Introduction

Election is an attribute as well as a safeguard of democracy. It is an attribute because it is inseparable from such other attributes of democracy as majority rule, equality and popular sovereignty. As a safeguard of democracy, it enables the citizens to determine who will come to power and carry on the government.¹ In fact, elections are the backbone of the democracy. They represent the people’s participation in the state affairs.² According to Dieter Nohlen, ‘without elections, without open competition between social forces and political groups for political power, there is no democracy’.³ In an electoral system, elections help people to crystallize their interest and to give expression to them. It is a procedure by which members of a political community or organizations choose representatives to hold an office.⁴ It is said that elections reveal the working of the political process in its entirety. They highlight the role of the numerous interest groups. Undoubtedly, elections were identified with democracy and voting pattern with the strength and viability of western form of democracy.⁵ Election forms the substance of democracy and is an important mechanism reflecting popular will.⁶ It is through popular elections that the authority of a government is clothed with legitimacy. Elections also make a peaceful and orderly transfer of authority to new leaders possible. A good electoral system is, therefore, the bed-rock of genuine representative government.⁷

During the elections, the masses have a right to franchise which is exercised according to the choice of the individual. Sometimes, it is

⁴Ibid.
⁷R.P. Bhalla, op.cit.,p.xi
found that the influence of caste or tribe or religion occupies an important part in the exercise of franchise by the electorate. It gives an opportunity to organize a sound public opinion and to express the grievances, demands and needs of the masses.

Election makes the party in power feel that unless they evolve and implement the policies as demanded by public opinion, the chance of being re-elected is doomed. Political leaders of the opposition, who keep a constant watch on the work of the government, make the people aware of its short-comings. They also evolve alternative policies and programme of work to attract the citizens in their favour. Thus, elections in a democracy keep the ruling and the opposition leaders in constant engagement to establish a favourable public image.

In a democracy, the people govern themselves through their elected representatives. In a parliamentary democracy, the executive is formed from the legislature and remains part of it and is also responsible to it. The members of Parliament are elected through an electoral process, which is the foundation of a parliamentary democracy. Many election studies have been undertaken in the West which seek to evaluate the working of democratic systems. The coming of behaviouralism into the social sciences from the fifties had brought the transformation of the discipline of politics too. This transformation needed to incorporate into election studies several aspects which include the nature of society, the stage of its economic growth, the working of organized groups, the role of the money power, the reaction of the various classes, the role of corruption, etc. Such a study in turn can be undertaken in the background of an analysis of the nature of the State. It can view the election results as the outcome of social-historical factors as much as the

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reflection of the issues that need to be tackled. Such a study can also seek answers to questions as the purposes that the elections achieve, the class and the group whom it serves, its limitations in the context of the merits of the parliamentary democracy and the aftermath of elections.9

Following the behavioural studies in the West, the behaviour of the citizens, especially the political behaviour of the Indian masses had come to the focus of many scholars. The more recent studies give importance to the various factors which may influence the individual’s behaviour.

**Statement of the Problem**

The present research work has taken up an empirical study of the 2003 Assembly Elections in the rural areas of Mizoram. The rural areas have been taken up for the study as most of the research works on elections have been conducted in urban areas thereby ignoring the importance of the rural areas in the politics of the state.

Out of the 40 assembly constituencies, 14 constituencies are in the rural areas in Mizoram. Out of the total number of the state population, more than fifty per cent of them (50.40 per cent) are in the rural areas of Mizoram and the remaining 46.6 per cent are living in the urban areas.10 The rural areas in Mizoram have some distinct features, such as, distance from the seat of power at the state capital, Aizawl, poor communication system and poor infrastructure, remoteness from the market place or towns, backwardness due to poor communication network and scarcity of essential commodities, shortage of power and high cost of transportation, industrial backwardness, agro-economic backwardness due to poor soil and rugged topography and also due to practice of shifting cultivation, that is, low productivity and poor per capita income, existence of various ethnic groups with distinct language and culture and political aspirations.

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9 Susheela Kaushik, *op.cit.*, p.15
10 *Census of India, 2001, Primary Census Abstract, Directorate of Census Operation, Mizoram.*
The problem that will be of interest in the present research work is how and why the rural voters voted in the assembly elections, 2003. An answer to that question will require an examination of the political behaviour and political participation of the rural voters in 2003 assembly elections. The voters’ perception and interest in the election, their attitude towards different political parties, candidates and issues and the extent to which different parties have been able to mobilize and influence the voters.

**Objectives**

The present study has the following objectives:

1. To study the socio-economic factors influencing the 2003 Assembly Elections in rural Mizoram.
2. To study various issues as reflected in the manifestoes, programmes and election campaign.
3. To analyse the voters’ perception during the 2003 Assembly Election campaign.
4. To analyse the level of voters’ mobilization and participation in the elections.

**Methodology**

This research work is based on primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of information were collected from government documents, publications and reports, pamphlets, public documents, manifestoes and party documents and interviews. In depth interviews of the respondents were carried out. Interviews were based on a structured questionnaire, which sought to analyse the socio-economic background of the voters, their general political perception, activities of political parties and the extent of mobilization and participation.
Four constituencies out of fourteen rural constituencies were taken for survey as this number was viewed as a proportionate sample of the total number.

Four constituencies, namely, Tuipang, Buarpui, Suangpuilawn and Sateek, 16 polling stations (4 from each constituency) and 400 respondents (25 respondents from each polling station) were selected through random sampling method for administering in-depth interviews. Respondents were randomly selected from the electoral rolls of 2003 assembly election in the concerned constituencies with the help of a constant number arrived at by computing it with addition of a random number to the probable dividend of the universe proportionate to the sample to neutralize any possibility of bias.

