group that went to seek or reach Zion following the vision of the headman in 1951. Formerly a successful insurance agent and the wife of a state legislator, and a former teacher she went to Israel in 1983. There she met Eliyahu Avichayil, an Orthodox rabbi whose Amishav organization searches the world for descendants of the lost tribes. He showed immediate interest in her story, saying Jews had been scattered as far as China. He urged her to return to India to catalogue Mizo history. She came up with a list of apparent similarities, including the building of altars, the sacrifice of animals, burial customs, marriage and divorce procedures, a belief in an all-powerful deity and the symbolic presence of the number seven in many festivities. Zaithanchhungi saw other links in musical instruments and household practices. ‘I was a non-believer, but after my research I now believe very firmly that the Mizo are of Jewish descent’. Yet she herself remains a Presbyterian.

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The following stanzas from James Dokhuma’s poem ‘Aw Delhi’ (translated in English by Rev. Zairema) reflect the changed attitude towards New Delhi (Symbolic of India):

_Aw! Delhi (Oh! Delhi)_
While nations poised for spoils,
Plan destruction for imagined wrongs;
Count their armies and cannons,
‘Might is right’ said they.
But you. O! Delhi, city of peace;
Sits serene indisposed to aggression;
Messenger of peace to all nations,
With your watch-word: ‘peace on Earth’.

... Mizo, Naga, Garo and Khasi from the east,
Down to wave-tossed boulders of Kumari on the south
From the Gate of India on the West,
To the snowy mountains on the north.
With one Accord we march together,
We drink your nectar, oh how sweet!
Should your enemies attack you,
We shall sing a victory song under your flag.
...
...


The growth in education and rise in Literacy (second highest in India); the reservation policies in Medical Colleges, Engineering, the accelerated pace of development (refer, to Chapter VI) all brought about a mellowing down of attitudes at both ends. The Zo/Mizo constantly began to contrast the grim memories of the insurgency times and the continuing turmoil in the neighbouring North-Eastern states of Manipur and Nagaland with that of the changed wave of peace and development in Mizoram. The Church feared that call for an independent Mizoram by the supporters of the ‘Lost Tribes’ could develop into an insurgency like situation. The Church felt that Mizoram as an independent country would be weak and defenceless. Likewise, an independent Mizoram would weaken the Indian Union as a whole.
and it would set an example for other Indian states to follow. The Church in Mizoram and the Indian State put a check on the Jewish missionaries in the North-East India as it could affect Indo-Arab and Indo-Palestine relations. Individual efforts have also been directed to counter the Chhinlung-Israel movement. One such critical voice was that of P.C. Biaksiama, who argued that ‘there was no similarity between Mizo and Israelite custom’. The belief about being a tribe of Israel arose out of a religious revival, out of a dream in a remote village in Mizoram. The Bible constantly spoke about the Israelites and the Mizo held them in high esteem. From this developed a tendency among certain Zo/Mizo to identify with the Israelites.

Lalchanhima Sailo countered Biaksiama’s criticism in a televised programme by arguing that ‘the Mizos do have customs that resemble those of the Ancient Israelites’. ‘Building an independent Mizoram was possible by non-violence. The mistake of the Mizo National Front was that they had not used international law and diplomacy to achieve their aim. Lalchanhima argued that he was following ‘the provisions of the Indian constitution, the United Nations and Gandhi. Resolution 242 could apply to the Mizos as a lost tribe of Israel and an independent Mizoram would not be landlocked. It would include the port of Chittagong in Bangladesh as well as the Arakan region of Myanmar.’

23 These concerns of the Church in Mizoram further stand as proof that the Church is not against India and is not the cause of insurgencies and secessionist movements in the Northeast as commonly perceived by many Indians.

24 In June of 2003, Biaksiama presented his report on the CIPC before the church elders in the Presbyterian Pastorate of Champhai. He claimed that the CIPC assertions, both about being a lost tribe of Israel and independence were full of lies. The elders who had become members of the CIPC were taken aback. Attacked harshly by Mr. Biaksiama, they said that they only sympathized with the CIPC call the independence and unification. P.C. Biaksiama continued his movement against an Israelite identity for the Mizos and the CIPC. He conducted a seminar at his home church in Canman Veng area of Aizawl and in November of 2003, he published a book called, ‘CIPC leh Mizo Israel’ dissecting the positions of the CIPC and condemning them for their wrong teachings.

25 Lalchanhima Sailo countered Biaksiama’s arguments by pointing that ‘the high priests did not sacrifice with pig and the lower priests who sacrificed with pig would not eat the meat. A kind of Sabbath was observed. They had a kind of circumcision as well. They buried their dead by first bathing and clothing the body before burial. ‘They had always referred to Menashe who is Menashe, the son of Joseph, their great ancestor.
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Over the years, the 'Zo-Israel-Chhinlung Identity' has invited protracted arguments and counter-theorisations on lines of the 'Zo-Christian-Chhinlung Identity'. The controversy over the 'lost tribes of Israel' is clearly visible from the newspaper and book stalls which continue to sell Biaksimia's book 'Mizo leh Israel' alongside the pro-Jewish newsletter, 'Israel Tlangau' with pictures of Amishav's new President Michael Freund, a supporter of the lost tribe theory of the Mizos. The Zo/Mizo in the streets are divided over whether to adopt a 'Zo-Israel-Chhinlung Identity' or a 'Zo-Christian-Chhinlung Identity'.

Both contested theories of the 'Zo-Christian-Chhinlung Identity' and the 'Zo-Israel-Chhinlung Identity' remain open to contestations and newer interpretations. The tussle between an overtly Christian Identity and a Jewish Identity continues to resonate in public debates. The Biaksiamas and Lalchanchimas in Mizoram are yet to solve the riddle of Identity and the 'double helix' of the DNA continues to be a contested strand. Interestingly, both contested theories build up their narratives in and around the 'Memory of Zopui-Chhinlung' (Traditional Myth-Memory of the Zo people). The 'Zomi movement' belongs to the genera of the 'Zo-Christian-Chhinlung Identity' while the 'Zo-Israel-Chhinlung Identity' stretches and links the 'Chhinlung Theory' to that of the 'Lost Tribes of Israel'; and provides a solution in the form of either creating an independent 'Israel State in and around Mizoram' or migrate back to the 'promised homeland'. Questions of racial roots aside, the Bene Menashe serves as an example and metaphor of subterranean crisis of identity. The confusion over identity is plainly visible in the narrow and precipitous streets of Aizawl the capital city. One side is Bethlehem, the other Salem, another side is Cannan and mid-way is Zion Street, with an intersection called Israel Point. Shops, schools, homes and institutions carry names such as Israel Stores, Zion Tailors, Solomon's Cave, Exodus Press, Bethesda, Beer-seba, Nazareth School, Mount Carmel School. Names and identities randomly plucked from the entire Judeo-Christian spectrum continue to exhibit the contest between the New and the Old Testaments.

3.2. C. ‘The Memory of Insurgency, Violation and Rape’

Memory is indeed the moving force of all narrations of identity, national or otherwise, displacement, movement, pain and pleasure, good times, bad times. In fact memories are objects that tumble out unexpectedly from the mind, linking the present with the past.27 ‘The Memories of Insurgency, Violation and Rape’ constitute the markers around which the community has been mobilised time and again. The horrors of the Insurgency and the Counter-Insurgency; the violation of basic Human Rights; and the mass rapes of women and minors remain embedded in the social memory of the Zo/Mizo people. The embeddedness of the memory is signified by the fact that the casual reference to the issue of rapes by the Army, CRPF was sufficient for our respondents to get charged: speak in a higher pitch, change in facial expressions, body language and occasionally with wet eyes.

Another instance, which supports the above argument of the embeddedness of memory of rape and violation is that as late as 2010 there was a strong demand asking the Government of India to seek forgiveness from the Zo/Mizo people for all the atrocities committed during the troubled times by the Indian Army and the bombing of Aizawl and other places in Mizoram by the Indian Air Force as its counter-insurgency strategy.28 From the narratives of the past it becomes possible to understand how people or persons perceive their own victimisation and to what extent it comes as into conflict with the identity ‘imposed’ on them or the identity that they accept for themselves. ‘It has been argued that, “a traumatised memory has a narrative structure which works on a principle opposite to that of any historical narrative”.29 A narrative is always related to a sense of the self and is told from someone else’s own perspective and in this sense narratives concentrate on particular events in a particular space and time. In other words, “memory begins where history ends”.30 Even

while receding into a past of over 40 years, the Insurgency and its memory remains a lived in reality, so much so that it becomes a metaphor for violence, fear, domination, difference, separation and the unsatisfactory resolution of the problems of the Zo people.

'Buai kum a khan Mizo kanlo la mol amae roh chu kan nun khan a rong lo' (during the insurgency times, we (Zo/Mizo) were really backward but we had our sense of humanity intact); 'Indian Army kha a rong zok' (the Indian Army had lost its sense of humanity) says Zaliana. They did not differentiate between MNF and the innocent civilians. Zaliana like many people who witnessed the troubled times blame the Assam politicians for Mizoram’s misery. Zaliana concludes with anger:

Assam’s politicians are to be blamed for they tried to impose Ahom identity and they felt the Indian Army’s action to be a befitting response to the anti-Ahom response that they got from the Mizo Hills. Assam should be blamed because they sealed-off Mizoram and sent the armed forces to take maximum action. Neither entry nor exit from the territory was permitted during the turmoil. The Army was left at its free will to handle the situation.\(^{31}\)

The interviews conducted by me further reaffirmed that the issue of rape as an incidence remains largely difficult to document due to the social stigmas attached to it. It is difficult to identify the victims and their families because society does not want to name them so that their ‘honour’ can be safeguarded and in course of time those who were victimised would be ‘healed’ even though the memory remains (largely in public). Rape incidents during the insurgency were hardly ever reported to officials mainly because of fear and ‘honour’. Zaliana observes:

Rape is in the ‘public Memory’, it still hurts and that a living scar (‘sennung’) remains in the memory of those who still have the memory; the profound emotional pain and stigma attached to it, fear for the safety

of family left behind and lack of ordinary support systems leave people without recourse.  

