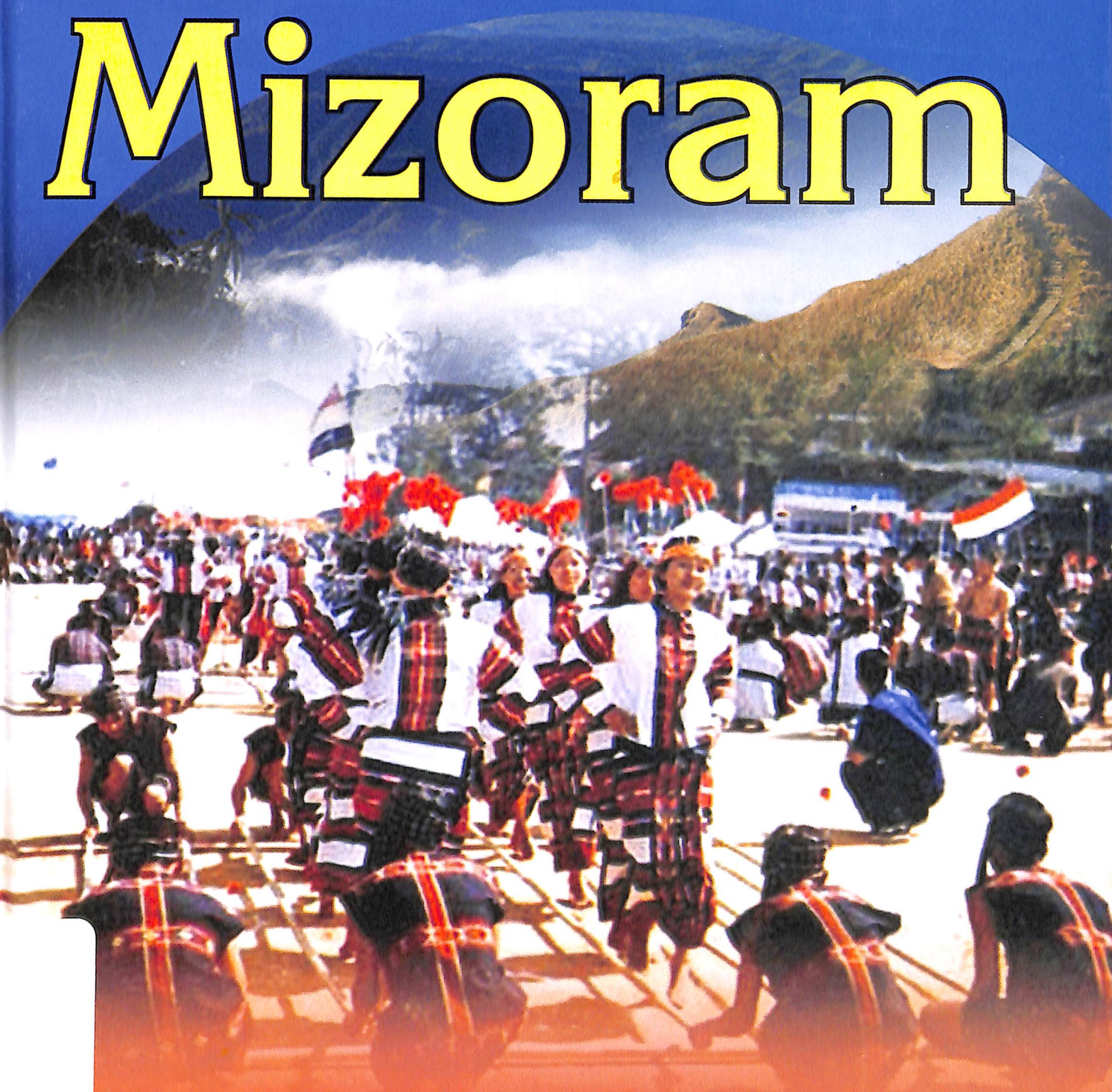


ENCYCLOPAEDIA
OF

Mizoram



TEISI THOU

Encyclopaedia
of
MIZORAM

Volume 2

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REFERENCE



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PREFACE

The origin of the Mizos, like those of many other tribes in the North Eastern India is shrouded in mystery. The generally accepted as part of a great Mongoloid wave of migration from China and later moved out to India to their present habitat. It is possible that the Mizos came from Shinlung or Chhinlungsan located on the banks of the river Yalung in China. They first settled in the Shan State and moved on to Kabaw Valley to Khampat and then to the Chin Hills in the middle of the 16th century. The earliest Mizos who migrated to India were known as Kukis, the second batch of immigrants were called New Kukis. The Lushais were the last of the Mizo tribes migrate to India. The Mizo history in the 18th and 19th Century is marked by many instances of tribal raids and retaliatory expeditions of security. Mizo Hills were formally declared as part of the British-India by a proclamation in 1895. North and south hills were united into Lushai Hills district in 1898 with Aizawl as its headquarters. The process of the consolidated of the British administration in tribal dominated area in Assam stated in 1919 when Lushai Hills along with some other hill districts was declared a Backward Tract under government of India Act. The tribal districts of Assam including Lushai Hills were declared Excluded Area in 1935.

It was during the British regime that a political awakening among the Mizos in Lushai Hills started taking shape the first political party, the Mizo Common People's Union was formed on 9th April 1946. The Party was later renamed as Mizo Union. As the day of Independence drew nearer, the Constituent Assembly of India set up and Advisory Committee to deal with matters relating to the minorities and the tribals. A sub-Committee, under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi was formed to advise the Constituent Assembly on the tribal affairs in the North East. The Mizo Union submitted a resolution of this Sub-committee demanding inclusion of all Mizo inhabited areas adjacent to Lushai Hills. However, a new party called the United Mizo Freedom (UMFO) came up to demand that Lushai Hills join Burma after Independence. Following the Bordoloi Sub-Committee's suggestion, a certain amount of autonomy was accepted by the Government and enshrined in the Six Schedule of the constitution. The Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council came into being in 1952 followed by the formation of these bodies led to the abolition of chieftanship in the Mizo society.

The autonomy however met the aspirations of the Mizos only partially. Representatives of the District Council and the Mizo Union pleaded with the States Reorganization Commission (SRC) in 1954 for integrated the Mizo-dominated areas of Tripura and Manipur with their District Council in Assam. The tribal leaders in the North East were laboriously unhappy with the SRC Recommendations : They met in Aizawl in 1955 and formed a new political party, Eastern India Union (EITU) and raised demand for a separate state comprising of all the hill districts of Assam. The Mizo Union split and the breakaway faction joined the EITU. By this time, the UMFO also joined the EITU and then understanding of the Hill problems by the Chuliha Ministry, the demand for a separate Hill state by EITU was kept in abeyance. But folklore has an interests tale of offer. The Mizos, so goes the legend, emerged from under a large covering rock known as Chhinlung. Two people of the Ralte clan, known for their loquaciousness, started talking noisily while coming out of the region. They made a great noise which leg God, called Pathian by the Mizos, to throw up his hands in disgust and say enough is enough. He felt, too many people had already been allowed to step out and so closed the door with the rock.

History often varies from legends. But the story of the Mizos getting out into open from the nether world through a rock opening is now part of the Mizo fable. Chhinlung however, is taken by some as the Chinese city of Sinlung or Chinlingsang situated close on the sino-Burmese border. The Mizos have songs and stories about the glory of the ancient Chhinlung civilization handed down from one generation to another powerful people. Rajiv Gandhi's assumption of power following his mother's death signalled the beginning of a new era in Indian politics. Laldenga met the Prime Minister on 15th February 1985. Some contentious issues, which could not be resolved, during previous talks referred to him for his advice. All trends indicated that neither the Centre nor the MNF would pass up the opportunity that has now presented itself to have a full lenient and flexible. New Delhi felt that Mizo problem had been dragging on for the long a time, while the MNF was convinced that bidding farewell to arms to live as respectable Indian Citizens was the only ways of achieving peace and development. Statehood was a prerequisite to the implementing of the accord singed between the MNF and the Union Government on 30 June 1986. The document was signed by Laldenga, on the behalf of MNF, and the Union Home Secretary RD Pradhan on behalf of the Government, Lalkhama Chief Secretary of Mizoram, too signed the agreement.

The book is an asset for all scholars, researchers, teachers, students and ofcourse, the general readers.

MIZORAM—FROM INSURGENCE TO RESURGENCE

With a population of over six lakhs and an area of 21, 087 Sq.km Mizoram has a predominantly a mountainous terrain. It is bound by the Cachar district of Assam and State of Manipur in the North, by Chin Hills in Myanmar (Burma) in East and South and by the State of Tripura and Bangladesh in the West. With an international boundary length of about 1000 kilometre with Bangladesh and Burma, Mizoram has all along been of strategic significance.