Effort was also made to obtain and check information from all relevant sources. This necessitated interaction with voters through informal discussion. The survey was carried out during October to December, 2005.

Secondary sources of information on the other hand were collected from books, unpublished thesis, journals, articles, magazines, newspapers and internet sources.

The data collected from both primary and secondary sources were quantified and analysed in qualitative terms to draw conclusions.

Substitution of the respondents was allowed on certain conditions. If the investigator was unable to meet the person to be interviewed after more than two attempts, substitution of the respondent was permitted on certain conditions. The substitute had to be from the same family and the same gender as the respondent being replaced. This was to ensure that the person who replaced the original respondent would be in terms of her or his sociological profile, as close to the original respondent. In some cases,
interview could not be completed due to unwillingness to co-operate in the interview. However, such cases were very few in the entire sample.

**Chapterization:**

Chapter I: Introduction
Chapter II: Rural Mizoram and Socio-Economic Factors
Chapter III: Political Parties and Issues
Chapter IV: Perception and Political Mobilization
Chapter V: Voters’ Participation in the 2003 Elections
Chapter VI: Conclusion

**Chapter I: Introduction**

This chapter begins with a conceptual clarification of the term ‘Election’. Some definitions of elections given by different scholars have been mentioned. Some election studies undertaken by some scholars, Indian and Western, have also been highlighted. The chapter further describes the objectives of the present study, statement of the problem and methodology of this research work. It further proceeds to highlight background of elections in Mizoram as well as background of the 2003 Assembly Elections in Mizoram in particular.

Political activities in Lushai Hills District started only in the wake of India’s independence as its status as ‘excluded area’ under the Government of India Act, 1935 precluded such activities. The first political party in the then Lushai Hills was Mizo Union which though regional in character was more committed to liberal democracy as evident from the adoption of a progressive measure through abolition of the traditional institution of chiefship.

The Mizo Union was able to capture 21 of 30 seats in the Mizoram Assembly in the first general election held in April 1972\(^{11}\) mainly on the

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plank of separate statehood, a demand which received more support in the rural constituencies greatly affected by disturbance and Army action arising out of MNF declaration of Independence from India. This was followed by election in 1978 which saw the emergence of People’s Conference (PC), a regional party which spread its network cutting across urban-rural divide with the formation of Human Rights Committee and electoral appeal thereafter.

Internal dissensions led to the downfall of the PC ministry leading to mid-term assembly election in less than a year which however brought about installation of the Party once again in power.

The Congress party came into prominence by extending its support-base in the rural areas and was able to get absolute majority in the Assembly in 1984 elections. Two years later the Mizoram Accord necessitated the induction of the MNF leader Laldenga as Chief Minister only as part of a political settlement. The MNF was able to secure 24 seats in a house of 40 in the first general election after statehood held in 1987. The MNF was yet to have its base extended to all rural areas and it only got 46 per cent of the votes polled.

Soon defections led to political instability and holding of another mid-term poll in 1989 which saw the highest ever turnout of voters, urban and rural alike, and making the total percentage to cross 81 per cent. The electoral success of the pre-poll alliance of Congress and rebel MNF was significant as it started the beginning of coalition politics in Mizoram. The same trend continued in the election of 1993 but it got reversed in 1998 with the emergence of MNF-MPC combine in power primarily on the strength of extension of the rural base of the MNF. It is also important to note that during the two and a half decade of electoral politics in Mizoram, a number of highly localised parties had also participated in areas inhabited by minority tribes.
The 2003 Assembly Election was the fifth assembly election in state of Mizoram. Three national parties – Indian National Congress (INC), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Communist Party of India (CPI); three regional parties (recognized) – the ruling MNF, MPC and Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP); four unrecognized parties – Ephraim Union (EU), Hmar People’s Convention (HPC), Janata Dal ‘United’ (JD ‘U’), and Maraland Democratic Front (MDF); and 12 Independents were in the election fray. There were 192 candidates including 12 Independents and 7 woman candidates. The percentage of votes polled was 78.59. In the previous general elections 1998, MNF made an alliance with the MPC party and formed the government. This time MPC made a pre-poll alliance with ZNP, a newly formed unrecognized regional party. The political parties in Mizoram thus entered into the election fray with wide and complex spectra of choice or alternatives to the voters in 2003.

Congress and MNF fought the 2003 assembly elections on their own without forming any alliance respectively. MNF returned with a victory winning 21 seats while congress could win only 12 seats. The combined MPC-ZNP secured only 5 seats (MPC 3 seats and ZNP 2 seats). Another 2 seats went to Independents. One candidate was supported by HPC and another candidate by MDF. When the MNF secured 31.69 per cent of total votes polled, Congress secured 30.06 per cent of votes polled. Thus, the MNF ministry under the chief-ministership of Zoramthanga was formed. The main issues during the 2003 elections were socio-economic issues in general and concern for development of the rural sector in particular. There was no difference between the national and regional parties in terms of the ideologies and programmes of the parties and the issues involved are the same whether they are in the ruling or in the opposition.

Chapter II: Rural Mizoram and Socio-Economic Factors
It is true that the socio-economic factors play important role at the time of elections. Therefore, the understanding of the area is necessary before any conclusion is drawn in the election study. This chapter attempts to study the socio-economic background of the rural voters which will reflect the socio-economic scenario of rural Mizoram.