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The above observation seems to explain the hesitation or reluctance on the part of the respondents to open up. Most of my male respondents spoke in detail about the incidents and the shame, and pain of being a witness to the Army’s high-handedness. An example of the type of physical violence that the men were subjected to besides beatings was the regular free service given to the Army in the form of supplying water/firewood every morning. Failure to do the task called for coercive action against the person and his family. The civilians were subjected to gross inhuman deeds. Anybody could be arrested on mere suspicion and someone who did get arrested found it really hard to come out alive without physical deformity.  

33

Another painful experience was the curfew which almost became a norm in Mizoram and Mizo life style. Zaliana narrates a personal account of the inconveniences experienced by him at the tender age of 11 in 1968:

during one such curfew ... A lady in my neighbourhood accidentally trapped her ankle in an animal trap that was set for hunting and she bled profusely... once inside her village people could not meet her nor provide her with necessary aid as because no one was allowed to light fire or gather in a group past the curfew siren...her family watched her...as she died at around 1 am early morning due to bleeding; people could not attend her funeral because of the fear of the Army.  

34

Another incident that he narrates was ‘when the Army barged into his house in Champhai and hit his old father with the butt of a rifle because he was standing and helping


with the family pray before meal while the Army was at a close distance. The period from 1966-75 was the most trying time for the Mizo/Zo people as a race’, says Zaliana.  

Rape is certainly a weapon of sexism, but is also a weapon of racism, and other forms of oppression and dominance as well. Effective institutionally, rape is used to target certain populations and to maintain the power imbalance that exists. For example, the organised mass rapes of women in Mizoram led to the construction of the myth of the ‘Vai Rapist’/‘Sikh Rapist’: which has been used in periods of Zo/Mizo history to target ‘Vai’ men for sexual misconduct such as ‘hmute deh’ (fondling of breast). The issue of rape in any given society is a sensitive and touchy one. Silence or total outburst remains the obvious binary response to the question of rape. The rapes committed by the CRPF and the Indian Army remain to this day a prickly memory in the way of mellowing the everyday lived relations between the Zo/Mizo and the ‘Vai’. The attitudes towards the outsiders are projected through the lenses of that memory of ‘rape’. The image that the common man has of the ‘Army’, is that of a robust, Indian (mostly Sikhs) who raped ‘their’ women in full public display. For instance, Zaliana shares his memory of the rapes and public memory in Mizoram:

The Army deployed in a particular area in Champhai hounded all women in common places like the church (Biak in) and segregated the men with hands tied behind in schools and other buildings sufficient to hold them in large numbers. Men were mercilessly beaten and warned to confess their links with the MNF. While they raped the women in turns in full public-view sometimes in front of children; in a holy place like the Church. It was inhuman and painful for the people who watched it. The Army did not look like humans they had fallen to the state of animals.  

The memory of Rape and Violence remains embedded in the collective social memory of the Zo people. The testimonies of people who witnessed the whole process of insurgency, show that violence against women and victimisation of women was directed against women for the simple reason that women were seen as ‘repositories’ of their

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
communities or as ‘territories to be occupied’. The memory of ‘Rape’ and ‘Counter-Insurgency’ is given an interpretation and directed towards the constructing the ‘Ideal Zo Christian state’. The targeting or the objectification of Zo/Mizo women during the insurgency led to growth in a hegemonic masculinity in the Zo/Mizo society especially in the MNF’s definition of manhood, the need to protect ‘our women’ and defend ‘our honour’. Consequently the vision of the ‘Ideal Zo Christian state’ was directed to the quest to find the enemy against the silhouette of the memory of rape and violence. The ‘Vai’, the Army/CRPF/Assam Rifles and also the Police began to be projected as objects of condemnation. For instance, the Sikh community began to be equated to ‘dogs in heat’; ‘endowed with unimaginable manhood which had no control over itself’ in other words a sexual enemy from whom ‘our women’ have to be saved. ‘People with whom we have such deep economic ties: the ‘Vai’, can never be trusted and made a part of our lives’. ‘We cannot get close enough to the Vai’, ‘they remain as permanent outsiders’ (‘Sumdawngna kan kom reng mi kha nunna a kan kom thei lo. Vai hi kan ngai thei lo’). Zaliana says:

People in the age group 45-70 in Mizoram especially in Champhai will never forgive the Indian Army (Vai, Sikh). This is one of the prime reasons why people from Champhai and adjoining areas are so suspicious of outsiders especially the ‘Vai’.

3.2. D. The Image of a Zo Christian

‘Being a Zo’ and ‘Being a Christian’ are the two issues around which religious identity politics in Mizoram is developed. The first issue has problems of parameters of definitions and it remains contested. While the second issue has elements of experiential-ness embedded to it as evident from the casual everyday use of language ‘Khristian nilo in an hrethiam lovang’ (‘Non-Christians will not be able to understand’) to brush side those who do not belong to the Church as not being able to understand the Bible and its teachings. Both these issues are projected in the state-building process of an ‘Ideal Zo Christian State’. The


Christian’s task is one of reconciliation. ‘Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called sons of God’. To be a peace-maker does not mean that a man must be politically neutral, but that, while believing whole-heartedly in the justice of his own cause, he tries to see and to make known all that is good on the other side, and never shuts any possible doorway into peace.39

In a predominantly Christian state where a large section of the population claims to be devout Christian, the Church naturally encapsulates every aspect of Zo/Mizo life. An abstract of a news item in Times of India dated January 9th, 1989 conveniently explains the predominance of the Church in Zo/Mizo politics:

In a state where 85 percent of the population is Christian, the Church is playing a vital role in the 21st January elections to the State Assembly and has even indirectly supported the Congress in a significant message to the people of the state, ten denominations of the Church, active in the state, have laid down guidelines for the voters and candidates, to be followed during the election. The message, issued shortly after the imposition of President’s Rule on September 7th last year (1988), however, does not name any party or individual. During the last (1987) elections, the MNF was voted to power, as the Church had given a call to vote for that party which would bring peace to the State... “In the course of the campaign, we (the Church) deem it best that no public feast be held under the name of any party. The different parties, instead of campaigning from house to house, may launch their campaigns through public meetings. Party politics with its potential to create antagonism loosened the solidarity of the Mizo community and is also a stumbling block for the Churches.”40


The Church’s influence is really deep and daily life is encircled by it. The church has become Mizoised through *ruai thre* (community feasting) and ‘*zai leh lam*’ (song and dances). Zaliana observes:

Alongside religion, the ‘Denominational’ factor has greatly influenced the Zo/Mizo politics. The undivided Aizawl district had a more welcoming attitude. While in the south (*chhim*) one had to have a local network or local connections to have a footing into the politics of that region. Most of the political leaders in Mizoram come from *Chhim* (southern). Excluding Lalthanhawla most leaders from Ch. Chhunga, Dengthuama, Laldenga, T. Sailo and others all had *Chhim* (southern) links and were under London Baptist influence. They also were the first set of Mizos to come under the influence of western education, religion and politics.41

The influence of religion can also be understood why the early leaders decided to do away the clannish affiliations and its markers for creating an egalitarian political identity cutting across clan and sub-tribe identity. For instance, politicians and people at large in Mizoram hardly use their clan names or tribe names and instead use their first names. Politics in order to survive and create an ‘Ideal Zo Christian State’, therefore crucified clannish identity and its markers at the altar because ‘if there is no crucifixion there is no rising’.42 The church leaders in turn maintain a dignified, respectable and non partisan stand. It is because of the role of the Church and its agencies that the Election Commission labelled Mizoram as a role model for other states in India. Vanramchhuangi humorously mentions that ‘Mizoram-ah chuan Sawkar a la a lal ber a, Kohran a thu ber’ (‘in Mizoram the Government is the highest authority, and the Church has the final say’) to describe the dominance of the Church and its agencies. The government and the bureaucracy have not been able to touch the masses as the Church. The elites try to go with the tide and without

42 Ibid.
any spirituality they enter the Church activities in order to gain popularity and mass appeal. So in short, they dictate terms in their interest through the church.\textsuperscript{43}

All political leaders project themselves as pious, god fearing citizens and publicly at least maintain their subservience to the Church. ‘The whole system is an outcome of a beautiful accident of Holy Spirit’.\textsuperscript{44} Laldenga time and again changed his stand on being a Christian and his proximity to the Church. For instance, during the insurgency especially in the 70s, Laldenga made himself close to the Church and publicly proclaimed the endorsement of the vision of an Ideal Zo Christian State by campaigning against ‘Zu’ drinking, sale of ‘Zu’ and asked people to turn away from pleasure-seeking behaviour.\textsuperscript{45} Right after attainment of Statehood Laldenga distanced himself from the Church and warned the Church not to interfere in politics just as the MNF does not interfere in religious matters. The clash with the Church proved expensive for Laldenga as the Church campaigned against him and gave a message to the Zo/Mizo public not to vote Laldenga to power. The political loss in 1989 compelled Laldenga to regain his lost closeness to the Church. Laldenga remade himself as the defender of Christianity and Zo people and in his personal life continued to ignore the claims of the faith because he ‘liked his booze and money/power’.\textsuperscript{46} Similarly Thenphunga Sailo made it public that he was with the Church; and so did Lalthanhawla. The imagery of Ideal Zo Christian state calls for professing the Christian faith and being a Zo (Zomi/Zo hnahthlak, Zo mi leh sa).

