Chapter IV

Experiments in Governance and Democracy:
Exploring the relations between the State of Mizoram and the Centre over the years

Paul Brass' observation that ethnic identities are created and realised by the manipulating elites, who, to use Lasswell's understanding are 'those who get the most of what there is to get', forms the backdrop of my arguments in this chapter. The elites manipulate beliefs and values and distort them in order 'to select only those which are politically useful rather than central to the belief system of the people in question'. The 'elites seeking to mobilise the ethnic group against its rivals or against the centralising state, strive to promote a congruence of multiplicity of the group's symbol.' Ethnic identities are thus consciously created and therefore they are also reversible.\(^1\) Ethnic Identities can be seen as contesting trajectories thrown towards the Centre not just at the cultural, ethnic discourse but also at the economic, political and psychological level. The notion of a separate and distinct identity has remained by and large beneath the surface of the political process in Mizoram. The 'Zo/Mizo-Mara'; 'Zo/Mizo-Lai'; 'Zo/Mizo-Chakma' conflict reflects one dimension of the Zo/Mizo vis-à-vis the 'Other' problem.

In this chapter, I have explored the braided relations between 'the Centre and the State' through phases from Union Territory to Statehood. I make an attempt to bring to light the undercurrent of ethnic enclaves/ethnic cocooning that accompanies the politics of Autonomous District Councils. I also take for my study the three prominent political parties in Mizoram namely: the Congress, the People's Conference and the Mizo National Front (MNF) to substantiate the argument that 'the process of party formation cannot be isolated from the process of identity formation'. Underneath the clash of leadership among the three local stakeholders and the power-play at the Centre (between the prominent national parties) was an important concern as to who would be credited as to having succeeded in ushering in 'Statehood', a dream long cherished by the public in the Zo hills: a panacea which would solve or resolve all tensions and conflicts in the region and bring 'remna leh muanna' (peace

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and prosperity). A multifold recapitulation of the historical as well as political developments during the period 1970s-80s ‘helps one to understand the different strategies adopted by the Centre and the local stakeholders cutting across party affiliations for making democracy function and make meaning of the constitutional provisions’ by interpreting them to fit their vested logic.

Here I have not followed the chronological order while discussing the three parties led by the three leaders namely Laldenga, T. Sailo and Lalthanhawla. This Chapter can be seen as a continuation of Chapter III in the sense that many of the contested arguments and findings highlighted in the previous chapter have been further substantiated against the political evolution or graduation from District Council to Union Territory to finally Statehood. I have dealt with the Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee first primarily because it helps us to explore the links of the Congress with the first political party of Mizoram the ‘Mizo Union’. The discussion on the People’s Conference Party follows next for the simple reason that its birth coincided with the period of the graduation to a Union Territory. The MNF has been dealt with last even though it was the pivot around which the whole process of party building and politics in Mizoram revolved during that period, primarily because it was not a constitutionally recognised political party till the Peace Accord of 1986. Also a discretionary note: though I have dealt with only the three political parties, there did exist a variety of political parties in Mizoram- socialist, labour, predominantly ethnic etc.

4.1. Institutional Development in the North East: A Recapitulation

The reorganisation of territorial spaces in the post independence times has echoed divergent claims of self-determination or autonomy. These however, have not been an organised collective representation of the said communities. For instance, the voices of the Northern tribes and the Southern tribes in Mizoram were very much plural and ambiguous. The national policy of India at that moment was thoroughly dictated by the ‘Nehru-Mahalanobis’ and ‘Nehru-Elwin’ model and the suggestions of the subcommittee headed by G. N. Bordoloi. The basic objectives for such strategies as claimed by Governmental sources
was 'to introduce the new political institutions without disturbing the tribal ways of life connected with land, forests, agricultural practices, and modes of settling disputes.'

From the very beginning a faint hope had been appended to the status of the autonomous units that in the near future they would percolate to full-fledged statehood. Interestingly, the creation of new states did not necessarily do away with the need for autonomous councils. Each time a major tribal group was identified with a state, the latter was likely to contain less numerous tribes or groups who chose to value such councils as their symbol of autonomy. For instance, when Mizoram attained the status of the Union Territory in 1972, three of the Regional Councils were also elevated to the status of Autonomous Councils. The result was a continued demand for the progression from autonomous councils to full statehood.

4.1.2. Federal Experiences in Mizoram: ‘Cosmetic Federalism’ Autonomous Councils (Pre-Peace Accord)

The people of the region, as was the case with the larger people of India, got steadily introduced to the western concept of participatory politics that is ‘democracy’ and ‘governance’. The emergence of the middle class accentuated experiments in these directions through their varied attitudes resonating between imitation, resistance and assimilation. The narrative of the Indian federal politics speaks of several initiatives of political jugglery aimed at generating and sustaining the process of governance. The Autonomous District Council in Mizoram was one such innovative enterprise in independent India. The federal experience in Mizoram tends to convey images of ‘dual regimes’, ‘dual citizenships’ through the politics of Sixth Schedule. Consequently Mizoram has been made into a Shangri-La or more appropriately into ‘Ethnic Enclaves’ of distinct tribes and each claiming its suzerainty. The politicisation of ethnic consciousness by the tribal elites and the resultant ethnic skirmishes has led to a concerted effort to propagate their ancient cultural

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strains by clinging to their traditional roots resulting in bringing to the limelight some of the most vibrant ancient traditions, cultural heritage and colourful customs of the people of Mizoram. The flip-side of these ethnic consciousnesses has been that there has been a strong resistance to opening the region to the ‘Outsiders’.

The issue of an autonomous area within a state as a special concession to accommodate the autonomy demands of smaller tribal group has remained by and large contentious. The District Councils had access to a wide range of legislative, executive, financial and judicial powers. These included powers to make laws for the allotment, occupation and use of and management of forests under the control; use of water resources; and the regulation of practices, including those related to agriculture, public health, and social customs, money-lending and non-tribal traders. Executive powers included the establishment and management of primary schools and the right to determine the language of education in primary schools. Among the financial powers, those regarding assessment and collection of land revenue and tax on trades and professions were the most important.

4.1.2. A.I. Mara and Lai Autonomy

The Southern tribes in Mizoram like many other ethnic tribes in the region are trans-border tribes, having populations across the borders of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar. The end of British Colonialism and the immediate partition of the Sub-Continent forced the Mara (earlier known as Lakher), to make a hasty decision to join either India or Myanmar taking purely the communications and transportation factors along the courses of the river Kolodyne, which flows through the middle of the Maraland. The people in the East of the

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6 One of the prime reasons as to why the tribes in this region chose two separate countries was the lack of communication and transportation. The experience of the ‘Monsoon’ in this rugged terrain tells that people from the other side could hardly manage to cross the river as there was and is no proper bridge and boat to ferry people across the river. The Mara on both side of the border thus were compelled to part ways and adopt two different countries as their home.
river choose to be with Myanmar as it was more accessible for them to get their daily necessities from Hakka and Sittewa township, and those who lived in the west of the river choose to be with India as getting salt was easier from Tlabung town. The Mara have a distinct material culture and language though they are classed in the Kuki-Chin-Lushai group. Stephen Fuchs (1973) speculates that ‘they were originally Naga who became Kukis through their close association with the latter’. The Pawi/Lai story also speaks of similar experiences of the process of partition in the sub-continent. Though the Lai (Pawi or Chin) have close affinities to the Lushai group, their relations historically have never been cordial.

In 1953, the Mara area of the erstwhile Lushai Hills was loosely amalgamated with the Lai area to create an autonomous region under the name ‘Pawi-Lakher Regional Council’ under the Sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was trifurcated into 3 district Councils namely Lai Autonomous District Council

9 The Lai/Pawi are the immediate neighbours of the Mara/Lakher and inhabitant the area ‘Lai Autonomous District’.
10 The P-L Regional Council from its initial days started facing hiccups for instance none of the groups cusped into the Council spoke a common language. According to Hiphei the first meeting of the Council was held without understanding each other’s language. Although Mizo (Duhlian) was used to officiate the transactions of the two groups, the Mara (at that time Lakher) and the Chakma could hardly follow it. The Lai (at that time Pawi) were the only group which could follow Mizo and had an advantage due to their ethnic proximity to the Northern tribes (the Lushei-Kuki-Mizo group). By 1958 the Council ran into stalemate as the Lakher kept themselves out of the Council’s meetings. The Mara (Lakher) and the Lai (Pawi) being traditional warring tribes could hardly cohabit under a common Regional Council. The matter was taken up in the State Assembly and the possibility of bloodshed was forewarned. The Union Home Ministry woke up to the seriousness of the stalemate and suggested granting separate Regional Councils for the three groups in South Mizoram in 1970-71. The three groups thus succeeded in persuading the Central Government on the eve of the reorganisation of the North-Eastern States in 1972 for separate autonomous districts and councils due to the differences in culture and language.
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(LADC); the Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC); and Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) under the provision of the North Eastern Areas (Re-organisation) Act, 1971. Each of these Autonomous District Councils was meant to cater to the ethnic aspirations of the exclusive tribe.

Post Statehood and the Amendment of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1988, and as per representation submitted by the Mara and Lai leaders, the Autonomous District Council’s powers have been enhanced in different subjects namely; Forest, Art & Culture, Rural Development, Agriculture and Horticulture, Soil & Water Conservation, Social Welfare, AH & Veterinary, Industry, Fishery, PHE, Sericulture, LAD, Road Transport, Sport & Youth Services, Cooperation, PWD, Water & Education etc.11

4.1.2. A.2. The Chakma Autonomy

Traditionally the Chakma occupy the South-West and the western belts of the territory between Mizoram and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) now in Bangladesh and the state of Tripura.12 The political developments over the years following the MNF movement


12 The Chakma tribes speak a language heavily influenced by the Eastern Indo-Aryan language group; it is closely related to the Bengali language. The Chakma in the CHT are known as ‘Jimma’/‘Jhumia’

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led to the formation of a Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC), a space for recognising the Chakma as a distinct tribal community in Mizoram. The Zo/Mizo believe that the Chakma tribes are comparatively recent immigrants of Mizoram. The Chakma (predominantly Buddhists) like other marginal tribes such as the Reang (Bru), are in the process of embracing Christianity. Though officially treated as tribes of Mizoram, the Chakma, till today are not counted as Mizo by the Zo hnahthlak. The Chakma feel neglected and deprived of economic benefits due their being non-Christians. The attitude of Zo/Mizo people towards the Chakma as an immigrant population feeds the strong feeling of identity amongst the Chakma. The issues of the distinctness of the Chakma from that of the Zo/Mizo have been milked by the dominant stakeholders from the state as well as outside to assimilate


or eliminate the minority *Chakma* tribes. For Instance, the issue of the *Chakma* in Mizoram has caught the attention of the Congress at the Centre since the 1970s and it was the Congress lobbying that had successfully led to the creation of an ADC for the *Chakma*.\(^{15}\) The Congress in Mizoram has used the *Chakma* as its traditional minority vote-bank. The MNF and the PC Party on the other hand have been presenting mixed reactions to the *Chakma*. The mood of the regional parties sways between two extremes—'minority tribes' to 'Chakma foreigners'.\(^{16}\) Here again the determining role played by the *Nexus of Patriarchy* in the 'politics of inclusions and exclusions' gets highlighted.

### 4.1.2. B.1. The Attitude towards the Mara, the Lai and the Chakma and strategies to counter the same by the three tribes in the Pre-Statehood period

The relations of the 'southern' and the 'northern' tribes have always been laced with prejudice and stereotypes. The attitude of the north in the pre-statehood times towards the three prominent southern tribes the *Lakher (Mara)*, the *Pawi (Lai)* and the *Chakma*, was that of selective targeting. For instance, during the MNF movement, the *Lakher (Mara)* and the *Chakma* were targeted as 'Others' for failing to positively respond to the MNF movement. The inability of these two groups to affiliate themselves linguistically as well as ideologically with the several initiatives of the MNF such as reunification of the Zo *hnahthlak*, secession from the Union of India etc. further fuelled the feeling of otherness. The MNF throughout its secessionist movement targeted the *Chakma* as either the permanent other or foreigners and the *Mara* as traitors in the reunification movement of the Zo *hnahthlak*. For instance, in 1972 when Mizoram became a Union Territory, Laldenga gave a call for abolishing the Autonomous status granted to the *Chakma*. Laldenga at one time even mentioned that 'it is totally wrong to grant constitutional autonomy to immigrants...No where in the world are immigrants granted autonomy'.\(^{17}\) Excepting the Congress\(^{18}\), the different political parties and

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\(^{15}\) Ibid.

\(^{16}\) Duriya Dhan Chakma (President, Chakma Students' Union (Lawnglai); Secretary, Central Young Chakma Association and also member of Development and Vigilance Committee, Kamalanagar). *Personal Interview*. Chakma House, Hunthar Veng: Aizawl. 26\(^{th}\) March 2010.

students' body from the northern belt toed the lines of Laldenga. Interestingly the Pawi (Lai) were spared the harsh treatment for the simple fact that they were linguistically affiliated to the MNF movement and also because Laldenga belonged to this particular group. So their claim to autonomy was justified and authentic.  