Rural Mizoram is predominantly a tribal area. In the rural areas, scheduled tribes population constitutes 51 per cent of the total scheduled tribes population in the state. Scheduled tribes population in the urban areas forms 49 per cent of the total scheduled tribes population in the State.\textsuperscript{12} Literacy rate in the rural areas is 81.2 per cent as per the 2001 census, while the literacy rate at the state level is 88.8 per cent. In the urban areas, the literacy rate is 96.1 per cent. Male literacy is higher than the female literacy in the rural areas and urban areas in 2001.\textsuperscript{13}

There were various ethnic groups or tribes in the rural areas of Mizoram occupying definite portion of territory. The tribes such as Lakher (Mara), Pawi (Lai), Chakma, Hmar, Paihte, etc. were, by circumstances, compelled to occupy peripheral location. As far as rural Mizoram is concerned, its economic foundation is weak. In the rural areas, the occupation of the majority people is cultivation, mostly shifting cultivation. The total cultivators in the rural areas form 80.9 per cent of the total rural workers, while the total cultivators in the urban areas constitute 23.3 per cent of the total urban workers and only 10.5 per cent of the total workers in the state. The work participation rate (57.20 per cent) in the rural areas is higher than that of the total workers in the urban areas (47.87 per cent). Both males and females worked almost equally.\textsuperscript{14}

For the upliftment of the socio-economic condition of the rural areas,

\textsuperscript{12} Census of India, 2001, Primary Census Abstract, Directorate of Census Operation, Mizoram.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
various rural developmental programmes have been implemented by the government of Mizoram.

For the study, four rural constituencies (Tuipang, Buarpui, Suangpuilawn and Sateek) were selected on the basis of random sampling method. The study was undertaken mainly on the basis of surveys of individual voters with a view to reveal the socio-economic factors influencing voting behaviour in the electorate. Interviews were conducted on the basis of questionnaire. Besides the use of questionnaire, participant observation method has been based upon the study.

It has been assumed that the background characteristics of an individual play a role in shaping his attitudes, perceptions and decisions.\(^\text{15}\) A study of the socio-economic background of the voters is one of the important aspects which is useful for understanding the electoral processes of parties and the voting behaviour of individual voters, such as who votes for whom, for which party and how. ‘Socio-economic variables are crucial in all studies of voting behaviour.\(^\text{16}\)

Although a number of variables may be included for describing the socio-economic background of a group of individuals, only some have been selected for the purpose of delimiting the scope of enquiry and highlighting some of the characteristics which have been considered relevant for a study of this kind. The socio-economic variables selected here are: (1) Age; (2) Sex; (3) Ethnic group or tribe, (4) Education; (5) Occupation and (6) Income. These are used as key variables which are usually treated as determinants of political attitudes and behaviour or voting choice in particular and overall electoral politics in general.\(^\text{17}\)

A broad division of age-groups into three categories, viz. young, middle and old reveals that the respondents were not equally represented in the three categories. After tabulating and analyzing the data, it may be said that the people belonging to the middle age-groups (25-49 years) are the highest in number (54 per cent) followed by old (50 years and above) forming second group (25.5 per cent). The third groups – young (below 25 years) formed the lowest percentage of respondents (19.75 per cent). The age of three respondents could not be ascertained. With regard to the sex composition, the analysis of the data reveals that male voters are larger in number than the female voters in the sample constituencies. 41.75 per cent of the respondents were females while 58.25 per cent of them are male voters. This shows that male voters outnumbered female voters.

There are various ethnic groups or tribes in the rural areas of Mizoram as well as in the state as a whole. Tribe-based electoral behaviour has been witnessed from 1989 general elections. The Chakma Jati Parishad, Hmar People’s Convention (HPC) and Maraland Democratic Front (MDF) have entered the assembly elections projecting their demands in various forms. From the analysis of the data, it has been found that in the rural areas 50 per cent of the respondents belonged to Lusei tribe. Luseis formed the highest percentage of the total respondents. Lakher (Mara) formed the second group with 22.5 per cent of total respondents. Below them in numerical strength stood the Hmar tribe (13 per cent), the Paihte tribe (7.5 per cent) and the Pawi (Lai) tribe (3 per cent). Only 3.25 per cent of the voters were in the category of ‘Others’. The ethnic group/tribe of only three respondents could not be ascertained.

Literacy and level of education are basic indicators of the level of development achieved by a society. Literacy forms an important input in overall development of individuals enabling them to comprehend their
social, political and cultural environment better and respond to it appropriately. Higher levels of education and literacy lead to a greater awareness and also contributes in improvement of economic and social condition. From the analysis of the data it has been found that literacy rate was high among the sample voters as 94.5 per cent of them were literate. This is higher than the overall Mizoram State literacy rate, that is, 88.8 per cent. Regarding the educational status/level, the respondents were divided into six groups. It has been found that the largest group of the respondents (37.5 per cent) had finished middle education. The second largest group of respondents (25.2 per cent) had finished primary education. The third largest group (19.5 per cent) of respondents can read and write but had not completed primary education. The fourth group (9.5 per cent) had matriculate education. The fifth group of respondents (2.8 per cent) had finished graduation and a very few of them achieved beyond graduation. The sixth group (5.5 per cent) did not have any sort of education.