The desire to create an ‘Ideal Zo Christian State’ has been strongly portrayed and at times has led to the voyeuristic intervention of the church and its agencies in both the private

\textsuperscript{43} Pi Vanramchhuangi. \textit{Personal Interview. Op. cit.}

\textsuperscript{44} Prof. Lianzela (Department of Economics, Mizoram University). \textit{Personal Interview.} Tanhril, Aizawl: 24\textsuperscript{th} January 2008. And also, Pu Zaliana. \textit{Personal Interview. Op. cit.}


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and public arena. Foucault’s ‘Pastoral Power’ helps to understand the kind of power the Church exercises over the individual. The message and assurance of salvation of next world through religion and to ‘the notion of individualism’ introduced through competitive market economy has combined to introduce a paradoxical notion of individual salvation in this life, in place of salvation in the next life, signified by markers like ‘health, wellbeing, security’ casually referred to as ‘Changkangna’ (progressive/developed) in Mizo (Duhlian).

Christianity spread like forest fire in Mizoram after the 60s MNF rebellion precisely because the post-rebellion psychological trauma compelled people take refuge in culture and religion in order to find solace. The post-rebellion trauma was exploited by the evangelists to convert because to convert more people to the fold of Christianity meant a more secured life for the evangelist in the next world. Similarly there was a growth in music and education in the post-rebellion times. The growth and rise of music and education can be seen as ‘healing’ the Zo/Mizo society. Christianity, Education, Music, in other words, “Religion” and “Culture” became important markers of Zo Identity. The predominance of religion in Zomi politics reflects itself through the constant references made to God (Pathian). Similarly, the traces of nationhood reflect from the stress on the geographic locationality of the Zomi territory.

The following statement reflects the emotional appeal of the Ideal Zo Christian State:

Pathianin duh taka a siam Khawvela Mizoten ram kan neih chhun
Mizoram hi chen renga tlak siam tur chuan kan chenna khua theuh
enkawl thei thuneihna nei ENKAWLTU kan mamavoh a.49


48 Pu Lallianchhunga (Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Mizoram University). Personal Interview. Chaltlang Campus, Aizawl: 19th January 2008.

(Mizoram, the only territory allocated by the Divine for the Mizo needs a better administrative mechanism so as to make it fit for living for the future generations).

3.2. E. The Card of Human Rights

Along with the above mentioned four markers of Identity which were projected by all leadership cutting across party affiliation over time, was the trump card of ‘Human Rights’. A quick glance of the memoranda submitted by different leaders and parties stretching through the decades of the insurgency would readily help to understand how the ‘Human Rights issue was manipulated to serve the end of constructing an identity in Zo/Mizo politics’. Laldenga’s call for ‘Mizo Independence’ in 1966 introduced the concept of ‘Human Rights’ to the Zo/Mizo people.50 Brigadier Sailo in turn gave the concept of ‘Human Rights’ its flesh and blood by linking it to the various types of human rights violation and atrocities committed by the Indian Army against the Zo/Mizo people.

Keeping in view, the seriousness of the situation and the increasing level of strained relations between the Indian Army and the public, Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo AVSM, a retired Indian Army Officer, along with some friends formed the Human Rights Committee (HRC) in the month of June 1974 in Aizawl. Brigadier Thenphunga was elected as the Chairman of the newly formed Committee. The HRC in Mizoram then launched a campaign against the prevailing atrocities and the public became a little more enlightened. People greatly appreciated what the HRC was doing. Within a short period of time, the movement spread throughout Mizoram and gained ground. However, the following year (1975) the Committee converted itself into a political party: People’s Conference (PC). Though the newly-formed party still claimed to champion the cause of human rights, the same was increasingly getting marginalised on the PC’s agenda. By the time it won the State Assembly Election in 1978, the party had firmly put the human rights issue on the backseat. It is indeed ironic, but nevertheless true that the same P.C. Government was accused of committing serious human rights violation after it launched a bitter and bloody anti-MNF operation using the State’s police force designated as ‘Special Force’. Several MNF personnel and people

sympathetic towards the MNF were killed; and in the process, many innocent lives were taken. However, despite this, the formation of the first HRC was a landmark in the history of human rights movement in Mizoram.

By the time the Memorandum of Settlement (Peace Accord) was concluded on June 30, 1986 between the Union Government and the MNF, the degree of concern for 'Human Rights' declined to a significant extent. In the post-Peace Accord period, nobody seems to take any interest or courage to talk about human rights mainly because of the strong contention prevailing among the people of Mizoram; and that the issue of human rights arises only during times of war, turbulence or insurgency and there can be no violation under normal circumstances. Vanramchhuangri who writes under the pen name 'Ruatfela nu', (Director HRLN Mizoram, Social Activist) believes that:

Human Rights have never been taken seriously in Mizoram eversince the pre-colonial times. Human Rights are used as a short term goal to achieve vested interest. Human Rights were focused throughout the insurgency. As long as Human Rights serve our interest we agree to champion it thereafter we discard it. This is the reason why Human Rights for the minorities are not guaranteed in Mizoram. Our leaders for instance, Brigadier T. Sailo used the Human Rights issue to meet his goal of getting a platform into Mizo politics.

Lallianchhunga also substantiates the above observation thus:

Even after the implementation of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 in India, the State Government of Mizoram has not taken any initiative for the establishment and formation of a Human Rights Commission nor Human Rights Courts in the state. Mizoram may be one of the few places where human rights have been extremely neglected and violated.51

Vanramchhuangi says, critically in Mizo: ‘Sailo ‘an Human Rights kha ahan zuar a’, PC Party a din ah’ (‘Sailo sold the issue of Human Rights and built his People’s Conference’). Mizos as a community are trend followers ‘Human Rights’ also became a trend during the insurgency.\(^{52}\)

Human Rights Activists and Social Activists observe that there seems to be little public resistance to the activities of ‘Community Policing’ which at times exhibits the co-existence of extreme forms of tradition and modernity. An interesting aspect reflecting the extreme co-existence of tradition and modernity in the Zo society is the attitude projected by the Community Policing and ‘mob rule’ in the name of ‘punitive actions’ or ‘instant justice’. The most common form of these instant justice or punishment being the caging of the culprits (victims) in a ‘Savawm Bawm’ (Bear Cages/animal traps) and putting them at public display; reminiscent of the pre-colonial tribal days when human heads or animals caught in a game were displayed for flaunting ‘Heroism’.\(^{53}\)

3.2. F. The Inner Line Permit Regime

The Inner Line Permit or ILP has been an important issue around which the four prominent markers of identity and Human Rights were bulwarked. The ILP over the years has been an added package for defining ‘us’ as against ‘them’; ‘insiders’ versus ‘outsiders’. The main anxiety of tribal people of the North-East as elsewhere has been ‘how to preserve their culture and racial identity.’ The Inner line regulations of 1873 empowered the lieutenant Governor of Assam to establish an Inner Line according to which no British subject could cross or go beyond a certain frontier that was drawn along the foothills of the north-eastern and south-western border of the Brahmaputra valley. The areas beyond the inner line were inhabited by the hill tribes where the Government did not want to apply complicated civil rules. The Inner Lines awarded the hills tribes a special status. Most notably, the Inner Line Regulation did not define the actual boundary of the British possession nor did it indicate the


territorial frontiers. Its sole purpose was to prohibit the plains people from entering into the hills without the permission of the Government. The Inner lines were drawn simply with a view to protect the hill tribes from any sort of interference from the plains area and to provide a simpler administration for the hill people.

The Inner Line Regulation, 1873 had empowered the Lieutenant Governor of Assam to establish inner line to distinguish the areas between the 'Inner Line' and the 'outer line'. The Inner Line Regulation, 1873 prescribed that "the local government by notification in Calcutta Gazette may prohibit all British subjects, or any class of British subjects, or any person, sending in or passing through, such districts, from going beyond such line without pass under the hand and seal of the executive officer" who "may authorise to grant such pass and the local government from time to time cancel very such prohibition". The identity formation in the Zo Hills has to be understood in the light of the deep impact of the advent of the British Administration on the Mizo psychology. The residues of the policies of the Colonial Administration which were aimed at restricting the demographic transformation of the region continue to direct and control the overall administration of the states in the region and their relations with the Central Government and rest of the federal units of India.

Politicians of various hues over the years in Mizoram have built their arguments around an imagined pristine identity untouched by other ethnic groups in the region based on the above markers of identity mentioned in this chapter. And most of the arguments hover around the construction of the 'in-group' against the 'out-group' and the permanent outsiders. The ILP in Mizoram forms a background for the highly complex debate on inclusion and exclusion. The ILP has been projected by almost all leaders to have a special healing power to seal off the boundary from the demonising influences as well as offer security to those who live within the boundaries of the imaginary lines. The issue of the boundary of the 'sacred territory' thus became a nationalised issue.

54 The 'Line System' was initiated by the British Colonial Government in 1916 and put to implementation in 1920. By this 'Line System' the British Government imposed restrictions on settlement in certain areas of the North-East. There were three classes of lines namely:
1. Immigrants' Line- within this 'line' land could be allotted to immigrants only.
2. Mixed Line- Both immigrants and indigenous people could obtain settlements here.
3. Assamese Line- Only the indigenous people could take up land here.
The line dividing the foreigners and the outsiders is sometimes emotional rather than real/legal. Like other hill people of the North-East, the Zo/Mizo are zealously protective of their identity and culture. A reported statement by the Union Home Minister in Shillong early in 1993 suggesting that the ILP might be scrapped triggered widespread protests throughout the region. A joint action committee headed by students and other activists was immediately formed to oppose the move. The fact that the ILP stands guaranteed under the Peace Accord added fuel to the fire and revived criticisms about the failures in implementation of the Accord terms by a section of the MNF. The MNF announced that it would start a drive to identify, detect and deport foreigners and the Congress government got intensive revision of the electoral rolls in the state. In 1993 hundreds of non-tribals, especially Bengali traders, fled in panic after the Government cancelled their ILP and trade licenses and the Mizoram Chamber of Commerce and the MZP issued ‘quit’ notices with an August 25th deadline. Many of those affected are said to have had invalid or expired ILPs. Violence broke out within a month with the killing of a Mizo truck driver by plainsmen near the Cachar-Mizoram border. In swift retaliation, some 90 non-Mizo shops and establishments in Aizawl were burnt down and 15 trucks and buses damaged. A number of persons were injured and an estimated 1500 to 6000 “outsiders” fled the state. The Aizawl-Silchar highway, Mizoram’s lifeline was cut. The Government pleaded a shortage of Police personnel and the situation was only brought under control with the arrival of the CRPF (refer to Chapter V).

