

## Psychological Awakening Towards Politics Among The Mizos In The North-East Region Of India

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### Abstract

(The precise origins of the Mizos have remained undisclosed until now. Historians and scholars have only been able to provide conjectures and hypotheses regarding the origin of the Mizo tribe. During the course of their research, numerous intellectuals and scholars have postulated that the Mizo people belong to the Tibeto-Burman family, which is a subset of the larger Mongolian race. The history of the Mizo people can be traced back to the time when British officers first encountered the Lushai Hills. The British officers were captivated by the rich culture and heritage of the Mizo people, prompting them to extensively investigate their history and traditions. These findings were documented by the British and subsequently published as scholarly books on Mizo history, which continue to be regarded as valuable sources of information. It was during the period of British rule that the Mizo people began to actively participate in politics and express their opinions on various matters. The establishment of political parties by the Mizo people marked a significant milestone in their political journey and heralded a new era in Mizo politics. Building upon this premise, this paper aims to explore the historical factors behind the Mizo people's initial interest in politics and the formation of political parties by the Mizos)

**Keywords:** Mizo, Lushai Hills, Mizo Union, British

### Introduction

One aspect that necessitates our attention is the specific delineation of "Mizo" in the context of this discourse. It is imperative to clarify that the term does not encompass the entirety of the Mizo tribe dispersed across various regions of the globe. Rather, our focus is on the Mizo populace currently residing in the geographical region referred to as Mizoram, previously known as Lushai Hills. The era during which the Mizo community familiarized themselves with and fostered an inclination towards politics presents substantial justifications for scholarly investigation. In its origin, the term "politics" derives from the Greek word "polis," denoting a city-state.<sup>1</sup> However, its connotation expanded over time. In contemporary times, politics transcends the realms of national, state, and even local governance, encompassing a broader scope. A prevalent understanding would encompass politics as involving the comprehension of power dynamics, the analysis of governmental policies and their impact on the citizenry, the administration of governmental affairs, and the distribution of power. Moreover, politics also entails an analysis of social phenomena that exert influence on our daily lives.

### Mizo Chieftainship and Social Contract Theory

The precise moment at which the Mizo people commenced the practice of having chiefs and being governed by chieftainship is challenging to determine. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that according to the oral traditions of the ancestors, Zahmuaka is considered one among the first popular chiefs among the Mizo tribe. Mizo historian B. Lalthangliana asserts that Zahmuaka assumed rulership when the Mizos began to exert dominance over the Lentlang regions between 1600–1650 AD.<sup>2</sup> The matter of why the Mizo people had chiefs may arise. One possible explanation could be that the Mizo people had historically settled and coexisted in clans, which inevitably led to periodic conflicts and attacks. Furthermore, their primary responsibility remained the defence of their community against enemy and wild animals. Nevertheless, living without a leader in their daily lives did not result in progress, as people require leadership in order to establish a more organized society. This fact allows us to deduce that the Mizo people were under chieftainship not due to coercion or forceful actions, but rather they had chiefs with their genuine consent. The examination of Mizo chieftainship may be examined through the lens of the social contract theory. In this regard, the social contract theory formulated by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and J.J. Rousseau offers insights into the origin of the state. Fundamentally, the social contract theory posits that the state came into existence through a contractual

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<sup>1</sup>R.C. Agarwal(1999).*Political Theory (Principles of Political Science)*. S.Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi.p.1.

<sup>2</sup>B.Lalthangliana(2009).*Mizo Chanchin (A Short Account of Mizo History)*. Gilzom Offset, Aizawl.p.31.

agreement. In order to live in a more structured manner, individuals agreed to surrender their freedom to their sovereign.

The undeniable reality is that the rulers of the early Mizo society exhibited a clear manifestation of politics in their treatment of their subjects. However, it is important to note that this manifestation lacked the modern elements of popular representation and participation in the selection of leaders and the administration, thereby signifying the absence of contemporary political systems. It is worth mentioning that the Mizo people were first introduced to modern political systems, particularly democracy, less than a century ago.