Occupation represents the economic activities of the people. From the analysis of data, it can be noted that 86.25 per cent of respondents are workers in the rural areas. Cultivators form 70.72 per cent of the total workers and 61 per cent of the total respondents. Thus, the main occupation of respondents is cultivation. The second largest group of respondents (13 per cent) is of those who are non-workers. They are students, very elderly people or house-wives. The third group (10.25 per cent) consists of labourers and artisans. The fourth group (6.25 per cent) is of those who have declared themselves as in government service. The next group (4.75 per cent) formed the category of ‘Others’. The sixth group (4 per cent) consists of those who are engaged in business. Three respondents (0.75 per cent) did not reveal their occupation.
The respondents have been divided into six groups on the basis of their monthly income. The lowest income group of respondents who earn Rs.1000/- or less per month forms the largest number of respondents which is 32.25 per cent of the total respondents. The second largest group of respondents, i.e., 12.75 per cent, is found to have an income of Rs.1001-2000/- per month. The third group of respondents, i.e., 10.25 per cent earn Rs.2001-3000/-. The fourth group of respondents, i.e., 9.75 per cent has an income of Rs.3001-4000/- per month. The fifth group of respondents again forms 9.75 per cent of the total respondents and this group has an income of Rs.4000-5000/- per month. The last group is in the highest income group. This group forms 13.5 per cent of the total respondents and has an income of Rs.5001/- and above per month. Of the total sample, 8.75 per cent of the respondents did not reveal their monthly income.

Chapter III: Political Parties and Issues

In the 2003 Assembly Election in Mizoram there were 10 political parties and 12 Independent candidates contesting the elections. Among these political parties, the main parties were Congress, the ruling party MNF, Mizoram People’s Conference (MPC) and Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP). There were 185 male contestants and 7 female contestants. Female voters outnumbered male voters as 2,65,737 were female voters and 2,62,459 were male voters. There were 798 polling stations. Total number of electors were 5,32,462 and total number of votes polled was 4,18,482. The percentage of votes polled was 78.59. The election result showed that MNF secured 21 seats, Congress 12 seats and the combined MPC and ZNP secured 5 seats (MPC-3 seats and ZNP-2 seats) and 2 seats went to Independents - 1 Independent supported by Maraland Democratic Front (MDF) (unrecognized) party and another 1 Independent supported by Hmar People’s Convention (HPC) (unrecognized) party.
The study of the manifestoes of the major political parties revealed that the manifestoes of all the parties hardly differed in substance from one another and the issues involved were state or local issues. As a whole, the manifestoes of the parties contained basically similar approaches and programmes on political, economic, administrative, agricultural, industrial, educational, social and other issues. The common concern of the parties were, for example, the integration of the Mizos living in the contiguous areas under one administrative unit, safeguarding a separate ethnic and cultural identity of Mizos, improvement of transport and communication, preservation of peaceful atmosphere in the state, creation of employment opportunities, promotion of youth’s welfare, promotion of sports and games, abundant supply of drinking water, development of power and electricity, establishment of industries with maximum use of indigenous resources, desirability of stable and transparent government, cultivation of cash groups and suitable marketing facilities, development of urban and rural poor people, etc. The problem of economic backwardness and the growing unemployment question in the state were important issues in the elections. All the parties suggested some remedial measures to cope with them. Industrialization as an important solution was recognized by all the parties. All the manifestoes pinpointed the vital need for agricultural reform and agricultural development. ZNP manifestoes called for supply of good quality of seeds to the cultivators. Congress promised, if voted to power, to implement a better and revised policy of NLUP (New Land Use Policy) which it had launched during its rule in the previous years. The MNF party also pledged to continue MIP (Mizoram Intodelhna Programme or Self-Sufficiency Programme) launched during its rule in the previous years, 1998-2003. The main purpose of NLUP or MIP was upliftment of the rural poor especially the shifting cultivators. The
manifestoes of MNF and Congress focused on the upliftment of urban-rural poor, preservation of peaceful atmosphere in the state and to keep up law and order in the state.

The foreigner issue was not of much concern. The main issues that were raised by the MZP (Mizo Students Association) included illegal migration and settlement of Chakma and Bru, implementation of Right to Information Act, construction of a good sport stadium for the youth, and the enforcement of Total Prohibition Act in Mizoram.\(^\text{18}\) The Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA) in its pamphlet wanted the people and political parties not to support any candidate merely on the basis of a particular tribal group/ethnic group. But ethnic/tribe based political parties/loyalties had already become operative in the 2003 elections.

The major issue on the eve of elections was ethnic issue and the problem became a core electoral issue. For the first time in the electoral history of Mizoram, Mizoram has experienced intimidation/threatening of voters in a Hmar dominated area of Suangpuilawn Constituency.\(^\text{19}\) The major political parties - MNF, Congress, MPC, ZNP and the largest voluntary social organization YMA (Young Mizo Association)\(^\text{20}\) and MHIP (Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhwam Pawl - All Mizoram Women’s Federation)\(^\text{21}\) requested for re-poll in Suangpuilawn constituency. The Mizo Students Association and Mizoram Senior Citizens Association also expressed their demand for re-poll in a press release.\(^\text{22}\) Inspite of the request made by different parties and organizations, re-poll was not allowed by Election Commission and Electronic Voting Machines were sent to Chief Election Commission office and vote counting was done on


\(^{20}\) Central YMA Letter dt. 23.11.2003 submitted to Chief Election Commissioner, Govt. of India, New Delhi.

\(^{21}\) MHIP Letter dt. 22.11.2003 submitted to Secretary, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

8 December 2003 in Delhi which resulted in the success of an Independent candidate supported by a tribe-based political party - Hmar People’s Convention (HPC). The percentage of votes polled in this constituency was only 38.56 where the overall percentage of votes polled in the state was more than 78. This shows that many voters did not cast their votes.

The churches and various voluntary social organizations such as MZP and YMA played important role during elections to have good atmosphere avoiding violence and other unfair means at the time of elections. They made appeals to the voters in the form of pamphlets as well as to the political parties to follow a model code of conduct that they projected for maintenance of peace, clean and healthy electioneering. Though having a minimum impact, their pamphlets certainly helped to check the higher inflation of electoral offences.

