

**ELECTORAL PROCESS IN MIZORAM: A STUDY ON THE
ROLE OF CHURCH IN THE SEVENTH ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS**

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled “ELECTORAL PROCESS IN MIZORAM: A STUDY ON THE ROLE OF CHURCH IN THE SEVENTH ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS”, submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY, of Mizoram University is my own original work. The dissertation has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree of this or any other university.

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Letkholun Haokip

Aizawl

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Elections are identified with democracy, and mass voting by the people is usually associated with the concept of participatory democracy. Elections are the major agents of political socialization where different issues are raised, and in this way elections serve as an instrument of political communication in the society. Elections are a key institutional mechanism in democracy. In a democratic form of government all eligible citizens can participate equally, either directly or indirectly through elected representatives. An election exercise is a formal decision-making process in which a population chooses individuals to hold public office. Elections have been a formal mechanism by which representative democracy has operated for over a couple of centuries. Elections fill offices in the legislature, sometimes in the executive as well, and at regional and local governments.

In India, electoral process can be described as a developing liberal democracy that was based mostly on the western liberal democratic system. The people are the source of all authority, they have legitimate authority to elect their government and vest it with power and authority. They can change the government as their will is supreme. The preamble of the Constitution clearly reposes faith in popular sovereignty. Like every liberal democratic system, the government in India is also formed by elected representatives of the people. The right to vote is available to all without any discrimination on the basis of caste, colour, creed, place of birth, religion, sex or property. Except for a minimum age qualification (18 years), there is no rigid and formal qualification in respect of their right to vote. Election of representatives by the people is secret, free and fair. The government represents the people and has to continuously reflect its representative character. It has to maintain and periodically demonstrate its popularity. People can change the government through the elections. In India, election studies are essentially a post-second world war development.

Like every other democratic system, a well structured election system is the *sine qua non* of the representative democratic countries. Elections in India also are conducted through a well structured institutional process. The Election Commission has assumed the sole responsibility for conducting of elections in India. It superintends, directs and controls all aspects of the electoral process. It is an autonomous institution vested with the responsibility of conducting all elections in India. However, the paradox of Indian democracy is that the enlightened middle class had shown indifferent attitude towards electoral process. In the era of globalization, this class is so deeply involved to fulfill its unending quench for attaining material pleasure that it failed to realize its larger national responsibility. This raises the question that when the most educated and enlightened group failed to fulfill its national obligation, what way can one expect the political system to improve automatically.

In the western democracy, the educated and powerful groups not only take part in electoral process but also influence the government through various pressure groups and also by forming civil society groups on a large scale. Whereas in India, people belonging to middle and upper classes maintain indifferent attitude and people belonging to lower social, economic, educational backgrounds register their participation in large numbers. For the success of democracy, the participation of haves and have-nots is equally required. If one analyzes the prevailing trend in Indian democracy, one finds that on the one hand electoral process had raised the level of political awareness and on the other hand, it has led to increase in the misuse of electoral process by political parties for their narrow ends. Winning elections has become the sole criteria for political parties. In order to win elections political parties seem to be compromised with ideology, values, and morality, which used to be associated with it. In the process, they failed to realize that they had larger national responsibility as well.

The major problems of the Indian electoral systems are such as, money power, muscle power, misuse of government machinery, criminalization of politics, impersonation, lack of serious candidature, heavy expenditure, poll violence, casteism, and communalism. All these electoral malpractices seem to pose serious problems and also threaten the process of free and fair elections, and thereby disturb the peace and harmony in democracy. Often, elections in India have been distorted by certain

malpractices because of massive corruption and pernicious rigging. And, they had become elusive because of emerging political uncertainties, shifting party identities, social fragmentation and economic chaos, and lack of ideology, purpose and functions on the part of political parties. It is high time to draw concrete solutions and find appropriate remedies in the electoral process. However, any pragmatic approach to the problems of practical politics could avoid both perfectionism as well as cynicism. Also, neither moral preaching nor legal enactments alone would make much difference in practical politics, which is the art and practice of acquiring and retaining power through elections. In any case, electoral pollution was rooted deeply in the India's social, political, public and business life, and it is nurtured by the prevalent socio-economic conditions¹.

The kind of electoral tactics applied by political parties for winning the elections has promoted casteism, communalism, regionalism, sectarianism and above all use of money, muscle power and criminalization of polity. This has become an accepted feature of Indian politics. In practical sense, no political party is ready to discuss the question of what should be done to do away with such electoral malpractices. Even Indian public too could not escape from its responsibility as it was electing people who were of dubious credentials. Somehow due to the effort of the Election Commission, electoral violence, misuse of money, bogus voting, among other malpractices have been substantially reduced. However, it is not enough to say that in India, free and fair election had been totally possible. Further, although the malpractice is recognized by the Election Commission, yet it does not have machinery to deal with the problem. It has a long way to go.

In the context of North-east India, the easternmost region of India that consists of the contiguous seven states, besides the state of Sikkim. It is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse regions of India, wherein each state had its distinct culture and traditions. The North-eastern states are very different in many ways from the other parts of India. However, like other parts of India, electoral process in the north eastern region is much influenced by factors like caste, tribe, language, region, religion, money and muscle power. It is also influenced by different types of social

¹ Anjoo Sharan Upadhyaya, *Electoral Reforms in India* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2005), 149.

groups and civil society organizations. Some of them are very powerful that they even influenced the state politics. These civil society organizations interfere in the electoral process and remain more active during the course of elections.

Electoral Reforms

Electoral reform is a change in the electoral systems to improve how public expectations are expressed through the election results. That includes certain reforms of voting systems, vote-counting procedures, rules about political parties, eligibility criteria to vote, nomination rules, safety of voters and election workers, measures against different forms of corruption, financing of candidates and referendum campaigns, and other factors that affect the rate of voter participation. As such, looking at the political scenario of India, one would observe that almost every election was to be carried out with different kinds of malpractices. Hence, the faith of citizens had been decreased over the years in the whole electoral process. There is a feeling that electoral system and various processes of the law associated with it could be revised and implemented so as to have had clean, free and fair elections.

Although political parties had offered certain suggestions as well as they had enacted certain laws that they did not have the political will to implement them. Without having political will, no suggestion or law could be effective. There is no dearth of rules and laws for conducting free and fair elections, but as far as implementation of these laws was concerned political as well as administrative will was hardly visible². Should one allow the electoral process to continue or should one start thinking of taking necessary remedial steps to stem the rot is a question that deserves some attention. There is no dearth of remedial steps either. The question is only of earnestness. Those who had a vested interest in the increasing deterioration of social and political values would resist any such proposal of reform in the electoral process.

²For instance, Time and again, political parties have talked about the imperative need of undertaking electoral reforms in their election manifestos but these promises have remained on paper. In the last decade, each in-incoming government assured the public that it would introduce a comprehensive bill for electoral reforms in Parliament but it has never been translated in practice. The only serious effort made in this direction was during the tenure of the V.P. Singh government in 1989-90 but since the government lost majority in the House, this initiative too was a non-starter. Even the special of Parliament called during the term of the P.V. Narasimha Rao government failed to arrive at any consensus on the outstanding issues relating to electoral reforms. Again, the Baharatiya Janata Party (BJP) le coalition government headed by Atal Behari Vajpayee has, in the president's address to the joint seesion of Parliament in October 1999, announced that a comprehensive electoral reforms bill, to cleanse the poll process and introduce proxy voting for defence and security forces, will be brought in Parliament. It is to be seen how far and when it gets translated into reality.

For the last few decades, the ECs had worked on the subject of electoral reforms and also submitted to the central government, from time to time, detailed and highly sensible proposals for ensuring electoral reforms. Unfortunately, these did not receive much attention in the government circle. As such, S.L. Shakhdar, the then CEC had lamented, “Despite a wide measure of agreement on the subject, the question of electoral reforms generally seems to come up only on the eve of a general elections when the stock answer is that it is too late and that such ideas had better be postponed until ‘next time’. That ‘next time’ has not arrived”.³ Thus, though India takes pride in declaring itself the world’s largest democracy, the subject of electoral reforms has been consistently and consciously neglected by all political parties.