The Mizo people engaged in occasional conflict with the British, primarily due to their belief that the British were encroaching upon territories they considered their own. Additionally, this conflict provided an opportunity for the Mizo chiefs to acquire firearms and other weapons, which proved advantageous for the Mizo people. In response to the frequent issues and disruptions caused by the Mizo people, the British launched a full-scale offensive against the Lushai Hills in 1890.

### **Modern Administration in Lushai Hills (Mizoram)**

The entry of the Britishers into the Lushai Hills with their administrative framework played a pivotal role in the significant political development of the Mizo people. Initially, the Lushai Hills was divided into North and South Lushai Hills, but they were eventually merged into a single administrative unit called the Lushai Hills on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1898 under the supervision of a superintendent. Major John Shakespeare served as the first superintendent in the Lushai Hills leveraging his expertise as a surveyor to bring about this administrative restructuring. As a result, the Lushai Hills were divided into 18 circles in the year 1901.<sup>3</sup> This decentralization of authority introduced the Mizo people to a novel and unfamiliar concept of governance, one where power resided in the hands of individuals other than their chiefs.

In addition to the administrative changes brought about by the British, the arrival of Christian missionaries in 1894 had a profound influence on Mizo culture. The establishment of schools, which commenced in 1898,<sup>4</sup> played a significant role in enhancing the political consciousness and education of the Mizo populace. This can be seen as one of the effects of the Christian missionaries' presence and their efforts to educate the local population.

Additionally, the enlistment of approximately 2100 Mizo males in France to join the allied troops during World War I, spanning from 1914 to 1919, served as a catalyst for political consciousness among the Mizo people.<sup>5</sup> Upon their return from France, these Mizo troops possessed knowledge of political structures and administrative practices from other nations, further contributing to the political awareness of the populace. Collectively, these events and factors allowed the Mizo people to gain a broader understanding of politics and its various facets.

When the British occupied the Lushai Hills, they employed a clever tactic in order to strengthen their occupation, thereby demonstrating their strategic acumen and intent to solidify their control over the region. In their administration of the Lushai Hills, the British astutely utilized the chiefs, thereby implementing an indirect form of governance over the Mizo people through the chiefs. Fascinatingly, the British did not desire a system of administration that was shared with the indigenous people, indicating their preference for a more unilateral approach in their rule. Conversely, the Mizo people experienced a sense of irritation and perceived this arrangement as burdensome when the chiefs became too closely aligned with the British authorities, thereby diminishing their autonomy and agency.

As we delve deeper into the historical context, we uncover a pivotal moment in the year 1926 when the locality of Kulikawn men, who were highly regarded as early Mizo businessmen and individuals possessing a wealth of knowledge, emerged as catalysts for change and transformation, thereby paving the way for the Mizo people to actively participate in a larger political landscape. It was during this juncture that they diligently sought certain measures to enable Mizo representation and involvement in the Assam Legislative Council, thereby recognizing the significance and power of political engagement and representation. This period coincided with Assam being under the dominion of the British Empire and being placed under the jurisdiction of the Governor in Assam Province, who wielded considerable control and authority over the region.

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<sup>3</sup>Robert Reid(1942). *The Lushai Hills*. Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta.p.20,43.

<sup>4</sup>Op.Cit.p.221.

<sup>5</sup>Ngurbiakvela(2019). *Mizo Tlangval German Ral Run Tura France Ram Kal te Chanchin*. Lengchhawn Offset, Aizawl.p.2.

The administration of the Assam province was structured around the Assam Legislative Council, a governing body comprising 41 elected representatives and 12 nominated members who were appointed by the Governor himself,<sup>6</sup> thereby ensuring a balanced representation of both elected officials and those chosen by the colonial authority. This intricate system of governance showcased the influence and reach of the British colonial administration, even as they navigated the complexities of political participation and representation. Interestingly, it is evident that the plain people in Assam enjoyed a wider scope of political agency and authority within this framework, despite their own status as subjects of British colonialism. Notably, the Assam plain people enjoyed a greater degree of political participation and authority, underscoring the complexities and nuances of colonial power dynamics.