4.1.2. B.2. The Attitude towards the Mara, the Lai and the Chakma and strategies to counter the same by the three tribes in the Post-Statehood period

The attitude of the northerners differed on the Autonomous Council status of the three southerners. While many justified the ADC status for the Mara because the Mara speak a distinct language which not even their closest tribes (in terms of geographic proximity) the Lai fail to understand. Likewise the Lai enjoying a special status was also found justified because of the geographic distance from the north and difficulties in terms of connectivity. Over the years the attitude towards the Mara (Lakher) has toned down and they have been accepted as distinct close cousins of the Zo/Mizo. The attitude towards the Lai (Pawi) has always been welcome. In fact the name change program of both the Lakher (now 'Mara') and Pawi (now 'Lai') has generated mixed responses among the northerners. For instance, one of my respondents observed that:

By adopting new names for their group, these tribes are trying to maintain their exclusiveness and authenticity to autonomous existence. While the name change program for the Mara (Lakher) has proved positive in terms of justification to their ADC status and acceptance among the northerners, the same is not true for the Lai (Pawi). The name change among the Lai (Pawi) has led to distancing from the core group 'Lusei-Mizo' of the north. 'Pawi kan ti thrin a; tuna eroh chuan Pawi an om to si lova Lai an inti to sia. Kan inhlat toh a ni' (they were called

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traditionally Pawi, now they call themselves Lai; we have distanced each other'.

The Chakma it was felt did not deserve their ADC status. Many respondents felt it was a historical mistake that they had been granted autonomy. The Chakma have been the permanent eyesore for the Zo/Mizo majority from the northern circles. Many of my respondents from the Aizawl circle cutting across class, gender and age felt that the granting of autonomy to the Chakma was the greatest blunder in Zo/Mizo politics.

The Chakma and the inability of the Zo/Mizo to mould their ethnic identity within the larger generic identity can be noticed in the statement made by a respondent who worked as a missionary among them for 8 years:

Chakmas are difficult to proselytise...we give them food, free school, free bible classes and when we think everything is fine and the message of God has reached the Chakma we leave that area only to come back and see that the Chakma goes back to the old ways of his Chakma religion... when we pose the question ‘I piangthar toh a ni lo mi?’ (Haven’t you already converted?), the Chakma replies or mutters almost inaudibly in pidgin Mizo, as if to brush the question aside ‘piangthar toh lo’ (I am no longer converted).

The Chakma have been the traditional vote-bank of the Congress, and barring the Congress the support for the Chakma minorities in Mizoram has been muted. Lalthanhawla

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22 Interview of a Missionary working among the Chakmas for 8 years on 10th February 2008, Zarkawt, Aizawl (Name with-held on request).

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says, ‘if there are Chakmas in Mizoram, the fault is that of the Mizos themselves. They were brought in from Chittagong Hill Tracts by the Mizo Chiefs to work as their labourers and many of them settled here’. The Chakma unlike the Bru (Reang) have been able to draw only partial attention of the Hindu nationalist party the BJP which has been trying to make a foothold in the Christian terrain.

The response towards the three groups from the South continues to be seen through coloured glasses and the Chhimlam mi continues to be a subject of mockery in everyday life in the North especially Aizawl. The Mara due to their distinct language and cultural practices have remained as a distant tribe yet to be encast into the capsule of the generic Identity ‘Mizo’ or the phonetic Identity ‘Zomi’. The ‘Lai’ have always been the distant Zo hnahthlak entrenched in the landlocked terrain of the Kolodyne (Kaladan) and the ‘Blue Mountains’ (Phongpui Tlang). In fact, the attitude towards the Lai (Pawi/Poi, Chin) has been traditional and more comfortable when compared with the Mara (Lakher) who today have been elevated to the position of an accepted distinct ethnic group for display purpose in the Chapchar Kut and other festivals. The Chakma continue to be branded as the foreigners within Mizoram. Many respondents felt that the desire or the compulsion to grant concession to the Lai (Pawi) in the South led to similar concessions being extended to fringe tribes and foreigner tribes in the South.24

The Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) with its headquarters now at Chawngte (earlier known as Kamalanagar) continues to be the public irritant in the Zo/Mizo politics. The existence of Bengali medium high school, Buddhist culture and pidgin Bengali language along with distinct cultural markers makes the Chakma a permanent pariah in a state that openly declares itself to be an Ideal Zo Christian State.25 Where to tuck away the Chakma? What to do with the Chakma? How to mould ‘them’ into ‘ourselves’ or fence them


‘off’ from their counterparts in CHT continues to be the concern of the *Nexus of Patriarchy* in Zo/Mizo politics.

The ‘Politics of Camouflaging’ continues to be a useful tool for the *Chakma* to counter the attitude of the northern tribes and their identity movement which sways between ‘generic’ and ‘phonetic’ identity consciousness. The *Chakma* have built up institutes to protect their rights and raise their concerns through the Young Chakma Association (YCA) on the lines of the Young Mizo Association26; the Mizoram Chakma Welfare Committee (MCWC), Mizoram Chakma Students Union (MSCU), Chakma Mahila Samitti and Mizoram Chakma Development Forum (MCDF),27 their major concern being the integration of all the *Chakma* dominated areas of Mizoram into a single administrative unit under the Sixth Schedule provisions of the Indian Constitution. The *Chakma* have mobilised their identity consciousness around their backwardness as a minority tribe within Mizoram. Through their institutions, they have time and time again fed the Central government with demands for speedy development and also information on the discriminations faced by them under the Zo/Mizo hegemony.28 The *Chakma* have felt that the Aizawl centric inclinations of development and the inaction of successive governments at Aizawl have failed to improve their living conditions.29 The *Chakma* also felt that being denied the opportunity to learn Mizo at school level has been a major discriminatory policy deliberately carried over by the Zo/Mizo government from Aizawl to check the entry of the Chakma into government


29 The BJP a National Party has been trying hard to gain a foothold in Mizoram. Supporting the cause or giving a patient hearing to the disgruntled marginal tribes like the *Chakma* and the *Bru (Reang)* serves as a ground clearing work for ‘take-off’ of the political flight of the BJP, a Hindu Nationalist Party in a predominantly Christian terrain.
They also accuse the Zo/Mizo government of failing to provide the Chakma, with equal educational opportunities and reservations in government jobs. These policies are in fact considered by the Chakma as 'glass ceilings' constructed by the Nexus of Patriarchy to snip the chance of the Chakma to get into determining positions within the sacred realms of the Ideal Zo Christian State.

Of late the various organisations have also served as a platform to raise the mood towards self-criticism and move towards participatory governance and accountability in line with the indicators of ‘Good-Governance’. Issues of non-implementation of welfare and development schemes in Chakma areas, mass deletion of Chakma voters from electoral rolls in the 1990s, discrimination under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), mass displacement due to ongoing Indo-Bangladesh border fencing, lack of relief to Chakma villagers affected by the bamboo famine, denial of benefits of the Border Area Development Programmes although Chakma live on the border, denial of forest rights, non-existence of medical facilities, lack of reservations in government jobs, and lack of alternate source of livelihood at a time when

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32 It was due to initiatives of Activist Citizenry that the State Government was compelled to change its apathy towards the Chakma areas. Post 2000 some strong steps have been directed to meet the urge of development in the border areas. For details refer under heading ‘Chawngte’ table 4.1 in this chapter. One can see a gradual rise in allocation for the Chakma area. Interestingly Mizo Lecturers working in Chakma region informed me about the gross misappropriation of Border Area Development Funds by the Chakma Politicians and elites. Pi Elizabeth Mannou (Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Kamalanagar College, Chawngte). Personal Interview. Tanhril, Aizawl: 10th March 2010; Pi R. Laldingliani (Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Kamalanagar College, Chawngte). Personal Interview. Tanhril, Aizawl: 10th & 11th March 2010.
the Forest Department has been busy declaring all forests as Reserved Forests around the Chakma habitations, among others, have been highlighted overtime.33

Table 4.1

| Block-Wise Expenditure Under Border Area Development Programme (BADP) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sl. No. | District | Block | Expenditure Under BADP |
| | | | 2006-2007 | 2007-2008 |
| | | | Roads | Building | Others | Roads | Building | Others |
| 1 | Mamit | 1 Zawlnuam | 20.80 | 27.70 | 32.90 | 22.50 | 31.50 | 83.85 |
| | | 2 W. Phaileng | 13.50 | 11.00 | 34.70 | 30.00 | 16.00 | 94.00 |
| | | **TOTAL** | **34.30** | **38.70** | **67.60** | **52.50** | **47.50** | **177.85** |
| 2 | Champhai | 1 Ngopa | 32.00 | 13.00 | 59.50 | 62.08 | NIL | 110.94 |
| | | 2 Khawbung | 44.00 | 2.00 | 39.00 | 56.00 | 12.00 | 45.50 |
| | | 3 Khawzawl | 31.00 | 7.50 | 53.00 | 40.00 | 10.00 | 59.34 |
| | | 4 Champhai | 59.50 | 40.70 | 32.50 | 41.00 | 34.00 | 126.60 |
| | | **TOTAL** | **167.00** | **63.20** | **184.00** | **199.08** | **56.00** | **342.38** |
| 3 | Serchhip | 1 E. Lundar | 21.50 | 9.00 | 20.50 | 33.50 | 14.00 | 55.10 |
| | | 2 Tuipang | 25.00 | 3.00 | 47.14 | 52.00 | 4.00 | 66.00 |
| | 4 Lunglei | 1 Hnahthial | 25.00 | 3.00 | 47.14 | 52.00 | 4.00 | 66.00 |
| | | 2 Bungmhun | 31.00 | 12.00 | 24.10 | 57.00 | 21.00 | 44.00 |
| | | 3 Lungsen | 6.00 | 8.00 | 48.03 | 34.00 | 6.00 | 74.45 |
| | | **TOTAL** | **62.00** | **23.00** | **119.27** | **143.00** | **31.00** | **184.45** |
| 5 | Saiha | 1 Saiha | 9.00 | 29.50 | 34.50 | NIL | 19.50 | 92.50 |
| | | 2 Tuipang | 28.50 | 8.00 | 37.50 | 44.00 | 26.00 | 56.00 |
| | | **TOTAL** | **37.50** | **37.50** | **72.00** | **44.00** | **45.50** | **148.50** |
| 6 | Lawngtlai | 1 Chawnge | 11.00 | 4.00 | 54.00 | 4.00 | 17.00 | 84.00 |
| | | 2 Bungthings ‘S’ | 7.00 | 25.00 | 35.40 | 38.00 | 32.00 | 52.00 |
| | | 3 Lawngtlai | 13.70 | 4.00 | 35.50 | 14.00 | 39.00 | 70.50 |
| | | 4 Sangau | 12.00 | 8.00 | 31.00 | 21.6 | 13.00 | 58.00 |
| | | **TOTAL** | **43.70** | **41.00** | **1.55.90** | **77.60** | **101.00** | **264.50** |
| | **GRAND TOTAL** | **366.00** | **212.40** | **619.27** | **549.68** | **295.00** | **1172.78** |

Source: Statistical Handbook of Mizoram 2008.

# Table 4.1 shows a gradual increase in the over all allocation of finances in the Chawngte area which is predominantly a Chakma area. However, when compared to the other districts dominated by the Zo hnahthlak, it still remains a small leap.

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The Chakma, over the years are yet to be assimilated to the mould of the generic identity ‘Mizo’ and Christianity. Their ethnic exclusiveness and distinct past has made them a distinct ethnic tribe in south western Mizoram. Though the Chakma have been placed under Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) for better administration and control, the irony is that more than half of the Chakma population in Mizoram lives outside the demarcated territory of the (CADC). Recently due to the increased activities of local evangelists/missionaries from the north, many among the Chakma have converted to Christianity. Several Christian rites and rituals are being followed with great reverence and faith. Interestingly though the resistance to the ‘generic’ as well as ‘phonetic’ identity remains, there is a strong mood to become developed and progressive like the Zo/Mizo. The strategies of the Nexus of Patriarchy in mobilising community resources and networking among communities have been emulated at the Chakma circles. The Chakma for instance, have been publicly expressing their eagerness to learn Mizo language so as to get the benefits of the state resources in terms of government jobs. Undoubtedly the Chakma are divided on the issue of the Zo/Mizo identity. There is a section which supports the idea of being recognised as authentic citizens of Mizoram while accepting the Zo/Mizo hegemony with certain reservations. For instance, being recognised as ‘Zo/Mizo Chakma’; having their distinct ethnic enclave in the form of a territorially unified Chakma Autonomous District Council. Contrarily a section of the Chakma continues to maintain a stiff resistance to the Zo/Mizo hegemony; and insists on nothing short of a Union Territory status for the Chakma. Amidst all these projected attitudes, the Nexus of Patriarchy and the northerners in general continue to exhibit their inability to accept the Chakma in totality.

The concerns and the vocality that the three groups from Southern Mizoram have managed to generate at the Centre can be grasped through the following news report:

DoNER Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar...grieved to see the backwardness of the three autonomous district councils of Mara, Lai and Chakma in the southern part of the state ... ...he was disturbed to learn that the minority

population (Chakma, Mara and Lai) in the southern part had been deprived of development funds... I can now understand why the minorities are demanding Union Territory status...  

The generic identity politics in Mizoram being very much a movement from the north attempts at enveloping the other minority ethnic communities in the south such as the Chakma. From the 80s onwards there has been a steady rise in the settlement of Zo/Mizo population in the Chakma region through Government initiatives of rehabilitation. There is a constant drive to out number the Chakma in their territory and over-write history in favour of the Zo/Mizo. The rehabilitation programme of the Zo/Mizo (MNF returnees) in the Chakma areas has not been easy and has involved the distribution of attractions such as cheap supply or rewards of power-tillers, costly agricultural equipments and such other attractions to those Zo/Mizo who agreed to settle in the warm, humid conditions of Chakma territory. The traditional Chakma names of places have been replaced by Mizo names. For instance, Chawngte (Mizo) for ‘Kamalanagar’, Tlabung (Mizo) for ‘Demagiri’ etc. The name change politics that has been carried out in the region has emotional content as it symbolizes the authority of the northern tribes -the Lusie-Mizo groups on the fringe tribes of the southern areas. The traditional Chakma names of places have been replaced by Mizo names. For instance, Chawngte (Mizo) for ‘Kamalanagar’, Tlabung (Mizo) for ‘Demagiri’ etc. The name change politics that has been carried out in the region has emotional content as it symbolizes the authority of the northern tribes -the Lusie-Mizo groups on the fringe tribes of the southern areas. This is a strong substantiation of the patriarchy thesis, I have identified in Zo/Mizo politics of identity.