Coming to the Mizoram state, bordered with Myanmar to the east and south, Bangladesh to the west, and by the states of Manipur, Assam, and Tripura to the north, it is the southernmost of India's hill states. It is a highly religious state, where Christians are in majority. There are also Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu minorities living in the state. In the 18th century, the Mizo tribes developed an autocratic political system that was based on hereditary chieftainship. The British government formally annexed the area in the 1890s. It was incorporated into Assam as the Lushai Hills District in 1898⁴. It remained part of Assam after Indian independence in 1947, and was renamed the Mizo Hills District in 1954 by the Act of Parliament.⁵ During that time the Mizos grew more dissatisfied, wanting greater autonomy. In February 1966⁶, an independence movement called, the Mizo National Front (MNF) intensified its activities and the hard core of the party had started an armed revolt.

This movement compelled the Indian government to take over the administration of the Mizo Hills in 1972. The insurgency movement continued till 1986, when the Mizoram Peace Accord was signed. Under the terms of peace accord, Mizoram was

³ Mandhav Godbole, “The Electoral Framework, Process and Political Parties”, *Political Parties and Party systems*, Edited by, Ajay K.Mehra, D.D. Khanna and Gert W, Kueck (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2003),182-183.

⁴ RN Prasad and AK Agarwal,*Political and Economic Development of India* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1991), 3.

⁵ Amendment of the Constitution 1964 Parliament Act. No. 18. Cited by SN Singh, *Mizoram: Historical, Geographical, Social, Economic, Political and Administrative* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1994), 115.

⁶ RN Prasad and AK Agarwal, *op. cit.*, 9.

granted statehood in February 1987⁷. Mizoram has created a single-chamber Legislative Assembly with 40 seats. The state has two members to represent in the Indian Parliament: one to the Rajya Sabha (upper house) and another to the Lok Sabha (lower house).

Since the time Mizoram got the status of Union Territory in 1971, the Church had been involved in the electoral process. The first visible engagement of the Church in the electoral process was noticed in the year 1972, when elections were held for the first time in the newly formed Union Territory of Mizoram. The Church had then made an appeal to the political parties, candidates and voters for ensuring a clean, free and fair election. This sort of practice had become a regular feature with the Church since then. The Church also appealed to the political parties for conducting a peaceful election campaign and to refrain from buying votes, and pursuing other illegal means. At the same time, the Church urged the people to exercise their franchise without fear or favour, and requested them not to sell their votes. Since the formation of state, the Church continued to play the role of political guardian and have had a major influence on the electoral process in this highly religious state, where Christians are in numerical majority.

The seventh Assembly Elections in Mizoram were held on November 25, 2013 and the results were declared on December 9, 2013. The main contest was witnessed between the incumbent Indian National Congress (INC) and the opposition, the Mizo National Front-led Mizoram Democratic Alliance (MDA). The Chief Minister Lalthanhawla and his party Indian National Congress (INC) won the Polls by absolute majority. Like in the previous elections, the Church and the civil society organizations demonstrated their dynamic role in the electoral process in the seventh Assembly elections. They issued the 'Election Guidelines' so as to have had free and fair elections and also enabled the law-abiding citizens to exercise their franchise, without fear or favour and to prove that elections in Mizoram were not about money and muscle power. They made an election appeal to all the political parties to put up upright, honest and reliable candidates and to stick to the election model code of conduct.

⁷ J.V. Hluna and Rini Tochwawng, *The Mizo Uprising* (Cambridge: Scholars Publishing, 2012), 327.

Thus, in the poll bound Mizoram, a predominantly Christian state, it is like the rule of trinity during election. The Church, civil society organizations and the Election Commission all of them working in tandem to make the election process a truly democratic exercise. The guidelines by the Church had ensured that the political parties were not only to follow the Election Commission's code of conduct, but also have had other institutional obligations that they could not ignore. The present research attempts to study the role of Church and civil society organizations during the electoral process. The researcher mainly focuses on the role of Church in the Seventh Assembly Elections, 2013.

Brief Profile of Mizoram

Mizoram is inhabited by the tribal groups of Tibeto-Burmese race. During the period 1750-1850, Mizo migrations led to create some permanent settlements in the hills. The tribal groups, also known as the Lushais were governed under a hereditary chieftainship. The Lushais are the predominant tribal people, besides a few other tribes like Panei, Lakher, Chakma, Riang among other that inhabited in the hills. Agriculture has always been the main occupation in this region. During the British period, Mizoram became a part of the territory of the British India in 1891, though the administration of the villages was left to the local chieftains. Influence of the British rule was responsible for the Mizos conversion into Christianity. After independence of India, Mizoram continued to be part of Assam. In 1966, the Mizos resorted to the use of armed struggle to put forth their demands to set up their homeland. It was in 1986⁸ that for the first time peace was established, and Mizoram joined the mainstream in the Indian Union.

The Landscape

Mizoram is a land of rolling hills, valleys, rivers and lakes. As many as 21 major hill ranges or peaks of different heights, which run through the length and breadth of the state, and with plains scattered here and there. The average height of the hills to the west is 1,000 metres (3,281 feet). These hills are at a height up to 1,300 metres on the east. Some areas, however, have higher ranges that went up to a height of over 2,000

⁸ Teisi Thou, *Encyclopaedia of Mizoram*, Volume 1 (New Delhi: Anmol Publications PVT. LTD., 2009), 195.

metres. Phawnpui Tlang (Phawnpui hill), also known as Blue Mountain, is situated in the south-eastern part of the state is the highest peak at 2,210 metres.⁹

The biggest river in Mizoram is Chhimtuipui, also known as Kaladan. It is originated from Chin State in Burma and passes through Saiha and Lawngtlai districts in the Southern tip of Mizoram, goes back to Burma's Rakhine state, and finally enters the Bay of Bengal at Akyab, which is very popular port in Sittwe (Burma). The state of Mizoram having shared common borders with two foreign countries, viz., Myanmar and Bangladesh, occupies an area of great strategic importance on the political map of India.

Origin, Migration and Settlement of the People

The origins of the Mizos, like those of many tribes in the northeast India is shrouded in mystery. There is no authentic record about the Mizos before the 17th century. The most reliable and accepted record is that the Mizos were one of the Mongoloid stocks and they are believed to have emigrated into their present habitat, possibly sometime between 1400 and 1700 or 1800 A.D. from upper Burma¹⁰. But no scientific study is available as to show, when, why and from where the Mizos came to this isolated landlocked hilly terrain called Mizoram.

The Mizo historians such as K. Zawla and Rev. Liangkhaia, who wrote "Ancient history and culture of the Mizo people" and "History of Lushai" have pleaded that the Mizos were in the Chin Hills in Burma from 1400 A.D. to 1700 A.D. and their gradual movements of migration started between 1700 and 1730 or 1740 A.D.¹¹ On the whole, the Mizos migrated from Burma for mainly two reasons – pressure of the Chins or the stronger clans of Burma and the pressure of over population, passing through the Chindwind valley and the Chin Hills, and finally came to the present Mizoram.

⁹ M.C. Arunkumar, eds., *Maxford Dynamic Series of Tribal Studies, Volume V: The Tribes of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Maxford Books, 2012), 1145-1146.

¹⁰ R.N. Prasad, *Government and Politics in Mizoram 1947-1986* (New Delhi: Northern Book Center, 1987), 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

On the other hand, it is generally believed as well as historically recorded that the forefathers of the Mizos have had their settlements somewhere in the mountainous areas of the southern part of China. According to Teisi Thou, “Encyclopedia of Mizoram”, the generally accepted view is that the Mizos were part of a great wave of migrations from China, and later on moved out to India, their present habitat. It is possible that the Mizos came from Sinlung or Chhinkungsan located on the banks of the Yalung River in China, first settled in the Shan State and moved to the Kabaw Valley.¹² It is also believed that the Mizos originated were from Mongolia, yet there is no written proof available. Hence no one knows for sure, when and how these people moved towards the west and reached their present habitat.

Further, the knowledge base is very limited and it is not more than at a level of mere conjecture. Hence, any conclusion reached on the early history of the Mizos is open to argument, because till now it does not have any historical backing.¹³ According to Sangkima, the author of “Essays on the History of the Mizos”, the first and foremost limitation in the study of Mizoram is about the absence of historical information. All the historical source was traced to the post-independence days. Lack of conventional data is a major hindrance to the tracing of early history of the Mizoram. The second limitation is that the Mizos did not form a homogeneous group with any single culture. This also creates an immense problem in the study of their early history. The third limitation is related to the periodization of their history.¹⁴

The Generic name of Mizo

One characteristic of those who are commonly referred to as the Kuki-Chin or the Kuki-Chin-Lushai-or the Kuki-Chin-Mizo people is a peculiar sense of importance attached to these names. Whatever be the values of this trait, it had lead them into apparently insurmountable problems.¹⁵ Unlike the Nagas in Nagaland and the Khasis in Meghalaya, the Mizos were known in earlier times to the British and others by various names such as “Kuki”, “Chin” and “Lushai”. This suggests that the term “Mizo” is a recent phenomenon. In recent times, use of the Mizo name has become

¹² Teisi Thou, op. cit., 1-2.