As an abode of a number of tribes with majority belonging to wider Mizo group primarily of Lushais, Mizoram was administered as Lushai Hills district of Assam Province since its annexation by the British in the closing decade of nineteenth century. It was renamed as district of Mizo Hills within Assam State in 1954 and was declared as Mizoram, when it got the status of Union territory in 1972. It got full fledged statehood in 1986.

The chronology of events since the advent of British rule in this territory is a narrative of compromise, confrontation and pragmatic character of the Mizos. In the process of the civilisational evolution they gave up their head hunting and even accepted a new faith of Christianity, which was the beginning of their assimilation with a new civilisational order. As victim of unholy nexus between the forces of repressive imperialism and religious exclusivism they had to compromise with the situation. However, in post colonial era, when they got the opportunity to be an equal partner in the wider space of civilisational evolution, they confronted the Government for an independent sovereign State. The much publicized hype of fear against tribal identity was in fact the political game played by vested interests. Finally, they understood the divisive and self-seeking game of insurgents and accepted pragmatic politics.

The advent of British rule in Mizo Hills was the beginning of a new era for Mizo society, which left a deep impact on its socio-political evolution. The colonial power introduced Inner Line Regulation and restricted the entry of outsiders in this area. The Christian Missionaries arrived immediately after the British and focused their whole enterprise to push the Mizo society to the domain of an unknown Christian tradition. With an army of priests and fat moneybags they increased the strength of Christian population in Lushai Hills from 0.05 % in 1901 to 80.31 % in 1951. The socio-religious transformation of Mizos to a new tradition arrested their integration in the wider civilisational mass of India.

It was a historical irony that the Mizos like their other tribal counterparts played politics of tribal extremism by raising the unknown concept of tribal nationalism and ethnic identity, which was introduced among them by the alien forces. They failed to understand the game of Church, which caused the first loss to their indigenous ethnic identity. "The irony of the whole missionary enterprise is that the Church which strongly advocated the sustenance of the ethnic identity of the Mizos actually destroyed it once for all" (Making of Mizoram – Vol. II by Suhas Chatterjee, M D Publications, New Delhi, 1994, Page 209).

The Church even destroyed some of the positive aspects of their egalitarian identity like 'Bachelors Dormitories', which used to impart informal education on community living; selfless obligation to society and trade crafts. N.E.Perry in his monograph of Lushai customs and ceremonies observed: "the missionaries were destroying some of the excellent customs of the Lushais" (Mizoram by Animesh Ray, 1993, Page 141). Factually, the Christian Missionaries kept them isolated in a mental sanctuary, sowed the seed of separatism and debarred them from democratic aspiration and rightful partnership in the national rebuilding programmes of India for long years.

Traditionally, Mizos were under the rule of their respective chieftains. The institution of chieftainship was based on the individual strength and possession. Loyalty to the chiefs and economic self-sufficiency kept them contented even in isolation. The British however, allowed the institution of chieftainship to continue with a view to keep the Mizos under control through it.

The Church on the other hand by providing primary education, salaried jobs of priests, teachers and medical attendants to the converts robbed of their traditional moorings and culture and emerged as a centre of power and patronage. A.G.MacCall while referring to Lushai Hills wrote: "Local educational practice soon gave rise to the belief that education and Christianity was pass-port to salaried job, relief from wearisome toil of cultivating hard land. Black coated occupations became synonymous

to progress. Christianity led towards black-coatism” (Government and Politics in Mizoram by R.N.Prasad, 1987, page70).

Inspired with the formation of Young Burmese Association, the half educated Mizo youths also formed Young Lushai Association in 1934 (In 1954 it was renamed as Young Mizo Association). Even though it was a Church sponsored socio-cultural organization, the British power took extra precaution to ensure that it does not have any link with the political developments in India. They therefore, excluded Lushai Hill from the legislative jurisdiction of Assam under India Act 1935.

Second World War provided the Mizo youths in British Army an opportunity to interact with the people of different culture in course of their postings beyond Mizoram. After the end of War they returned to their native place with new civilisational experience and political ideas. The Mizo students, who were studying in the bordering towns of Silchar and Sylhet, too had seen the upsurge of freedom movement. These developments created a new political awakening in the emerging middle class in Lushai Hills, which started talking against the desirability of the institution of chieftainship.

With freedom knocking the door of India, the Mizos were found divided over the merger of Lushai Hills with Indian Union. Those under the influence of the Church and chieftains pleaded that they would lose ethno-cultural identity due to civilisational pull of the larger mass of non-tribal population of mainland India if their territory were merged with Indian Union. Some of them preferred merger with Myanmar (Burma). The group led by chieftains initiated a debate on feasibility of introducing Crown Colony Scheme. But the ‘commoners’ with an aspiration to free their society from the traditional control of the chieftains formed a first political organization named as Mizo Union (MU) in April 1946 and adopted a resolution in support of the merger of Lushai Hills with Indian Union. “In its first General Assembly on September 24, 1946, at Kulikawn, Aizawal, the party resolved that in the event of India attaining independence, the Lushai Hills must be included within the province of Assam” (Mizoram: Politics of Regionalism and National Integration by Lalchungnunga, 1994, page 73, Reliance Publishing House, New Delhi).

In reaction against the formation of Mizo Union, the chieftains encouraged the formation of United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO) in July 1947 to oppose the merger. But this new party failed to convince the Mizo masses and Lushai Hills became a part of Assam under Indian Union after Independence. “Independence of India was enthusiastically welcomed by the Mizo Unionists” (Mizoram: Politics of Regionalism and National Integration).

In absence of any unit of Indian National Congress (INC) in Lushai Hills formation of integrationist pro-Congress Mizo Union was the beginning of political renaissance

in Mizo society. "It appears to us that the INC also did not bother to form its unit in Mizoram for a long time because the integrationist pro-Congress Mizo Union Party was there" (Mizoram: Politics of Regionalism and National Integration by Lalchungnunga, 1994, page 73, Reliance Publishing House, New Delhi).

At no point of time after the end of colonial rule Indian people living in plains made any attempt to sideline their counterparts living in hills and forest. Incorporation of sixth schedule in Indian Constitution mandated the tribal people the rights to self-govern. The institution of District Council provided them administrative, judicial, legislative and taxation powers to preserve their ethno-cultural identity within the federal character of Indian Union.

With the exception of Nagas, who demanded sovereignty from the very day of India's independence, the tribal inhabitants of the British period districts of Khasis and Jaintiya Hills, Garo Hills, Mikir Hills, North Cachar Hills and Lushai Hills accepted the institution of the District Council in their respective areas and joined the mainstream politics of the country. But despite such honest intention of the Government the forces detrimental to the national interest raised the bogey of tribal identity and sowed the seed of divisive politics. Jawaharlal Nehru's speech in Kohima on March 30, 1953 that "the works of the missionaries were not clean of politics" (Government and Politics in Mizoram by R.N.Prasad, 1987, Page 71) also suggests that in addition to evangelical works, the Christian Missionaries were also involved in local politics.

Although, the Mizos were under the push and pull of the chieftains and Church leaders, who had deeply penetrated the tribal-non-tribal antipathy and politics of secessionism among them, the Mizo Union as an associate of the Indian National Congress actively worked for their democratization. It put pressure on Government of Assam for abolition of the institution of chieftainship. The power of the chieftains had already declined with the advent of British rule. The institution got a final blow after the enactment of "The Lushai Hills (Acquisition of Chief's rights) Act 1954. The enraged chieftains under the patronage of divisive forces however, raised the bogey of imaginary danger to the ethno-cultural identity of Mizos and pushed them away from the path of national integration.

The disastrous famine of 1959-60 caused great frustration in Mizo Hills and thereby accelerated the politics of negativism. Poor handling of famine and inadequate relief measure followed by imposition of Assamese as official language in the State forced the Mizo Union to disassociate itself from the Assam Congress Legislature Party. Its volunteers however came forward in a big way to extend relief to the people to save them from the calamity. But the Government of Assam in stead of extending helping hand to a tested nationalist Mizo Union patronized Laldenga, an ex-serviceman,

who had formed Mizo National Famine Front in 1960 to launch relief operations. The Congress Party opened its unit in Mizoram only in August 1961.

Mizo National Famine Front was converted into a political party known as Mizo National Front (MNF) in October 1961 with Laldenga as its president. The objective of the party was to achieve Independence of Mizo Hills as a sovereign State. It mobilized the support of the anti-Mizo Union forces like Chieftains, Church leaders, zealous youths and some ex-servicemen from the disbanded 2ND Assam Regiment.