Coming to the issue of the national parties attitude to the Chakma in Mizoram post-Statehood: the stand of the Congress seems to be similar to the one presented in the 1970s. The BJP from 1998 onwards has been strongly supporting the Bru (Reang) as minority tribes who deserve autonomy within Mizoram and by the same logic partially supports the Chakma. However, the BJP presents stiffness when it comes to granting more autonomy in the form of a graduation to UT status to the Chakma. The BJP both at the Centre and in

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38 Ibid.
Mizoram seem to be toeing a tight trapeze on the issue of infiltration of illegal immigrants in the region. This opposition to elevation of the CADC to a UT however, maybe due to the BJP's genuine concern for illegal infiltration in the North East or 'just opposition for the sake of opposition' for denying the Congress the credit for such a move which will permanently 'seal-off' the possibility of ever converting the traditional vote-bank of the Congress in Mizoram to its advantage.39 Another obvious reason being that the BJP is cautious of hemming in its future possibility of any alliance with MNF for whom, the Chakma (Chakma foreigner) is a sensitive issue pricking the national ego of the Zo hnahthlak. In other words the mission of creating an exclusive space for the Zo hnahthlak or 'Zomi' in the form of an Ideal Zo Christian State gets eclipsed by the presence of an ethnic enclave for the Chakma (Chakma foreigner). For instance, the BJP Mizoram Pradesh in its press release dated 29th July 1998 mentioned:

Keini Mizoram BJP-te chuan Congress tikloh Party dange hi chu, a hranpa taka thawpui theiloh kan nei lova, BJP hi Indian MNF ang an ni e, kan ti ang a, Nuclear Bomb pawh tipuak ngam, Sawrkar hnahthawk pension hun pawh kum 2-a pawhsei sak a, Lecturer-te hlawh pawh, siamthat saktu anih, keini Mizoram BJP hi Mizoram leh mipuite humhimtu nih hi a tum ber a ni.

Mizorama Foreigner-te thawn chhuak vek turin tan a la bawk, Rajya Sabha-a, Congress Committee hi Chakma UT a recommend pawh duh lovin, ruahsur hmuaih BJP hotute chu kawngzawhin, ruahsur pawh pawisa lovin, a tawp rawt thleng tan latu a ni.40

(The BJP in Mizoram is open to alliance with any political party excluding the Congress. The BJP is a nationalist party very close in its ideologies to the MNF. Infact it is the Indian MNF. A party which dares to test the Nuclear Bomb, makes innovative changes like extension of the retirement age by 2 years for Government servants, revised salary for Lecturers etc. The BJP's interest in Mizoram is to preserve and promote the interest of the people of Mizoram.


40 Ibid.
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The BJP is committed on its anti-foreigner stand unlike the Congress which had placed the recommendation for UT status for the Chakma in the Rajya Sabha. It was because of the BJP leadership that the recommendation was stopped. The BJP leaders' infact organised a rally opposing the recommendation. Not even the heavy showers could stop the BJP from exhibiting their displeasure against the Congress recommendation.

4.2. Tracing The Growth Of Political Parties In Mizoram

The Government of India employed numerous tactics to check the secessionist activities of the Mizos from the year 1966. The elevation to the status of a Union Territory was 'one such rabbit' pulled out from the hat of the Centre Government. The Government of India decided that the main military phase of counter-insurgency operations against the MNF was over, and it was time for seeking resolution of the conflict through structural techniques aimed at changing the political framework, and distributive policies for providing better economic opportunities and rewards. On January 21, 1972, the Mizo Hills district was taken out of Assam and made the Union Territory of Mizoram under the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971, and the Government of the Union Territories (Amendment) Act, 1971. The structural changes that were brought about first involved devolution of political authority by changing the territorial arrangement, and subsequently, electoral innovations.

The strategy of granting Union Territory status to the insurgency torn Mizo Hills had a lasting effect on the future course of events and politics in Mizoram in general. The new government needed a large number of civil services personnel such as secretaries, joint secretaries, deputy secretaries, and directors etc. to administer its various departments. This meant finding officers to man the numerous posts in these new establishments. The number of officers available from the Union Territory cadre of the Indian Administrative, Police and Forest Services for the senior positions in these various organisations and hierarchies, was inadequate and it became necessary to bring officers on deputation from other States, to set the new Mizoram Government going. 41

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At this point, a large number of Mizo officers working in other States and regions of India expressed their willingness to serve in Mizoram, and the newly elected political leaders in the Union Territory supported the idea. As a matter of policy, the Government of India had so far discouraged deputation of All India Services officers to their home States. But an exception was made in the case of Mizoram. What was done to tide over a temporary shortage of officers, as well as to oblige loyal Mizo politicians, turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Many of these officers were related to influential Mizo businessmen and politicians, including those in the MNF. Their arrival as senior officers of the government was a joyous event in the history of the community, and they became the nodal points of the most powerful social group in Mizoram, with a strong and abiding vested interest in their linkages with the rest of the country.42

The Mizo Hills District Council was dissolved, and following elections in 1972, the Mizo Union Party under Lawrence Ch. Chhunga formed the first Government of Mizoram after winning 21 seats in a 30-member Union Territory legislature. The Indian National Congress won six seats and three seats went to the Independents. One nominated seat went to a person of Nepali origin, one to a woman social worker and a third to a prominent businessman. Later towards the end of 1974, the Mizo Union Party merged with the Indian National Congress. The Ch. Chhunga Ministry resigned in May 1977 at the end of its five-year term, and this was followed by 7 months of President’s rule (Article 356) after which the next elections were held.

The genesis of party formation in Mizoram reaffirms that the party formation cannot be isolated from the process of identity formation (refer to Chapter III). For instance, the initial days of independence saw the birth of two distinct political parties on class lines and the clash of the new elites vis-à-vis the traditional elites (for details refer to Chapter I). The Mizo Union aimed to break the nexus between the Chiefs and the British and bring in some

42 Based on innumerable discussions which sometimes became really charged and heated on the issue of the ‘Vai’ and the ‘Gorkha’ with my father, Mr. A.S Chakraborty, (Rtd. S.P (Security) Mizoram). Who has served in the Mizoram Police for over 30 years; also substantiated by the informal talks with Mizo as well as Gorkha police officials in Mizoram.
form of democracy in Mizoram under the benevolence of India and Assam. Thus, the sole motive behind the formation of the political party/parties was the desire of achieving a democratic system of administration for the Mizos and fighting the local stakeholders such as the Chiefs. The party wanted autonomy in all matters affecting custom, law, ethnic identity, culture, land and the dialects of the Zo/Mizo people.43

Post 1972, the leaders were more interested in consolidating their political positions in the community than in attending to the developmental needs of their own people. The leaders’ emotional expressions of the community’s urgent needs made in public, or especially for outside audiences often stood in sharp contrast to gross financial irregularities. Until 1969; there were no audit systems to check them. Even later some glaring problems persisted. Yet, no criticism of these practices from the state authority (Centre and Assam) above them was regarded as legitimate. The Assam language policy was conveniently exploited by the local stakeholders in the Mizo Hills to divert the attention of the local masses from the gross irregularities. Interestingly, when these same leaders interfered with the language rights of the minor tribes for educating their children in the Regional Council within the District Councils, it was not supposed to count as a violation of tribal rights.44

But the leaders of the Mizo District Council, especially in the 1960s were, eager to blame the Assam and Central Governments for the relatively poor performance of their own representative institutions. They declared that only the status of statehood could solve their problems. This was the claim of the Mizo Union that ruled the Council for nearly two decades. Its demands for a state, however, were peaceful and constitutional. But there was also the secessionist case for an independent state advocated by the MNF, which opted for

43It was through the Mizo Union’s relentless efforts amidst the rising commoners’ anti-chief movement that Chieflainship was finally abolished in the Lushai Hills by an enactment of the Assam Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of Chiefs’ Rights) Act in 1954 (A.C. Ray. (1982). Mizoram Dynamics of Change. Calcutta: Pearl Publishers/ICSSR).

insurgency.\textsuperscript{45} Then too MNF was convinced that the state would deliver the ‘Promised Land’/‘ZORAM’. The weak performance records of Mizo representative institutions were of no relevance to their calculations. The active political parties during the pre-UT days were:

1. The Mizo Union (a party of the Lushei-Mizo group ‘Anti-Chiefs’ formed in 1946 by an emergent educated middle class having a Christian background. Important young leaders were Bawichhuaka, Pachhunga and Ch. Chhunga)

2. The United Mizo Freedom Organisation (a party of the Lushei-Mizo group ‘Pro-Chiefs’ formed in 1947 under the guidance of Phizo by L.B. Thanga and Lalmawia)

3. The Mara Freedom Party (a party of the Mara (Lakhers) tribes of the southern region formed by Vanluia Hlychho and Mylai Hlychho in 1960)

4. The Chin National Party (a party of the Lai (Pawi) tribes of the southern region formed by L. Chinzah in 1965)

\textbf{A. Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC)}

The congress, it must be remembered, was not an unchallenged party in Assam during the national movement and the same argument goes for Mizoram or Lushai Hills as well. Almost all Political Parties in Mizoram were formed out of the 1\textsuperscript{st} political party in Mizoram the Mizo Union (refer to Chapter I). The birth of the Congress in Mizoram also followed the same story. Defection and internal feuds within the Mizo Union led to the birth of the Congress in 1961 by A. Thanglura.\textsuperscript{46} After the formation of the Union Territory the local Congress (Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC)) leadership was taken over by the young Lalthanhawla as its President. The initial days of the Congress were that of stiff resistance from the Zo/Mizo public and blunt criticism from the other Political leaders. For instance, the Congress for a very long time was looked as a ‘Vai’ party having its core in


\textsuperscript{46} The Congress contested the general elections for the District Council but managed to win only one seat. By 1969 even the congress split due to internal feuds between the two factions, one led by Hrangchhuana and the other led by Dengthuama. However, just prior to the election for the UT Assembly in 1972 the two factions united to form the Mizoram Pradesh Congress. Following the amnesty offered to the MNF a large number of MNF returnees joined the Mizoram Congress. For details \textit{Cf.}, M.C. Lalrinthanga. (1993). \textit{Op. cit.}; F. Hmingthanga. (MCS Rtd.). (2003). \textit{Op. cit.}; C. Hermana. (1999). \textit{Op. cit.}
Delhi (India). In other words the Congress was an alien party trying to control the lost sovereign Zo territory through remote control and filtering ‘Vai’ (Hindu) ethics to the sacred territorial space of Zo Christianity. The attitude towards the Congress was that of a mixed baggage. At one level it was seen as an alien party trying to control the Zoram. At another level it was seen as a party that was the root cause of all mismanagement/mis-happenings in Zoram. For instance the Congress was blamed for all the misery caused by the great famine. At the 3rd level it continued to reflect and sustain the enigma of the Nehru-Gandhi parivaar. At the 4th level it was also seen as a party that was rooting for filtering the Assamese hegemony through the process of Ahomisation and supporting the cause of the Sanskritised Ahom culture into the sacred territory of the Zo Christian space. For instance, the silence maintained by the Centre on issues such as the language policy of Assam during the said period was taken to mean the unsolicited support of the Centre towards the Chaliha government.

The Congress began to grow in membership and political acceptance after the attainment of Union Territory status and the seal of recognition given by Indira Gandhi. The Congress in other words, became a safe refuge for all those who defected from the Mizo Union as well as the MNF returnees (from under-ground to over-ground). The Congress made a systematic and calculated move, by blaming the core Mizo Union and its leadership Lawrence Ch. Chhunga for all the problems in Mizoram and waving sympathy towards Laldenga’s MNF. The political defectors from all quarters made a bee-line to the Congress. So much so that by 1973 the Congress almost looked like the demon that it had denounced.


48 For instance, the leadership provided by Nehru and Indira to the Congress at Delhi to an extent continued to spray hope for a better dealing with the local sentiments and demands i.e. the Zo interest and Zo Christianity. The Gandhi factor continues to enthral the Zo/Mizo people because of the fact that Gandhi revered the teachings of the Bible and this acted as a binding factor between Gandhi and the Zo/Mizo people.
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it’s the arch political rival the Mizo Union.\(^49\) The Mizo Union due to its stiff-lipped approach to the MNF and its anti-MNF stand was loosing in popularity in the public. Ch. Chhunga was unable to match the image of a ‘Hero’ attached to the persona and leadership of Laldenga and his parallel ‘Mizoram Sawrkar’.