¹³ Sangkima, *Essay on the Histories of the Mizos* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2004), 1.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1.

¹⁵ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Miso Theological Conference, 1997), 16.

popular among the people themselves in order to develop a feeling of separate identity and to represent their political ideology.¹⁶

Socio-Culture

Generally speaking, one may say that there were four different cultures in Mizoram. The Mizos, the Pawis and the Lakhers, although all are Christians, they have their own particular cultures. Whereas, the Chakmas are different from others in language, religion and culture. The Mizos are quick in giving up their old customs for adopting the western mode of life. Many of their present customs are mixtures of both the old traditions and the western pattern of life. The boys and girls socialize within society freely. The bachelors would go around courting the maidens. This system of dating is called 'nula rim'. The groom has to pay bride price to the relatives of the bride. In earlier times, the bride-price was paid in the form of mithuns, pigs and guns. Now this is being paid in cash. Divorce is quite common among the Mizos. However, the divorced women are not victimized by any social stigma, as they are free to remarry.¹⁷ The Church does not recognize the practice of divorce, but it accepts divorce as a matter of fact. According to the Mizo customs, the youngest son inherits all moveable and immovable properties. The elder sons usually move out of the parents' house after they got married. The youngest son is expected to stay and look after the parents during their old age.

The Mizo social customs are marked by good principles of self-help and cooperation. Under a system called 'Hnatlang', the villagers are expected to contribute labour for the welfare of community. Inter-village paths, community halls, and water points are constructed and maintained by Hnatlang. The ethical code of 'Tlawmngaihna'¹⁸ or 'moral discipline' is one of the most unique characters in the Mizo society, that bounds them together and expected to contribute his/her good will and the free-will offering to the poor and the needy. And, voluntary services are to be rendered towards the neighbors for the unity and welfare of the society, which is a

¹⁶ Sangkima, op. cit., 15.

¹⁷ Mangkhosat Kipgen, op. cit., 80.

¹⁸ Sangkima, Op. cit., 70.

characteristic of the 'tlawmngaihna'. Under this obligatory practice, no one is expected to receive a reward of profit or gain in return for rendering such service.¹⁹

Festivals: Traditional Mizo social gatherings revolve around the agricultural calendar. 'Kut'²⁰ is a common feature of their social life. But it is not because of its pomposity, merriment and gaiety of the celebration, rather because of its religious aspects. Kut is a festival, primarily to remember and offer thanks to the creator God for his abundant blessings. There were three kinds of Kuts such as Mim Kut, Pawl Kut and Chapchar Kut. Chapchar Kut²¹ is a festival celebrated during the month of March, after completion of their most arduous task of Jhum operation i.e., jungle-clearing (clearing of the remnants of burning). This is a spring festival celebrated with great fervor and gaiety. The Mim Kut²² festival is usually 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. Samples of the year's harvests are consecrated to the departed souls of the community. And, Pawl Kut, Pawl means "shaw",²³ hence, Pawl Kut means a 'straw harvest festival' held soon after the harvest was over. It was a sort of harvest thanksgiving.

Songs and Music: The Mizos are Music-loving people. Their traditional tunes are soft and gentle. During the church service, drums are commonly used known as "khuang". They are made from wood and animal hide and are often beaten enough to instigate the worshippers as they dance in a circular fashion. Mizos enjoy singing and even without musical instruments, they enthusiastically sing together, clapping hands or by using other rhythmic methods. The early Mizos were close to nature and music is still an essential part of their cultural life²⁴. While gospel music remains an integral part of Mizo culture, the Western influence is evident from the contemporary music scene as young people experiment with rock, metal, rap, pop and hip-hop types.

¹⁹ Letkholun Haokip, *An Appraisal of the Interaction Between Christianity and Kuki Culture* (Unpublished BD Thesis, AICS, Aizawl, 2008), 10.

²⁰ Kut is a Mizo word for 'festival' or 'feast'.

²¹ Chapchar Kut is a contemporary of the Pawl Kut. It was set apart for adults. This Kut was held immediately after Jhum cutting was over.

²² Mim Kut is the oldest Kut. Mim is a kind of plant, the grain of which is taken. So this Kut is called after this Mim.

²³ M.C. Arunkumar, eds., *Maxford Dynamic Series of Tribal Studies*, Volume V, 1159-1165.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1153.

Economy

The economy of Mizoram is largely dependent on agriculture. The agrarian economy accounts for the livelihood of more than 70%²⁵ of the state's populace. The rocky hilly terrains are not conducive for several crops. However, a regular distribution of rainfall for the whole length of the year and the fertile temperate soils has resulted in the springing up of dense forests enveloped in lush foliage. In spite of the rugged terrains, the favorable climatic conditions and the rich soils have led to them undertake extensive jhum cultivation in the state. Besides, horticultural crops are also grown for economic purposes.

Agriculture forms the primary sector in the economy of Mizoram. Thus, all subsidiary small scale industries happen to be agro-based. Several food processing units are mushrooming all over the state and the government is optimistic that the increase in the production of spices, fruits and vegetables as well cultivation of cash crops could lead to growth of food processing industry in the state. Mizoram houses a small repository of minerals. Thus, mining activity also contributes to a small part of the state economy. In fact, majority of the mines in Mizoram dug up the hard tertiary rocks were used as construction materials. A large number of small scale industries that include exquisite bamboo works as well as handlooms also contributed to the state economy. Another sector of the economy, tourism, contributes largely to the state's revenue. Besides, the state is trying to exploit the untapped hydro electric power potential and is also to explore the medicinal value of various herbs that grow in plentitude in the state forests.

Religious belief

Traditional religion of the Mizos, before the arrival of Christianity was described by most writers as 'animism'. Though they believed in an essentially benevolent God called 'Pathian', who was the creator of universe, they also believed in the existence of numerous 'Huais'. The spirits known as 'huais' are of two types, good and evil. These spirits mainly reside in trees, mountains, streams, rocks, caves. The good 'huais' causes good to mankind, sometimes, it was said that it acted as Pathian. The

²⁵ Teisi Thou, op. cit., 76.

evil spirits cause harm to the people. They believe that all types of calamities- failure of growing crops, ill health, disease, death or other misfortunes were due to the evil spirit²⁶. The concept of God was not clearly conceptualized among the Mizos at the time when Christianity was introduced to them.

Christianity in Mizoram

With the entry of British in the region, administration was followed by the coming of Christian missionaries at the end of 19th century. After the two Lushai Expeditions in 1871 and 1890 respectively, and especially after the Expedition of 1890, the British extended its rule and jurisdiction over the Lushai Hills. This had paved the way for Christian missionaries to enter the area with the objective of popularizing and preaching the Christian faith among the Mizo people.²⁷ The missionaries, through their valiant efforts gradually convinced the Mizos to accept the Christian faith. These Christian missionaries and their religious missions have had a crucial political significance. Until the abolition of chieftainship in 1954,²⁸ Mizo society was under the control of local chiefs. Especially, during its formative years under the British rule, and in the early periods even after the entry of Christian missionaries, the socio-political and economic conditions and culture of the Mizos as a whole remained largely backward, under-developed and superstitious.

The missionaries' established churches had opened up educational institutions, hospitals and undertook numerous other social works. Gradually, they transformed the Mizo society on the pattern of western culture and social organizations, while at the same time, kept up with their indigenous culture and traditions. As a consequence of their contacts with western liberal education, the Mizo people had developed a sensible socio-political outlook, benefiting from the education imparted by the

²⁶ Mangkhosat Kipgen, op. cit., 115.