While most of my respondents hailed ILP as an effective exclusivist mechanism to protect the Zo/Mizo people from outside influx,55 a few critiqued the ILP in contemporary globalised times. For instance, Vanramchhuangi critically says, ‘ILP hi Zo culture tan a thnagkai lo. Min ti chak lo zok’, MZP, YMA te hian chakna a mo an ti a mahase atak a chuan chaklona a ni zok’ (ILP is not an effective weapon for protecting Zo culture; the Politicians, MZP, YMA and such others think that it is positive but in reality the ILP is a backward weapon meant for wild tribes, its exclusivist in nature). ILP can never help development in

55 Almost all my respondents from the University and Colleges as well as other offices; and also the business persons felt the ILP to be an effective mechanism to check the inflow of ‘Vai’ into Mizoram. They were in favour of retaining the ILP regime.
Mizoram nor can it protect us from assimilation. Outside influences and cultural contacts will never assimilate a culture which is internally strong. It’s the internal lacunae that bring about the annihilation of a culture and history of civilisation stands as proof (‘khawvel civilization ral na chan po hi Khawtlang mun thra avmlo avangin ain ti ral zok a ni’). Vanramchhuangi (Lalruatfela nu/ Ruatfela nu) in one of her articles in the Aizawl Post (NA) ‘Total Bandh hi a Hlawtling Ngai Meuh Lo’ also critiqued the ‘Total Bandh’ which is an ordinary bandh for all citizens as being ineffective and causing huge losses to the State and its shaky economy. Likewise she has been vehemently opposing the ‘Vai Bandh’ strategy adopted by the MZP, VDP (Village Defence Party), YMA and other agencies of the Nexus of Patriarchy. She says, ‘it’s against any ethical norm and it’s a gross violation of basic Human Rights.’

3.3. Contesting Leadership

Laldenga, Thenphunga Sailo and Lalthanhawla the three prominent leaders of Zo/Mizo politics developed their take on Identity Politics by weaving their arguments in and around the above mentioned ‘Identity Markers’. These three men have been selected for this particular overview on the “Politics of Leadership and Identity Construction” basically because of the contested nature of their stature in politics in Mizoram. Few like Zaliana say ‘We need a strong leader like Sailo who is ‘Pu chang sipai anga ri-thlap’ (‘a bold manly military leader in outlook’, the right Hindi word to convey the sense of the Mizo term ‘ri-thlap’ would be ‘kadak’). During the course of my interaction with the respondents in the field study I realised that these three men are vying for the position of ‘The Father of the Zo/Mizo Nation’ and the degree by which they differ in the choices can be seen across the age-groups and sex-groups (refer to Figures below). Moreover, the role that these three men played in the peace process makes them the ready choice for any study on politics of leadership in that state.

TABLE 3.1
Profile of the 200 Mizo respondents

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<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number of persons Between 18 – 30 years</th>
<th>Number of persons Above 31 years</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Tribe</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>P</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own Survey Data
# (RC= Roman Catholic; P= Protestant)

*The 200 Zo/Mizo respondents consisted of 100 young respondents aged between 18 to 30 years and 100 middle aged respondents above 31 years. The objective was to chart the difference in opinion of the respondents born after the Peace Accord and those who had lived experience of the troubled times in Mizoram. The above table clearly shows the difference in education and present employment scenario in the state. Very interestingly a section of my young male respondents identified themselves not by their tribe or clan names but as Scheduled Tribes. The middle aged respondents seemed to be more conscious of their primordial identities. The table also shows that the generic identity (Mizo) has been by and large accepted by the younger generation among the Zo/Mizo.
FIGURE 3.2
Who should be rightly called the ‘Father of the Mizo/Zo state’?
All Age Groups

Lalthanhawla 30%
Laldenga 57%
Brigadier T. Sailo 13%

Source: Own Survey

FIGURE 3.3
Who should be rightly be called the ‘Father of the Mizo/Zo state’?
Middle Aged Men

Lalthanhawla 20%
Brigadier T. Sailo 10%
Laldenga 70%

Source: Own Survey
FIGURE 3.4

Who should be rightly called the ‘Father of the Mizo/Zo state’?
Middle Aged women

Lalthanhawla
10%

Brigadier T. Sailo
20%

Laldenga
70%

Source: Own Survey

FIGURE 3.5

Who should be rightly be called the ‘Father of the Mizo/Zo state’?
Young Men (18-30)

Lalthanhawla
50%

Laldenga
50%

Brigadier T. Sailo
0%

Source: Own Survey
FIGURE 3.6

Who should be rightly be called the ‘Father of the Mizo/Zo state’?
Young women (18-30)

Lalthanbawla 40%
Laldenga 40%
Brigadier T. Saito 20%

Source: Own Survey
TABLE 3.7: Opinion of the 200 Mizo respondents on relevant issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human rights taken seriously in Mizoram?</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should the church be even further involved in daily affairs of the state/government?</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should the church be even further involved in daily life of the common persons in Mizoram?</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion plays an important role in politics in Mizoram?</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Mizoram an Ideal Christian State?</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a vacuum in leadership in the politics in Mizoram ever since the death of Laldenga?</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own Survey
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# Table 3.7 (above) shows the opinion (in numbers) of the Zo hnahthlak on a wide range of issues from Human Rights; to issues related to church and its Ideal Zo Christian State building programme; and leadership in Mizoram post-Laldenga. The table also shows the contested nature of opinion of the Zo hnahthlak on these pertinent issues relating to politics in Mizoram. For instance, on the issue of Ideal Christian State the response is 100 affirming it and an equal number negating it. Similarly on the issue of Church’s role in Mizoram the affirmative response is 105 while 95 negate it. On the issue of vacuum in leadership post Laldenga, 115 respondents felt that there is a vacuum while 85 did not think so. 135 respondents felt Human Rights are no: taken seriously in Mizoram while 65 affirmed that they are taken seriously, clearly indicating the Human Rights trend in the state.

3.3. A. ‘Enter the Tiger’: ‘Rise of the Hero’ Laldenga (pre-Peace Accord)

Laldenga, a bank clerk in Aizawl advocated the secession from India following the great famine of the late 1950s when starvation stalked the hills following the ‘Mautam’. Laldenga exhibited the spirit of tlawmghaihna through the Famine Front. He skilfully impressed upon the ill-informed villages his interpretation of the story of victimisation, neglect and cultural suppression.58 The MNF declared independence after an audacious attack on the district’s major towns. This was followed by the counter-insurgency strategy of the Indian State. Thousands of villagers were uprooted from the hills and sent to Regrouped Villages built along the highways. For the next 20 years, violence continued in the Mizo hills with the MNF camping in East Pakistan. With the fall of East Pakistan in 1971, Laldenga’s men scattered to Myanmar while he moved to Pakistan. Rajiv Gandhi in 1986 hammered out a deal to end the secessionist agenda. During these times of crisis ‘the Churches role in peace process was mostly in the form of community prayers (‘twang tai’) and church services. In fact the underground MNF returnees say, ‘the prayers of the public made them come back to the normal life in Mizoram.’ ‘We were fed up of the troubles of insurgencies.’ ‘The MNF used ‘the prayers’ of the public as an excuse to come back to mainstream politics.’ Vanramchhuangi is of the opinion that ‘the MNF themselves had realised the futility of their demands and Laldenga had come to realise that his movement was failing. Therefore he and his followers said that the call of the church was the reason why they gave up arms.’ ‘They

needed an excuse to justify their calling to an end of their demands and secessionist movement. They publicly said that they surrendered to God (Jesus Christ) and not to anyone else.\textsuperscript{59} Mizoram attained statehood and Laldenga became its interim chief minister before his MNF won the first elections to the state legislature. However, defections toppled him from office. Laldenga died in 1990 of lung cancer at the age of 63. The huge numbers that gathered to participate in Laldenga’s funeral in Aizawl in 1990 was a tribute to his charisma and the courage and statesmanship displayed in bringing back the insurgency ridden state to the fold of constitutionalism.\textsuperscript{60} The Congress government feared that discontentment with the Peace Accord might find expression in an emotional outburst at his funeral but the event passed off peacefully.

The post-Peace Accord era has also witnessed the steady contestation of the position of Laldenga as the father of the Zo/Mizo nation. Zaliana felt that ‘Laldenga was a great orator and a towering personality and compared to other ethnic identity based movement leaders, he seems to have a matured and more encapsulating acceptance with no direct confrontation or challenge to his position. Public memory is short lived and in the case of the public memory in Mizoram this seems to be even truer especially in the case of the youths. Nearly twenty years past his death the image of Laldenga or Pu Denga has subdued to an extent and has faded in the young public memory (\textit{Cf.}, Figures above). I prefer to use both names with subtle difference while the former evokes the image of a strong high handed leader for a large majority of people especially for the Government of India. The image that the name ‘Laldenga’ emits is that of a rebel leader who led one of the most bloody insurgency movements in North-East India. The latter evokes the image of a loving, caring, leader with a vision and a mission; a quintessential ‘\textit{Tlawmgai Pasaltha}’ for his followers and admirers. Though evoking subtle nuanced sentiments, both names Laldenga and Pu Denga provide a statement of pride and progress for those who follow his leadership as well as his adversaries. In other words, the image of a well oiled Pu Denga in black suit, white tie,


white shirt and spectacles as well as ‘Laldenga: the man donning the uniform’ continues to be an enigma providing awe and inspiration to Zo/Mizo politics.