Ch. Chhunga’s anti-Laldenga stand and pro-India stand was by and large accepted by most members of the Mizo Union. The alliance with the Congress was seen by many within the Mizo Union as a sly strategy to dislodge the Chief Minister and the Mizo Union from power. This led to fissures and cracks within the Mizo Union. Ch. Chhunga the then Chief Minister of Mizoram realised that the Congress would soon out number it and so decided to merge with the Congress and gain from its proximity to the national party. The unconditional merger of the Mizo Union with the Congress was sealed at the AICC meeting at New Delhi. The move further created factions within the Mizo Union and finally some consensus was achieved when the Congress High Command officially approved the merger of the two on 24\(^{th}\) January, 1974. As per the merger, Ch. Chhunga was allowed to continue as the Chief Minister and two members of the Congress were inducted in the Ministry. The merger had two pronounced effects in the public: first, the absorption of the regional party in the national party was seen as threatening the indigenous Mizo way of life; second, it brought into power the Mizoram Congress which all along had been exploiting the Laldenga trump card to its advantage.

Ch. Chhunga faced a psychological blow when his 15 year old son, Chalthanzuala left his home at Aizawl and joined the MNF rebels on 15\(^{th}\) June 1974. This came as a personal loss for the leader who was known as being a staunch anti-MNF and supporter of India. The public image that Ch. Chhunga has built over the years was brought to question and his leadership was questioned. ‘Mahni fapa poh in zui duh loh chu zui tham a ni lo’ (‘a person deserted by his own son is not worth following or leading’).\(^50\) The Congress though being a


\(^{50}\) Based on informal talks with older persons in Aizawl during my visit in January and February 2008.
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partner of the Mizo Union exploited the issue and pointed fingers at Ch. Chhunga’s leadership and his party’s commitment to the anti-MNF stand. Ch. Chhunga succumbed to the strategies of the Mizoram Congress and finally on May 9th 1977 Ch. Chhunga resigned. The psychological pressure from within and without was too heavy to bear, though Ch. Chhunga said that his ‘Ministry was resigning on the expiry of its five years term in the Assembly’.51 The resignation of Ch. Chhunga was followed by imposition of President’s Rule (Article 356) a strategy which was later repeated even in 1988 when the Laldenga Government was toppled by the Mizoram Congress.

Through the power-sharing scheme the Mizoram Congress was able to absorb its former political rival and make the Mizo Union’s presence invisible in Zo/Mizo politics. So much so that public memory today hardly remembers its first Chief Minister or the first political party in Mizoram.52 The Congress thus initiated the first coalition through power sharing, a model which it later used once again very profitably in the post-statehood period for mellowing down the MNF. Interestingly the Mizoram Congress throughout the insurgency period never openly denounced the activities of the MNF or challenged Laldenga’s leadership and his parallel government. Instead the Mizoram Congress under the young leader Lalthanhawla milked the Laldenga fan-following to its maximum advantage so as to clear the rubbles beneath its ground to make for a deep foundation of the party. The Mizoram Congress also exploited Article 356 time and again to maintain the supremacy of the Centre in the State.

The Mizoram Pradesh Congress under the leadership of Lalthanhawla came to power on 5th May 1984 and remained in power till 20th August 1986. Laldenga’s objective of ousting the Sailo government from power was achieved when the Congress won the Assembly elections and Lalthanhawla took over as the Chief Minister of the UT of Mizoram.


52 A personal account would help to substantiate this statement. When my younger sister Asha Chakraborty participated for the Lelte Miss Mizoram contest in 1996 she introduced herself as representing ‘Saron Veng which happens to be the locality of the first Chief Minister of Mizoram Pu Ch. Chhunga’, the media and public was taken aback and took time to recall the forgotten enigma in Mizo politics Pu Ch. Chhunga.
Lalthanhawla was the blue eyed boy for Laldenga and having won the trust and confidence of the rebel leader Lalthanhawla was able to channel his way deep into Zo/Mizo politics. Both the MNF and the Congress had painted Sailo and his PC Party as the main villains for the failure of earlier Peace Talks especially the talks of 1982 when Sailo refused to step down in favour of Laldenga. Lalthanhawla showed political maturity and political farsightedness and offered to step down to bring back the MNF Supremo to the negotiation tables to solve the problems in Mizoram. The Zo/Mizo story of transition from insurgency and violence to constitutionalism and peace, to a large extent revolved around the Politics of Tlawmgaihna. For instance, Lalthanhawla leaving aside his post of the elected Chief Minister of Mizoram for Laldenga, all for the greater cause of peace and stability and the realization of the greater, long term goal of creating/building an Ideal Zo Christian State (refer for details to Chapter III). The power sharing that followed in the interim period reflected that the Centre had the last say in the peace process. For instance, Lalthanhawla was initially reluctant to share a platform with Laldenga whose personality had always overshadowed other contesting leaders in Zo/Mizo politics. It was the then Home Minister of India, Buta Singh who persuaded Lalthanhawla to join the interim Government as a Deputy Chief Minister.

The content of Rajiv Gandhi speech to the public in Aizawl during his Mizoram Tour right after the signing of the Peace Accord well summed up the sentiments and by and large it was a pat on the back for the Congress (both at the Centre as well as the State):

now a new dawn will come over Mizoram- a new dawn that will bring in the re-union of families, the end of tension, the re-construction of villages and basically, the most important of all, the building of the economy of Mizoram.” “Today we have the “Memorandum of Settlement” but we could not have had that, if it was not for certain sacrifices by Shri Lalthanhawla and other Congress leaders and congressmen in Mizoram. They have placed statesmanship and patriotism above petty or party political interest. They have most of all,

placed their faith in the Mizo people. It is the Country which needs such vision, such sensibility, and such sense of service.\textsuperscript{54}

The MPCC had finally come of age in Zo/Mizo politics and its leader the shining example of a ‘Tlawmgai Zo Pasaltha’, a new hero in the horizon of Zo/Mizo politics. Though unlike Ch. Chhunga and Sailo, Lalthanhawla never directly challenged the authority of Laldenga throughout the troubled times, post-Peace Accord a new development took place in the form of direct mud-slinging between the erstwhile partners. Laldenga in a news report mentioned that the 1984 elections that had brought the Congress to power in Mizoram were undemocratic, since Mizoram was a ‘disturbed area’. On the other hand Lalthanhawla held that the election was the most democratic ever held in Mizoram and averred that his party would work with any other wholly Indian party.\textsuperscript{55} Even though Lalthanhawla’s image has over the years been tarnished with corruption and misappropriation charges,\textsuperscript{56} the youths seem to see him as a strong alternative to Laldenga (refer to Chapter III, Figs. 3.2-3.6).

B. Mizo People’s Conference Party

Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo (AVSM) entered Zo/Mizo politics with multiple feathers in his hat. Having served in the Indian Army and posted in various parts of India he seems to fit the image of a sophisticated, religious, tlawmgai quintessential family man. Sailo’s immediate popularity through the Human Rights Committee was a direct result of the vacuum in leadership created by the exit of Laldenga on self-exile to Pakistan. The increased


level of strained relations between the Indian Army and the public compelled Brig. Thenphunga Sailo, a retired Indian Army Officer, along with some friends, to form the Human Rights Committee (HRC) in the month of June 1974 in Aizawl. The popularity of the HRC was converted into a Political Party and the following year (17th April, 1975) the People’s Conference (PC) came into existence (for details refer to Chapter III). Brigadier Sailo started on a note of clean politics, honest politics, to solve the political problems of the state. Sailo felt that on economic development Mizoram was lagging behind Meghalaya and Nagaland. He blamed Ch. Chhunga and the Mizo Union for all the failures of the state to bring the MNF to the negotiation tables. Coming from the ‘Sailo Chiefs clan’\textsuperscript{57}, the Brigadier felt that he was superior to the earlier leadership of the Mizo Union which was very much middle class and mediocre. He targeted the leadership qualities of Ch. Chhunga and at times even exploited the issue of Ch. Chhunga’s son who joined the MNF. Ironically, Sailo forgot that while in service in the Indian Army he had to face similar personal attacks from his colleagues when his son, Lalsangliana, had joined the MNF.\textsuperscript{58} Right from its initiation the PC tried to align itself with the Janata Party and maintained a strategy just the opposite of the Mizoram Congress. Though never officially recognised by the Janata Party at New Delhi, Sailo maintained his commitment to the national party. Sailo most probably felt that proximity to the national party would fetch it suitable gains. Sailo maintained a positive attitude towards the Centre.

Sailo hoped to act as the self appointed political advisor to the parallel government of the MNF. Sailo was well aware of the fact that most of the followers of the MNF were under educated, with very little expertise in statesmanship required to deal with the more polished ‘Vais’. With his experience in the Indian Army and prolonged contact with the ‘Vai’, Sailo felt that he was the right man to steer the unrest and lead Mizoram towards peace. The People’s Conference by the end of 1977 had two clear groups: those inclined towards the

\textsuperscript{57} Brigadier T. Sailo was the son of Vanchheuva the Chief of Thuampui village in Lunglei district.

\textsuperscript{58} Lalsangliana, the eldest son of Brigadier T. Sailo studying at St. Edmund’s College, Shillong along with eight other Mizo youths joined the MNF on 18th July 1966 and moved to Sylhet in East Pakistan for training as Special Forces meant for liquidation of political enemies etc. Lalsangliana became the Staff Officer of Laldenga and was later dismissed from the MNA along with Biakchhunga, Vanthanga and others in 1979.
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MNF and the other having a neutral stand or anti-MNF stand. The popularity of the PC topped the charts and the young educated masses flocked to it. Sailo strategically made a calculated move and tuned down his anti-Indian Army stand as well as its pro-MNF stand. The PC before coming to power at this stage was largely welcomed by the MNF leadership. The President’s Rule that followed Ch. Chhunga’s resignation ended on 2nd June 1978 when Brigadier T. Sailo formed the Ministry. Sailo appealed to the people to help bring peace back to Mizoram. Brigadier Sailo had initially milked the issue of ‘Human Rights’ and atrocities committed by the Indian Army on the Mizo people. Sailo after assuming power realised the thorniness of the Chief Minister’s position. Instead now Sailo played with the image of a ‘Pa chang sipai anga ri-thlap’ (refer to Chapter III) and conveyed the message that ‘the need of the hour was a new set of leaders with good army background to check the excesses of both the Army and the MNF as well as provide quality leadership which both the Mizoram Congress and Mizo Union were ‘unfit to provide’. Sailo realising the unhappiness of a section of his followers especially women due to the tuning down of the ‘Human Rights card’, felt the urgency to pull out a new rabbit from his hat. This time Sailo attempted to appease the Church and garner the support of the powerful Church. Sailo made a calculated move and declared his goal ‘to cleanse the Zo/Mizo society which through external contacts had lost its way’. The first steps was to check ‘fraud and liquor’ a move welcomed by the Church.59 This alliance between politics and religion further strengthened the influence of the Nexus of Patriarchy on Zo/Mizo identity politics.

Sailo through his strict handling of the MNF earned him the wrath of the MNF Supremo Laldenga so much so that Laldenga ordered the people not to vote Sailo.60 It is indeed ironic, but nevertheless, true that the very 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. Sailo himself reviewed his first stint as the Chief Minister in 1978 in an article in *Mizoram Today* (December, 1979):

In 1978, the people of Mizoram gave a massive mandate to the PC Party. The PC Ministers had just started to work in all sincerity and right earnest when unexpectedly and to my utter surprise, eight PC MLAs motivated by selfish interests and totally disregarding the wishes of their electorate, joined hands with the self-centred Congress MLAs, with a view to destroy the Ministry and with no constructive programme for the future. I had no idea that these eight PC Party MLA rebels could have behaved in the way they did...I could have saved the situation quite easily by an offer of some sort to anyone of the rebel MLAs, if I was only concerned with the continuation in office of the Ministry. But I took no such steps as I was totally against defections...Instead, I choose to refer the matter back to the people’s court and accordingly recommended fresh elections. With the elections just concluded, the people’s verdict is very clear. They have condemned defections and destructive policy.

Lalthanhawla the Congress leader had by this time successfully won the confidence of the Laldenga. The erstwhile partners in the MNF movement were back in partnership (*Cf.*, page 147,160 of this Chapter). Sailo’s second stint as Chief Minister of Mizoram began on 8th May, 1979 and continued till 4th May, 1984. Sailo kept the option for peace talks open for bringing lasting peace in Mizoram. Sailo made it public that his party was in favour of stronger institutional safeguards and stricter implementation of the ILP which would govern the entry of the ‘*Vai*’ in Mizo territory. Sailo also highlighted the sensitive issue of the ‘Chakma influx’. The objectives of the PC started on the plank of development issues, improvement in power and communication, efficient administration. Laldenga felt offended by the verdict of the Zo/Mizo people and claimed that the verdict was no verdict as it did not involve a larger section of the Zo/Mizo people who were beyond the borders of the Union Territory of Mizoram. To make situation tough for Sailo, the MNF issued ‘Quit Mizoram’ notices to the ‘*Vai*’ ordering all outsiders to leave Mizoram by 1st July 1979 and threatened defaulters with death. The timings of the ‘Quit Mizoram’ notices was matched with the ‘Peace Accord of 1976’ and conveyed the message loud and clear that the MNF did not
uphold the Accord and would not surrender arms. The MNF felt that Sailo was acting as a mouth piece of the Centre and was too close to New Delhi. The MNF impressed upon the public that Sailo was being remote controlled by the ‘Vais’ in Delhi. The tensions between Laldenga and Brigadier Sailo had reached a level where political extermination was not shied away from. The arrest of Lalhminga (Hmingtea) a courier-cum-body guard of Major Lalrawna of the ‘L’ Battalion of the MNF by the BSF at Aizawl on 23rd June 1979 revealed the plot to assassinate Chief Minister T. Sailo and other important ministers.