The average number of electors per constituency was 10,133. The total number of votes polled for the four seats was 31,003. The overall percentage of votes polled for the 4 constituencies was 76.48 and the percentage of votes polled at the state level was 78.59 per cent. There were 100 polling stations in the 4 rural constituencies and the average number of electors per polling station in the 4 constituencies was 405.33. There were 2 national parties (recognized), 4 regional parties (unrecognized), and 2 Independents in the election fray in the 4 constituencies. There were 21 candidates including 2 Independents contesting the 2003 assembly elections for the 4 seats in the four selected rural constituencies. There were multiple contests in the three constituencies, triangular contest in one constituency, that is, Tuipang. Six political parties and 2 Independents were involved in the elections, but the actual contest was between the four parties, viz. Congress, MNF, MDF (Maraland Democratic Front) and HPC (Hmar People’s
These four parties secured one seat each. But MDF and HPC were not recognized parties. They supported the Independent candidates.

This chapter also examined the performance of political parties in the four selected rural constituencies with the past performance of the parties. The main political parties which contested the 2003 assembly elections in the rural sample (Tuipang, Buarpui, Suangpuilawn and Sateek constituencies) were Congress, MNF and Mizoram People’s Conference (MPC). In the 4 rural constituencies, Congress occupied a dominant position in the first two assembly elections (1987 and 1989). But it was found from the analysis of the data that from 1993 elections, Congress lost its dominant position in the rural areas which was due to the appearance of Independent candidates in the election scene and the development of electoral alliance in the elections.

The 2003 assembly elections in the rural constituencies (four selected constituencies) saw the status quo of Congress with 1 seat, and MNF with 1 seat respectively. Two seats went to Independent candidates - one from Tuipang constituency who was supported by a tribe-based political party MDF (Maraland Democratic Front) and another candidate from Suangpuilawn constituency who was supported by another tribe-based political party HPC (Hmar People’s Convention). The election results in the rural areas showed that any single party, either Congress or MNF, could not make much headway in the rural areas of the four selected constituencies. One reason may be due to appearance of ethnic-based political parties in the rural areas with greater influence in election politics.

This chapter also tried to study the socio-political background and experiences of the candidates contesting as Independents and put up by the political parties in the 2003 elections in the four rural constituencies.
Out of the total 21 candidates, 15 candidates were chosen from different parties for the purpose of interview on the basis of questionnaire survey. Information about 1 candidate could not be obtained due to his non-availability. Another six who had lost their security deposits were not contacted.

From the analysis of the data, it was found that the majority of candidates (10 candidates) belonged to 41-60 years age-group. This indicates that there remained a preponderance of the middle age group. Regarding the educational attainment, 2 candidates had passed middle school, 3 had education upto High School standards, 4 had intermediate education, 2 had college education and 3 had University education. From occupational point of view, business men were found high in number. There were 7 business men and 2 contractors. The other 5 candidates could not mention their occupation. Regarding their past experience in the election as a candidate, 8 contested the assembly election for the first time. One contestant had contested the election once before, 2 candidates contested twice and 3 candidates contested more than twice prior to the 2003 assembly elections. It can be mentioned also that out of the 21 candidates, 4 were elected and these 4 elected members were in the age group of 41-60. The 4 elected members belonged to different tribes – 1 was Pawi (Lai), 1 was Lusei, 1 was Mara and 1 was Hmar tribe.

Chapter IV: Perception and Political Mobilization

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse the people’s perception of the 2003 Assembly Election in the rural areas - the extent of people’s interest in the elections, the attitude of the people towards different political parties or candidates and policies, the extent to which the different political parties have been able to mobilize and influence the people. It was thought that the study of some aspects of electoral behaviour of the sample voters/respondents in the rural areas of four
constituencies would highlight/describe the electoral behaviour of the rural people. For this purpose, a questionnaire was administered on 400 selected voters from the four rural constituencies. The sample voters included 233 males and 167 females from the 16 polling stations of the 4 constituencies. The result thus obtained was tabulated, analysed quantitatively and interpreted.

In order to know the people’s knowledge about the candidates in their constituencies, the voters/respondents were asked about the names and the parties of the candidates to which they belonged. The data received in response to this question was coded in the form of very high, high, medium and low categories. While coding, if a respondent knew more than three candidates or all the candidates, this answer was put in the very high category. Similarly, those who were familiar with 3, 2 and 1 candidates, their answer were coded as high, medium and low respectively.

The analysis of the data revealed that those who had knowledge of more than three or all the candidates with their names and parties (very high category) in their constituency were 15.25 per cent of the total respondents. Respondents who were in the High category formed 30.25 per cent of the total respondents. Those who were in the Medium category constituted 11.25 per cent of total respondents. Respondents who were in the Low category were 8.25 per cent of the total sample. Male voters had better knowledge of the candidates than female voters. As a whole, a greater proportion of male voters/respondents, 66.09 per cent against women’s 63.47 per cent, had knowledge about the candidates in their constituency. Among the total respondents, 32.5 per cent did not know any candidate and 2.5 per cent did not reply the question. The analysis showed that a larger proportion of respondents in the rural areas
(65 per cent of total respondents) had some knowledge about the candidates in their constituency.