The prose of North-Eastern institutional construction had a hard time competing with the poetic promise of a prosperous state and authentic community offered by insurgent groups. The MNF had the added advantage of emulating from the Naga insurgency movements the techniques of state formation. Unlike the gradualist Mizo leaders who gave a fair trial to representative institutions embodied in the District Council, the MNF leaders like Laldenga had the benefit of support from adjacent and distant countries. However, Laldenga and his supporters had proved their credential for serving the community by demonstrating their organising skills in the course of mobilising the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) in 1960 for famine relief action.61 Laldenga was, at that time, an employee of the District Council. Laldenga floated the MNFF as an organisation to combat the famine or Mautam.62 Through tactical moves Laldenga succeeded in gaining the confidence of the Chaliha led Assam Government and took the role of an active actor to distribute food to the famine stricken people in the remote interiors. The state patronage to Laldenga and his band enabled the MNF to gain easy popularity. The Assam Government relied on the non-state actor more than the State-actors that is the political parties and especially the Mizo Union for the simple arithmetic that the Mizo Union was venturing on the possibility of breaking up from the Assam Government and rallying behind the Eastern India Tribal Union for an independent Hill State. The other alternative of collaborating with the United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO) was not feasible for the Congress led Assam Government for the simple reason that the UMFO was openly preaching separation from the Union of India. The politically motivated move of the Assam Government proved costly for the Chaliha Government. The Famine Front mutated itself into a political outfit- the MNF in 1961.63 Laldenga made full

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63 There is no consensus on the exact date and day when the MNF matured into a political party from the root body the Mizo National Famine Front. While two of the original eight members who formed the MNF are of the opinion that the MNF was floated on 28th October, 1961; the other three C. Hermana, H. Zirliana and A. Rohnuna faintly remember that it was a Saturday night. A Rohnuna also
use of technology (magnetic tapes)\textsuperscript{64} and print nationalism through his paper ‘Mizo Aw’ (Mizo Voice)\textsuperscript{65} to construct a new ‘Political Identity’ heavily laced with primordial overtones for the Zo/Mizo people.\textsuperscript{66}

Laldenga, the MNF President, accompanied by Lahnunmawia and Saihngaka, went to East Pakistan in December, 1963 where they were well-received by the Pakistanis. On 30\textsuperscript{th} October, 1965, the Mizo National Front (MNF) submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India for granting freedom and aimed to fight it through non-violent means. The Memorandum being ignored Laldenga issued a call for sovereign Mizoram. The MNF created tensions between Mizos and non-Mizos and even declared themselves as non-Indians. The Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister in 1965 mentioned:

During the 15 years of close contact and association with India, the Mizo people had not been able to feel at home with India. The only aspiration and political cry is the creation of Mizoram, a free and sovereign state to govern herself to work out her own destiny and formulate her own foreign policy.\textsuperscript{67}

On March 1\textsuperscript{st} 1966, the Mizo National Front (MNF) declared Independence and set up its self-styled ‘Mizoram Sawrkar’ with a President and a Council of Ministers, in charge

\textsuperscript{64} The MNF during the Mizoram Assembly in 1978 distributed and played tape-recorded speech of Laldenga through which Laldenga denounced the People’s Conference of Brig. Sailo and called upon the people to boycott the election. Though it created some difficulty for the People’s Conference, it did not have much impact on the Mizo people, as such. For details Cf., H.K. Sareen. (1980). \textit{Insurgency In The North-East India: A Study of the Sino-American Role}. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.p.71.

\textsuperscript{65} Laldenga through his newspaper tabled before the people his visions of an independent Zoram which would be an Ideal Zo Christian State for all the Zo hnahthlak. The ‘Mizo Aw’ was print nationalism at its best and the intelligentsia and the young educated were swayed by such nationalistic arguments and helped the imagination of Mizo/Zo nation.


\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Ibid.}
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of Home, Defence, Foreign, Finance and Public Information. The MNF frantically and secretly began preparing for taking over the military and civil administration of the Mizo District. All the towns of Mizoram viz. Aizawl, Lunglei, Champhai, Vairengte and Chhimluang were encircled by a 2000 strong Mizo National Volunteers Force to strike at 'zero-hour' One o'clock of March 1st 1966. They successfully struck at the appointed time. The engagement continued till March 3, 1966 when Aizawl fell to the hands of the MNF. After this heroic and momentous event, Mizoram became the centre of world attention.\(^{68}\)

Laldenga and his followers began to attract the intelligentsia and the masses primarily because of 3 main factors:

1. The Mizo Union (MU) had alienated itself from the people and had become corrupt overtime and largely unpopular;
2. The Mizo Union (MU) remained largely undecided on the question of a separate state and its refusal to merge with the EITU (Eastern India Tribal Union);
3. The Mizo Union (MU) was undecided on the issue of the merger of all existing Zo/Mizo inhabited territory into one unit that is Zomi Movement ('Greater Mizoram').

Laldenga and his followers cashed in on these issues, especially on the 'Zomi' or 'Greater Mizoram', issue as it had emotional appeal and passions could be easily generated into electoral/political success.\(^{69}\) By late 60s when the MNF plans began to fail, Laldenga showed willingness to negotiate with the Congress Party leaders at the centre. The latter, for party reasons, did not reciprocate at that time, though post-Union Territory the Congress stealthily cultivated support for the MNF to counter the non-Congress leaders’ popularity in the electoral politics in Mizoram. The Congress Party won the 1984 elections with the support of the MNF. Laldenga at this crucial stage reiterated the demands of the MNF such as special constitutional provisions at par with Jammu and Kashmir (Art. 370) providing for

\(^{68}\) Ibid.

\(^{69}\) Towards the end of 1965 Laldenga and his followers made it clear that they would not repeat the mistakes made by the Naga and make their movement for sovereignty more organised and systematic including seeking help from foreign powers. H.K. Saracen. (1980). Op. cit. pp59-76.
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separate constitution and Flag and integration of the contiguous Zo/Mizo inhabited areas of Assam, Manipur, Burma and Bangladesh, election of the Governor, special safeguards for the Culture and border trade with Burma and Bangladesh etc.  

Eventually, under Rajiv Gandhi’s initiatives, the Mizo Accord of 1986 was signed and Mizoram graduated to statehood on 20th February 1987. The Mizo Accord paved the way for open and democratic politics in Mizoram and brought the MNF, the party led by Laldenga, to power. A mellowed Laldenga became the interim chief minister and his party won the 1987 elections. The MNF thus became a regular participant in an institutional system and became a legally recognised political party. Newspapers across the world in mid-February 1987 reported about the winds of change in Mizoram:

The Mizo National Front captures a majority in state elections, becoming the first insurgency movement to be elected to rule an Indian state. An estimated 60% of the half million population vote in the polls and no violence is reported. The MNF wins 24 out of the 40 seats in the state assembly, followed by the Congress (I) with 13 and the People’s Conference with 3. MNF leader Laldenga will assume the Chief Ministership and promises a major program of social reform, along with the promotion of self-reliance and vigorous support for the agricultural and communication sectors (UPI, 16 February, 1987; Washington Post, 1987).


71 Laldenga was soon outsmarted in electoral and political games by the master manipulator, Lalthanhawla, who ensured a return of the Congress within two years of the signing of the Accord. In 1987, the MNF came to power basking on the glory of Peace by winning 24 out of the 40 seats. However, the MNF failed to sustain its power due to internal fissures leading to withdrawal of support by 8 MNF MLAs. The political crisis in the newly emergent state lead to the imposition of President’s Rule from 7th September, 1988 and fresh elections were held on 21st January, 1988. The Congress (I) managed to win 24 seats while the MNF won just 14 seats. For details Cf., P. Mahapatra and L. Zote., Political Development in Mizoram: Focus on The Post-Accord Scenario. IUPS. (2008). For a critical reading on Peace Accords in Northeast India also refer, Samir Kumar Das’ ‘Nobody’s Communiqué: Ethnic Accords in Northeast India’ Section II, Chapter 4, pp.120-141, in Samir Kumar Das. (Ed.). (2006). Peace Processes And Peace Accords: South Asian Peace Studies. Vol. II. New Delhi: Sage Publications/ MCRG.


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Ever since attaining full-statehood, five general elections to the Mizoram State Legislative Assembly have been held. Interestingly the mandate of the electoral process clearly shows a patent trend in terms of the political victors and the political vanquished. The State power is wielded alternately with an interval of two terms by the two opposing Political Parties namely MNF and the Congress.