To make situations worse, the MNF carried out atrocities on the ‘Vai’ and murdered outsiders who had continued to stay in Mizoram following the assurance of their security by the constitutionally recognised Government. The MNF also carried out daring attacks on the All India Radio (AIR) transmission Centre and the Police Complex at Shivaji Tilla (Aizawl). The MNF even wanted the newly posted Government officials from other parts of India to leave Mizoram. Sailo felt that such a demand was unpalatable as that would harm the functioning of the newly created Union Territory. Sailo reported the grim situation in Mizoram to the Centre and accordingly the Centre declared the MNF and its allied organisations as unlawful under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967. The Janata Government at the Centre under Morarji Desai placed Laldenga under arrest under sections 121, 121A and 120B of the IPC on 8th July, 1979. The Janata Party at the Centre toed the lines of the State and Sailo had an upper hand in the negotiation tables.61

Though Laldenga re-tuned his stand on the peace talks in the changed situation and changed leadership from Morarji Desai to Chaudhury Charan Singh at the Centre, after a series of meetings soon realised that there was no change in the stand of the Janata Government at the Centre and therefore, turned to the Congress to bail him out. The calculated move of toeing towards the Congress can be seen through the report in ‘India Today’ dated 16-31 July, 1979:

Pu Laldenga has chosen Pu Lalthanhawla, a cultured and calculating politician who headed the Mizoram Congress which was linked with the Congress (I) as his advocate. Pu Lalthanhawla, who had served under Pu

Laldenga, as Cabinet Secretary in the MNF till 1969, and as the later leader of the opposition in Mizoram Assembly, felt that the only way to bring back peace in Mizoram was to invite Pu Laldenga for negotiation and ask Brigadier T. Sailo to quit.

The change in the Central Government in 1980 brought newer hurdles for the pro-Janata Party Sailo Government in the Union Territory struggling to keep up with insurgency and counter-insurgency. The subtle message that the MNF and the Congress conveyed to the minds of the masses was that ‘the Brigadier’ was the chief stumbling block in the way to remna leh muanna (‘peace and prosperity’). Out and out politics in Mizoram became a battlefield where the personality of the two titans clashed and pitched themselves against the external support of two contesting National Parties: the Congress and the Janata Party. For instance, Laldenga’s public message to the people of Mizoram on 14th December, 1979 blaming Sailo for creating fissures and cracks within the MNF was countered by Sailo’s radio broadcasts on 4th January and 25th March 1980. Sailo in his message to the people of Mizoram gave details of the killings and violent dealings of the MNF. Through these broadcasts Sailo made it clear that the MNF were having double standards and that they were in actual working to achieve their objective within the framework of the Indian constitution contrary to the public projection made by the MNF Supremo Laldenga. Sailo also accused the MNF movement for all the backwardness of the Union Territory. He severely criticised the violent methods of the MNF and gave examples of States in the North-East that attained Statehood without violence. Sailo also made it clear that violence was delaying the goal of Statehood and blurring the vision of an Ideal Zo Christian State.

Laldenga also struck back and made his dissatisfaction with Sailo’s government more pronounced when he said that ‘the Sailo government must go. Sailo is a political tool in the hands of the Government of India in its political warfare against the Mizo people.’ Laldenga dubbed Sailo as a stooge and a puppet tarnishing the image of the ‘Pa chang sipai anga rithlap’ quintessential Zo/Mizo Hero.62 Laldenga also repeated his allegations that the Sailo Government was violent and criticised its Special Forces tactics of counter-insurgency. He

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also alleged that some of the violent killings in Mizoram had been committed by Sailo’s Special Forces, in the guise of the MNF rebels, in order to stall the peace efforts so that the Brigadier could continue with his chair. The year 1980 also saw a rise in the number of incidences of violence in Mizoram. The first three months of the New Year began on more violence, more blood and more gruesome tactics all geared to oust the ‘Vai’ and Sailo. Things got tough for Sailo when on 30th June, 1980 the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate of Delhi dropped the criminal proceedings against Pu Laldenga “for waging a war against the Government of India”. The partnership between the MNF and the Congress (both at the Centre and in the Union Territory) paid well for Laldenga. However, being a legally elected leader Sailo was able to have his share of the Centre’s attention. For instance, having experienced the double dealings and double standards of Laldenga during the earlier Peace Talk’s, Sailo requested the Home Ministry to record the message of Laldenga asking his men to surrender and agree on the ‘ceasefire’ and broadcast if over All India Radio (AIR) from stations at Shillong and Aizawl. The suggestion was accepted and Laldenga’s stand was made clear to the public that peace would be within the constitutional framework of India.

The Brigadier having deprived of the benevolence of the Janata Party at the Centre was left vulnerable to strong criticism from the Congress at the Centre and the Union Territory as well as the parallel-Government of the MNF (Mizoram Sawrkar). From late 1979 Laldenga sensed the possible return of Indira at the Centre and strategically began his pro-Congress stand and squarely blamed the Brigadier for the failure of peace talks and the terrible condition of the civilians in Mizoram. The allegations made by the MNF Supremo and the pressure tactics of the Congress from the Centre and within Mizoram made it almost impossible for Sailo to carry on with his office. The situation was almost a repetition of the pressure tactics and resignation of Ch. Chhunga government on 9th May 1977. Sailo was staunchly opposed to the suggestion made by the Centre (Congress) or the demands made by the MNF and the Mizoram Congress at the UT for the dismissal of the constitutionally elected PC Ministry. Sailo felt that the suggestion as well as the demand was an appeasement tactic to please the ‘Rebel Leader’.

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Sailo through his dignified positioning and personality was able to win a substantial support from within and without. An Editorial titled ‘Ban on MNF’ in the Maharashtra Herald dated 22\textsuperscript{nd} January, 1982 reflects the support that Sailo got from mainland Indian public:

The status of Union Territory of Mizoram in 1982 had by and large made the Mizos happy. But it was the militant minority, led by Laldenga that was creating trouble for the people of the Union Territory headed by Brig. Sailo. Laldenga wanted the Sailo government to be dismissed. But the demand does not stand to reason. The Sailo government is trying its best to contain the MNF. The centre must therefore do everything to strengthen the Sailo government and not show any indulgence to Laldenga and his outfit anymore. The logical follow up of the ban on the MNF will be to put Laldenga behind bars, as long as he wants it. It is one thing to accommodate a person but another to appease him.

With all these paraphernalia of challenges, the Ex-Army man continued to battle his existence and completed a full term in office on 4\textsuperscript{th} May 1984, bringing to an end Brigadier T. Sailo’s two terms as the Chief Minister of Mizoram.

Post statehood Sailo once again tried his best to revive his old ties with the national party: Janata Dal. Sailo this time as well was able to win a warm response from the Janata Dal.\textsuperscript{64} For instance, in mid-1990, Sailo was able to convert his newly formed party the Democratic Party\textsuperscript{65} into a full-fledged unit of the Janata Dal. The conversion to a national party was in fact an emulation of the strategy adopted by the Mizo Union in the early 1970s. What really came as a surprise for political pundits was the subtle yet strong message that the


\textsuperscript{65} The Democratic Party was formed with the merger of Sailo’s PC Party and MNU (Lalduhoma) a faction of the Laldenga led MNF. Though merged into an alliance both the Army officer (Sailo) and the Police officer (Lalduhoma) did not see eye to eye. For instance, even before the announcement was made public by the Janata Dal President (S.R. Bommai) for the official conversion both Sailo and Lalduhoma claimed their respective party to be the original Janata Dal unit in Mizoram.
conversion emitted among the masses in the region. Sailo all along had been throwing dark hints that his ‘ZORO’ movement had the blessings of the Centre though central leaders (Janata Dal) had been denying it. The conversion indeed stamped the Centre’s approval and gave a new dimension to the sensitive ZORO movement.66

Post conversion to Janata Dal Unit, Sailo made it loud that his ‘Greater Mizoram’ movement aimed at the unification of the Zo hnahthlak into a single territory by amalgamating Zo inhabited areas in Burma, Bangladesh, Tripura, Assam and Manipur.67 Sailo also made a distinct clarification on his ZORO movement and the erstwhile MNF led movement demanding the same by pointing that ‘the former (MNF) was said to be wedded to violence while the latter (Sailo led ZORO) claimed to use non-violent means to achieve the same goal.68 In stark contradiction to the ‘Non-Violence’ mantra chanted by Sailo in defence of his ZORO, Brigadier Sailo choose to head the ZORO’s militant wing, the Zomi reunification Volunteers (ZRV). Sailo’s post-Statehood jugglery with multitudes of issues evoked a wave of youth activism in politics in Mizoram and had its spill-over effect in neighbouring Zo dominant areas creating newer challenges to the not so stable (between 1989-1990) Congress led Lalthanhawla Government:

Mizo youths and students have threatened a militant agitation to press their demand for Mizo autonomy in the Jampui Hills of North Tripura...The Jampui based “Mizo Convention”, stated to be a non-political welfare unit, is agitating for the Mizo Regional Council... “we shall prefer the merger of Jampui Hills with Mizoram unless our demand for a Regional Council is fulfilled”, a Mizo Convention leader explained. The Convention leaders met the Mizoram Chief Minister, Mr. Lalthanhawla, to persuade him to exert his influence over Tripura coalition leaders. The “Greater Mizoram” protagonists from Aizawl are

67 Ibid.
68 However, the 13 organisations which became signatories to the ZORO formation included such groups as ‘Sea Wind’ which even at the ZORO Convention had announced a programme of violence at variance with the declared aims. Ibid.
quite active in Jampui where a Mizo Volunteer force is being raised “to spearhead the popular Mizo agitation”.

In fact, the strategy that Sailo adopted for pressure tactics on the Congress in power in Mizoram through his ZORO movement was so effective that other political leaders such as Laldenga by mid-1990 also began to re-chant the old mantra of ‘reunification’ of the Zo hnahthlak. Interestingly about a year back (January 18, 1989) Laldenga had publicly criticised the Brigadier for ‘whipping up people’s sentiments in the name of ZORO’. Laldenga had brushed aside Sailo’s antics’ as ‘ZORO was actually a zero’. In fact the MNF chief criticised the PC Party for inviting people from Burma and Bangladesh for the Champhai Convention of the ‘ZORO’ since it was against the foreign policy of every government. He said, ‘the Burmese Army is not going to run away shouting Zomi Tlangval Hei Hei (Long Live Mizo Nation)’.

Sailo by the late 80s and early 90s resurrected the ‘Greater Mizoram’ issue and constituted the Zomi Reunification Organisation (ZORO) to reach its goal of making a comeback in Zo/Mizo politics. Though these tactics appealed much to the young voters, Sailo could not prove a match to enigma that Laldenga or Pu Denga had become in the years following the Peace Accord.

Sailo now over 80 still nourishes the dream to ‘come back’ as the leader of the Zo/Mizo people like some ‘old’ ‘one time’ popular Bollywood film star trying to make it big for a second time and ‘off and on’ announcing his ‘sanyas’ (renunciation) from politics. He

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continues to strongly support the dream of creating an *Ideal Zo Christian State* and unification of the *Zo hnahthlak* under the umbrella of ‘Greater Mizoram’. His election speeches still continue to be thickly laced with such emotional overtones. Sailo earned his share in Zo/Mizo politics during the UT phase and his popularity has over the years thinned or fogged in public memory. However he continues to linger in the minds of middle-aged Zo/Mizo women (*Cf.* Chapter III, Figs. 3.2- 3.6).

### C. Mizo National Front

The MNF was formed by converting the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) into a political outfit in 1961. The history of the MNF is intertwined with the history of insurgency and the growth of its leadership. The formation of the MNFF and its graduation to a political outfit MNF in 1961 and later recognition as a legal Political Party within the Constitution of India in 1986 are deeply embedded in the history of State formation and Identity Building (for details *refer* to Chapter I, II, & III as well as subsequent portions of this Chapter). The above discussion on the Mizoram Congress as well as the PC Party helps to understand the calculated tactics employed by Laldenga to build a strong base for his political outfit the Mizo National Front (MNF).

Laldenga through his pressure tactics and invocation of the name of *Isua Khrista* (Christ) tried to attract the masses. Laldenga challenged every other leadership that came up to lead the Zo/Mizo in the direction of political maturity. He first clashed with Ch. Chhunga and then later with T. Sailo both of whom were legally elected leaders of the Zo/Mizo people. Laldenga having a brief stint in the Indian Army wanted to create a following on the lines of ‘one nation, one religion, one leader’. A quick glance at the process of entry and exit in the MNF as an organisation would help understand the overwhelming nature of Laldenga’s personality and his hegemonic tendencies. Many insiders felt that Laldenga never liked the idea of having an alternative power centre or alternative leadership.

Belonging to the South (a Pawi tribe) he felt that the northern attitude had to be corrected. Likewise, he felt uncomfortable in the presence of other sophisticated much educated leaders like Ch. Chhunga and Brigadier T. Sailo who were also originally from the
south and almost his contemporaries age-wise. He felt threatened by the contesting claimants
to leadership. Lalthanhawla being young and subordinate (Lalthanhawla had served in
Laldenga’s MNF for a brief stint) did not threaten Laldenga. More over Lalthanhawla unlike
Ch. Chhunga and T. Sailo never directly confronted the leadership of Laldenga.
Lalthanhawla was more interested with making a foothold in the Zo/Mizo soil for a party
(Congress) which for a very long time was seen as a ‘Vai’ Party. Lalthanhawla from the very
beginning kept himself as the agent of the Centre and acted accordingly. Where as the other
three regional parties namely the Mizo Union (Ch. Chhunga), P.C Party (T. Sailo) and the
MNF (Laldenga) contested the role of the Centre and changed their stand or attitude towards
the Centre depending upon the kind of response that they managed to get from the Centre
(national parties: Congress and the Janata Party/Janata Dal).