With the politics of aggressive tribalism, the MNF emerged as a force to challenge the Mizo Union. Criticizing the Mizo Union for its alleged connivance with the Government for integration of Mizo society in the larger masses of non-tribal India, it contested Assembly bye-elections as well as Village Council elections in 1963 and won two and 145 seats respectively. The MNF at the same time also developed contact with Pakistan.

Although, secret visits of MNF leader Laldenga and others to Pakistan were known to the Government, the latter did not take up the issue seriously. The Congress Chief Minister of Assam B. P. Chaliha rather used the MNF to weaken the integrationist Mizo Union., which demanded separate statehood for Mizo Hills. The Government in fact ignored the anti-national activities of the MNF leaders ever since its formation.

Laldenga was arrested while he was returning from his secret political mission in Pakistan. But he wrote a letter to Chief Minister Chaliha and assured him that he would join the mainstream politics under Indian constitution. Chaliha got trapped in the Machiavellian politics of Laldenga and released him from jail. Getting a heroic welcome from his people on his release, Laldenga reorganized MNF volunteers, sent them for training in Pakistan, procured huge quantity of arms from the same country and finally raised an armed revolt on February 28, 1966 for secession of Mizo Hills from Indian Union.

“The disbandment of the Mizo dominated Second Battalion of Assam Regiment in 1964, the presence of a larger number of discontented ex-Chiefs and unemployed youths, the readiness of the Pakistan Government to help the MNF, Chaliha’s (Chief Minister of Assam) patronage of the MNF in order to weaken the Mizo Union, the growing number of juvenile delinquents and the Assamese language issue” (Mizoram: Politics of Regionalism and National Integration by Lalchungnunga, 1994 – Quoting Dr. V.V.Rao- Century of Tribal Politics in North East India, 1976, Page 83) collectively prompted the secessionist armed revolt.

The Mizo National Army of the MNF launched armed attack on various Government establishments, killed some of the Assam Rifles personnel and kidnapped SDO Lungleg as well as a couple of Intelligence Bureau officials. Laldenga declared independence

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for Mizo Hills on March 1. The rebellion shocked the whole country and seriously affected the civil life with large scale continuous disturbances throughout the district for days that followed. The Government invoked Assam Disturbed Areas Act and ordered Army deployment to control the situation.

The security forces, with wide range of powers under the Assam Disturbed Areas Act and Defense of India Rule took stiff and effective measures by adopting the policy of stick and carrot and restored normalcy. But it was handicapped to find out the rebels taking shelter in isolated and scattered villages. The army operation might have left an inedible experience in the memory of the Mizos but Regrouping of Progressive and Protected Villages Scheme for rehabilitation with sincere and honest efforts of the same army was a grand success and left an indelible imprint on their confidence in Indian establishment. This was the reason as to how they could face the challenge of the rebels for twenty years.

The insurgents established their provisional government with headquarter in Chittagong Hill Tract of East Pakistan and continued sporadic violence in Mizo Hills. But the Indo-Pak War followed by fall of Dhaka and emergence of Bangladesh was a major setback for them as the new regime did not allow its territory as their sanctuary. This led to surrender of a sizeable number of rebels before the security forces.

The Mizo Hills got the status of Union Territory in January 1972 followed by its first 30-member Legislative Assembly election in April. Of the 27 elected members, Mizo Union won in 21 constituencies followed by Congress with six seats. Three nominated members also joined the Mizo Union Parliamentary Party, which formed the Government with Chhunga as Chief Minister.

After a lull for some times, the MNF revived its activities with support from Pakistan and China and made further violent attacks in 1973. This led to a discussion between the leaders of the Mizo Union and Congress for the merger of the two parties to meet the challenge of the MNF unitedly. Merger of Mizo Union, a most popular party in Mizo Hills with the top mainstream party the Congress in January 1974 was a reflection of the pragmatic mindset of the Mizo elite. But the merger failed to bring desired result as the MNF launched a campaign against the merger on the plea that it was a surrender of the regional and ethnic identity of the Mizos. With new recruitment, arms build-up and the swelling strength of rebels, the MNF cadres ran a parallel government from its base in the mountainous region of Burma.

Revolt for secession from India was nothing but a legacy of intra-ethnic war in the crags of hills and dense forest carried forward by the tribal people. But the gradual decline in the glamour of such romantic adventurism brought them to negotiate for

peace. Tired of the hard life and pressure from security forces, the rebels were in favour of peace negotiation. Laldenga too being away from Mizoram for twelve years wanted to return to India and accordingly signed an agreement in January 1976 for solution of Mizoram problem within the Constitution of India. He also gave assurance that the rebels would surrender all the arms before the security forces within a month. After this peace accord, the Chief Minister Ch.Chhunga urged the Mizo people: "It is a great privilege to be an Indian. There is in India room for all diverse races, speaking different languages, following different religions and having different culture. (Government and Politics in Mizoram by R.N.Prasad, 1987, page 322).

Laldenga backed out from the agreement due to major difference within the MNF and resumed violence by re-organizing the MNF cadres. The insurgents however, failed to stop the ensuing Assembly election in 1978. Political parties like Congress, Peoples Conference of Brigadier Sailo, Mizoram Janata, Mizoram Democratic Front, break away faction of Mizo Union and some Independents contested the elections, which were peaceful. With Peoples Conference securing comfortable majority Brigadier Sailo became the Chief Minister. Sailo wanted to isolate Laldenga and initiate fresh negotiation with the anti-Laldenga faction of the MNF. But personal ambition of the MLAs irrespective of their political affiliations created a political crisis and Mizoram was brought under President Rule. After midterm poll in April 1979 Peoples Conference again secured majority and new ministry headed by Sailo took over in May. Laldenga signed another agreement in July 1980, which too failed to bring desired result.

Participation of the Mizos in elections since Independence was a reflection of their love for democracy and peace. In 1984 election too they elected a Congress Government in Mizoram but welcomed the peace initiative by insurgent leader Laldenga even though he was gradually losing the sympathy of the masses. Laldenga too could understand the mind of his community members. In October 1984 he said: "I have come back as Indian to solve our (Mizoram) problem and take my place as an Indian in Indian politics" (Mizoram by Animesh Ray, 1993, Page193).

With Congress winning the Mizoram Assembly election in 1984 peace talks with Laldenga were resumed. However, due to assassination of Indira Gandhi in October, the talks remained inconclusive. It was revived in March 1986 at the instance of Rajiva Gandhi and the Accord was signed on June 30. Laldenga became the interim Chief Minister. His party MNF secured majority in midterm poll held after Mizoram was formally elevated to the status of full fledged State in February 1987. He was again formally elected as Chief Minister.

Laldenga had carried forward the burden of separatist revolt for a long period of twenty years (1966-86) on his shoulders and tried to inspire the concept of Mizo nationalism among his people. People had a lot of expectations from him. But his short

tenure (February 1987-September 1988) of flamboyant misrule with financial scandals, corrupt ministers and legislators, suppression of protest, cajolment of bureaucracy and rebuffing of media engulfed the Mizo people in the economic darkness and anarchy of unprecedented dimension.

Realizing the self-centric and authoritarian politics of insurgent leader, they rediscovered the meaning of democracy and threw him out of power in the midterm Assembly election in 1988. They rejected his politics of negativism and joined the democratic process for resurgence of Mizoram as a partner of resurgent India. Taking lesson from the darkest chapter of their post-colonial history, they negated the philosophy of separatism and are now proud of being equal partner in national movement for socio-economic resurgence. Meeting the challenge of disastrous politics of secessionism Mizoram survived as a democracy and is now one of the most stable States in the country. The post-colonial history of Mizoram is a lesson for the Government as well as for the tribal people of the rest of northeast States. Insurgency in Mizo Hills was in fact an outcome of the apathetic attitude of Assam Government towards its hill people. Its casual approach in relief operation during the great famine of 1959-60 and erroneous policy of imposing Assamese as official language on them widened the gap of mistrust between the Government and the people residing in hills and forest. The forces of vested interest exploited the situation by inciting the people with the imaginary danger to their ethnic identity and sowed the seed of secessionism.

Integration of the hearts and minds of the hill people of northeast with rest of the countrymen is yet to complete full circle but enjoying equal opportunity in sharing political power they are marching faster in a positive direction. One may consider the election of a Mizo as a Member of Lok Sabha on BJP ticket from the State of Karnataka, P.A.Sangma, a Garo from Meghalaya as former Speaker of Lok Sabha and Lyngdoh, a Khasi from Meghalaya as former Chairman of the Election Commission of the country as isolated examples but the dynamics of change in the region suggest that the tribal people of India's isolated corner are now geared to fast socio-economic transformation by joining the mainstream politics of the country. Mizoram is a classic example in this regard as after suffering from the trauma of twenty-year (1966-86) insurgency its people are now moving closer to the socio-economic progress and prosperity. If the insurgency in some of the other northeastern States is still surviving as a dominant political feature, it is only an effective tool to derive as much political concessions at a particular point of time and nothing more.