The four hundred voters in the four rural constituencies were asked whether they knew about the election meetings organized by candidates and their supporters during the election days. The replies were recorded in the form of ‘Yes’ and ‘No’. The analysis of the data revealed that more than half of the total respondents (54.5 per cent of the total sample) did not know about the election meeting organized in their constituency. Male voters had better knowledge about the election meetings. When 52.36 per cent of male respondents had knowledge about the election meeting organized by the political parties or candidates, 35.92 per cent of female respondents had such knowledge. As a whole, it was found that a larger number of respondents were not exposed to election meetings or did not have any knowledge about such election meetings in their constituency. That is, the majority of respondents/voters did not have political awareness about election meetings.

The political awareness/consciousness of the respondents/voters was examined on the basis of their knowledge of the ideologies and programmes of the political parties contesting the assembly elections 2003 in their constituency. It was found from the analysis of the data that a larger proportion of the respondents (54.25 per cent) did not have the knowledge of the ideologies and programmes of the political parties contesting the elections. Male respondents had better knowledge about the ideologies and programmes of the parties than female respondents. While 56.22 per cent of male respondents had such knowledge, only 31.13 per cent of female respondents had knowledge of ideologies and programmes of any political party. The 400 voters/respondents in the four rural constituencies were also asked about their interest in the ideology and programmes of a particular political party. Nine per cent of the
respondents did show their preference for Congress and 15 per cent of them had interest and preference for MNF. 3.25 per cent of the respondents preferred Mizoram People’s Conference (MPC), and 4.75 per cent of them were in favour of Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP). 7.75 per cent of respondents were attracted by Maraland Democratic Front (MDF). Only one female respondent was attracted by Hmar People’s Convention (HPC). As a whole, a majority of respondents (60 per cent) did not show their preference for any particular political party. Though it was found that MNF attracted the largest number of rural voters/respondents, the assembly election results showed that MNF party did not get majority support from the four rural constituencies.

This chapter also has made an attempt to analyse the efforts and activities of the candidates to reach the voters while campaigning. To what extent is the relationship between the voters and candidates built up during elections? Personal contact by the candidates with the voters facilitates the candidates in having a close relationship with the voters during the election campaign which may not only add to voters’ commitment and cognition, but also strengthens voters’ participation in the election syndrome. From the analysis of the data, it was found that a majority of respondents (62.5 per cent) were contacted personally by the contesting candidates themselves during the election days and the remaining 37.5 per cent of respondents were not approached personally by the candidates. 8.5 per cent of the total respondents were approached by only 1 candidate, 12.5 per cent were contacted personally by 2 candidates, 21.5 per cent were contacted by 3 candidates, and 20 per cent of the total respondents were contacted by more than 3 contesting candidates. This revealed that when the majority of respondents were contacted personally by the candidates, a considerable number of respondents were not approached personally by any candidate. Male
respondents (63.1 per cent) had more contact than female respondents (61.68 per cent).

The media of communication plays a significant role in making people politically conscious. It is felt that there exists an intimate relationship between the media of communication and the strains and stresses of political process. The individual’s exposure to mass media of communication accelerates his contacts with the external world and enables him to acquire political education which is essential for participation in democratic processes. The easy availability of the means of communication to the villagers has helped in the process of politicization.

The mass media of communication, such as newspaper, radio and television imparting knowledge about elections became one of the bases for the measurement of the political consciousness/awareness of the voters. Therefore, for the present study, questionnaire was designed to elicit information regarding the respondents’ exposure to mass media of communication, such as newspaper, radio and television. The 400 respondents of the four constituencies were asked to reply whether they read newspaper, listened to the radio and watched television concerning the elections. Further, they were also asked how often did they read newspaper, listen to radio and watch television. The data received were tabulated, analysed and interpreted.

Chapter V: Voters’ Participation in the 2003 Assembly Elections

To measure the extent of participation of the rural voters, the present study has been limited to certain activities of the electorate during the 2003 assembly elections in Mizoram. The study enquired not only about the people’s participation in the assembly elections held in 2003, but also took note of their performance or voting in the previous assembly elections. Information was collected about the activities especially
relating to the electoral processes and the level of non-electoral participation as well. The activities that link the citizens/people particularly with the electoral processes are party affiliation of the voters/membership of a political party, voting in the last two elections, i.e. 1998 and 2003 elections, consideration for voting, taking interest in election politics, campaigning for candidates, working as election/polling agents and participation in election meetings.

For this purpose, a questionnaire was administered on 400 sample voters from the 16 (sixteen) polling stations of the four selected rural constituencies. The results obtained were tabulated, analysed and interpreted. The level of people’s participation in the 2003 assembly elections in the rural areas was judged/examined from the angle of their party affiliation or membership of political parties. The analysis of the data showed that about fifty per cent of the respondents (50.75 per cent) had formed membership of any political party. Of these, 57.08 per cent of males and 41.91 per cent of females had party affiliations. It was found that 12.75 per cent of the total respondents were members of Congress party, 25 per cent were MNF and 4 per cent were MPC. 2.5 per cent of the total respondents had attachments with ZNP and 5.75 per cent with MDF. Only 0.75 per cent of the total respondents were members of HPC.

Male respondents were more in number than female respondents in terms of party membership. In this chapter, the extent of people’s participation in the elections was also examined on the basis of voting in the last two assembly elections, i.e. the previous assembly elections in 1998 and the last assembly elections in 2003. For this purpose, two questions – (1) Did you vote in the 1998 assembly elections? and (2) Did you vote in the 2003 assembly elections? – were put to the 400 respondents from the 4 selected constituencies. Regarding the assembly elections in 1998, it was found from the analysis of the data that as many
as 79.5 per cent of the respondents voted in the 1998 assembly elections. On the basis of voting in the elections, the participation rate for males was higher as 80.68 per cent of males voted in 1998 election while such percentage for females was 77.84. With regard to the assembly elections in 2003, it was observed that as many as 87.25 per cent of the total respondents voted in the 2003 assembly elections. Participation rate for males was 87.98 per cent against 86.22 per cent for females. A comparative study of the figures of the respondents who voted in 1998 and 2003 elections revealed that there was an increase in the degree of participation from 1998 to 2003 and there was a high degree of participation in the assembly elections. Though the percentage of female voters in 1998 as well as in 2003 elections was lower than the percentage of male voters, there was little difference.