²⁷ <http://zarapachauau.blogspot.in/2014/02/role-of-church-in-the-process-of-peace-and.html,3>

²⁸ during the years in which the socio-political affairs of the administration was at the hands of the local chiefs, they use to construct pillars at the center called 'Sutpui' inside the house of their chiefs. If anyone commits a crime and has been condemned by the society, and thereby face the wrath of the public, if the defaulter rush and reached the chief's house and lays his hands on that pillar, he would be automatically granted asylum by the chief. Nobody could lay their hands upon him, whatever serious crime maybe, and the daughter and his family, as well as his future offspring would then remain as the personal slaves of the chief through their lives.

missionaries. Hence, the overall socio-political outlook of the Mizos had also shifted away from their earlier influence of myths and superstitions. They realized their social and political conditions, then became more conscious about their socio-economic and political survival. Besides, the churches established by the missionaries, based on the principles of Christian faith, goodwill and peace, continued to serve as one of the major peace-brokers in times of crisis and political turmoil later on. The Church has been an important and one of the most active organizations that exerted psychological influence on the socio-political administration of the state.

Some of the notable early Christian mission societies that came to Mizoram were: William Williams from the Welsh Presbyterian missionary, working at Shella in the Khasi Hills, visited Mizoram on 20 March 1891.²⁹ He stayed for a short period of time and left Aizawl on 11 April 1891. Some writers stated that although he stayed for a very short period of time, he was the first missionary, ‘first sound the name of Jesus’ to the Mizo and the first person who brought to light the prospect of founding a new mission field for the Welsh Presbyterian Church.³⁰ William Williams was very much attracted by the Mizo people and he wrote to the Mission headquarters in Liverpool to undertake Mizoram for its mission field. He also offered his services, expressing his strong desire to go there for teaching them the Gospel. The Board reacted favourably and after getting the approval of British officials of Assam, Mizoram was formally adopted as a mission field by the General Assembly of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church in 1892.³¹

The Arthington Aborigines Mission: On 11 January 1894, the two missionaries of this mission, namely, J.H. Lorrain and S.W. Savidge (known as Pu Buanga and Sap Upa by the Mizo people) entered Mizoram.³² Lorrain and Savidge stayed on for four years in Mizoram. Their contributions during these four years were significant. They engaged themselves to language learning and converted the language into written form, using the Roman scripts. They were the first who taught the Mizos on how to

²⁹ H. Lalrinthanga, *Church and State Relationship in the Mizo Socio-Political Life 1952-2006* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), 23.

³⁰ Saiathanga, *Mizo Kohran Chanchin (History of Mizo Church)*, 3rd print (Aizawl: The Mizo Theological Literature Committee, 1993). Hereafter cited by H. Lalrinthanga, 23.

³¹ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *op. cit.*, 191-192.

³² Frederick S. Downs, *History of Christianity in India Vol. V, Part 5, North East India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Bangalore: The Church History Association of India, 1992), 188.

write and read the language. They translated the Bible and completed some portions of New Testament such as, Gospels of Luke and John, and Acts of the Apostles in the Mizo language.³³ The Mizos had the whole New Testament translated in their language in May 1916. They (Lorrain and Savidge) wrote hymns, a catechism, a simple primer, a grammar, and produced a dictionary of seven thousand words. Lorrain also composed ‘A Grammar and Dictionary of Lushai Language’, which was published in 1898 by the Government of Assam. They were willing to sacrifice their whole time to remain in the region. They requested the Welsh Mission to accept them as its evangelists, but the Welsh Mission did not accept their request. Therefore, they left Mizoram by the end of 1897.³⁴ The contributions made by the Arthington Aborigines Mission were remarkable.

The Welsh Presbyterian Mission: After its pioneer worked, the Arthington missionaries were to move on, leaving the field to other missions. Such an understanding was made by the Welsh Mission. The first missionary of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission D.E. Jones, accompanied by Dr. T.J. Jones and a Khasi Christian who was a teacher in Government service, Rai Bhajur and his wife arrived Aizawl on 30 August 1897. Lorrain and Savidge met the party between Sairang and Changsil.³⁵ D.E. Jones received a warm welcome and great help from Lorrain and Savidge, and the four months during which they remained with him were of considerable benefit. In the next year, Edwin Rowlands joined them in the missionary work. The Welsh missionary work was mainly divided into four areas, such as education, preaching, medical, and literature. After the Baptist Mission came into contact with the Southern portion of the Lushai Hills in 1903, the Welsh Mission concentrated in the North Lushai Hills. The Welsh mission contributed much to the social improvement of the Mizo society by providing primary education. They also contributed towards the Mizos social change and development through medical work.³⁶

³³ W.J.L. Wenger, *Pioneers in the Lushai Mission: Pioners and leaders of the Church in India* (Serampore: Church History Association of India, Burma and Ceylon, 1938), 5.

³⁴ H. Lalrinthanga, op. cit., 23.

³⁵ Mangkhosat Kipgen, op.cit., 199.

³⁶ H. Lalrinthanga, op. cit., 24.

Consequently, Christianity became the main religion in Mizoram, and the Church played its role in shaping the socio-political life of people in the state. The major Christian denominations were viz., Presbyterian, Baptist, Salvation Army, Seventh-day Adventist, Roman Catholic, Evangelical Church of Maraland (ECM), United Pentecostal Church (UPC), Evangelical Free Church of India (EFCI), Isua Krista Kohhran (IKK). There were also some other religious groups in Mizoram, which can be termed as the minority religious groups. The people of these groups follow the religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam.

Statement of the Problem

Mizoram being a Christian-dominated state, it is very much influenced by religious faith and beliefs in every walk of life including that of politics. The fact that the Church played vital role in electoral process was not a strange phenomenon for the Mizos, and also for the state Mizoram as a whole. The Church played its due role to bring about certain changes in the mindset, life style and political culture. The first visible engagement of Church and civil society organizations in the electoral process in the state was discernable in the year 1972, when elections were held for the first time in the newly formed Union Territory of Mizoram. The Church leaders had then issued an appeal urging the political leaders, candidates and the voters for clean, free and fair elections in the state. This had become a regular feature with the Church thereafter. And, gradually the electoral reforms initiated by the Church had been joined by other civil society organizations in the state.

The elections in Mizoram were free and fair till the fourth Assembly elections, however certain malpractices were crept into the system gradually. As such, untoward electioneering activities were said to be reported in the fifth Assembly elections, in the form of indirect involvement of some armed groups, rampant use of money and heavy election expenditure during the poll process. Hence, the matter was discussed by the Mizoram Synod Assembly in 2004, and the Church resolved the matter to be pursued in a right perspective. Consequently, the Church resolved to initiate necessary steps for electoral reforms in the state. That led to the formation of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) in 2006, to reform electoral politics in Mizoram. In the subsequent elections, the Church involved itself deeper and further by playing more pro-active role in raising the voters' awareness and electoral participation. Thus, the

Church continued to play an important role in the electoral process thereafter. Mostly the role played by the Church in the recent elections had a positive impact in electoral reforms in the state.

The proposed research is to understand and unearth the underlying factors and reasons like, why was this religious influence very effective in Mizoram and how far had it brought about constructive changes in the political process in the state. Further, the study is to examine the problem of how the Church worked towards establishing democratic government through free and fair elections. And, it explains how the Church is instrumental to establish good governance, peace and harmony in the state for promoting a progressive, just and to sustainable socio-economic development, besides fighting corruption in the Mizo society.

Scope and Limitation of the Study

The scope of the study is limited to the electoral process in Mizoram Assembly elections, and the role played by the Church in these elections. It discusses the activities of the Church in the poll process. The study covered the historical background of political process in Mizoram as well as the development of political parties in the state. The study also briefly highlights the genesis and development of electoral process in Mizoram from District Council elections to the Assembly elections that helped to get appropriate information. Further, the research discusses the contribution of the Church, in the electoral reforms of Mizoram Assembly elections. The main focus of the study is on the Church's participation in the Seventh Assembly elections.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To understand the reasons and factors that were important in making the Church very influential in the electoral process in Mizoram
2. To analyze the electoral impact that the Church had brought about in the Seventh Assembly elections
3. To examine the Church-Polity relations in these elections.

Hypotheses

A research hypothesis is a statement of expectations or assumptions that would be tested by researcher. The following hypotheses were formulated for the present work.

1. The Church played an important role in the electoral process in Mizoram and influenced voting behavior in the elections.
2. The Church raised the political awareness level of people in the seventh assembly elections.
3. Both Church and Polity coordinated their activities quite positively in these elections.

Methodology

The methodology employed for the proposed exploratory research is based on collecting requisite empirical data. As part of qualitative research, participant observation method was applied as it enabled the researcher for studying opinions, viewpoints, attitudes and social facts. The data for the proposed research were collected mainly from two sources, primary and secondary sources.