North-East Violence—An Overall View

Brahmaputra, Imphal and Surma valleys with surrounding mountains and hills are the geo-political boundaries of Northeast India. Comprising of seven States Assam,

Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Tripura, with a collective area of 255, 088 sq. km. (about 8% of the country's territory) include two third of hills and forests and one third plains. Bounded by Bhutan and China (Tibet) in north, Myanmar in east and south and Bangladesh in south and west, the region is connected with about 4000 sq. km of porous international borders and touching the two ends of only a 20km wide corridor (Siliguri Corridor) in west with the rest of India.

With a combined population of about four crores (38, 495, 089 -2001 Census), which includes 209 Scheduled Tribes (Arunachal Pradesh -101; Manipur -29; Assam - 23; Nagaland - 20; Tripura - 18; Meghalaya - 14; and Mizoram 53) - Northeast is a most diversified region. States with overwhelming tribal population are Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram whereas those having more than one third tribal population are Manipur and Tripura (Women and Changing Power Structure in Northeast India - Ashok Kumar Ray - Rajendra Prasad Athparia, 2006). Contrary to the general perception these tribes constitute below 30% of the population of the entire Northeast. While Assam, Tripura and Manipur are dominated by about 60% of non-tribal population, the rest of the states are having a tribal majority ranging from 60 to 90 percent. The area being the abode of various ethnic groups like Ahom, Naga, Lusai(Mizo), Meitei, Garo, Khasi, Koch, Hajomg, Rabha, Kachari, Tippera, Chakma, Abhor, Bodo, Miri and hundreds of other tribes for centuries - remained the isolated corner of Indian sub-continent and away from the larger civilisational masses.

Contented in forests and hills, the tribes of the Northeast viewed anyone entering in their territory as outsiders. With a definite territory, kinship, social structure, distinct tradition and mostly having non-monarchical character, they remained away from the influence of Sanskritisation for centuries and preserved their exclusivity till the annexation of their territories by the British in the nineteenth century. Except for Nagas and the Mizos most of others were however, under the domain of some princely kingdoms like Ahom, Manipur, Tripura and Khasis. Nagas and Mizos were constant problems for these rulers.

The British annexed the Northeast at different points of time like Assam plains (1826), Cachar plains (1830), (Khasi Hills (1833), Jaintia plains(1835), Karbi Anglong or Mikir Hills (1838), North Cachar Hills (1854), Naga Hills (1866-1904), Garo Hills (1872-73) and Mizo Hills (1890) (Autonomy Movements in Assam - Documents by P. S. Datta, 1993, Page 5-6). All these areas formed parts of Assam Province of British India. But the colonial power with a view to keep them excluded from the ministerial jurisdiction of Provincial Government declared these hill districts as Excluded Areas under the exclusive administrative control of Chief Commissioner of the province. They introduced inner line permit to prevent the entry of outsiders in this area without valid permit. This permit system debarred the hill people from interaction

with the larger masses of Indian mainstream and from the socio-political influence of the outside world. Manipur, Tripura and Khasi States (Now Khasi Hills in Meghalaya) remained as Princely States under British control.

The Christian missionaries followed the British and established their foothold in the region. Converting the tribes from their indigenous faith to Christianity, they robbed off their traditional identity and imposed on them a new socio-religious identity based on Christian traditions. Such socio-religious transformation was though contrary to their respective ethnic traditions, over the years the converted tribes accepted it as the generic identity. Christianization and basic education helped some of them to get middle to lower level jobs in Church and British administration which gave birth to a middle class; a new social phenomenon in tribal society.

This new class of people, who came into contact with the people outside their area gradually developed identity consciousness. The social reformers of mainland India practically remained indifferent of this development and did not make any effort to counter it. Similarly, the leaders of freedom movement due to lack of rapport with hill people - failed to instill among them any emotional feeling towards India. Thus, in the absence of socio-cultural intercourse with the plains of India the isolated tribes developed a centrifugal tendency against mainland Indian sub-continent.

In the backdrop of the historical reality, when freedom knocked the door of the country and the British declared the lapse of its paramountcy over Indian States, it placed the national leadership in a complex situation. Being confronted with the problem of preventing further balkanization and the task for integrating 562 Princely States - they failed to appreciate the new political awakening in tribal society (Integration of the Indian States by V. P. Menon, 1985, Page 485).

The tribal masses accepted many imposed changes, which were against their self-governing character and heterogeneous system of pristine institutions but had not anticipated their future political identity because of non-participation in the freedom movement. Therefore, even with provision in Indian constitution for preservation of their traditions a section of vested interest with the investigation of foreign forces sought independent existence outside India. Ironically, those, who with a view to preserve their independent identity had fought decades after decades against the British before their subjugation - were in the forefront of secessionist demands on a plea of imaginary danger to their forcibly imposed religio-cultural identity.

But the Mizos under the influence of Mizo Union, Garos under the banner of Garo National Council and most of the other tribes favoured integration of their territories with India with more tribal autonomy and thus, the entire region of the northeast became the integral part of Indian Union.

It is a known fact of history that in a federal polity the national objective cannot be achieved without regional support for which the Indian core was expected to appreciate the unique geo-social problem of the region. It needed an organic relationship with its diverse ethnic groups particularly the hill tribes. The national leadership however, failed to develop any mechanism for their emotional integration with the national mainstream. In stead of breaking the legacy of imperialist rule, undoing the arbitrary and irrational British method of administration and formulating a coherent nation-centric policy to build up an organic relation between the tribal masses and rest of people in India, they took them for granted. Ignoring the alienated mindset of these people, they provided opportunities to the forces of vested interest to fish in troubled water.

Taking advantage of the situation, the imperialist forces while establishing their operational bases in different parts of South East Asia began playing the divisive game in Northeast. (Insurgency in Northeast India by S. K. Sareen, 1982). While China with its eye on this oil, tea and mineral rich region tried to unite its people for an umbrella of Mongoloid movement, Pakistan and Bangladesh with Muslim League agenda of 1906 for Islamic expansionism promoted Muslim infiltration in the region and helped the secessionist forces against India. Church is regarded one of the four arms of western powers besides Infantry, Air Force and Navy (Dr. J. C. Kumarappa's quote from 'What ails North-East' by Bhanu Pratap Shukla) and hence the Christian Missionaries, with a view to maintain religio-cultural hegemony in the region also helped them through western powers.

Against the background of the unique situation, India has been facing the challenge of autonomist and secessionist demands at different places in Northeast at different points of time but ethno-political violence in the region was often greatly exaggerated in the media. India is a country where caste, creed, language and religion dominate the political discourse and therefore, the centuries old isolated region cannot be an exception. If we look into the on going movements and revolts in number of regions in the country, it appears that entire India is passing through a whirlpool of competitive and violent politics as seen in Northeast. Maoists, Sikh extremists and the movements for new States like Telangna, Bundelkhand and Harit Pradesh are nothing but a continuous search for new political identity by the diverse groups in the country.

In absence of a sense of pan-Indianism among them, hill people of Northeast, who had more proximity with the people and cities across the international border than rest of India, were not expected to overcome their political confusion overnight. With arms left by Japanese army in the region during Second World War the Nagas under the banner of Naga National Council led by Angami Zapu Phizo therefore, fired the first shot for liberation of this territory from Indian occupation just on the eve of

Independence on August 14, 1947. Though, the revolt was suppressed and Phizo was arrested in 1948, his arrest made him the supreme leader of the Nagas. Gradually he succeeded in accomplishing Naga unity irrespective of their division in over a dozen of sub-tribes. He even consolidated the Nagas residing in the contiguous areas of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and even in foreign territory of Myanmar and now the insurgents are demanding Greater Nagaland, which includes all the Naga inhabited areas. The poisonous virus of Naga revolt disturbed the political climate of entire Northeast and subsequently encouraged other ethnic groups like Mizo, Bodo, and Meitei for similar demands.