The use of terror and violence became more pronounced during the clash of
personality and leadership between T. Sailo and Laldenga during the second term of Sailo’s
office. The gruesome murders of ‘Vai’ persons and liquidation of several important
personalities of the MNF who had returned back to public life and the non-compromising
stand of the MNF Supremo distanced the Church and its agencies from the MNF. The
strategy and calculated moves made by Sailo in terms of using the card of Development,
Christian way of life and the cause of a Greater Mizoram and good life for the
Zo hnahthlak
attracted the inclination of the Church. Zairema’s advice to Laldenga clarifies the wrong
understanding that the Church or Christianity was responsible for triggering insurgency or
separatism in Mizoram and North East in general. Rev. Zairema in a letter to Laldenga
asking the latter to put an end to the strife wrote:

We admire the courage of your conviction. However, we would like to
remind you that India has herself never been one nation. The Telegus are
as different from the Punjabis as the Bengalis from the Mizos. Yet, we
together are determined to build one mighty nation. In this process, each
of us has a right as well as a responsibility.73

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Laldenga having realised his growing distance from the Church in Mizoram and the negative image that had been projected through the MNF activities, changed his strategy once more. This time to appease the Church and keep them in good humour, the 'Mizoram Sawrkar' appointed Town Commanders at Aizawl to launch a drive against Zu and use of narcotics. Laldenga exploited Christianity to serve his vested interest. For instance, he called for all the Zo hnahthlak to keep distance from the 'Vai' who were 'idol worshippers' ('Milimbia') and determined to pollute the Zo Christians as the main stumbling block towards the creation of an Ideal Zo Christian State and unification of the Zo hnahthlak: 'Greater Mizoram'. 'Such was the venomous content of the hate speeches made by Laldenga that any one who would listen would be charged and the first reaction would be to thrash the first 'Vai' that one met on the streets', says Zaliana.

Through the violent activities of the MNF, Mizoram earned its image 'of a disturbed Christian area demanding secession under the leadership of Laldenga' in the 'National News'. Laldenga once more changed his tune towards the Centre during the change in leadership from Morarji Desai to Chaudhury Charan Singh at the Centre. However, hopes were belied when the new Union Home Minister Y.B. Chavan was fixed on implementing the July 1976 Peace Accord. The renewed interest in the peace talk's offer was primarily because Laldenga hoped that the treason and criminal charges against him would be dropped. Laldenga after a series of meetings soon realised that there was no change in the stand of the Janata Government at the Centre. Laldenga then turned his attention to the Congress led by Indira Gandhi who had promised him that is she came back to power in January 1980

74 The Town Commander of the MNF at Aizawl was the literal ruler of Aizawl and the most powerful symbol of the parallel government of the MNF styled as the 'Mizoram Sawrkar'. Even though he was a 'Wanted person' no one in authority (legally recognised) seemed to have the courage to arrest him. He would be seen visiting the UT Ministers and having dinner with them and often would ask those in office to release vehicles for him, give licences and contracts to persons of his choice. He was also held as the 'Robin hood' by many Zo/Mizo who were often victimised by the Security Forces in their action against the MNF. Petty local shopkeepers in special benefited from the frequent notices put up by the Town Commander which most often would prohibit the purchase of items available in Mizo shops from that of non-Mizo shops or work only under Mizo contractors and not under non-Mizo contractors; diktats on inter-marriages between Mizos and non-Mizos, inter-dining, participation in non-Mizo festivities and wearing Indian dress/clothings (sarees, dhotis, caps, salwars etc.).

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...she would honour her Government’s commitments and let him leave the country if he wanted to. Laldenga felt that apart from her all the other leaders had proved ‘untrustworthy’ as the Janata Government had gone back on its commitments.76 Interestingly Laldenga has branded the same Indira Gandhi during her leadership at the Centre in the pre-emergency period as “Hitler’s wife” and often referred to her as “the Widow”. The latter name reflects the patriarchal mind set of Laldenga which undermines a widow or a ‘Hmeithai’ as something not worth respect.

Laldenga sent a message to the people of Mizoram on 14th December, 1979 conveying his Christmas and New Year Greetings as if to say that the year of peace is getting closer with the ‘New Year’ (1980).77 In his message Laldenga blamed Sailo for all the problems of the Zo/Mizo people including his personal detention during the ‘Emergency’. Laldenga alleged that Sailo had advised him to surrender arms during a meeting with the Home Minister in 1977. Laldenga accused Sailo of attempting to create a rift in the MNF leadership and it was because of his handiwork that senior officers of the MNF like Biakchhunga had surrendered to the Government. Laldenga also alleged that the nomination of Biakchhunga as an MLA to the Mizoram Assembly by the Sailo Government was a reward for his assistance to the PC Party. He also pointed that his imprisonment on 8th July 1979 was the work of the conspiracy of the PC Party and the Janata Party (the Centre).


77 The year 1980 had been visioned as the predestined year when the Zo hnahtlak would be freed from subordination and would be unified into one single unit. Miss Parchi or Poparchi (35 years old) a Mizo/Kuki woman who claimed to have visions of God known as a flamboyant anti-Laldenga rebel. She preached a bizarre Gospel, predicting the birth of a mythical Mizo hero in 1980. Miss Parchi’s ‘Ramthuhlung Group’ had a Seventh Day Adventist background and preached that the Mizos would get their independence in 1980. The Ramthuhlung cult preached that as Mizoram would achieve independence in 1980 there was no need to continue with peace talks and the continuation of the armed struggle. She managed to influence important members of the MNF headquarters in Aizawl and preached an anti-Laldenga gospel to the MNF members thus creating fissures in the MNF and rising dissatisfaction with Laldenga’s leadership. She also managed to enter the inner circles of the MNF when she became a part of the MNF Organising Committee on Politics Affairs (COPAS) a scheme which aimed to bring all ethnic tribes of the same origin under one Government. A scheme Laldenga had kept close to his heart in the earlier days of his leadership (Verghese & Thanzawna. (1997). *Op.cit.* p. 198).
Throughout the insurgency, the flow of MNF returnees and surrender of arms along side the new entry into the MNF fold went on simultaneously. In other words, the entry into the MNF and exit from the MNF went side by side. An interesting phenomenon of corruption which emerged during the period was that of unemployed, educated and semi-educated Mizo youths including school-drop-outs making a bee-line to join the MNF for a short time. In anticipation of getting rehabilitation benefits and employment as MNF returnees', young unemployed people joined the MNF and whenever a surrender ceremony took place, some of the new entrants would line up as MNF veterans, who had under-gone severe hardships in the jungles of Chittagong Hill Tracts. 'Majority of the new recruits had joined the MNF for the thrill of it and for financial benefits and not for patriotic or political reasons'.

The short term entry into the MNF was not just exploited by the youths to extract the benefits of amnesty but also by Ex-servicemen. Ironically, the Government of India was providing better facilities to the MNF returnees than to the Ex-servicemen who laid down a quality time of their life for the service of the 'Nation in the Making- India'. Naturally this created dissatisfaction among the Ex-servicemen and induced them to join the MNF for short term and return to public life in Mizoram. Many such MNF surrenderees got rehabilitated in the Police Department and other Government offices and continued to render services to the MNF as and when required mainly due to the fear of being liquidated by the MNF.

Many of the over-ground MNF workers taking advantage of the liberalised amnesty and the changed political climate during the UT phase infiltrated and entrenched into the Government offices and exploited the constitutional/legal offices to expand the control of the MNF and defend their unconstitutional activities. For instance, many of the MNF returnees joined the different political parties and tried to make a pro-MNF wing from within those organisations. This was one of the prime reasons that led to the division of almost every political party into anti-MNF and pro-MNF wings during that period and eventually led to the questioning of the authority of the leadership of those political parties. For instance, the leadership of Brigadier T. Sailo was challenged by Thangridema the Speaker of the House.

during Sailo’s first stint as the Chief Minister of the UT of Mizoram and as a result the PC Party was split into PC Party ‘A’ (T. Sailo) and PC Party ‘B’ (Thangridema).  

The coming of Lalthanhawla to power on 5th May 1984 and the politics of tlawmgaihna that followed brought the MNF and the Government of India to the negotiation tables. The Central government made it role as the final authority loud and clear in the Peace Process. For instance, Lalthanhawla who was initially reluctant to be a part of the interim government was persuaded by the then Home Minister of India Buta Singh to join as the Deputy Chief Minister. Another instance which clearly outlined the Centre’s overwhelming presence was the 1988 incident where the Speaker of the House suspended the defecting group under the provisions of ‘anti-defection law’ (Rule 9 of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly Rules) and the Governor Hiteshwar Saikia (a Congress Veteran from Assam) challenged the Speaker and also rejected Laldenga’s plea of testing his strength on the floor of the House. Instead the pro-Congress Governor dissolved the House and declared President’s Rule.

Underneath the clash of leadership among the three local stakeholders and the power-play at the Centre (between the prominent national parties) was an important concern who would be attributed as to having succeeded in ushering ‘Statehood’, a dream long cherished by the public in the Zo hills: a panacea which would solve or resolve all tensions and conflicts in the region and bring ‘remna leh muanna’ (peace and prosperity). What really makes a multifold recapitulation of the historical as well as political developments during the period 1970s-80s useful is the fact that ‘it helps one to understand the different strategies adopted by the Centre and the local stakeholders cutting across party affiliations, for making democracy function and make meaning of the constitutional provisions’ by interpreting them to fit their vested logic.

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4.3. Federal Experiences in Mizoram: Cosmetic Federalism (Post-Peace Accord)

The autonomy movement in Mizoram can be traced back to the pre-independence period and has two distinct dimensions. One is the movement for abolition of chieftainship, with the objective of acquiring democratic self-government, which was internal in nature; and the other is to attain complete independence and achieve a ‘Greater Mizoram’, that was external in character. From administration as an ‘Excluded Area’ to the attainment of Statehood was a long road for the Zo/Mizo people in their struggle for assertion of national identity. The Zo/Mizo have successfully achieved the first dimension. However, the goal of the establishment of sovereign independent state of ‘Greater Mizoram’ has been partially realised by securing Statehood of a special category along with a certain degree of autonomy. The positive aspects of community formation, the linkages of communities in wider political institutions as parts of the north-eastern administration and representative systems, and the contribution of these processes to the national system remain largely unexplored. The key issues in this context are power sharing and safe guards regarding land, natural resources and cultural practices; through awareness generation at the grass roots level, where innovative techniques and information exchange patterns are practiced.

These identities are anchored on primordial consciousness and have strong underpinnings of ‘self-description’ of the communities and convey the images of ‘Fuzzy Identities’ (Sudipta Kaviraj). At the same time these emergent identities are reflective of the process of ‘Enumerated Identities’ through which new/newer identities are born out of the process of Census Collection in India. In other words how groups define and re-define themselves, and re-assess their numerical positions through the prism of economic advantage. The question of identity is guided by the underlying challenge of the redefinition of the ‘collective self and the collective state of the mind’, the ‘imagined community’.

‘Mizoram represents a shining example of people who have steered their course wisely through insurgency and are firmly on the path of modernity and development’. Yogendra Singh. (2000). Culture Change in India, Identity & Globalisation. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, p.86.

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world at large. A nuanced reading of the terms of the Accord or the Memorandum of Settlement suggests several ambiguities and unfulfilled promises. The Memorandum mentions that ‘with a view to satisfying the desires and aspirations of all sections of the people of Mizoram, the Government will initiate measures to confer Statehood on the Union Territory of Mizoram.’ The amendment aforesaid shall provide, among other things, for the following:

1. The territory of Mizoram shall consist of the territory specified in Section 6 of the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971.

2. Notwithstanding anything contained in the Constitution, no act of Parliament in respect of (a) Religion or Social practices of the Mizo, (b) Mizo customary Law or procedure, (c) Administration of Civil and Criminal Justice involving decisions according to Mizo customary Law, (d) Ownership and transfer of land, shall apply to the State of Mizoram unless the Legislative Assembly of Mizoram by a resolution so decides.

3. Provided that nothing in this Clause shall apply to any Central Act in force in Mizoram immediately before the appointed day.

4. Article 170 Clause (1) shall, in relation to Legislative Assembly of Mizoram, have effect as if for the word sixty the word forty has been substituted.

5. Soon after the Bill of Conferment of Statehood becomes law, and when the President is satisfied that normalcy has returned and that conditions are conducive to the holding of free and fair elections, elections to the Legislative Assembly will be initiated.

   (a) The centre will transfer resources to the new Government keeping in view the change in status from a Union Territory to a State and will include resources to cover the revenue gap for the year.

   (b) Central assistance for the Plan will be fixed taking note of any residuary gap in resources so as to sustain the approved plan outlay and the pattern of assistance will be as in the case of a Special Category State.

6. Border trade in local produced or grown agriculture commodities could be allowed under a scheme to be formulated by the Central Government, subject to international arrangement with neighbouring Countries. The Inner-line Regulation, as now in force
in Mizoram, will not be amended or repealed without consulting the State Government.

The other matters that the Peace Accord took into consideration were to preserve and protect the rights and privileges of the minorities in Mizoram as envisaged in the constitution, and look into their social and economic advancement. The Government of Mizoram was envisaged the responsibility to review and codify the existing customs, practices, law or other usages relating to the matters specified in Clauses (a) to (b) of Para 4.3 (II) of the memorandum, keeping in view that an individual Mizo may prefer to be governed by Acts of Parliament dealing with such matters and which are of general application. It was also pointed out on behalf of the Government that as soon as Mizoram becomes a State. The Provisions of Part XVII of the Provision of the Constitution will apply and the State will be at liberty to adopt any one or more language to be used for all or any of the official purposes of the State. The establishment of the separate University in the State in accordance with the prescribed procedure was also signalled.