A brief time-graph of the Political Developments Post 1986 in terms of Government formation:
1. 1987 20th February formation of MNF Ministry under Laldenga 24 seats out of 40 (1st election);
2. 1988 7th September Fall of MNF Ministry, President’s Rule;
3. 1989 24th January formation of Congress Ministry under Lalthanhawla (2nd election);
4. 1993 re-election of the Congress Ministry under Lalthanhawla (3rd election);
5. 1998 birth of coalition politics in Mizoram MNF-MPC (Mizoram Peoples Conference) under the auspices of Citizens Common Forum, a non-political body Zoramthanga as the CM (4th election);
6. 2003 re-election of MNF Ministry Zoramthanga as the CM 21 seats out of 40 (5th election);

The Mizo story relates the transition from insurgency and brazen violence to constitutionalism and peace-building contributing to democratic mechanisms. Perhaps the source of surprise lies more in the scholarly and bureaucratic expectations that ethnic oppositions are likely to constitute ‘dangerous enemies’, posing severe threats to democracy and well-ordered political systems.73 The North-Eastern cases actually suggest that proper

institutional processing of ethnic demands, including violent ones, can transform ‘dangerous enemies’ into constructive contributors to the democratic processes. However, if the national or regional authorities use cynical, unscrupulous, or simply unintelligent ways of manipulating ethnicity or insurgency, then the state itself can become a dangerous enemy of the democratic system. The complicity of the state or of the ruling parties in undermining democratic institutions could be clearly seen in the way the centre negotiated with the MNF. The process of state-building/peace-building reflects the demonstration of the positive sense of cooperation for national and democratic objectives by all actors involved in the process.

3.3. A.1. ‘Chiselled by Democracy’: ‘Enter the Wiseman’ Laldenga (post-Peace Accord)

Post Peace Accord Laldenga’s leadership underwent a severe metamorphosis both at the level of authority and administrative tactics. The change in leadership tactics echoed the dynamics of the changed times. The erstwhile ‘uniformed guerrilla’ ever ready for combat now gave way for a ‘sophisticated suited statesman’. And it is the latter image of a suited (Black coated) Pu Denga that encapsulates the public memory in contemporary times. The effects of democratisation had its ripples even at the level of MNF Party’s functioning. The change in the persona of Laldenga post-Statehood reflected to an extent the successes of India’s democratic mechanism at channelling and taming the dissident voice.

The era of long-distance leadership being over now, Laldenga had to taste the ‘bitter sweet’ nature of ‘real power’ exercised in constraints within the sphere of democracy. Laldenga began to realise the pushes and pulls of exercising power in a democratic set up and also the multiple stakeholders pressures’, the most pronounced of which was ‘the Church’. For instance, Laldenga found it difficult to cope up with the issue of ‘Total Prohibition’, and openly challenged the dictates of the Church but soon he had to bite his words because the Church started anti-Laldenga propaganda which led to his downfall. An abstract form a news item in the Times of India mentioned:

Church sources said ...its role in the political affairs had become more prominent during the liquor controversy ...when the former CM Mr. Laldenga clashed with the Church leaders. He had gone to the extent of
warning the Church not to interfere in temporal matters, “just as we do not interfere in spiritual affairs”\(^{74}\)

The ‘love-hate’ relationship between Laldenga and the Church in Mizoram can be traced back to the 60s and 70s when the Church attempted to mediate between the MNF rebel leaders and Government of India. Even though a general perception exists that ‘Insurgency’ in most cases in the North-East is sponsored or supported by the missionaries,\(^{75}\) the case in Mizoram proves otherwise, ‘in fact, the Presbyterian Church, the most powerful of the 10 denominations in the state, had opposed the insurgency led by Mr. Laldenga.’ The Church accused Laldenga of high-handed-ness and encouraging social evils and deviating from the code of a Zo Christian life and the vision of an Ideal Zo Christian State. In a direct reference to the MNF Supremo, the Church accused Laldenga of encouraging various social evils like drinking, partying, sex, night-life, corruption and consumerism in the post-peace accord era. The Church also stretched its accusations by blaming all vices in the Zo/Mizo society to the long years of disturbance and lack of guidance during the MNF led insurgency. The Church squarely pointed fingers at Laldenga for sustaining rampant corruption in Zo/Mizo politics and using money power to win over support from young voters and other quarters.

Post 1989 Laldenga realised that his challenge to the Church had cost him heavy electoral losses. For instance, the election code of conduct for the Mizoram Assembly Elections outlined by the Church:

- asked political parties not to nominate candidates who are known to consume liquor, another indirect reference to Mr. Laldenga whose fondness for the spirit is well known. Let all those who make


\(^{75}\) I cite a personal experience where I and my Supervisor faced a query from a Senior Lecturer of a College in Kolkata who firmly believed that Christian Missionaries were instigating and supporting insurgencies in the North East. I take this opportunity to thank the Department of Political Science, University of Calcutta for providing with a platform to present a paper titled ‘Understanding Politics in Mizoram through the lenses of Good Governance’ in the UGC-DRS Programme (Phase 1) on “Democratic Governance in Indian States”, University of Calcutta, on 14th February 2009 and have ample time to interact with college lecturers in and around Kolkata and get a taste of their take on politics in the North East.
nominations select only such persons who stay clear of sin. We appeal not to select any person who falls short of the Church’s wishes and criteria, no matter which party he belongs to.76

Laldenga had to re-think and re-formulate his take on Church-Politics relationship in Mizoram in the Post 1989 situation. Laldenga strategically crafted his new take on Church-Politics relationship in the new times though as a result he had to live a life of schizophrenic dilemma publicly defending the cause of Christianity and the Zo people’s reunification and defending ‘Total Prohibition’ while privately challenging the same by ignoring the claims of the faith and indulging in booze and money-power. Laldenga, post-1989 was a changed man having succeeded in hiding the tragic news of his long battle with cancer from public life. Laldenga knew well that he would not survive long and showed apathy towards active political life as evident from the following piece of news in the Times of India: ‘The 63 year old leader was, in fact more pre-occupied with completing his 3 storey house near Aizawl than campaigning for the MNF...’77 The above cited news report seems to show a different picture of a Laldenga as a family man concerned for the welfare of his family and provide them with all comforts, wellbeing and all sort of financial security after he was gone.

The Electoral verdict of the Assembly Elections of 1989 led to the fall of the image of ‘Laldenga’ at the political front and the fading of the image of ‘Pu Denga’ at the social front. For instance, at the political front the fall of the MNF Ministry in 1989 led to further factionalisation of the MNF Party so much so that a section of the MNF began to have second thoughts about the Accord78 and its leadership. At the social front the general message conveyed was that of Divine intervention/Divine punishment. For instance, Chawnghzuala, President of the MNF (D) faction of the MNF firmly believed that it was God

who toppled Laldenga from power positions. Chawngzhuala said that ‘Mr. Laldenga was neither with the Church nor with the people.’

Laldenga was quick to re-affirm his take on the issue of political loss and made it loud and clear to his followers that the ‘MNF would not go back to insurgency’ just because it failed to handle the reins of democratic power. Laldenga also brushed aside rumours that the MNF factions were having second thoughts about the Accord as being fabricated by other contending parties like the People’s Conference; Lalthanhawla led Congress and the Governor of Mizoram Hiteshwar Saikia. Laldenga at a National Press Conference in New Delhi on 24th February 1989 mentioned that ‘if we (MNF) ever take up arms again, it will be for the defence of India.’ Though critical of the Mizoram Pradesh Congress and its leader Lalthanhawla, Laldenga continued his good words for the Congress leader Rajiv Gandhi.

The over-all persona of Laldenga can be sensed through a quick glance at the following abstracts of interviews of Laldenga taken by Deepak Dewan (Executive Editor, North East Sun in New Delhi in January 1982 and December 8, 1984) and also an article titled ‘Mizoram problem is almost solved’ by Pu Laldenga published in Sun dated December 29, 1984. The abstract also helps one to understand the changing nature of Laldenga and his tactics:

... While blaming the Government of India for the failure of talks (1982) Laldenga said on January 12, Home Minister Zail Singh informed me about the talks being called off ... It seems they (The Government.) don’t want any solution for the Mizo problem. What they are interested in is MNF surrender only. ... I agreed to surrender with all my underground men in operation...But at the same time the Government is not willing to give anything. If you want everything and are not willing

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to give anything then how can one even negotiate and the question of settlement does not even arise...

...Laldenga mentioned that the 1982 talks failed because of the Centre’s failure to dismiss the Sailo Government. The simple reason is that this is not a democratically elected Government. Mizoram is a disturbed area. The term ‘disturbed’ signifies that a free and fair election cannot be held in such condition. ... Even the Lalthanhawla Government (1984) was not legitimate as Mizoram was a disturbed area. ...

Most writings, both party sponsored and private, seem to project Laldenga as a practical, positive and a forward looking visionary. For instance, Laldenga’s writing dated December 18, 1982:

We are all working hard to solve the Mizo problem which has been going on for the last 20 years and here I must express my gratitude to the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. It was she who always encouraged every one of us to solve this problem peacefully and it was she who opened the door for the resumption of talks when she visited Mizoram in April 1984. ... the present Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who have a keen desire to solve this problem. ... Peace is always a state of mind ...

... They should not think Laldenga and the Government of India are making peace. ... The world in which we are living has to be built on give and take. ... That is what I want to stress particularly to political leaders, religious leaders and leaders of social organisations. They should understand that we have to contribute to a peaceful solution to the problem of Mizoram. ... Those who were underground will be coming back, they should be welcomed with open arms. This is a fundamental necessity for bringing peace in Mizoram. ...

This is the time to work together. And the underground persons should also understand that now is the time to go home and be good Mizos, good citizens of a great country, citizens who have responsibilities, citizens who have to contribute for the peaceful country. We all have to work together, meet together, serve together. We should remember that we all are brothers and sisters-part of the same family, part of the same society.
The above portions of interviews of Deepak Dewan and abstracts of articles written by Laldenga reflected Laldenga’s stubbornness on the issue of the dismissal of (legitimate) State Government and his keen desire to take control of the steering of Government in Mizoram (legitimate or otherwise). He had not changed an inch on this issue but otherwise he was completely a changed and pleasant Laldenga who was looking forward to things with practical and very positive attitude.