### **Political Activities in the Hills**

Telela and his companions, knowledgeable men from Kulikawn, ventured to Shillong with the intention to alleviate the burdens faced by the Mizo people and to join the Assam Legislative Council. They had the opportunity to meet with Reverend JJM Nichols Roy, the Minister of Assam Tribal Affairs, along with other government officials. However, it was brought to their attention by these officials that due to the Lushai Hills' status as an "Backward Tract," their ability to effect change was limited. Additionally, they were advised to recruit at least 1000 individuals who expressed a desire to join the Assam Legislative Council. The Superintendent of Lushai Hills, N.E. Parry, was made aware of the efforts of these Kulikawn men, and he responded with great anger, incarcerating Telela and his friends. Laldela, one of the Kulikawn men responsible for maintaining important documents, was held in a jail in Burma, located outside of the Lushai Hills. Consequently, these Kulikawn men were eventually released from imprisonment, under the condition that they refrain from engaging in any political activities.<sup>7</sup>

Due to the emergence of various political issues in the Lushai Hills. Lushai Hills superintendent A.G. McCall (1931-1943) recognized the pressing necessity for the involvement of commoners in the government administration. As a result, in 1940, representatives from each of the 18 circles in the Lushai Hills were carefully chosen to form the 'District Chief Durbar', aiming to establish a platform for collective decision-making and governance. Superintendent McCall further proposed the establishment of Village Welfare Committees in each village, which was enthusiastically accepted during the Durbar Conference held in Thenzawl in October 1940.<sup>8</sup> The primary objective behind the formation of these Village Welfare Committees was to bridge the gap that existed between the chiefs and the common people, thereby enabling the latter to actively participate in the political structures and administrative processes. However, it is disheartening to note that the success of this committee was limited. A myriad of issues such as forced labour, burdensome tax impositions, forced voluntary works and wrongful expulsion from the village continue to plague the lives of the village people, serving as persistent challenges of the people.

When assuming the position of Lushai Hills superintendent from 1943 to 1947, Mac Donald possessed a profound understanding of the hardships endured by the people, as well as the challenges posed by the authority of the chiefs, which often caused difficulties for the common people. Recognizing the urgency of reforming the social and political administration, Mac Donald also acknowledged the impending departure of the British from India, further reinforcing his belief in the importance of involving the people in decision-making. Consequently, in order to address these concerns, Mac Donald organized a District Conference. This conference aimed to include its member that in each of the 18 circles, one representative of the common people and one representative of the chiefs would be elected.<sup>9</sup> However, it is unfortunate that this District Conference did not fully achieve its objectives, as the common people raised a complaint regarding the equal representation given to both the chiefs and the common people. As a result, the conference was perceived as lacking the essence of a truly representative gathering for the people. As a result of this perceived deficiency, a tangible and overwhelming necessity arose among the people to establish a comprehensive and inclusive political party that would address their concerns and aspirations.

During the period under consideration, it is noteworthy to mention the existence of two broad-based voluntary organizations, namely the Lushai Student's Association (LSA), which later came to be known as Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP), and the Young Lushai Association (YLA), subsequently referred to as Young Mizo Association (YMA). The primary focus of these influential organizations revolved around the future political status of the Lushai Hills following the departure of the British colonial rule. Regrettably, their endeavors did not yield significant success. Consequently, during the YLA Conference held at Boys Middle English School on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March, 1946, it was unanimously

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<sup>6</sup>*Our History Published by Directorate of Archives, Government of Assam.*

<sup>7</sup>Chaltuakhuma(2001).*Political History of Mizoram*. David Memorial Press, Aizawl.p.41.