Primary sources are collected by applying an unstructured questionnaire method among respondents from various representatives in the state, such as district-wise, community-wise and gender-wise. An interview was conducted with some religious leaders of various denominational churches, leaders of political parties, and lastly some academicians, and leaders of eminent civil society organizations. Primary sources also include press releases, leaflets, newspaper clippings, Church related publications, and pamphlets that were available during the course of elections in the state.

Secondary data are collected from government documents, circulars and political parties' documents, journal articles, books, research publications and unpublished dissertations, and some relevant websites. Data collected through both primary and secondary sources have been cross-checked and analyzed on qualitative basis.

Review of literature

The first election study in India was conducted by S.V. Kogekar and Richard L. Park, wrote a book “Report on the Indian General Elections since 1951-52”³⁷. After that, election studies were conducted in Poona, Gujarat, Bombay, Goa and others. The first study on voting behavior was done at the time of the Fourth General Elections in 1967, that was sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) under the leadership of M.S. Gore. And, conducting regular election studies became a constant practice from 1996 onwards in the state and elsewhere in the country by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS).

S.K. Chaube’s book, “Electoral Politics in North East India”³⁸, discusses a glimpse of Hills Politics in North east India. The book also discusses the political developments in Mizoram, as it mentioned how the MNF-led insurgency organized various social activities till it became one of the regional political parties. The book also acknowledges the participation of some NGOs and the Church in the electoral politics. However, the book has had a limited scope as it does not give any details on the electoral process in Mizoram.

Sandeep Shastri et.al. had edited a volume on the theme, “Electoral Politics in Indian States: Lok Sabha elections in 2004 and Beyond”³⁹. The book is a collection of articles related to the electoral politics of different states in India. The book contains some important information about the data collection and analyzes electoral democracy in India. It further discusses certain voting trends that had influenced the electoral politics of different states and factors behind it. However, no such work is undertaken on the Assembly Elections in Mizoram in any specific manner.

J.V. Hluna’s book “Church and Political upheaval in Mizoram (1985)”, traces the political history of Mizoram and the social administration of the Mizo society. It also mentioned about the growth of Church and its involvement in electoral politics. The book explains how the Church played an important role as a political mediator between the Mizo National Front and the Indian government, as it was trying to

³⁷ S.V. Kogekar and Richard L. Park, *Reports on the Indian General Elections, 1951-52* (Bombay: Popular Book Depot., 1956)

³⁸ S.K. Chaube, *Electoral Politics in Northeast India* (Madras : University Press, 1985)

³⁹ Sandeep Shastri et. al., *Electoral Politics in Indian States: Lok Sabha elections in 2004 and beyond* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009)

bring about political settlement within the framework of the Indian Constitution. The book is very informative and helpful for the proposed research to some extent.

P. Lalnithanga wrote a book on, “Political Developments in Mizoram”⁴⁰. The book traces the historical developments of Mizoram politics, formation of various political parties and their role in the state politics. The book also acknowledges the role of Church and other civil societies in the electoral politics, but not beyond.

Paul Wallace and Ramashray Roy’s book, “India’s 1999 Elections and 20th Century Politics”⁴¹ provides a comparative analysis of the 1999 general elections in the light of a political development that was beginning to unfold at the start of 20th century. It also discussed the 1999 general elections as well as various elections that had taken place in the preceding years. Further, it noted several issues and factors that had affected the electoral politics in different dimensions such as caste, ethnicity, religion and others.

A.P.K. Singh’s book on, “Election Politics in Manipur”⁴², highlights the political profile of Manipur. It analyses the electoral strategies, party-wise electoral manifestoes and voting behavior in the state. The book also mentioned the role of money power, muscle power and other malpractices during the elections. The book helped the present research to develop certain ideas and also to get some relevant information on the subject. The book mainly focuses on the Manipur politics, as such the work is hardly focused on other states in the country.

Lalhmachhuana Zofa’s book, “Mizoram Political Records”⁴³, records on who was who in Mizoram Politics in the period (1946-2013). The book also records all the political parties in Mizoram and their establishments. The book is helpful to get some relevant information about political parties and their performance in the state elections. However, the book is limited to deal with the recent electoral process. It is

⁴⁰ P. Lalnithanga, *Political Development in Mizoram* (Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press, 2005)

⁴¹ Paul Wallace and Ramashray Roy, *India’s 1999 Elections and 20th Century Politics* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publication, 1999)

⁴² A.P.K. Singh, *Election Politics in Manipur* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2009)

⁴³ Lalhmachhuana Zofa, *Mizoram Political Records* (Aizawl: Lalhmachhuana Zofa, 2013)

more about the statistical records of the elections and the chronology of political developments that formed on political leaders and their parties in Mizoram.

Mankhosat Kipgen wrote a book on, “Christianity and Mizo Culture”⁴⁴. The book has done an indepth study on not only the Mizo Christianity, but also on the Mizo culture. It begins with a persuasive argument for the use of name ‘Zo’, that represented the numerous clans like those inhabited in India, Burma and Bangladesh borders as an anthropological classification of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo. It proceeds with an in-depth study of the traditional Mizo culture, demonstrating the interrelatedness of the political, social and aesthetic dimensions, which combined to create an integrated ethical code called ‘Tlawmngaihna’. The book described the growth of Christianity in Mizoram. The book is helpful for having an historical background in the study.

K.M. Zakhuma wrote a book on, “Political Development in Mizoram from 1946 to 1989: A study with Special Reference to Political Parties in Mizoram”⁴⁵. The book attempts to report the past events from an academic point of view. The book briefly highlights the social background of the Land and the people of Mizoram. It proceeds to study the political and administrative developments before 1947. It studies not only the political parties in Mizoram, but also political developments among the Mizos and other hill peoples in the North-east. It further studies the parties and party politics in the state and the Assembly Elections of 1987.

R.N. Prasad & A.K. Agarwal wrote a book on, “Political and Economic Development of Mizoram”⁴⁶. The authors divided the book into two parts; the first part includes different research papers, which provided a comprehensive account of different dimensions of the government and politics in Mizoram. The book also discusses various political factors, over to the elevation of the Mizo Hills district to the status of Union Territory of Mizoram. It further highlights different trends in Mizo politics in the period (1974-1986), merger of the Mizo Union party with a national party like the Congress (I), and the emergence of a new political party, the People’s Conference (PC) and about its coming into power in the state. The book also discusses the

⁴⁴ Mankhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997)

⁴⁵ K.M. Zakhuma, “*Political Development in Mizoram from 1946 to 1989: A study with Special Reference to Political Parties in Mizoram* (Aizawl: Sangkungi, 2001)

⁴⁶ R.N. Prasad & A.K. Agarwal, *Political and Economic Development of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1991)

election politics in Mizoram and an analysis of state in the Assembly elections of 1987, which identified the trends of Mizo politics during the general and midterm polls to the Legislative Assembly and the Lok Sabha during the period (1972-1983). It also studied the Mizo National Front and its political activities. The first part of the book covers the village administration in Mizoram and also the general elections to the Mizoram state Assembly in 1989. The second part of the book dealt with the problems and prospects, related to the economic development in the state.

H.C. Thanhranga's book on, "District Councils in the Mizo Hills (Updated)"⁴⁷, was started with an introduction which is divided into four sections- a profile of the Mizo Hills district, Chieftainship, Political and Constitutional development and Political development in Mizoram. The state profile provides information about the land, the people, religion, and education. The author mainly focused on the district councils in the state. It further deals with the village councils as part of the district council. Also, it traces the administration of justice under the chieftainship as well as under the district councils at village, sub-divisional and district council levels. The author mainly based his work on the district council's records, proceedings, official documents and reports.

H. Lalrinthanga wrote a book on, "Church and State Relationship in the Mizo Socio-Political Life 1952 to 2006"⁴⁸. The book discusses the Mizo Socio-Political history. It also highlights the background of the people. Further, it deals with Christianity in Mizoram, which dichotomized 'Sacred' and 'Secular' that affected the Mizo social practices. The author also studied the transition period (1946-1951) on the development of political consciousness among the Mizos. It narrates the relationship of the Church and the state under the Mizo District Council. The book focuses on the Church and State relationship, when the Mizo Hills became a Union Territory, and also on how the Church played a significant role in the political life of the state. The book further deals with Church and Mizoram Liquor Total Prohibition Act., and the Church and socio-political reforms in Mizoram. It concludes with the events that led to formation of Mizoram People Forum (MPF) and also its activities such as to

⁴⁷ H.C. Thanhranga, *District Councils in the Mizo Hills (Updated)* (Aizawl: Dr. H.C. Thanhranga, MJS (Retd), 2007)

⁴⁸ H. Lalrinthanga, *Church and State Relationship in the Mizo Socio-Political Life 1952 to 2006* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013)

promote good governance, free and fair elections, just and sustainable socio-economic development in the state.