The study also has made an attempt to understand the voters’ participation in the elections on the basis of the factors conditioning the voting preference of the voters. The respondents were asked about the factors which influenced their choice while casting votes in favour of a particular candidate. The analysis of the data showed that the largest number among the respondents (38 per cent) who gave reasons of their choice was influenced by the personality and merit of the candidates. The next group, that is, 26 per cent of the total respondents, voted on the basis of party consideration. The third group, that is, 21.5 per cent of respondents, was influenced by consideration of community (tribe or ethnic group and the like. The fourth group, i.e. 3.25 per cent of the respondents, voted in favour of a particular candidate on the basis of something else/any other. The last group, that is, 11.25 per cent of respondents had shown their disinclination to answer the question. 8.15 per cent of male voters did not
know on what grounds they voted for a particular candidate or did not want to reveal, while such percentage of female voters formed 15.56.

It can be stated that study of voting behaviour cannot be considered as a perfect indicator of people’s participation in political life of the nation as there are a number of other factors which influence a particular person to vote. What probably one can gather is the extent of people’s interest in the elections. An attempt has been made to understand how far the voters had interest in election politics. In this connection, the following question was put to the voters: How interested were you in the election politics? The analysis of information obtained from the 400 respondents revealed that out of the total respondents, 56.5 per cent were having interest in election politics. Of these, 47.5 per cent of the respondents had interest in election politics to some extent. Only 9 per cent of the respondents had much interest in election politics. As many as 12.75 per cent of the respondents did not know whether they had such interest or not as they had shown their disinclination to answer the question. Male respondents were having more interest in election politics than female respondents (60.08 per cent of males against 51.49 per cent of females). Out of the total respondents, 30.75 per cent showed that they did not have any interest (not at all) in election politics which formed 33.53 per cent of females and 28.27 per cent of males. As a whole, it can be said that about fifty per cent of the total voters/respondents in the rural areas of the four constituencies had interest in election politics during the 2003 assembly election.

**Chapter-VI: Conclusion**

This chapter discusses the major findings.

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Results of assembly elections in Mizoram demonstrate that since the very first general elections the voter turnout in every election has been very high varying from 72.90 per cent in 1972 to 78.59 per cent in 2003 elections. The oldest regional party Mizo Union (MU) was a dominant political party in the 1972 assembly elections. The main cause for the weakness of the only national party, Congress, was found to be factionalism. In the various assembly elections a few tribe-based political parties like Maraland Freedom party were in the election fray.

Leaders of political parties in Mizoram are not free from the state of shifting loyalties from one party to another. Two ministries fell due to defections – one in 1978 and another in 1988. Several political parties have emerged in Mizoram. But the two major political parties have been Congress and MNF since Mizoram attained statehood. From 1989, coalition politics started functioning in Mizoram politics. In 1989 elections Congress made a pre-poll alliance with MNF(D) and in 1993 with Mizoram Janata Dal (MJD). In 1998, MNF made electoral alliance with MPC and in 2003 MPC made alliance with ZNP.

A significant aspect of electoral politics in Mizoram is that it witnessed a small number of woman contestants in every election although female voters sometimes outnumbered male voters. Male voters and female voters were almost equal in every election. Seven woman candidates contested the 2003 assembly elections and no one was elected. Since 1972, only three women have been elected as MLAs.

From 1989 to 1998 assembly elections, Mizoram had Congress-led Government. From 1998, MNF became the dominant party. Whether the Congress or MNF has been the leading party in the state assembly elections, the interesting aspect about election results in the state of Mizoram has been the fragmented mandate by the people and the
presence of Independent candidates. Independent candidates have been the prime targets for parties seeking to form the government.

The 2003 election results in Mizoram showed the attributes that have characterized election politics in the state since it attained statehood in 1987, that is, high turnout, absence of decisive mandate and presence of ethnic/tribe-based political parties. The presence of ethnic-based political party – Hmar People’s Convention (HPC) was felt by the voters of rural Mizoram during the 2003 elections.

It has been observed that the rural voters are mostly tribals. Economically, the most productive group, the middle age-group forms the largest category of rural voters. This indicates that there is quite a large work force in rural areas to participate in the economic activities. Due to the presence of the largest percentage of middle age-voters, people’s participation in the rural areas was high. The male voters outnumbered the female voters. Though female voters had the numerical strength, they could not return even a single woman candidate to the Assembly in 2003 assembly elections.

Literacy was high among the rural voters (94.5 per cent). A great majority of them were literate. But the level of their educational attainment was not high. The main occupation of the rural voters was cultivation, that is, shifting cultivation. It is significant to note that though literacy rate was very high among the rural voters, a majority of them are engaged in cultivation.

As already stated, the rural economy is dominated by agriculture. Majority of the voters (71 per cent) depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Due to practice of shifting cultivation and other reasons – poor soil and rugged topography, there is stagnancy in the rural economy. The rural voters cannot have high income. The stagnation in the rural economy is the result of low agricultural productivity. A significant
finding of the study is that the rural voters are economically backward with meagre income. Only one constituency, that is, Sateek constituency, is not dominated by the low income group. The lowest income group of voters earn Rs.1000/- or less per month.