<sup>8</sup>Keihawla Sailo(2010).*Golden History of Lushai Hills*.Synod Press, Aizawl.p.170.

<sup>9</sup>H.Vanthuama(2001).*Mizoram Politics Chanchin 1952 Hmalam*.Zotlang Press, Aizawl.p.13.

decided that any political matters ought not to be discussed in subsequent YLA Conferences.<sup>10</sup> This decision arose due to the prevailing circumstances at the time. Consequently, the early Mizo educated men recognized the urgent necessity of establishing a political party that would champion the rights and interests of the Mizo people, as well as initiate proactive measures aimed at their overall welfare and progress. Towards the end of 1945, individuals such as Ch. Saprawnga, C.H. Kela, and R. Dengthuama petitioned the Superintendent of Lushai Hills, D.A. Penn, with a request to establish a political party known as "Mizo Hmasawn Pawl" (Mizo Development Party) in the southern region of the Lushai Hills.<sup>11</sup>

Regrettably, amidst these circumstances, the application submitted by R. Vanlawma to establish a political party was accepted by the Lushai Hills Superintendent MacDonald on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April, 1946, at precisely 2:00 PM. This marked the formation of the first political party in the Lushai Hills, initially referred to as the "Mizo Commoners Union," which was subsequently renamed as the "Mizo Union."<sup>12</sup> The Mizo Union set forth several significant objectives, including the promotion of equality within Mizo society, the unification of all Mizo individuals residing within and outside the Lushai Hills, the upliftment of women's status, as well as the critical analysis, protection, and necessary amendment of the customary laws and traditions of the Mizo people.<sup>13</sup>

From the standpoint of political ideology, the Mizo Union can be characterized as embracing a liberal conservative ideology, a unique blend that incorporates elements of both liberalism and conservatism. The formation of the Mizo Union generated an overwhelming sense of excitement and anticipation among the populace, as it symbolized a new chapter in the history of the Mizo people. One of the key objectives pursued by the Mizo Union was the abolition of chieftainship, an objective that garnered widespread support and endorsement from the Mizo people. The narrative surrounding the Mizo Union's contribution to the comprehensive development and progress of the Mizo people is a multifaceted and intricate one, replete with numerous facets and dimensions that warrant careful examination and analysis. The Mizo Union's efforts and endeavors in this regard can be traced back to its inception and continue to unfold even in contemporary times, paving the way for transformative changes and advancements in various spheres of Mizo society. The story of the Mizo Union's impact and influence on the Mizo people's holistic growth and prosperity is indeed a captivating tale that demands close attention and scholarly inquiry.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be analysed that the introduction of politics to the Mizo people was not an abrupt event but rather a culmination of various events and circumstances that gradually raised the awareness of the people regarding political matters. Furthermore, it can be argued that the British occupation of the Mizo people did not effectively address the issues faced by the common masses, which may have contributed to the Mizo people recognizing the necessity of establishing a political party. This is particularly significant when considering the prevailing scenario in certain north eastern states of India, where the system of chiefs still persists, while the Mizo people fervently desired to eliminate chieftainship even during the British era.

This evident contrast between the Mizo people's aspirations and the flawed administration of the chiefs during that period greatly exposed the shortcomings of the chiefs' governance. Additionally, it can also be stated that the political scene during the post-Mizo Union period can largely be characterized as a state of friction between the chiefs and the general populace. Subsequently, with the establishment of the chiefs-oriented party known as the 'United Mizo Freedom Organization', or 'Zalen Pawl' as referred to by the Mizo people, the politics of Mizoram predominantly revolved around the conflict between the Mizo Union and Zalen Pawl. It is indeed questionable when considering the trajectory of political growth and development, whether Mizoram's politics even today remains predominantly focused on party politics rather than the actual progress and advancement of the state.

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<sup>10</sup>Op.Cit.p.53.

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<sup>12</sup>R.Vanlawma (1989).*Ka Ram leh Kei*. Lengchhawn Press, Aizawl.p.134,137.

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