Michael D. H. Robbins wrote an article on, “The Effect of elections on Public Opinion Toward Democracy: Evidence From Longitudinal Survey Research in Algeria”. The article noted that the elections were a key political institution, associated with democracy. However, he tried to bring out that elections were also found in most nondemocratic regimes. The writer raised a question in this article, whether electoral experiences affect the way that ordinary citizens thought about democracy. The writer uses the field survey data that was collected in Algeria in 2002, 2004, and 2006 to investigate this question. Most specifically, it investigates whether and how the attitudes towards democracy held by ordinary Algerians were affected by perceptions in a national election. The writer also stressed on the importance of public support for democracy as long-term success in a democratic political system. The writer states that all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass levels, believed that the democratic regime was the most appropriate one for their society, better than any other realistic alternative they could imagine with. Although the article is about Algerian experiences, certain patterns of political process that evolved in the country were helpful for a study in Mizoram.

Sanjay Kumar Jha’s article on, “Impact of Political Corruption on Democracy and Economic Development in India: Some Issues and Reflections”⁴⁹, was published in the Indian Journal of Political science in January – March 2013. The article deals with fundamental problems with the Indian democracy, a history of political instability and party conflicts, loopholes exploited by Indian politicians, underground banking due to the loose commercial regulations in India and the accountability and justice mechanisms in the system. The writer mainly focused on a solution to the problems about corruption. In conclusion, the writer suggested that the civil society group has had a key role to play in exposing corruption and compelling the government to initiate certain actions.

⁴⁹ Sanjay Kumar Jha, “Impact of Political Corruption on Democracy and Economic Development in India: Some Issues and Reflections”, *The Indian Journal Of Political Science*, Vol. LXXIV. No. 1. January-March 2013.

Johanna Kristin Birnir and Nil S. Satana wrote an article on, “Religion and Coalition”⁵⁰, which was published in the *Comparative Political Studies*. The article examined the effect of a minority constituency, religion on the probability that a religious representative would participate in the governing coalition after the elections. It observed that the coalition was important to the minority for policy reasons, but credit for including minority may be equally important for the majority, particularly where minority issues were politically silent. The article also highlighted the recent findings in the broader context about religion and politics that the probability of the minority involvement in political conflict depended on whether or not the minority communities differ from the majority in religious, family or other denominations.

Lalramthanga wrote a book, “Mizoram People Forum” Annual General Meeting Wawi 6-Na⁵¹ (The 6th General Meeting), October 4, 2014. The book is about an annual report on the Mizoram People Forum and its activities. It covers various activities of the MPF on electoral reforms and good governance in Mizoram, such as, for instance, Village Council elections, Local Council elections and various seminars and consultations conducted by the MPF. It also included the ‘election guidelines’ for the seventh Mizoram Legislative Assembly elections.

Finally, even the “Election Commission of India”⁵², has contributed some data on the subject through the website. The website covers, the Schedule for General Election to the Legislative Assemblies of 2013 and 2014 in states like- Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram, Rajasthan and Delhi besides bye-elections to fill the casual vacancies in other state Legislative Assemblies. It gives necessary information on the election patterns and trends in these states.

A brief review of existing literature on various aspects of election revealed that although there are valuable contributions made by scholars and researchers, there is a limit on the available data. The existing literature is inadequate to understand the

⁵⁰ Johanna Kristin Birnir and Nil S. Satana, “Religion and Coalition”, in *CPS Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 46. No.1, January 2014.

⁵¹ Lalramthanga, *The 6th Annual General Meeting of the Mizoram People Forum*, October 4, 2012, Vanapa Hall, Aizawl.

⁵² Election Commission of India, www.eci.nic.in

electoral process in the proposed theme of the present work. The seventh Assembly elections held in November 2013 were unique in the electoral history of Mizoram, as it was a battle between the regional political parties representing Mizo nationalism, which was led by Mizo National Front (MNF) and the national political parties like, the Indian National Congress (INC).

Another noteworthy development in the 2013 Assembly Elections was that the Congress had faced strong anti-incumbency factors in Rajasthan, Delhi, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh states in north India, yet retaining Mizoram was a matter of greater importance for the INC. Besides, the role played by the Church needs a thorough investigation for this study. Since, the existing literature is very limited on the subject, there is a rationale for the proposed research. While books and articles authored by academics and researchers are insufficient, the study is based on more primary sources like, Church-related publications and Newspaper clippings that appeared during the course of Seventh Assembly Elections.

Chapterization

As part of organizing the study on the basis of specific objectives and themes, the study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter covers introduction, statement of the problem, Scope and Limitation, objectives of the study, hypotheses, methodology and literature review. The chapter also highlights a brief profile of Mizoram, socio-culture of the people, and the arrival of Christianity in Mizoram.

The second chapter discusses the historical background of the political administrative system from the traditional chieftainship to the formation of statehood as it help the study to be located in proper historical perspective. The chapter also briefly highlights the genesis and development of political parties, and electoral process from the elections to the District Councils era to the Legislative Assemblies in the statehood era up to the period of sixth Assembly elections. In all these processes from the formation of statehood to the statehood era in Mizoram polity the Church had been instrumental in all aspect.

The third chapter studies the role of Church in the seventh Assembly elections of Mizoram. The chapter highlights the Election Commission of India model code of

conduct, the political parties, conduct of elections, and also electoral process that covered a range of activities such as election manifestoes, campaign method, voting behavior, and election expenditures. The main focus of the chapter is to investigate the role of Church and civil society organizations in all these processes, and also to ensure how the Church played an important role in the electoral process.

The fourth Chapter deals with the impact of Church on electoral process that brought about various changes in organizing the electoral process. The impact of 'election guidelines', observed by the political parties, candidates and voters in the state has also been covered so as to ensure that, the Church and civil society organizations coordinated each other with the Election Commission to make election process a truly democratic exercise in the Seventh Assembly elections.

The fifth chapter discusses the problems and prospects that prevailed in the context of Church and electoral process in Mizoram, and also evaluate the remedies proposed. The chapter further attempts to stress the importance of keeping Church and politics in a dynamic and dialectical balance, giving full and equal weight to each other in the discussions. Both Church and politics should be taken as sources of motivation and guiding ideas.

Finally, the sixth chapter covers summary of findings and suggestions for further study on the subject. The chapter is to discuss, the contribution of the Church on electoral reforms that was witnessed in the seventh General Assemble elections in the state. The chapter also made an observation that, the contribution of Church and civil society organizations upon the electoral reforms in Mizoram could be a model for reforming elections in other parts of India.

To sum up, in Mizoram, the Church has been regarded as the foremost factor for the socio-political and economic modernization and development. And, the role of Church in the electoral process was not a strange phenomenon for the Mizos and also for the state Mizoram as a whole. The present study focused on the role of the Church that had a very positive impact in the recent Mizoram Assembly elections held in 2013. The study attempts to understand and unearth the underlying factors and reasons like, why the Church have been so influential in the electoral process, and

how far had it brought about constructive changes in the political process in the state. Further, the study is to examine how the Church worked towards establishing democratic government through free and fair elections.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Mizos had been living in their present territory when the British took possession of the region in 1891, for about two hundred years⁵³. Since that period until the installation of the District Council in 1952, the Mizos had been looked after and managed by the traditional chiefs. Under the rule of their respective chiefs, each village and the society within it strived to become self-reliant, self-governing and independent. Besides, the declaration of area as one of the ‘Tribal Areas’ by the ‘Government of India Act 1935’ and the subsequent declaration of the area as ‘Excluded Area’ in 1936 under the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas Order, 1936,⁵⁴ had rendered the Hill District to a period of isolation and politically turmoil.

Thus, any attempt to study the political and administrative affairs in general is made difficult by the socio-political and economic consequences of the long period of isolation and the young history of election process in the state, which more or less could be traced only from the first District Council elections in 1952.⁵⁵ In short, the system of rule by the local chiefs-based on hereditary chieftainship was the only form of administrative organization in the Lushai Hills till later part of the twentieth century. After the amalgamation of North and South Lushai Hills in 1898, there had been several socio-political developments within the District.