The Unique geo-political situation of Northeast with long international border is vulnerable from the security point of view. Moreover, instigating hand of foreign enemies further complicated its problem. The British granted political asylum to Z. A. Phizo, the legendary Naga rebel and extended helping hand to Mizo insurgent Laldenga. Pakistan, China and Bangladesh on the other hand were supplying arms to various insurgent groups regularly. Baptist Christian Missionaries like Michel Scott meddled in tribal politics. These known misdeeds of foreign forces are enough proof to suggest that had the Indian establishment countered the evil designs of foreign adversaries effectively, the on going insurgency would not have persisted. Forced migration of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan reduced the aboriginal natives of Tripura to minority and Assamese also became scared of similar fate due to the politics of Muslim infiltration. Despite these developments the national leadership remained contended and paid little attention to study the problem dispassionately. Even re-organization of states in mid 1950s was carried out without looking into this dark area.

The dialogues maintained by different insurgent groups in northeast with Government of India are continuing since independence. In the process some of them gave up their secessionist demand and also joined the politico-economic mainstream of the country. But there are still a sizeable number of insurgents particularly in Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Tripura where widespread ethnic conflict has kept the entire northeast disturbed for decades.

Over the years the Government of India with a view to pacify the secessionist and autonomist ethnic groups, reorganized Assam and created Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1972), Mizoram (U.T. in 1972 and full-fledged statehood in 1987), Manipur (1972), and Arunachal Pradesh. Creation of smaller States on the basis of ethnic groups opened a Pandora box as the state leadership in the region have not fulfilled the political aspirations of over 200 hundred tribes, who have been in inter-ethnic conflicts for centuries. In Manipur various aboriginal ethnic groups like Meitei, Nagas, Kukis, and Hmars are fighting against each other under their respective insurgent leaders.

In Meghalaya too, Garos and Khasis do not have smooth relation. In Assam the Bodos, Kacharis and a number of other tribes are demanding their separate States or independence. Even though peace is restored in Mizoram, Chakmas in this State are not at all comfortable with the Mizos.

The background of all the secessionist movements in Northeast is different but ironically, a section of media, academics and social scientists are trying to combine them together and have made the problem more and more complex. Blaming the Centre for the neglect of the region they plead that the former is treating its people as if they are not the citizens like rest of India. Mahasweta Devi, a well-known litterateur while answering to a question on unrest in Northeast said, "I think the area has been neglected for years. We have not treated them as part of India so it has resulted in unrest" (Pioneer dated January 16, 2006). Such academic assessment suggests that the genesis of the trouble has emanated from the neglect of the region.

Movement for preservation of ethnic identity in India has been an important issue of political discourse for decades. There is nothing wrong if such discourse is meant for the progress of the society without negating the nation building process. In Northeast it is however used by wide network of self-serving and anti-people corrupt politicians, Government officials, drug and arm smugglers and lumpen elements with the help of instigating hands of neighboring countries.

The educated elite among the hill peoples with their share in political power emerged as a new feudal class that changed the socio-economic scenario in the tribal society. Usurping the traditional right over land and forest of their own people and dividing the tribal society between rich and poor, they created class rivalry, which was unusual for tribal society. Ironically, despite the deep-rooted inter-tribe contradiction, tribal intelligentsia, who failed to share political power, is in unending search for larger identity on the plea of ethno-nationalism, which is the common ideology of all the secessionist groups. Their so-called quest for identity related insurgency is simply a pressure tactics for more and more political concessions.

The State leaders are saleable commodities at the hands of the ruling party at Centre. They change their loyalty overnight if there is change in Centre as they are more interested in seeking Central fund than to change the secessionist tendencies of the people. The national leadership overlooks the siphoning of public fund to the insurgents for the sake of their respective party's interest. Media reports suggest that the insurgents extort huge amount from ruling party leaders in their respective States. "The Outlook magazine carried a story that Ibobi Singh, Chief Minister of Manipur paid Rs. 1.5 crore to some Revolutionary Peoples' Front. Former Governor Lt. Gen. (Retd) V. K. Nayyar leveled similar charges against two former Chief Ministers in the State, besides a number of other politicians" (Pioneer dated February 9, 2006).

In spite of the known nexus between the various anti-people forces and the insurgents, to put blame only on Centre may not be fair.

Above all, the ground reality also suggests that the failure of the Central Government to manage the international boarder with firm hand to counter the unfriendly designs of our neighbours is the prime reason behind the unrest. Except Bhutan no other country across the border took tough action against the insurgents. If trans-border migration of insurgents is prevented, they may not survive for long. Ever Since Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of the country was trapped in the 'Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai' slogan and faced humiliating defeat in 1962, his successors continuously maintained soft attitude towards undesirable developments along the northeastern borders. Failure of the Centre in 1962 War gave rise to centrifugal forces in Northeast to accelerate secessionist demands.

The insurgents groups have covered a long way in fighting for the independence of their territories and some of them strengthened their striking power due to the sanctuary and help from across the international border but the common masses are not with them. They are fed up with the disturbances, which have only increased their miseries. They are more interested for development than to support them. It is a historical fact that rise of any country is closely linked to the emotional integration of its diverse regions and accordingly, contrary to the general academic perception the post-colonial leadership of India always accepted the people of the region as equal partners in nation-building process. But it is unfortunate that they are facing the trauma of insurgency for over half a century at the hands of a group of their own people. As discussed above, their owes are factually linked with the deep nexus between the insurgents and corrupt politicians and State officials, who allow unabated black-marketing of essential commodities and drug smuggling and not with identity crisis as is often highlighted by the media.

One can understand that the hill people of the region were under historical isolation from the socio-cultural interaction with the larger civilisational masses for centuries and were therefore apprehensive against the imaginary danger to their ethnic identity. But had such historical background been reason behind insurgency, why did the Assamese, who had centuries old socio-cultural link with the rest of Indian sub-continent and had taken an active part in freedom movement also now pose challenge against their assimilation with Indian State?

In view of the multiplicity of large number of ethnic groups, who are now aspiring to have their respective independent States or sovereignty on the plea of their pre-British status and separate nationality, the problem is getting multiplied day by day. The belief of the hill people that they were sovereign entity before their annexation by the British is applicable to a number of ethnic groups in the country. After

departure of British over five hundred Princely states which had sovereign status merged under one democratic geo-political boundary and the Hill districts of Assam also became a part of Indian Union. Thus, harping on Pre-British status will only add to the prevailing socio political tension in the region. With growing number of militant outfits, if independence were granted on the basis of ethnic identity, there would be endless fight for hundreds of States or nations in the northeast. This is neither practicable nor feasible. However, being a region of competing ethnicity of a large number of tribes and sub-tribes, North-East needs a lasting solution in totality through a revolutionary nation-centric policy.

Academics, political analysts, social scientists and tribal intelligentsia are pondering over only the economic neglect of the region and their pre-British identity as primary reasons behind the insurgency. But if one looks into the overall economic structure of the country Northeast is also in the continuing process of development particularly in fields of education, communications, rural electrification and cottage industries. The level of development in this region may not be at par with relatively higher developed states like Punjab, Haryana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu but in comparison to BIMARU States, from where crores of populations are migrated for search of livelihood, Northeast is much better off.

An ambitious plan of a grand Asian high way to connect India to Myanmar, Thailand and China through Assam, Manipur and Nagaland is already in pipeline, which will provide economic boom to the region once it is through. Thus, the blame on Centre for economic neglect of Northeast may not be fair. In fact the Indian establishment provided respectable and proportionate place in the political map of the country also to the people of Northeast. But with greater number of western educated people than many of Indians in plains, they expect larger share in political power. Despite political and administrative corruption, the increasing participation of the people of Northeast in the development process of their respective States and significant changes in their socio-political behaviour have sent a positive signal that they are working as equal partners in the nation-building exercise. Sending larger number of their representatives in Parliament from national parties like Congress, BJP and CPM and participation of the people of entire region in elections prove their commitments towards the core of Indian Union. Laldenga, the Mizo rebel leader ultimately joined the mainstream politics under India's constitution and Mizoram is practically free from the menace of insurgency.

Similar is the case of Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore, the apprehension of the dismemberment of Northeast from India through the so called coordinated challenge to the Indian core is far from the ground reality. Only some misguided sections in Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Assam are working for India's inimical neighbours and anti-Indian forces only for their self-serving interest. They

need to be handled with a strong political will as the rise of a sovereign state depends upon the integration of its diverse regions under a centripetal pull. Once the forces of disintegration are allowed to grow it will be the beginning of its decline.

Culture of Mizoram

Dances of Mizoram

Khuallam: Khuallam literary means 'Dance of the Guests'. It is a dance usually performed in the ceremony called 'Khuangchawi'. In order to claim a distinguished place in the society and to have a place in paradise or Pialral one has to attain the coveted title of 'Thangchhuah'. Guests invited from the other villages at the Khuangchawi ceremony enter the arena dancing Khuallam. Traditional hand woven Mizo cloth known as Puandum is wrapped over the shoulders while dancing. Puandum has the colors black, red, yellow and green stripes. Significantly Puandum is an indispensable item which every girl has to take along with when she gets married. It is used when her husband dies to cover the dead body. As most other folk dances of the Mizos, this dance is accompanied by a set of gongs known as Darbu and no song is sung.