The historic signature of June 30th, 1986 closed the chapter of ‘violent Mizoram’ and ushered in the era a peace and progress aptly put in Mizo/Duhlian as ‘remna leh muanna’. The Memorandum signed on June 30th, 1986 was preceded by another agreement signed between Indian National Congress (I) and the Mizo National Front (MNF). This agreement marked ‘Confidential’ was signed by Arjun Singh, then the Vice President, Indian National Congress (I) and Pu Laldenga and it was signed in the presence of Pu Lalthanhawla, then Chief Minister of Mizoram. This agreement was signed on June 25, 1986, exactly five days prior to the signing of the Mizo Accord. In fact this agreement led to the signing of the main accord as the agreement took care of Pu Laldenga’s demand of installing him as Chief Minister of Mizoram. The text of the Agreement between the Indian National Congress (I) and the Mizo National Front, Mizoram mentioned that ‘the Government of India under the leadership of the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has brought about a situation wherein the long years of disturbed conditions in Mizoram are being brought to an end. The Memorandum of Settlement is being signed between the Government of India and Laldenga, President of the Mizo National Front to give shape to this effort to usher peace and prosperity in Mizoram within the framework of the Indian Constitution. Laldenga has pledged to bring the MNF into the mainstream of the Indian polity and irrevocably committed it to strive for a strong and united India. In order to further strengthen this resolve and to enable a smooth and orderly transition, the Indian National Congress (I) and the MNF headed by Laldenga agreed to form a coalition Government. It was decided that as soon as the members of the underground MNF lay down their arms to join the national mainstream the following processes would follow:

1. On a date agreed to between Shri Laldenga and the Government of India, Shri Lalthanhawla, the present Congress (I) Chief Minister will submit his resignation and
Shri Laldenga will be elected the leader of the Government of Mizoram and be sworn in as the Chief Minister there.

2. Shri Lalthanhawla, the present Chief Minister, will be sworn as the Deputy Chief Minister.

3. In addition to the Deputy Chief Minister, four members of the Congress (I) Party shall be made Ministers of the new Government.

4. In addition to the Chief Minister, three members from the MNF Party will be made Ministers.

5. The name of the Ministers will be nominated by the respective political parties and the Chief Minister will propose to the Lt. Governor.

6. All issues concerning the formation and induction of this new Government will be decided mutually by the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister.

7. In order to smoothen the function of the coalition Government, a Coordination Committee will be constituted consisting of the following: (a) Shri Laldenga as the Chairman (b) Shri Lalthanhawla as the Vice Chairman (c) Two members of the Congress Party and (d) Two members of the MNF Party. The committee will take into consideration all matters concerning the party and the Government which either of the political parties may deem necessary to bring for its consideration in order to help smooth functioning of the Government and to bring better coordination between the Congress (I) and the MNF.

8. This Coalition Government will continue to function till such date when the President is satisfied that normalcy has returned and the holding of elections has become feasible.

9. In the event of any difference arising between the two parties in the functioning of the Government or relationship between the parties they would seek the help of the Honourable Prime Minister to resolve the same.

The agreed terms and conditions were ardently followed by both parties. For instance by July 1986 all the armed cadres of MNF laid down their arms. The MNF were welcomed to mainstream as heroes and the public sentiment ran high as evident from the public display of emotions on August 2nd, 1986, during the grand reception organised by the YMA (Young
Mizo Association) organised for the MNF returnees at Aizawl. The Congress in turn kept its promise best symbolised by the heart warming gesture of Lalthanhawla stepping down from the post of Chief Minister all for the glory of the Zo/Mizo and India; and peace ‘remna leh muanna’ laced with the spirit of the Christ. Laldenga took over as the new Chief Minister of Mizoram and Lalthanhawla as his Deputy Chief Minister. This was the beginning of MNF as an over ground (legitimate) political party in Mizoram. The transition from uncertainty towards certainty would not have been possible without the ‘will’ of the Zo/Mizo who longed for a lasting peace in Mizoram.

3.3. B. Contesting Leadership: ‘Enter the Statesman’ Brigadier T. Sailo (pre-Peace Accord)

Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo, AVSM, a straight forward and educated senior army officer entered Zo/Mizo politics at a time when Laldenga made an exit to Pakistan. The leadership vacuum impelled the Mizo people to look out for a suitable leader capable of handling the problems in Mizoram. After his retirement from the Indian Army in January 1974, Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo came back to Mizoram. Feeling the pulse of the people the retired Brigadier set up the ‘Human Rights Committee’ with the objective of rendering help in legal measures against mass rapes, the grouping of villages, to uphold civil rights of the ‘oppressed’ civilian population, and to educate the public in upholding their legal rights against the Security Forces. Thenphunga’s intervention toned down the Army’s brutal activities in Mizoram and the populist ‘anti-Army’ slogans and attracted a large fan following immediately. For a while, the sway of the ex-MNF people towards the Congress party was effectively stopped. Sailo milked the Human Rights issue to clear the ground for launching his political party the People’s Conference (P.C) on April 17, 1974.82

While the Brigadier was serving in the Indian army his son, Lalsangliana, had joined the MNF and this was construed by Sailo’s detractors as a clever move to secure official goodwill of the MNF as and when the freedom movement in Mizoram succeeded.83 While

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83 Ibid. p19.
Laldenga had started his Mizo National Famine Front and took up his cudgel against the state Government of Assam for neglect in taking precautionary and preventive measures to avoid shortage of food stuff, Brigadier T. Sailo made the Human Rights Committee as a test case for ascertaining his popularity amongst the Mizos for which he made careful preparations in collecting accounts of alleged exercises.

Brigadier Sailo compiled details of incidents which were supposed to have taken place after March 1st, 1966 in the Mizo Hills District and submitted a report to Indira Gandhi. He also filed cases against various army officers who had carried out counter insurgency operations in Mizoram, including some who had been (were) decorated posthumously. He filed a suit in Guwahati High Court against the Government of Mizoram for the grouping of villages, but lost the case. He then collected a large number of petitions against the Security Forces and forwarded them to the Central Government for action against the guilty. He criticised Government policies, Army actions as well as army in-actions, but failed to condemn the atrocities of the MNF and the brutality of the MNF. Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo earned the wrath of the Indian State and was detained under the infamous Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) during the Emergency. Sailo thereafter, openly aligned with the Janata Party, which had ousted Indira Gandhi in 1977.

Two years, later Thenphunga’s popularity eclipsed that of Ch. Chhunga the first chief minister of Mizoram. The use of the ‘Human Rights card’: Indian Army’s violation of women; strategic extension of sympathy to the MNF leader in exile (Laldenga) and, the use of the ‘Zo Christian Identity’ readily helped the People’s Conference to convert the popularity of its leadership into electoral success and Brigadier Sailo became the Chief Minister of Mizoram in May 1978. Sailo’s party also won the mid-term elections of 1979 and became the Chief Minister of Mizoram for the second time. Superficially, the defeat of the Congress was blamed on factors that had brought about the rout of the Congress and Indira Gandhi in the immediate post-Emergency phase. Sailo apparently rode the crest of popularity because of his anti-Security Forces stance, and his promise to bring the MNF and the Government of India into the negotiation table, and bring about peace and development. Union Territory Governments of Ch. Chhunga and also Sailo ushered in a relaxed
atmosphere for instance, the dusk-to-dawn curfew, which had become a permanent feature of Mizo life for the past thirteen years, was lifted, and the movement-by-permit system was also abolished along with the de-grouping of select villages. The elevation to a UT status brought about multi-fold infrastructural developments and the insurgent hit people began to see a ray of hope in the PC Party. The Party in turn exploited all possible strategies including that of ‘Social Welfare’ to systematically convert popularity into electoral support through votes to secure their foothold in Zo/Mizo politics. The conditions during this period would, in all probability, have led to an accord, but Brigadier Sailo refused to hand over power to Laldenga. This adamant posturing of Sailo led to the failure of talks and renewed tensions in the region. The MNF and New Delhi squarely put the blame on Sailo naming him as the main stumbling block during the peace talks between the rebels and the Indian government. The loss of lustre in the persona of Sailo resulted in the loss of his party in the 1984 assembly elections, and the rise of Lalthanhawla’s Congress.


By the time the Peace Accord was signed Sailo begun to realise his short-comings as a statesman and the need to develop newer strategies to attract the masses. The first step that Sailo initiated towards this end during the changed times was to realign with the ‘Greater Zoram’ movement which by then had matured to an organisation the ZORO (Zo-Reunification Organisation). However, Sailo found it hard to juggle with the numerous stakeholders in the post-peace situation and ended up earning the wrath of the most prominent stakeholder in post 1986 politics in Mizoram- the Church. For instance, the Church also indirectly rapped the methods of canvassing of the People’s Conference Party whose ZORO Movement caught the imaginations of almost every youth in the State. Boys and Girls under 15 and college students can be seen almost everywhere sporting the ZORO headgear and waving ZORO flags. The giving of uniforms by the party to ZORO volunteers has come in for adverse criticism from many quarters. “We request that the parties and candidates carry out their campaign in a graceful manner as would befit the believers”, the Church message said.84

Considered as the grand patriarch of Zo/Mizo politics Sailo, is known for announcing his retirement from politics time and again in the post peace period, but each time plunges back to politics to give a last try. Though popular in public and considered to be a visionary, as well as a ‘Statesman and a Diplomat’, for his path breaking policies of development during his tenure as the chief minister of Mizoram (1978 -1984 with a short President’s Rule in between), Sailo has been largely unable to convert his mass appeal and populist strategies such as the Zomi movement into electoral success. The mid-seventies crisis in Mizoram was his high-tide and most successful stint in Zo/Mizo politics when he was projected as a veritable ‘Saviour’ ‘the political messiah’ of the helpless Zo/Mizo.