In the light of the Prime Minister’s statement at the Joint Conference of the Chief Justices, Chief Minister and Law Ministers held at New Delhi on 31st August, 1985 it was agreed:

Mizoram will be entitled to have a High Court of its own if it so wishes. It was noted that there is already a scheme in force for payment of ex gratia amount to heirs/dependants of persons who were killed during disturbances in 1966 and thereafter in the Union Territory of Mizoram. Arrangement will be made to expeditiously disburse payment to those eligible persons who have already applied but who had not been made such payment so far.

The Government of India accordingly made arrangement for the payment of compensation in respect of damage to crop: building destroyed/damaged during the action in Mizoram, and rented charges of building and land occupied by security force.
The Memorandum of settlement on Mizoram or the Accord signed by Laldenga, Lalthanhawla and Pradhan in Delhi showed the gesture of ‘Tlawmgaihna: the Zo code of moral conduct’ that is Lalthanhawla resigning from office to make way for Laldenga. With the surrender of arms, the MNA cadres were to be rehabilitated in civil pursuits. The MNF undertook not to support the Tripura Tribal National Volunteers or the PLA in Manipur or any other armed group. Border trade with Bangladesh and Myanmar was to be addressed; the ILP would not be amended or repealed in its application to Mizoram without the consent of the State government; the rights and the privileges of all minorities in Mizoram as enshrined in the Constitution be preserved and protected and their social and economic advancement ensured; the plea for a separate University and High Court would be endorsed etc. The amendment to the Constitution of India in 1986 introduced a number of safeguards relating to Mizoram. For instance, Article 371G provided that no Act of Parliament in respect of the religious or social practices of the Mizos, customary laws and procedures or “ownership of land” shall automatically apply unless the State Assembly by a resolution so decides. It is noteworthy that only ownership of land is protected, not “land and its resources” as the MNF earlier sought on the lines of what has been conceded in Nagaland.

The MNF has its own reservation about the terms of the Peace Accord and accused the Centre of non payment of housing and rehabilitation grant promised to each of the 700 or more MNF returnees. They also focus on the failure to establish a High Court as promised and argue that the attempts at re-establishing trade with Burma and Bangladesh has been partial. The MNF has been projecting a Congress conspiracy behind the non fulfilment of the terms of the Peace Accord that is the congress does not want the MNF to get credit for fulfilling the Zo/Mizo aspirations. The Congress in response claims otherwise and brushes

83 The Congress and the MNF have been stiffly contending to credit themselves for the laurels of Peace and development in Mizoram. For instance, Rajiv Gandhi directly countered the MNF supremo’s accusations during his 1989 election campaign in Mizoram. Rajiv Gandhi accused the previous administration (MNF) in Mizoram of ‘failure to distribute Central funds allocated for the underground returnees and other purposes properly’. Addressing a public rally in Lunglei Rajiv Gandhi said, ‘it was under Governor’s rule that the rehabilitation was done properly’. For details Cf., The Assam Tribune. (1989), ‘PM Accuses Former Mizoram Government’. Aizawl: 05 January. Guwahati: 06 January.

What catches one’s ears in Rajiv Gandhi’s speech is that there seems to be a clear message that for good government and implementation of policies/Programmes, the Mizo’s have two alternatives: one, the Congress led by Lalthanhawla and second, President’s Rule/Governor’s Rule (Article 356).
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aside these allegations as false propaganda tactics for hoodwinking the masses in Mizoram. They maintain that housing assistance of Rs.30,000 per claimant had been released as promised and that the MNF had touted Rs.40,000 as the "agreed" figure merely to gain some propaganda mileage. In fact, even the Rs.30,000 was not to be given entirely in cash but partly in kind. However, as a populist measure, Laldenga had distributed Rs.20,000 in cash but held back the remaining Rs.10,000 that had been released during President's rule.

Lalthanhawla set up an Accord implementation committee in 1991 with all-party representation including the MNF. They were shown all the documents and could not establish any further claim, barring a letter from Laldenga to Buta Singh, then Home Minister, asking for further Rs.10,000 to which there was no reply. The Chief Minister offered to send a delegation to Delhi to represent any grievances on this score. But there was no response. Jobs were made available as part of the rehabilitation package.

With regard to the distribution of allowance for damaged properties and rentals during the disturbance period, the authorities admitted some difficulties in verification of claims which are not easily established. The promise of a Mizoram University has been granted and the High Court is yet to be established. As of now, a bench of the Guwahati high court is in Aizawl and the number of cases coming up before it does not warrant for the establishment of a full-fledged High Court in Mizoram. As for the trade aspect of the Accord several initiatives in that direction have been taken and the infrastructural aspect has been created in Champhai. For instance, highways have been improvised in the Indo-Myanmar border. Likewise, in the Bangladesh side, transit facilities have been initiated through Chittagong. Shipment through Chittagong would reduce the cost of civil supplies and bring down the price of everyday good in the state and its capital Aizawl, which is as of now the most expensive city in India. The Accord at the same time passes the core responsibility of maintaining and containing 'peace' to the State. The Accord seems to convey the message that the Centre's responsibility is over as it has elevated the Union Territory of Mizoram to the status of a State, which was the demand of a major section of the Zo/Mizo. Few prominent trends that can be seen while scrutinising the post-Peace Accord politics in Mizoram are: First, the Centre seems to have relieved itself of its role in the post-Peace times as the object of granting statehood has been achieved. Second, the Centre seems to have
undergone a sudden amnesia regarding the issues of payment of compensation in respect of damage to crops, buildings destroyed/damaged during the insurgency and rental charges of buildings and land occupied by the Security Forces during the insurgency. Third, the Centre’s role is limited to that of ‘dole-development’ minus accountability. Fourth, the Centre seems to have distanced itself from mushrooming internal post-Statehood hiccups that Zo/Mizo politics is facing for instance, the issue of border with Assam, ‘Greater Mizoram’, Zo- reunification, ethnic conflicts and the like.

The Centre’s attitude to post- Statehood Mizoram seems to be well summed up by Rajiv Gandhi’s assurances to the masses in Mizoram in 1989:

> The centre had unscrupulously implemented it (Peace Accord) in every way. However, one of the provisions of the Accord relating to the border trade was being looked into.  

After 20 years of violence and agitation it is now time for the development of the State, of taking the people ahead...the centre would ensure completion of the railway link between Lalbazaar (Assam) and Bairabi (Mizoram) by March 1990...the Bairabi Hydro electric project of 135 MW will also be completed so that it will help in rapid improvement in agriculture and industries...the Centre has accepted the setting up of a Veterinary College...numerous suggestions made to him during his 1986 Tour of Mizoram had been followed by the Centre and Sri Lalthanhawla.  

When, critically re-reading the Memorandum Settlement, one comes across several unsolved puzzles which today have been fanning discontentment and have been hijacked by disgruntled sections. Out of the plethora of issues which still ignite discontentment I highlight five most prominent and vital issues which can shake the stability of peace:

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One for instance is the unsolved boundary issue between Assam and Mizoram. A major irritant in Mizo politics is the issue of border with Cachar/Assam-Mizoram border.\textsuperscript{86} The division of Assam and the creation of several new hill states have left a residue of boundary problems with forest areas in the foothills being claimed by both Assam and the newly-created hill states. The contention of the hill people is that the creation of reserved forests, consideration of forest management and the earlier desire to have a buffer between the settled plains and tea gardens and the more turbulent hills, led the British to draw a series of political, administrative and forest management lines which ultimately robbed them of part of their traditional homelands. Maps of 1935 and 1975 show the layered contestations in terms of moving boundaries.

Another is the terms related to the rights and protection of the ethnic minorities in Mizoram. This issue of minority rights coupled with that of development and lack of socio-economic security filtered by those majoritarian tribes in and around Aizawl (the capital city as well as the district) is a major bone of contention and forms the base of major-minor debate in Zo/Mizo politics. In fact, the HPC movement and also the Bru movement sprung up from this debate of the hegemony of the majority and the Aizawl centric model of development and re-distribution which by-passed the concerns of those who mattered less important.

A prominent issue in Zo/Mizo politics yet to be fulfilled is that of a ‘Greater Mizoram’. The Centre had diplomatically told the MNF that the proposition for unification of the Mizo dominated areas into one single unit had to be dealt with the provisions of the Indian Constitution. ‘Greater Mizoram’ cannot be realized unless Manipur and Assam agree as well as Myanmar and Bangladesh agrees to part with their territories respectively. The proposition though highly charged, thus, remains best functional at the level of imagination and nostalgia in Zo/Mizo politics and will continue to do so. For instance, Rajiv Gandhi while addressing the Press in 1989 Assembly Election Campaign in Aizawl had cleared his stand on Zo-Reunification Organisation’s Programme:

We will not tolerate any fresh attempts to create violence, be it in the name of the ZORO movement or any other cause...it was neither in the interest of Mizoram nor in the nation’s interest to allow any such attempts to succeed.\textsuperscript{87}

The ZORO is keen on agitating and there are also rumours that some people have crossed over into this state with the intent to create violence...But this is not in the interest of the people of Mizoram. It is detrimental to the state’s development. Anybody who seeks to agitate is not keen on development of the state...After 20 years of violence and agitation it is now time for development of the state, of taking the people ahead. It is important especially during election time that you, the people, should make it very clear that you will not allow anything which affects your development.\textsuperscript{88}

A public irritant to the Mizo sentiment has been the delay in shifting the headquarters of the Assam Rifles Battalion from the very heart of the city of Aizawl to a less prominent location outside the city. Though the Battalion forms an integral part of Mizoram’s history, political considerations certainly warrant relocation at a less intrusive site even at some cost (\textit{refer to Chapter V}).

The last and a very sensitive issue, that of ‘the rehabilitation of former underground personnel’s' or the ex-MNF insurgents and its non-fulfilment has led to the birth of PAMRA (Peace Accord MNF Returnees Association).\textsuperscript{89}

The different stakeholders equally played a curtail role to make the provisions of the Peace Accord realisable. For instance, the MNF amended its party constitution by deleting objectionable provisions. The Centre likewise lifted the ban on the MNF and introduced the


Mizoram Statehood (Constitutional Amendment) Bill in 1986, which later became an Act. Thus the Union Territory of Mizoram became the twenty-third State of the Indian Union. As an interim arrangement, a coalition Government was formed in Mizoram with the MNF leader Laldenga as Chief Minister and Congress leader Lalthanhawla as the Deputy Chief Minister. The coalition Government was sworn in on August 21st 1986. But this Government was short-lived, owing to fundamental differences between the two coalition partners. The Congress being a national party and the MNF a regional party, their policies and programmes obviously differed widely. Differences also cropped up over the issue of inclusion in the ministry of members from both the parties, and the allocation of portfolios. While the MNF wanted to keep key portfolios like Home and Finance, Pu Lalthanhawla vehemently objected to this. The public utterances of both the leaders revealed their conflicting positions. However, in spite of all these bickering, peace returned to Mizoram.

The Mizo Peace Accord to an extent has both fuelled the autonomy aspirations within and without at one level and at another has helped suppressed such aspirations. In the discourse on 'peace dividend', Mizoram has earned several distinctions to its credit. It is a State where the once dreaded insurgents, through the democratic process, are now lawmakers. A State where peace triumphed over violence, Mizoram has become a role model for conflict resolution not only for the other disturbed States in India's North-East, but for other parts of the world as well. Further, in Mizoram 'mediation and negotiation' emerged primarily from within the society in conflict. The MNF leadership did not emphasise neutrality for arriving at a political settlement. Rather, they looked towards trust and confidence in the negotiators. The authority to mediate was vested in the third party through a personal relationship with the disputants and through respectability, rather than through secondary characteristics of an external intervener. Weber's 'traditional authority' played a crucial role in this complex process of mediation and negotiation towards peace-building.

It is not difficult to discover the causes of the decades of turmoil that engulfed Mizoram. Exploitation by chiefs, poverty, economic imbalance and the lack of civic amenities fuelled insurgency in Mizoram. Poor communication, the lack of contact between the Government and people, a regional economic imbalance, Government apathy to the
problems of the common people, and a long history of neglect wounded the sentiments of the Zo/Mizo. Internal corruption, nepotism, favouritism and non-participation in the processes of development alienated the people from the ruling elite. Further, differences in culture, language, religion, habits, etc., accentuated these grievances among the Zo/Mizo.

It is true that the Centre had at the early stages ignored the regions genuine/specific problems and thus faltered to bring the Zo/Mizo into the nation-building mould. Nevertheless, it is also equally true that the local stakeholders took advantage of the situation that prevailed in the early years of India’s independence and immediate problems of nation-building. The local players, in order to further their agenda of corruption, nepotism and mismanagement blamed the suffering of the local people on the inept attitude of the Assam Government and the casual attitude of the Centre. Individually and collectively, these factors led to over three decades of tug of war between Mizoram and the Centre.

Samir Kumar Das’ article titled ‘Nobody’s Communiqué: Ethnic Accords in North-eastern India’ in Ranabir Samaddar & Helmut Rifled (2001). ‘Peace As Process: Reconciliation and Conflict Resolution in South Asia’, observes that ‘As the failures of ethnic accords become increasingly apparent, peace audit exercises are gaining currency in India and elsewhere. Usually such exercise involves the politics of accusations, politics of betrayals, and non-commitments, of false promises etc. which over time converts the accords into mere paper work and assign them the status of ‘those accords’ as aptly argued by Ranabir Samaddar’.