Cheraw: Cheraw is a very old traditional dance of the Mizos. It is believed that the dance had already existed way back in the 1st Century A.D., while the Mizos were still somewhere in the Yunan Province of China, before their migration into the Chin Hills in the 13th Century A.D., and eventually to the present Mizoram. Some of the tribes living in South East Asia have similar dances in one form or the other with different names.

Sarlamkai/Solakia : This is an impressive dance originating from the Pawi and Mara communities in the southern part of Mizoram. This dance is known as 'Sarlamkai' whereas the Lushais referred to it as 'Rallu Lam'. In older days when the different tribes were constantly at war with each other, a ceremony to deride the vanquished beheaded skull of the enemy was usually held by the victor. This ceremony is performed to ensure that the vanquished soul remains a slave to the victor even when the latter also dies.

Chailam: Chailam is a popular dance performed on the occasion of 'Chapchar Kut' one of the most important festivals of the Mizos. In this dance, men and women stand alternatively in circles, with the women holding on to the waist of the man, and the man on the women's shoulder. In the middle of the circle are the musicians who play the drums and the mithun's horn.

Chawnglaizawn : This is a popular fold dance of one of the Mizo communities known as Pawi. It is performed in groups of large numbers. Boys and girls standing

in rows dance to the beat of drums. Shawls are used to help the movement of the arms, which also adds color to the dance. Only drums are used in this dance.

Chheihlam : Chheihlam' originated after the year 1900 on the lines of the songs known as 'Puma Zai' and the dance known as 'Tlanglam'. It is a dance that embodies the spirit of joy and exhilaration. It is performed to the accompaniment of a song called 'Chheih hla'. People squat around in a circle on the floor, sing to the beat of a drum or bamboo tube while a pair of dancers stand in the middle, and recite the song.

Tlanglam: Tlanglam is performed throughout the length and breadth of the State. Using music of Puma Zai, there have been several variations of the dance. This dance is one of the most popular dances these days by our cultural troupes in various places. Both sexes take part in this dance.

Khal Lam: is another popular dance of Mizos in which a group of boys wearing specially made shawls dance to the beat of drums and gongs. The dancers wear one type of striped loin cloth (puan) and a uniform striped shawl (puandum). While one beats a gong, the dancers in a row move gradually forward, with small forward-backward steps, keeping with the time. The arms would be flayed, along with the steps.

Sawlakin: This was originally a Lakher dance, but now it has been adopted by all the Mizas. Sawlakia means spirit of the slain. The dance was led by the warrior who had hunted a big game or killed a man. He would wear his best clothes and a plume of red feather. He would wield a gun or dao and a shield. He would be followed by other dancers in a row, who would also carry weapons, or cymbals or gongs. Some boys would stand in a group beating drums or blowing bugles. The dancers would move forward and slowly go round the head. While dancing weapons and shields would be wielded keeping time with drum or gong beats. All the time dancers would be plied with Zu by the women. This dance is a popular dance now. The modifications now are that there is no head in the circle and no Zu.

Chhilam: Chhilam was the dance performed in beer parties. But this dance still continues in a modified form, particularly in gatherings at homes. This dance is for elderly people and mostly by men, but sometimes women also join in. The men and women sit in a circle, beating the drum, and sing anecdotes and each takes a turn to dance in the centre of the circle.

Crafts of Mizoram

Textiles

The weaves and patterns bear a strong resemblance to similar textiles worn by the people of Myanmar and so do the clothes into which these fabrics are tailored.

Like the other states of the Northeast, textiles in Mizoram are largely a woman's activity. One of the traditional textiles of the state is the puan. Although it is rarely seen today on the streets of Mizoram, the weaving and the patterns of the puan are remarkable. Shawls and puans are available at the local markets, which often look like textile museums with their vast variety of weaves, patterns and colours on display.

Bamboo Craft

The 95-year-old Raj Bhavan, home of the present Mizoram governor, is a fine example of the state's expertise with bamboo and cane. The Mizos are also known for their basket weaving skills. Like the rest of the Northeast, the variety of styles and uses that the bamboo basket is put to is quite amazing. The Mizo conical bamboo basket called Paikwang is popularly used to carry firewood, cotton and such other stuff.

Wood Carving

Some of the finest woodcarvings in the Northeast are found among the people of this region. The woodcarvings are usually of human figures or decorative pieces that adorn the youth dormitories in these villages and sculptures erected in memory of the dead. In ancient times, woodcarving was associated with religious beliefs

Arts & Crafts of North-East

The Land

Mizoram, a mountainous region is sandwiched between Myanmar in the east and the south and Bangladesh and Tripura in the west with its northern frontiers touching Assam and Manipur states. Located in a strategic position, it has an 1100 km international boundary with Myanmar and Bangladesh. It was one of the districts of Assam until 1972 when it became a Union Territory.

After being annexed by the British in 1891, for the first few years, Lushai Hills in the north remained under Assam, while the southern half remained under Bengal. Both these parts were amalgamated in 1898 into one district called Lushai Hill District under the Chief Commissioner of Assam.

With the implementation of the North- Eastern Reorganization Act in 1972, Mizoram became a Union Territory and as a sequel to the signing of the historic memorandum of settlement between the Government of India and the Mizo National Front in 1986, it became the 23rd state of the Indian union on 20 February 1987. Mizoram literally translated means "Land of the Highlanders". The hills are steep with an average height of 900 metres. The highest peak in Mizoram is the Blue

Mountain (Phawngpui) with a height of 2210 metres. The tropical forests of Mizoram abound in a wide variety of flora and fauna. The thick bamboo groves strewn with wild plantations dominate the lower altitude, slowly giving way to dense woods festooned with creepers and canes as the hills rise higher. Orchids of various hues, pinkish- white bauthinia, sparkling rhododendrons, yellow sunflowers and many other colourful wild flowers, add a touch of delightful tonal contrasts to the greeneries. Besides being an ornithologist's delight, the jungles are home to tigers, wild boars, leopards, monkeys, barking deers, sambars and elephants.

The People: Historians believe that the Mizos are a part of the great wave of the Mongolian race spilling over the eastern and southern India centuries ago. Their sojourn in western Myanmar, into which they eventually drifted around the 7th century, is estimated to last about 10 centuries. Mizo is not just one tribe as normally presumed but the term represents several tribes taken together. The term Mizo means "the "men who live in the hills" (Mi- men; Zo- hills) or the Highlanders. Mizo comprises of 5 major tribes and 11 minor tribes known under the common name Awzia. The 5 major tribes are- Lushei, Ralte, Hmar, Paihte, Pawi (or Poi). While major tribes maintained their respective dialects, the 11 minor tribes either lost their distinctive dialects as a result of association with larger tribes.

Mizos are of Mongoloid origin, speaking a dialect of Tibeto- Burman origin. The Mizos came under the influence of the British missionaries in the 19th century and today the majority of the Mizos are Christians by faith. The literacy rate is the second highest in the country. The people are mostly non- vegetarian and their staple food is rice. The Mizos are a close- knit society with no class distinction and discrimination on grounds of sex, status or religion. They are hospitable, sociable and love music, singing and dancing. Mizos are agriculturists, practising what is known as "Jhum Cultivation" or slash- and- burn system of cultivation. They cut down the jungles, burn the dried trunks and leaves and then till the soil. All their activities revolve around this cultivation and their festivals are connected with such agricultural operations.

Social and Cultural Heritage: The fabric of social life in the Mizo society has undergone tremendous changes over the years. Before the British moved into the hills, for all practical purposes the village and the clan became units of the Mizo society. The Mizo code of ethics or dharma moved round "Tlawmngaihna" an untranslatable term meaning on the part of everyone to be hospitable, kind unselfish and helpful to others. Tlawmngaihna to a Mizo stands for selfless service for others.

A gregarious and close- knit society, they evolved some principles of self-help and cooperation to meet social obligations and responsibilities. Constructive social works were executed through voluntary community works known as *Hnatlang*. Every family was expected to contribute labour for the welfare of the community and participate

in Hnatlang. The spirit of Hnatlang combined with Tlawmngaihna makes it mandatory for the Mizos to render all possible help on occasions of marriage, public feast, accident and death.