From a chief-based administration, the socio-political administration of the Mizo Hills had been transformed itself into a formal democratic order down the years, with politically enlightened and conscious intellectuals who had taken some initiatives for the establishment of civil society organizations, such as the Young Lushai Association (YLA), now known as the Young Mizo Association (YMA) in 1935, as well as political parties with the formation of the first Mizo political party, the Mizo Union in

⁵³ K.M. Zakhuma, *Political Development in Mizoram From 1946 to 1989: A study with Special Reference to Politcal Parties in Mizoram* (Aizawl: Sangkungi, 2001), 1.

⁵⁴ R. Zamawia, *Zofate Zinkawngah Zalenna mei a mit tur a ni lo* (Aizawl: R. Zamawia, 2007), 104.

⁵⁵ <http://zarapachuu.blogspot.in/2014/role-of-church-in-process-of-peace-and.hrml>, 10 October, 2014.

1946⁵⁶. From then on, several political parties and other influential civil society organizations were started, which played an integral part in the electoral process and politics of the state. This chapter discussed the historical background of political administrative systems from the time of traditional chieftainship to that of the formation of statehood. The chapter also briefly highlighted the genesis and development of electoral process in Mizoram from District Council elections to the Assembly Elections in the state.

1. Background of Political Process

1.1. Chieftainship: Before the advent of British, the Mizos did not have a political organization that comprehended the entire tribe.⁵⁷ However, the Mizos had conducted an efficient system of administration and disciplined as a distinct group governed by their traditional laws, customs and organizations. The traditional political system was based on kinship structure that revolved round the concept of chieftainship and that of territorial jurisdiction over which its authority was wielded, and that the village was the highest political unit. Each village had its own government, and a chief or Lal functioned as administrator for the entire village.

The British were amazed to find numerous efficiently run village administrative units, entirely independent of each other. Apart from a number of Pawi, Mara and Fanai chiefs who ruled mainly in the southern hills, most chiefs belonged to the Sailo family of the Lusei clan who established themselves as the principal chiefs throughout the northern and central areas of what came to be called Mizoram. The Sailos had gained this position of dominance by eliminating the lesser chiefs long before the advent of British rule. Mangkhosat Kipgen, mentioned that a number of scholars had described the way in which the Sailo chiefs ruled their villages⁵⁸. The chief owned the village and its land. The inhabitants of village were his subjects and were implicitly bound by customary laws to obey and execute his commands. The chiefs were generally wise and shrewd, knowing how to make their people loyal to themselves. Hence, the people were loyal to their chief.

⁵⁶ K.M. Zakhuma, Op. cit., 2.

⁵⁷ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997),58.

⁵⁸ Mangkhosat Kipgen, op. cit., 58-59.

The Chief had also a great responsibility towards his subjects. As the guardian of a village he was responsible for defending it from enemies. He was the leader in war as well as the dispenser of justice. His attitude towards his subjects was paternalistic, as they were treated as his children, whom he helped in need, chastising the guilty and rewarding those who achieved something noteworthy. The chief was respected, admired and loved by his subjects. Very seldom did the subjects disregard his rulings. If they did, they would almost certainly be expelled from the village and their property confiscated. The chief with his hereditary rights had acquired great power. There were, of course, some chiefs who abused that power.

Abolition of Chieftainship: The traditional hereditary chieftainship was abolished under the provisions of the Assam Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of Chiefs' Right) Act, 1954, the rights and privileges of the Mizo chiefs and the Pawi-Lakher chiefs were acquired by the government with effect from the First April, 1956. With the abolition of chieftainship together with its rights and privileges' in 1955, the powers of chiefs were transferred to the Village Councils in 1955.⁵⁹

1.2. District Council: When India attained Independence, it accepted a democratic set-up of government to conduct business of administration for its people of different cultural and religious backgrounds. Prior to the birth of republic, India gave to itself a constitution which shaped the political structures pertaining to the norms and systems of self-rule. It was in accordance with the provision contained in the Sixth schedule of the Constitution that the District Council was created in the Mizo Hills. One of the notable committees that was responsible for the formation of Mizo District Council was the Bordoloi Committee. The Bordoloi Committee recommended that the government of Assam should not exclude or modify the area of Lushai Hills autonomous District Council without its consent.⁶⁰ The Bordoloi Sub-Committee was a sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly.

The Colonial Administration passed a legislative enactment called the Government of India Act 1935, to place the hill areas of Assam into two categories of administrative

⁵⁹ H.C. Thanhranga, *District Councils in the Mizo Hills* (Updated) (Aizawl: Dr. H.C. Thanhranga, MJS (Retd), 2007), 28.

⁶⁰ K.M. Zakhuma, *op. cit.*, 135.

areas: excluded and partially excluded areas. The Lushai Hills was placed in an Excluded Area under the provision of this Act and the jurisdiction of the Provincial Ministry was not extended to the District. Hence, the set-up of the Lushai Hills and all other Hill Areas of Assam was considered by the Bordoloi Committee. The Bordoloi Committee recommended that there should be an autonomous District Council in the hill areas of Assam. The committee also recommended that there should be a regional Council if there were distinct groups of people therein. The recommendation was taken up for further discussion by the Constituent Assembly of India. It accepted the recommendations and the same was given effect to in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. When the Bordoloi Committee visited the Lushai Hills in April 1947, the Committee co-opted two representatives, namely, Ch. Saprawnga and Khawtinkhuma who belonged to the Mizo Union party of the Lushai Hill district.⁶¹

So far as the district councils in Mizoram were concerned, at first there was only one district council in the Lushai Hills.⁶² Based on the provisions enshrined in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, the Government of Assam enacted the Assam Autonomous District (Constitution of the District Council) Act in 1951. In April 23, 1952 the Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council was formed which led to the abolition of Chieftainship in the Mizo society. Consequently, the Lushai Hills District Council (later on the Mizo District Council), and the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council came into being in 1952 and 1953 respectively. The Mizo District Council worked for 20 years and was abolished in 1972 (when the Mizoram became a Union Territory) along with the Pawi-Lakher regional Council under the North-Eastern Regional Areas (Re-organization) Act, 1971. The Pawi-Lakher Regional Council was divided into three Regional Councils viz. the Pawi Regional Council, the Lakher Regional Council and the Chakma Regional Council. And, each one was upgraded to the District Council level in April 29, 1972⁶³ under the same Act.

The main reason behind such change was a combination of different factors like, ethnicity, compact geographical contiguity, fiscal adequacy and community of

⁶¹ H.C. Thanhranga, op. cit., 69-87.

⁶² V. Venkata Rao, et al., *A Century of Government and Politics in North – East India, Volume III- Mizoram* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Company (Pvt) LDT, 1987), 158.

⁶³ S. N. Singh, *Mizoram Historical, Geographical, Social, Economic, Political and Administrative* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1994), 145-146.

interest. Over and above, the political factors were more powerful and dominating which over-shadowed other factors. Hence, the Mizo District Council which has been in existence for 20 years from 1952-1972 came to an end on 28 April 1972 when it was abolished under the Dissolution of the Mizo District Council (Miscellaneous) Order, 1972 as per paragraph 20A of the Sixth schedule to the Constitution.⁶⁴

1.3. Union Territory: The political development of Mizo Hills District (now Mizoram) was interrupted due to insurgency in 1966 which continued till 1971, when the security forces were able to bring the situation under control. The emergence of Bangladesh also contributed in crippling the hostile activities and compelled the rebel leaders living in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to return to their homeland. In the meantime, the government liberalized the amnesty offer and gave a number of chances to their surrender and to lead a civilized and normal life. A liberal group, among the Mizos and the hostiles, emerged that joined in the quest for peace in the Mizo Hills. The Mizo Union party which was regional in character, also played an important role in mobilizing the people and molding public opinion in favour of better status of Mizo Hills or statehood within the framework of the Indian Constitution.⁶⁵ The most powerful initiative for peace, however, came from the Church leaders who were quite enlightened and politically conscious.

As a result of their effort alongwith other forces of peace and following the implementation of the north-Eastern Areas (Re-organization) Act, 1971, the Mizo Hills District was upgraded to the status of a Union Territory on 21 January 1972 with a 33-member Legislative Assembly (30 elected and 3 nominated) and one Lok Sabha seat,⁶⁶ as per the para 6 of the Act and the Government of the Union Territories (Amendment) Act 1971. Consequently, the Mizo District Council was abolished (para 20 A of Sixth Schedule). Obviously, the three other tribes of the district, namely the Poi (or Pawi), Lakhers and Chakmas reaped the benefit of this re-organization and three District Council were created.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ H.C. Thanhranga, op. cit., 42.