The political behaviour and political participation in the 2003 elections are found to have been significantly influenced by tribal attachments and low literacy. Due to economic hardship faced by the rural people, the political participation of the rural voters is mostly localized.

From the survey of the performance of various political parties in the state, it is found that the MNF and Congress are the two major parties since Mizoram attained statehood in 1987. In 2003 assembly elections, MNF came out as a single largest majority party in the state and formed the MNF ministry. The 2003 assembly elections in rural constituencies saw the return of Congress and MNF with 1 seat each. Two seats went to 2 Independents, 1 Independent supported by a tribe-based political party, HPC, and another 1 Independent supported by another tribe-based party, MDF. Thus, it is found that in the rural areas, there was no single dominant political party as far as electoral outcome is concerned. The presence of ethnic minority parties is seen in the 2003 elections and the greater influence of such parties is distinctly noticeable from the election results.

Political parties have their own ideologies and programmes. It is found from the study of the manifestoes of different political parties that there existed similarity in approach between the parties. All the manifestoes are more or less the same as the issues involved were state or local issues. The common concern of the parties, for example, are safeguarding ethnic and cultural identity of Mizos, socio-economic development, improvement of transport and communication, preservation
of peaceful atmosphere in various parts of the state, etc. From the study of the manifestoes, it is found that Congress turned out to be a national party with decisively regional outlook. Its main concern was on local issues and problems.

Party flags and poster campaigns were popular in the villages. Personal contact was seen to be the most effective method of campaigning during elections. Money was found to have a great impact on the electioneering. It is found that personality and merit of the candidates is the most influencing factor for consideration of voting in the election. Besides, the party factor and tribe consideration have been found to be the important deciding stimuli for the voters. This is seen from the two constituencies, Tuipang and Suangpuilawn. In these two constituencies, Independent candidates supported by HPC and MDF were declared elected to the Assembly.

It is found that the political consciousness of rural voters on the basis of their awareness about the candidates was moderately high as only 65 per cent had the knowledge of the candidates with their names and parties. Another indication of their low level of political consciousness is that the majority of voters (54.5 per cent) were ignorant about the election meetings organised during elections and were not well aware of the ideologies and programmes of political parties and did not show their interest and preference for a particular political party. The main medium in the campaign carried out by the parties and candidates was house-to-house campaigning. This contact was found to be more effective than any other method. Majority of the voters were approached personally by the candidates during election period. Public meetings, election posters, leaflet and mass media of communication do not seem to have influenced the voting behaviour of the voters though a majority of them were
exposed to mass media of communication, such as radio, television and newspapers.

It is found that about 50 per cent of voters (50.75 per cent) are members of any political party. Congress and MNF have considerable members among the voters. Other parties could not have formalised their relationship with the voters. MNF have larger followings/members than the Congress. But the election results show that MNF and Congress secured one seat each from the four rural seats. It can, therefore, be noted that only membership of the political party cannot be a perfect indicator of the extent of political participation of voters in the rural areas.

The proportion of both male voters and female voters was more or less the same in terms of voting in 2003 elections. In other words, it may be stated that female voters in the rural areas can no longer be regarded as lagging behind in their political action, that is, in exercising their democratic right. Another significant finding of the study is that the voters were influenced by several mixed factors in making their decisions while casting votes. They were greatly influenced by the personality and merit of candidates and by consideration of community, ethnic group or tribe. The candidates’ personality and merit played a relatively more important role than either his political affiliation or community or tribe consideration.

The extent of political participation of voters was also examined on the basis of the extent of voters’ interest in election politics. The finding of the study is that about fifty per cent of the voters (56.5 per cent) were having interest in election politics. Male voters had more interest than female voters in election politics.

In general, it has been found that regarding turnout in voting, the voters have shown high mark of participation but in relation to activities such as campaigning for candidates, working as election/polling agents
and participation in election meetings, a vast majority of the voters were not found to be involved. This shows that the general voters in the rural areas do not give much importance to activities other than casting their votes.

The study of 2003 assembly elections is significant as the two regional political parties in Mizoram, MPC and MNF, though in power as ruling combine in the preceding years, were seen to be engaged in bitter competition for extending respective sphere of influence in the 2003 assembly elections.

A very significant finding of the study in the rural areas of Mizoram is that the level of awareness among the rural voters was low. Inspite of the high percentage of voting, the rural voters were having a low level of political awareness. This was evident from the influence of the personality and merit of the candidates. Another important indication of the low level of politicization of the rural voters is that issues whether local, regional or national as factors of voting were not shown to be important in the concerned constituencies. Another indicator of low politicization of the rural voters was their preference for the tribe of the candidates. This was again indicated by the fact that political parties’ manifestoes played insignificant role in the elections and loyalty towards parties was not particularly very strong. The voters were not well aware of ideologies and programme of the political parties and were having insufficient information about the candidates. The evidence from the voting pattern over time supported this. This may be a glaring example of lack of proper functioning of various agents of political socialization particularly the political parties. They only make electoral contact with the voters. Significantly, there is no permanent office of the political parties in the four constituencies surveyed. Party offices only come up during election. The candidates seem to consider political parties only as
a mechanism to contest elections and to get finance. The parties kept the voters hibernating in between the elections.

The study concludes that electoral politics in the rural areas of Mizoram revolves around the candidates and tribe and clan linkages and preferences. This really could be seen during 2003 elections in the rural areas. During elections, candidates and their campaigners tried their best to influence their relatives first. Then, there was continued interaction among relatives and friends to organize strength for their candidates. In fact, electoral behaviour of voters of rural Mizoram in 2003 election only confirmed the general verdict in favour of regional parties.