3.3. C. The Political Pastor: ‘Congress Pa’ Lalthanhawla (pre-Peace Accord)

Lalthanhawla a ‘Durtlang Pa’ as he is popularly referred in Mizoram started his career as Recorder in the office of Inspector of Schools in the District Council. After that, he joined the Assam Co-operative Apex Bank as Assistant. In 1966, he joined the Mizo National Front as Secretary till 1967 when he was arrested and jailed in Silchar. Once released from jail, he joined the Indian National Congress party and in 1973 he was elected Party President. In 1978 and 1979 he was elected as a Legislator in the Union Territory Elections. In 1984, under his leadership, the Congress party swept the elections in the state and he became Chief Minister. The results of the 1984 election in Mizoram were, therefore, more or less a foregone conclusion. Congress party fought the elections on the platform of peace and won with an overwhelming majority. Lalthanhawla became the first Congress Chief Minister of Mizoram in May 1984. In accordance with their election pledge, the first major action taken by the new government was to formally appeal to the Prime Minister to resume talks with the MNF. The Security Forces’ operations against the MNF were suspended. Unfortunately, Laldenga returned to New Delhi from London on October 29, 1984, a day before the assassination of Indira Gandhi, and the talks could not be resumed for many months.86

85 For instance, the Aizawl city extension project, ‘Bairabi Hydel Project’ and the Greater Aizawl Water Supply Scheme (GAWSS) Phase-I, which Sailo alleges were never pursued by the successive governments of the Congress and the MNF.

The next two years saw the development of secret links between the Indian National Congress (I) and the MNF, evidently with the full backing of Indira Gandhi. The Congress Party in Mizoram was largely a party of ex-MNF operatives and sympathisers. Lalthanhawla, who headed the Congress in Mizoram, was a young, suave and sincere politician who enjoyed an enviable degree of trust and respect in the Prime Minister’s inner circle. He was able to persuade the Prime Minister that, with her support, he and his ex-MNF colleagues in the party would be able to achieve what she herself desired most: a settlement in Mizoram leading to an end to insurgency and the ouster of Sailo and his People’s Conference from power. The Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee embarked on this mission and openly charged Sailo with sabotaging the peace process because of his personal ambition and love for power.

Throughout the insurgency period, the Congress in Mizoram emphasised on peace and tranquillity; though the Congress Manifesto during the elections of the said time frame did not openly promise Statehood, it did address the issue in a subtle manner. The Congress made it clear that once peace and tranquility were established all things would automatically follow. The other issues that were highlighted by the Congress during the time were improvement in agriculture; industrialisation of the State, integration of territories inhabited by the Zo/Mizo (Zo territorial integration movement, ‘Zomi leh sa’; ‘Zo hnahthlak’) provided they were contiguous to Mizoram.

Lalthanhawla in 1986 abdicated his Chief Ministership as part of the Peace Accord agreement for Pu Laldenga. Through this gesture Lalthanhawla began to be held in high esteem in public memory as the true ‘Tlawmgai Congress Pa’. this gesture for initiating the era of peace made Lalthanhawla’s popularity even more overwhelming than that of Sailo and next just to Laldenga. In fact, in the post-peace Accord Zo/Mizo politics, the contest for the ‘Father of the Zo/Mizo nation’ had two prominent contestants namely Laldenga (MNF) and Lalthanhawla (Congress). The ground was cleared for a clear tug of war between the two parties- the MNF and the Congress. The public attitude towards the Congress mellowed fast under the tactful leadership of Lalthanhawla. The Congress now began to be viewed as a party that could bring greater resources, finances and faster development to Mizoram and
make the vision of an *Ideal Zo Christian State* realisable. The popularity of Rajiv Gandhi and his wife (Sonia Gandhi) also helped the Congress to make its hold in politics in Mizoram even stronger. The fear of the congress as being a ‘Vai’ Party having its remote control in New Delhi (‘Vai ram’, mainland India) began to ease off. The charisma of Rajiv Gandhi and the issue of his wife being a foreigner (Christian origin, Roman Catholic) were interpreted among the people of this Christian state and the Church as being advantageous for the Zo people. The Congress (I) in general and Rajiv Gandhi in particular (as indeed the Nehru-Gandhi family members) have always exerted some fascination in the North-East, especially in the peripheral States of the North-East. The apparent ease and the lack of inhibitions with which the Nehru-Gandhi family have conducted themselves in the public in these predominantly tribal territories have made an impression difficult to contest. Also their western appearance (white skin/complexion, light eyes and doze of superficial western outlook made them, almost ostentatiously as it were, when they were in these regions, further predisposed the people of the region, so avidly attached to the most superficial and ersatz symbols of such ‘westernisation’, in their favour. More than being a clash between two contesting parties, the case in Mizoram reflected a contest between personality and leadership.

The Zo/Mizo story of transition from insurgency and violence to constitutionalism and peace, to a large extent revolved around the *Politics of Tlawmgaihna*. Few instances to support this argument are: Laldenga organised the Famine Front to distribute food to the Mautam victims; Brig. Sailo put to use the power of the pen to write about the Human Rights violations during the insurgency in order to mobilize the Zo/Mizo consciousness and; Lalthanhawla abdicated his legally recognised post of the elected Chief Minister of Mizoram for Laldenga all for the greater cause of peace and stability and the realisation of the greater, long term goal of creating/building an *Ideal Zo Christian State*.

3.3. C.1. The Political Pastor: ‘Tlawmgai Congress Pa’ to ‘Corrupt Congress Pa’

Lalthanhawla (post -Peace Accord)

Lalthanhawla the ‘Tlawmgai Congress Pa’ was quick to realise that collaborating with the Church and its agencies could enable the congress sound benefits and strong footage in Zo/Mizo politics in the peaceful times. In order to exhibit the spatial and psychological proximity of the Congress Party with the Churches in Mizoram tickets were given to people fulfilling the criteria mentioned by the Church. For instance, in the 1989 Assembly Elections in Mizoram, Mr. Vanlaltluanga, a senior church leader was made to contest the Aizawl South constituency on a Congress ticket. Vanlaltluanga himself made it public that he was contesting elections for enabling a better co-ordination between the Church and the Government. He also said that many other Church leaders were contesting the 1989 elections because of the unsavoury tiff with the Laldenga Ministry. Accusing the Laldenga led MNF Ministry of corruption, Vanlaltluanga mentioned that ‘the Church had asked the Laldenga Ministry for land to build structures for the Church but the Laldenga Ministry did not do anything’ and that made the tug of war between the Church and Laldenga public.

Lalthanhawla strategically placed his people in important positions and made his grip firmer in Zo/Mizo politics. For instance, Lalthanhawla backed Lalchhunga his brother-in-law as the IGP of the state. Similarly the important posts of Chief Secretary and other important portfolios were handed to people having close proximity to Lalthanhawla.

One blot in his career has been the charge sheet filed against him in October 2003 by a lower court. Lalthanhawla has been charged of cheating the state exchequer in collusion with some businessmen. However, Lalthanhawla brushes the charges aside and says:

It is only an attempt by my political rivals to deny me the right to fight these polls and stop the Congress from coming back to power. There will be no more talk of this corruption case once we are back in power. I have immense faith in the Indian judicial system.


Lalthanhawla has faced several mounting criticisms and has often been said to have matured from 'Tlawmgai Congress Pa' to 'Corrupt Congress Pa' (Tlawmgai Congress man to the Corrupt Congress man). For instance when Lalthanhawla visioned the Lengpui Airport which officially began to function between 1999-2000 he was swamped with criticism from all quarters for dreaming it too big. The location and the site selected for the international size airport was highly contested and the opposition booed Lalthanhawla that ‘not even a vulture would land in such a hilly terrain and wooded area’. Few felt that Lalthanhawla selected the site primarily because he would get compensated for his mother’s property which was a large portion of the area demarcated for that purpose.

Lalthanhawla continues to be a towering personality in state politics and his gesture of ‘tlawmgaihna’ remains an example set for politicians and stakeholders across the nation and among countries and communities facing conflict and conflict situations. Lalthanhawla’s popularity over the years has over-shadowed Brigadier T. Sailo’s leadership and; has begun to contest the towering personality of Laldenga in the race to be crowned the ‘Father of the Mizo/Zo nation’ especially among the younger generations (refer Figures above).

Conclusion

Leadership occupies an important place in identity movements because the leaders are responsible for and instrumental in translating objective causes in to subjective consciousness, articulating the causes of deprivation in whatsoever form of which the common people may have little or no knowledge. Although the leadership patterns of the identity movements vary from one another, yet a general pattern of leadership can be discerned which reveals that the leadership in identity movements tends to be more charismatic and overwhelming like the one provided by Laldenga in Mizoram or Phizo in Nagaland. Leadership in identity movements in Mizoram usually tends to have a support base in the educated, Christian, middle class, urban population and according to the need of time and space give assurances to the rural.

Leaders are central to social movements and play a critical role in collective action, shaping movements in numerous ways like defining goals and advancing strategies,
mobilising followers, galvanising organisations, and forging coalitions, they significantly influence responses to external repression. Moreover, the actions of the leaders, and their rhetoric and style affect the conflict outcomes in movements. The three different Leaders and their types of leadership become prominent at various phases, for instance, militant leadership of Laldenga dominated the initial phases of the Zo/Mizo identity movement while more accommodationist leaders came to the forefront as the movement required negotiation with its opponents. The Mizo/Zo situation also shows the change in the tactics of leaders in terms of innovation, recruitment, mobilisation and formation of organisations. The Mizo case supports the view that movements overtime get personified in its leaders as has been the case of the MNF movement. This has led to identifying the movement to a single leadership and therefore, has eclipsed the role played by other leaderships. At the same time the Zo/Mizo story of transition from insurgency to constitutionalism has to a large extent been made a possibility by multiple leadership; cutting across party and religious affiliations. The Politics of Tlawmgaihna has by and large been one of the strong guiding principles of Zo/Mizo identity politics.

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