The Mizos are a distinct community and the social unit was the village. Around it revolved the life of the Mizo. Mizo village is generally set on top of a hill with the chief's house at the centre and the bachelor's dormitory called Zwalbuk, prominently located in a central place. In a way, the focal point in the village was the Zwalbuk where all young bachelors of the village slept. Zwalbuk was the training ground and indeed the cradle wherein the Mizo youth was shaped into a responsible adult member of the society.

Until today the old belief, *Pathian* is still in use to term God. The Mizos have been enchanted to their new- found faith of Christianity with so much dedication and submission that their social life and thought- process have been altogether transformed and guided by the Christian church organisations directly or in indirectly and their sense of values has also undergone drastic change.

No class distinction and no discrimination on grounds of sex are not seen in Mizo society. 90% of them are cultivators and the village exists like a big family. Birth of a child, marriage in the village and death of a person in the village or a community feast arranged by a member of the village are important occasions in which the whole village is involved.

Economy: Agriculture is the mainstay for about 60% of the population of Mizoram. Only 5% of the total area is under cultivation. About 7% of the total cultivated area is under irrigation. Maize and paddy are cultivated in the hill slopes. Pulses, sugarcanes, chillies, ginger, tobacco, vegetables, turmeric, potato, banana and pineapple are the other crops grown in the state. Forest account for nearly 21% of the area.

Mizoram has no major industry. It has remained backward industrially which can be attributed to physical alienation, lack of mineral resources in the state, distance from the heart of the country coupled with communication, etc. The cottage industries comprise of handloom and handicrafts. In the small scale sector are the rice- milling, oil and flour milling, mechanised bamboo workshops, saw milling, brick making and furniture workshops.

Festivals: The Mizos have three main festivals- Mim Kut, Chapchar Kut and Pawl. These festivals or Kuts as they call them are in one way or another associated with their agricultural activities.

Chapchar Kut: Among many other festivals, Chapchar Kut or Spring Festival, is the most popular festival, celebrated after completion of their most arduous task of jungle clearing for "jhum" operations. On this day, people of all ages, young and old,

men and women, dressed in their respective colourful costumes and head-gears, assemble and perform various folk dances, sing traditional songs accompanied by the beating sound of drums, gongs and cymbals.

Mim Kut: Mim Kut or Maize festival is celebrated during the months of August and September, after the harvest of maize. Mim Kut is celebrated with great fanfare by drinking rice-beer, singing, dancing and feasting. Sample of the year's harvests are consecrated to the departed souls of the community.

Mizos are fast giving up their old customs and adopting the new mode of life that is greatly influenced by the western culture. Many of their present customs are mixtures of their old tradition and western pattern of life. Music is a passion of the Mizos. The most colourful and distinctive dance of the Mizo is called *Cheraw*. Long bamboo staves are used for this dance, therefore many people call it 'Bamboo Dance'.

Places of Interest: Aizawl (capital; religious and cultural centre of Mizoram); Champhai (beautiful resort on the Indo-Myanmar border, 192 kms away from Aizawl); Lunglei (hill station); Tamdil Lake (natural lake with virgin forest around); Vantawng Waterfalls (near the town of Thenzawl); Saitual (tourist resort); Rengdil (bird sanctuary).

Bamboo and Cane Culture of Mizoram

Mizoram is the land of a number of craftsmen and skilled artisans excelling in various crafts. Bamboo and Cane related crafts are a major source of income to the state as well as the people. The Mizo's dexterity in wicker-work and basketry is well known. Bamboo and Cane have their multifarious uses in turning out various commercial crafts and items of furniture. Even their houses are generally built with bamboo walls and floors and thatched roofs. While women excel at weaving, men are expert at cane and bamboo work. They make fine cane hats and uncommonly beautiful baskets. The traditional Mizo hat is known for its workmanship. It looks as if the hat is woven out of fine bamboo as fine as cotton yarn. Besides their typical hat or caps, domestic baskets are all made from plaited bamboo and these are reinforced by stout cane, which is very hard and durable. By smoking, the cane would be coloured a shiny mahogany to give some colour and patterns to the work.

A typical Mizo basket is broad at the rim and tapers at the bottom. There are baskets for carrying firewood, water, paddy, rice and vegetables. Baskets made of cane and bamboo together with leaves and grasses, for storing ornaments, clothes and other valuables are also made. Other items made are chairs, sofas, tables, bamboo screens and cages, umbrella-handles, knitting needles and hats. All types of traditional baskets and decorative articles are products in the Handicrafts Centres situated in three districts- Aizawl, Lunglei and Chhimtuipui (Sailha). The Handicraft Centres at

Luangmual, Aizawl produces typical Mizo Cane Hats. Traditional ornaments too use bamboo in it.

On celebrations, Mizo women use a headgear of a bamboo band with parrot feathers stuck in it, the ends of which are decorated with beetles. Other bamboo products include fish and animal traps, rain bamboo hat seen with the formation of a flat thin layer on its top, *japis*, cones, circular boxes and other materials serving as reservoirs and containers of goods, crops and other things. Therefore, a variety of them is catered to the village craftsmen on regular or irregular basis. They serve mainly as body panniers for placing head-loads, carrying baskets, cages, fish nets, etc. They take different shapes and vary from slim or even flat (like rice winnowing fans) to broad, elongate sizes and the traditional size with regard to proportion from rim to base is retained. Panniers or cones accommodate the bigger loads whereas the other baskets of course do not support heavy weight.

Mizos both men and women are inveterate smokers. They love their locally made pipes. The women's pipe is like a small *hukkah*, small enough to be easily held in the hand and carried about. The men's pipe is of western type. These are made out of bamboo and weed. Provided with selected, seasoned bamboo and given proper training in carving pipes for export, the Mizo craftsmen could possibly introduce a new range with sufficient prospects.

So far as the bamboo in the Mizo Hills are concerned, it is available in large quantities but at present it has not been utilized to the maxim. However, it seems that the constituted authorities have envisaged the feasibility of introducing in Mizoram better vocational trades in spinning and weaving, cane hats and cane baskets, bamboo chairs, tables, teapots, racks, safes, etc. as well as bamboo screen cages and umbrella handles.

Mizo House

The houses built by the Lushai tribe of Mizoram, predominantly uses bamboo and wood in their construction. Most of the houses are built on the slopes and are invariably supported by wooden posts of varied lengths, so that the house is balanced horizontally with the level of the road. Cross beams are fastened against these posts and over the beams long solid bamboos are laid. Bamboo matting is then laid over the bamboo frame, which forms the floor of the house. The walls of the house are also made up of bamboo matting fastened to the outer posts. The roof consists of solid as well as split bamboo frames covered with thick thatch and some other kind of leaves. Cane is generally used for keeping the joints together and in some cases, iron nails are also used. In case where the floor of the house is much above the ground, a ladder made entirely of a piece of log is placed across the intervening space between the floor

of the house and the ground. The doors and windows are usually of bamboo matting and these are fastened against the wall. It may be noted that in some cases the floor, doors and windows are made of wooden planks, while in others split bamboos are used instead.

The interior of the house is a single rectangular structure. It is partitioned into a number of rooms according to the convenience by screens made of bamboo matting or with a cloth fixed to bamboo or wooden frame. In houses where both married and unmarried persons live together, separate sleeping apartments are made by partition as described above. The hearth is always at one corner of the house usually near the front floor. It is made of clay and stones and is raised about 2-3 ft above the floor supported by raised poles. Above the fire place is hung a bamboo frame which is kept suspended to keep various things used in cooking as dried chillies, dry fish, salt, etc.

Basketry

Basketry among the tribes is a delicate work. They are experts in making etches and notches from the soft fibres of cane. Baskets with lids and without lids, smoothly surfaced, strongly floored, gently fenced from mouth to base and modelled into oval, square, flat structures, revealing a considerable skill in slitting, folding and inserting are seen. They serve various purposes such as cages, containers, baskets of different articles, etc.

Models of Baskets (local names)

- i) Dawrawn.
- ii) Empai, Emping, Tlamen.
- iii) Paikawng: It is a basket made from split bamboo strips.
- iv) Hnam.
- v) Nghawngkawl.
- vi) Thlangra.
- vii) Koh or Fawng.
- viii) Paih-Per. (Dawrawn, Hnam, Nghawngkawl, Paih-Per are best examples of Panniers).
- ix) Thul or Thulte: They are used for storing valuables at home and outside.
- x) Herhsawp: It is a bamboo stool.
- xi) Arbawm: It is usually netted and is a poultry basket.
- xii) Thuttleng or Thutthleng: It is a bamboo chair; it is four legged.
- xiii) Bontong: It is an ornamented basket for storing coloured yarn.
- xiv) Bawmrang: It has a hollow circular rim and it is u-shaped.