4.3.1. Autonomous Councils Politics: Growth of ‘Ethnic Enclaves’ in Mizoram (Post-Peace Accord)

The functioning of the ADCs in the Mizo Hills reveals that the District Council had access to a wide range of legislative, executive, financial, and judicial powers and to an extent became ‘Ethnic Enclaves’ in their own right. These included the powers to make laws for the allotment, occupation, and use of land; management of forests under its control; use of water resources; and the regulation of practices, including those related to agriculture, public health, social customs, money lending, and non-tribal traders. The executive powers
included the establishment and management of primary schools, and the right to determine the language of primary school. Among the financial powers, the ones regarding the assessment and collection of land revenue and tax on trades and professions were the most important. All the District Councils in Mizoram, including those of the pre-state-formation phases, however, showed an initial unpreparedness to exercise many of these powers. The leaders were more interested in consolidating their political positions in the community than in attending to the developmental needs of their own people. Their emotional expressions of the community’s urgent needs made in public or especially for outside audiences often stood in sharp contrast to gross financial irregularities. The expansion of numbers of unnecessary personnel mainly fed their own political support system.90

The creation of the Autonomous district Councils to preserve the socio-cultural codes of these people symbolised not only recognition of the existence of difference between the people (tribes) of the region and elsewhere (mainland India; tribes from the plains); but simultaneously meant the official recognition granted to the traditional political institutions and patriarchy(ies) of the region. It also symbolised the creation of double sources of authority and dual administrative bodies and double sense of citizenship that is multiple identities. The North-East region of India has always remained at the periphery of both the political as well as economic decision-making of the federal set-up. The traditional institutions in the North-East do not conform to the modern political institutions and the underlying tensions resulted in the restricted federal experience in the North-East. These tensions and gaps in the political institutions generated feelings of incompleteness and frustrations among the people especially the youths and displaced their feelings through anti-state movements and other such methods of articulations. The generation of these movements both for autonomy and otherwise has resulted in the rejection of the centrality of the Indian Union and the ‘Crisis in India’s federalism’.91


91 The crisis generated by these movements at one level has exposed the fissures in the federal arrangements and democratic polity in India. In practice, the federal democratic experiment in India eulogized through the Nehruvian slogan ‘Unity in Diversity’, emanating in the pluralistic attitudes has unitary bias.
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The federal experience in the North-East specially in Mizoram has resulted in the emergence of Ethnic Enclaves through the instrumental weapon of Sixth schedule and ILP system. The different tribes in the region have thus lived under a double-citizenship regime making their integration towards multicultural, pluralistic conditions a distant illusion. The experiences generated from the Mara, Lai and Chakma Autonomous Districts at least substantiate the arguments in that direction. The ‘Minorities at Risk Project, Assessment for Mizos in India’, 31st December 2000 mentions:

The Mizos in India have three of the factors that increase the chances of future rebellion: territorial concentration; a high level of group support for organisations representing their interests; and a history of lost autonomy. Factors that could inhibit future rebellion include India’s history as a stable democracy; persistent federal government efforts to negotiate settlements with groups seeking autonomy; and the lack of transnational support for the Mizos despite ongoing armed conflicts in neighboring countries like Burma. It appears that Mizo desires for self-determination were largely satisfied with the creation of a separate state of Mizoram in 1986. Mizoram remains one of the few states in India’s northeast that has remained relatively free of violence in the past fifteen years. The major issue confronting its residents is the relationship between the Mizos and the Reangs and whether Reang desires for greater autonomy can be incorporated within Mizoram without the occurrence of further violence.

(Source: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/469f3a91lf.html accessed on 13th October 2008)

There was no agreement on the issue of emergent ADC status by the minority ethnic communities such as Bru (Reang) in Mizoram. Few of my respondents felt that granting Autonomous district to sub-tribes was not feasible ‘It will spoil the peace and development in Mizoram. Can the Reang (Bru) and the Hmar justify their claims? The present Mizoram is a total Sailo area that is not at all a territory of these small groups. These smaller groups have lost their land to the other tribes in and around Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland, Assam (Haflong) and other areas in Myanmar and Bangladesh. The present territory of Mizoram especially the northern part was a total ‘lusei-sailo’ area, excluding Sakawrdai area which was the village
of a Hmar chief. So how do they (the Reang (Bru) and the Hmar) justify their demand for an ADC without bases in history?” 92 Few of my respondents even linked the ‘Zo Reunification demand’ with that of the frustrations of not being able to achieve an ADC status thus: ‘the leaders of the movements know that they lack historical proof to support their demands of an ADC status. It is but natural that they are demanding the cause of Zo unification’.

The Accords meant for evening-out the rough edges of the demands for ADCs or ‘Ethnic Enclaves’ are seen primarily as instruments through which contending parties seek to make their respective interests visible. Accords instead of putting an end to the battle become the nuclei through the whole battle of arguments and counter-arguments resurface in any given society. In short the accords become embedded with contestations and become subject to different/multiple interpretation depending upon time and space.

4.3.1. A. Sinlung Development Council (SDC) (Hmar Story)

The Hmar inhabit the northern and north-eastern part of Mizoram. They are spread across to the areas of South Cachar (Assam) and Churachandpur (Manipur) and have been demanding the unification of all Hmar territory in a single unit. To achieve this objective they have been strong supporters of the ‘Greater Mizoram’ or unification of all the Zo hnahthlak into a single unified territory that is Zo reunification. The Hmar in Mizoram can be broadly categorised into are groups of Hmar those who are completely Mizoised; and those, who are only partially assimilated by Mizo culture. The Hmar of the first category are satisfied to consider themselves Mizo. They have totally forgotten the Hmar language as well as their cultural ethos and values. On the other hand, the partially assimilated Hmar, while resisting the generic Mizo identity prefer to identify themselves with the phonetic identity ‘Zo’ or ‘Zomi’ (Zo hnahthlak), and at the same time they are fully aware of their distinct cultural identity, traditions, customs and language. This is more so among those Hmar living

outside Mizoram in Manipur and Cachar areas. It is among this group of partially assimilated Hmar that the search for a separate identity has gained momentum.

In July, 1954, a Hmar political body called the Hmar National Congress (HNC) was formed at Lakhipur village in Cachar district of lower Assam with Rochunga Pudaite as its chairman. The HNC was later renamed as the Hmar National Union (HNU) in December, the same year. Another Hmar political body, the Hmar Association was formed in 3 July 1986. That year itself, it was renamed the Hmar People’s Convention (HPC). The HPC demanded an autonomous district for the Hmar in Mizoram. When statehood was conferred to Mizoram on 20th February 1987 the Hmar were confident of securing a status of an Autonomous Hmarland much on the lines of the benefits granted to the Mara, Lai and Chakma in 1972 when Mizoram was elevated to the status of a UT. Hopes were belied and the HPC raised a banner of armed revolt in April 1989. To put an end to the HPC armed movement fourteen rounds of peace talks were held under the initiative and guidance of Lalthanhawla between July 1990 and July 1994. The Mizoram Government finally signed an Accord with the HPC in 1994. The salient features of the Memorandum of Settlement are:

1. The Sinlung Hills Development Council will be constituted.
2. The President, HPC, will be the Chairman of the Council during the interim period of 2 years.
3. Promotion and preservation of Hmar culture.
4. Use of Hmar language as a medium of instruction up to primary level and recognition of Hmar language as one of the major languages of the State of Mizoram.
5. Up gradation of the existing Primary Health Centre at Sakawrdai into a 30 bedded Community Health Centre.
6. Opening of a new Civil Sub-division at Sakawrdai including sub-divisional officers of different departments at convenient locations within the Council area.

93 For instance, the Hmar language is offered as a vernacular paper even at higher secondary school level in these areas and now the Hmar language is being processed for inclusion even at the degree courses.

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7. Payment of ex-gratia to next-of-kin of HPC killed during insurgency and rehabilitation of HPC underground.

The Accord (1994) signed with the Hmar People’s Convention led to the formation of the Sinlung Development Council (SDC) and proposed to give greater autonomy for socio-economic-cultural and educational advancement of the people in the Hmar areas of Mizoram (Article 3). All the four clauses of Article 4 of the Hmar Accord deal with the provisions for restoration of the order. While the first clause intends to disarm the armed cadres of the Hmar People’s Convention, the second one assigns to it the responsibility of taking immediate steps ‘to amend as may be necessary, its articles of Association Constitution so as to conform them to the provisions of law’. Clause 3 vests the Government of Mizoram with the responsibility of rehabilitating the rebels who have come over ground before 18 December 1992. Clause 4 obtains the promise from HPC that it will not extend any support to such organisations as the ULFA and NSCN (I-M). The settlement is, however, still unstable as the Hmar seek a larger grouping with their fellow tribesmen in Assam (Cachar) and Manipur.

With a view to satisfy the desires and aspirations of the Hmar community in Mizoram, the state government agreed to initiate measures to introduce Hmar language as a medium of instruction up to the primary level. They also agreed to recognise Hmar language as one of the major languages of the state of Mizoram. The Hmar story whispers the ‘Winds of Change in Mizoram’ in the post-Peace Accord times.95

The State Government has been of late awakened to the need for auditing in these ethnic enclaves that have mushroomed in the state. The Sinlung Development Council (SDC) has gone for superficial development such as building select sports grounds, schools etc. the leaders especially the Chief Executive Member’s (CEMs) have been found guilty of misappropriation of funds and nepotism. Development has failed to reach the target people.96


96 Nurul Haque Mazumdar (Under Secretary, Social Welfare Department, Government of Mizoram). Personal Interview. 20th March 2010.
To add to this, the over-lapping of revenue district and such other matters in the state has led to duplication of projects and functions. The Mizoram Government agreed on paper that duplications and misappropriations has occurred all these years and now it was time to put an end to these practices:

The State Government as well as the Autonomous district Councils of Lai, Mara and Chakma have been implementing more than one schemes or projects either in form of Centrally sponsored schemes or State schemes relating to the same Department or subject, and there is every likelihood of having duplicacies of utilisation of funds sanctioned for the same project or projects in the Autonomous Districts;

Now, therefore, in public interest and to prevent such types of duplicacies of functions as well as utilisation of funds to ensure that the benefits of administration and development schemes undertaken in the Autonomous Districts reach the people there, the Governor of Mizoram, in exercise of his powers available under paragraph 14 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution and in supercession of this Department's Notification of even No. dt. 1/3/2007 is pleased to constitute a one man committee consisting of PU Tawnluaia, IAS (Rtd.) to study the above mentioned aspect and examine and recommend how the duplicacies of such functions of the State Government and the district level and those of the Autonomous District Councils in the same district be minimised and administrative expenditure economised to the most.97

Conclusion:

The case of the Autonomous District Councils in Mizoram reflects the complex web of ‘Governance-Autonomy, Federalism, Ethnicity and Development; and that of ‘Identity. The constant flux in the mood of the identity formation can be seen through the case of the Mara, the Lai and the Chakma. This aspect of ‘acquired’ identity has its contemporary

manifestation in the highly clichéd and contested generic as well as phonetic identity. The discussions also brings out the complex within tribe relations which are moulded by strictures of patriarchal control and are exerted very intensely over issues of identity formation, centre-state relations and issues of governance; and such relations continue to be moulded in the strict notions of Zo/Mizo understanding of identity and development.

Local autonomy has not solved the problem of ethnic conflict. The case of the Mara, the Lai and the Chakma throws up a number of issues on autonomy, ethnicity and governance. More often than not, autonomy is considered a panacea for ethnic conflicts. Autonomy unites people (as with the Mara, the Lai, the Chakma or the Chhim lam (southern) tribes) as well as divides (the Mara-Lai-Chakma division) or marginalises (Zo/Mizo versus Mara and Lai; Mara-Lai versus Chakma; Mizo/Zo versus Chakma etc.) sub-communities. The Mizoram experience re-confirms that ‘Autonomy’ becomes a part of the problem and not the solution. The minorities such as the Chakma or the Bru (Reang) or any other ‘marginal/peripheral’ group feel discriminated against and seek further autonomy in the form of Autonomous District or Union Territory or Statehood depending on the time and space factor.

Likewise another interesting feature of the Autonomy Movements in Mizoram is that they are viewed in terms of ‘Ethnic enclaves’ for cocooning a certain group. There is an inevitable conflict between autonomy and over dependence on the ‘dole-development’ from the Centre. My study also indicates and offers enough clues in the direction that successful processing of ethnic demands can encourage new demands from those who were not able to speak out before. This emulation effect can be seen as a signal of social mobility and benefits amassed by the middle-class out of the ethnic movements. This encourages the other ethnic groups to channel their claims around newly created ethnic labels. The initiation of the power sharing model in the post-statehood period for mellowing down the MNF; the exploitation of

\footnote{Poor exploitation of natural resources and inadequate economic infrastructure, combined with the lack of trained manpower, forces the state to become the largest employment agency. The obverse side of a high literacy rate is educated unemployed, which the government cannot now absorb. All these culminate in a spiral of dissatisfaction.}
Article 356 to maintain the supremacy of the Centre in the State; the provisions under Article 371G (Constitutional amendment, 1986) in respect of the religious or social practices of the Mizos, customary laws and procedures and such other provisions, all indicated a smooth exchange of power relations between the centre and the state. This process can be seen as the filtering of democracy to the roots to tap new sources of strength from the deeper strata of society thereby contributing to the 'successes of India’s Democracy'.