- xv) **Aiawt:** This is a fish or crab trap. In most cases, a variety of jungle cane is used. The fine cane serves the purpose of etching, notching and more making a suitable coherence in the parts of the bamboo structure.

Baskets

A. Open Weave Carrying Basket:

Paikawng: The *paikawng* is an open-weave carrying basket made and used by the Lushai tribe of Mizoram. Women generally use the basket as a rough work basket for carrying firewood, bamboo water tubes, etc. The basket, made entirely of bamboo outer splits, is carried over the back with a strap resting on the head. The local names of the bamboo species normally used are *rawnal*, *rawthing* or *phulrua*. The basket has an extremely strong construction which is very resistant to vertical loads. This is due to the construction pattern as well as the fact that fairly thick strips of bamboo are used. The *paikawng* has a square base of diagonal 230 mm from where it gradually transforms into a circle of diameter 390 mm at the rim. The height of the basket is 390 mm. To the craftsmen making this basket, the height is assumed to be the one hand-measure known as *tawngkhat* in Lushai. The main elements are those that form the base, sides and rim of the basket. The basket is carried by means of a braided head-strap.

Emsin: The *emsin* is very similar in construction to the *paikawng*. In fact, it is an ornamental version of the work basket. Lushai women use this basket for marketing or carrying belongings to the fields. It is used for light work. Young girls take pride in taking this basket on evening walks to the bazaar. It is carried over the back with a strap resting on the head. The *emsin* has a square base whose diagonal measures 225 mm, the rim diameter is 370 mm and its height is 370 mm. The main elements are about one-third the width and thickness of the *paikawng* but more elements are used. The rest of the structure is similar to that of the *paikawng* except at the rim.

B. Closed Weave Basket:

Paiem: The *paiem* is a closed-weave carrying basket used by the Lushais of Mizoram to carry grain and other field produce. In Lushai, the word *em* means "basket" and *pai* means "without holes". This basket is also called *empai*. The Lushai women also use this basket for marketing. It is made from bamboo outer splits from a species locally known as *rawnal*. Split cane is used in the rim-strengthening element; the weft elements of the side weave near the base; in bindings at the rim; and for strengthening the corners of the basket. The cane species used is locally known as *mitperh*. The basket has a square base whose diagonal measures 200 mm and the cross-section of the basket goes through a gradual transition till it reaches a perfectly

circular rim of diameter 410 mm. Its height is about 430 mm. All elements made from cane are smoked to a rich red-brown colour before they are used in the basket.

Tlamen: The *tlamen* is a Lushai product, larger than the *paiem*, which is carried by men to bring in produce from the fields. The basket has a square base and a circular rim. The diagonal of the base square is 210 mm and the sides flare outwards sharply to a rim diameter of 520 mm. The height of the basket is 520 mm. The structure and method of construction is similar to the

Dawrawn: The *dawrawn* is another closed-weave carrying basket used by the Lushais, both for storage as well as to bring in field produce. This basket is made in two sizes, the men's size and the women's size.

It is a tall, narrow basket with a square base and circular rim. The diagonal of the base square measures 190 mm; the rim diameter is 420 mm and its height 740 mm. The structure and method of construction is similar to that of the *paiem*, except that slightly coarser strips are used for the warp and weft elements.

C. Small Storage Baskets:

Fawng: The *fawng* is a shallow, square-based basket with a self-strengthened square rim and is used by the Lushai tribe of Mizoram. The diagonal of both base square and rim square measures 400 mm and the height of the basket is 160 mm. The basket is woven in the diagonal-weaving method with two mutually perpendicular sets of elements interlacing in either a 2-up-2-down twill structure or a 3-up-3-down twill structure. The corners of the base square are in some cases strengthened by split-cane binding. Smaller baskets of a similar construction are made by the Lushai to store yarn for making the loin-loop warp. These are called *fawng-te-laivel*. "Fawng" refers to the square-based basket described above, while *te* means "small", and "*laivel*" refers to the "concentric square pattern" generated by the twill-weave structure used in the basket.

D. Storage Containers:

Thul: The Mizos use a basket called *Thul*. These baskets, though shaped like their carrying baskets, have a double-walled structure and legs located at the corners of their square base. A lid shaped either like a semi-spherical dome or like a cane covers the mouth of the basket.

Native Furniture

Stool from Mizoram: The Mizo stool is a short cylinder made of two rings of cane held apart by a series of vertical bamboo splints located around the circumference of the rings. These splints have both ends shaped to form tenons, which are firmly driven into corresponding holes provided in both rings. The seat surface is made of

raw hide stretched over the upper rings and simultaneously held in place by the bamboo verticals. The cane rings are held in shape by overlapping the free ends by an inclined cut, which is then bound by leather thongs. The local name of the cane and bamboo are *mitperh* and *phulrua* respectively.

The most fascinating feature of this stool is the manner in which the rings are formed. The Mizo craftsmen have found a unique way of bending cane. As freshly harvested cane is fairly flexible, a length of cane is wound around a cylindrical post of selected diameter into a tight helix and left to cure in the sun. The cane is left in the sun for three or four days before being removed from the mould and cut to form rings of the required size.

Whole Culm Containers

Tuim: The *tuim* is made from a bamboo with a diameter of about 100 mm to 140 mm and internodes length of 450 to 600 mm. Two internodes are used to make a water tube 900 to 1200 mm long, with one nodal wall forming the base. The nodal wall between the internodes is pierced to connect the lumen. Half the circumference of the top open edge of the tube is cut at an angle to facilitate pouring. The outer skin of the bamboo is removed and the nodes are scrapped off to reduce the weight of the tube, to prevent it from cracking and to keep the water cool by evaporation through the internodal walls.

Winnowing Trays

Thlangra: The *thlangra* is a winnowing tray used by the Lushai tribe of Mizoram. The triangular *thlangra* requires manufacturing skills that only a few craftsmen possess. The rawthing bamboo is used because of the resistance of thin strips of this bamboo to impact loads. The equal sides of the isosceles *thlangra* are held in the hand when it is being used.

Fish Baskets

There are baskets that are used to store fishes. These are either carried by the fishing folks in their hands or tied to a belt around their waist.

Paikur: The Mizo *paikur* is a bottle-shaped structure with a conical spiked valve at the mouth. This again only allows the fish to enter the bottle. The fish can be collected by removing the spiked cone when required.

Rain Shield and Head Gear

Lukhum : The *lukhum* is the traditional hat commonly worn by Lushai men. Its shape is like a peaked cap and retains its shape even when not in use. It is formed in two layers, each made from strips of bamboo woven in an open-hexagonal weave.

The inside layer is generally coarser than the outside layer and is woven first, spinning at the top. This hat is made extremely delicately, with a high quality of craftsmanship. The recent trend however is to make the hats a little coarser, with paper or plastic replacing the palm leaves between the layers.

Miscellaneous Products (Toys)

Bamboo Pop Gun: The bamboo pop-gun is an interesting toy made for children by local craftsmen. A length of small diameter bamboo is used as the barrel. When the splint is pulled back in the slot and released, it can propel a small pellet placed inside the tube. An indigenous trigger mechanism is provided to regulate the release of the pellet.

These devices seem to have evolved from the countless bird and animal traps that are used locally. Most of these traps uses the elastic property of bamboo splints in order to spring the trap when the prey touches the trigger.

Smoking Pipes

Vaibel: The Lushai tribe of Mizoram makes a bamboo pipe called *vaibel*. The species of bamboo used is locally called tursing. It is a solid bamboo upto 50 mm in diameter and it is very strong, as it does not break when dropped. A part of the culm including a node is used to shape the bowl. The hollow of the bowl is bored in the centre passing through the node in a small hole. The bamboo stem passes through the shaped branch segment to enter the hollow created below the node. The hole at the bottom is sealed with a piece of dried gourd. Locally grown tobacco is used and only men use this pipe. Whereas, the Lushai women use a pipe called *tuibur*.

Tuibur : The *tuibur* is made in an interesting combination of bamboo and clay. It consists of five parts connected to respective elements in housed joints wedged tightly together. The joint between the water container and the central element is covered and strengthened by a fine braided band made from a palm fibre. The central element is solid and is shaped from a part of a rhizome.

Weapons

Sairawkher: The *sairawkher* is a bow made by the Lushai tribe of Mizoram and used to hunt birds and small animals. Unlike the usual bow, this one fires clay pellets instead of arrows. It consists of a strong beam made from a wide splint of bamboo, which is held bent in tension by a bow-string made from a fine bamboo split. The beam is made from rawthing bamboo while the bow string is from sairil bamboo. The bow requires some skill to operate, as it has to be twisted slightly to one side to permit the pellet to sail past without striking the beam.