⁶⁵ RN Prasad and AK Agarwal, *Political and Economic Development of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1991),18.

⁶⁶ Brigadier CG Verghese VSM (Rtd) & RL Thanzawna MCS (Rtd), *A History of the Mizos- Volume II* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House PVT, 1997), 140.

⁶⁷ S. N. Singh, op. cit., 154.

2. The Formation of Statehood

2.1. Mautam Famine: In 1959, the Mizo Hills was devastated by the worst famine known in the Mizo history as “Mautam Famine”⁶⁸. The cause of famine was attributed to flowering of bamboos which resulted in a boom of the rat population. After eating bamboo seeds, the rats turned towards crops and infested the huts and houses and that led to the plague in the villages. The havoc created by the rats was terrible and thus very little of the gain was harvested.

For sustenance, many Mizos had to collect roots and leaves from the jungles. Several others moved to far away places, and a considerable number of them died of starvation. In this hour of darkness, many welfare organizations tried their best to help starving villagers. Earlier in 1955, the Mizo cultural Society was formed with Laldenga as its secretary. In March 1960, name of the Mizo Cultural Society was changed to the ‘Mautam Front’. During the famine of 1959-1960, this society took the lead in demanding relief and managed to attract the attention of all sections of the Mizo society⁶⁹. In September 1960, the society adopted the name, Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF). The MNFF gained considerable popularity as large number of Mizo Youth assisted in transporting rice and other essential commodities to interior villages. Besides, the Front had undertaken several social activities in the villages of Mizo Hills.

2.2. Insurgency: The Mizo National Famine Front dropped the word ‘famine’ and a new political organization, the Mizo National Front (MNF) was formed on 22 October 1961⁷⁰ under the leadership of Laldenga, with a specific goal of demanding the sovereign independence of Greater Mizoram. Simultaneously, large scale

⁶⁸ Teisi Thou, *Encyclopedia of Mozoram*, Volume 1 (New Delhi: Anmol Publications PVT. LTD., 2009), 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Brigadier C.G. Verghese and R.L. Thanzawna, op. cit., 14.

disturbances broke out on the mid-night of 28 February 1966⁷¹, government installations at Aizawl, Lunglei, Chawngte, Chimluang and other places. Meanwhile, the search for political solution to the problems had been in the hill regions of Assam district continued. As such, the Mizo District was declared a 'disturbed area' by the Government of Assam under the Assam Disturbed Areas Act.1955, and the underground MNF was declared unlawful organization in 1966⁷². However, the demand for statehood gained fresh momentum. A Mizo District Council delegation, which met Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in May 1971, demanded for a fullfledged statehood for the Mizos. The union government offered a proposal of turning the Mizo Hills to a Union Territory (UT) in July 1971. The Mizo leaders were ready to accept the offer on the condition that the status of UT would be upgraded to that of statehood sooner than later. Inconsequence, the Union Territory of Mizoram came into being on 21 January 1972⁷³, with an allotment of two seats in the Parliament, one each in the Lok Sabha and in the Rajya Sabha.

2.3. The Role of Church in the Process of Peace Settlement: The Church had played a vital role during the insurgency period in Mizoram that lead to form the Mizoram Church Leaders Committee (MCLC) comprising of 9 Church denominations such as, The Presbyterian, The Baptist, The Salvation Army, Th Roman Catholic, The United Pentecostal Church, The Seventh Day Adventist, The Assembly of God, The Lairam Baptist and Isus Krista Kohhran so as to restore peace and normalcy in the state.⁷⁴ On 31 May 1983, at the initiative of the Church leaders and four main political parties in Mizoram signed a joint appeal, requesting the central Government and the MNF to resume peace talks. Although the MNF had suffered several setbacks during the 1982-83 periods, as it was facing financial hardships and low morale, their leadership was interested in peace talks, more for gaining time for refurbishing and strengthening the underground movement, than their genuine desire for securing peace.⁷⁵ For attainment of peace in Mizoram, six representatives of the United Churches, on 4 April 1985 left

⁷¹ JV Hluna and Rini Tochhawng, *The Mizo Uprising* (Cambridge: Scholars Publishing, 2012), xvii.

⁷² JV Hluna and Rini Tochhawng, *Op. cit.*, xviii.

⁷³ Teisi Thou, *op. cit.*, 3

⁷⁴ Dr. J.V. Hluna and Rini Tochhawng, *op. cit.*, 324.

⁷⁵ Brigadier CG Verghese VSM (Rtd) & RL Thanzawna MCS (Rtd), *op. cit.*, 76

for Delhi to confer with Laldenga and the Government of India.⁷⁶ The Church leaders stayed on in Delhi till 12 April 1985.⁷⁷ Church leader Rev. Zairema also appealed to arrange a meeting of the Church leaders with the MNF for exploring ways and means to restore peace and normalcy in the Mizo Hills.⁷⁸

The Presbyterian and Baptist Churches also formed “Peace Mission” to persuade the MNF leaders to give up their violent activities and resort to non-violent methods for regaining peace and prosperity in the Mizo Hills District.⁷⁹ During this period they met the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Laldenga and those government officials who wish the talks between the MNF and Government of India to be successful and with that spirit, they conferred with them. Accordingly, they had submitted a memorandum to the Government of India on the occasion. The Church had no proposal for any political agreement upon which a settlement could be reached. It was left to the Union Government and the MNF to discuss the terms of agreement. There were several other peace committees initiated by the Church during political disturbance.

2.4. Mizoram Accord 1986: The Government of India had all along made earnest efforts to bring about an end to the disturbed conditions in Mizoram so as to restore peace and harmony. Towards this end, an initiative was taken by the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, that was accepted by Laldenga, on behalf of the MNF⁸⁰. During the time when Laldenga was supposed to meet Indira Gandhi, she was shot dead by her bodyguards on 31 October 1984. As fate would have it Laldenga had only seemed to bring misfortune to her whenever he tried to meet her. Earlier, the day Laldenga was to meet her after conducting discussions about their demands with his followers at the MNF Headquarters, the Prime Minister’s son Sanjay Gandhi was killed in an air crash and the scheduled interview with the Prime Minister was

⁷⁶ Those Church leaders were Pastor Lalsawma- Presbyterian, Vanlalbela-Roman catholic, Major Thansanga-Salvation Army, Major Sawichhunga-Salvation army, Pastor P.L. Lianzuala-Baptist and Pastor Rinsanga-Pentecostal Church.

⁷⁷ P.Lalnithanga IAS (Retd), *Political Development in Mizoram* (Revised & Enlarged) (Aizawl: P. Lalnithanga IAS (Retd), 2006), 170.

⁷⁸ Brigadier CG Verghese VSM (Rtd) & RL Thanzawna MCS (Rtd), op. cit., 76.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 91-92.

⁸⁰ Dr. J.V. Hluna and Rini Tochwawng, op. cit., 362.

postponed⁸¹. This time again, Laldenga had to wait for some time before he could place his demands to the new Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi.

The Government of India under the leadership of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had realized the need of peaceful situation whereby long years of disturbed conditions in Mizoram came to an end.⁸² Laldenga, parleyed with several representatives of Government of India including the Vice President of the Congress, Arjun Singh. Political decisions were made on substantive issues, such as statehood for Mizoram, setting up of an interim coalition government under Laldenga and rehabilitation of the MNF insurgents. On 25 June 1986, a political agreement was signed between the All India Congress Committee (AICC) Vice President Arjun Singh and Laldenga, details of which were kept secret for several days.⁸³ In fact, Rajiv Gandhi's success in the 1984 elections following his mother's death signaled a new beginning of an era in the Indian politics. Laldenga had also met the prime minister on 15 February 1985 in this regard. As such, after the three spells of political dialogues, the Peace Accord was at last signed between the Union Government and MNF on 30 June 1986⁸⁴.

The document was signed by Laldenga on behalf of the Mizo National Front, and the Union Home secretary R.D. Pradhan, and on behalf of the state government, Lalkhama, the Chief Secretary of Mizoram. The formalization of the statehood of Mizoram was complete on 20 February 1987⁸⁵. The Chief Secretary Lalkhama read out the proclamation of statehood at a public meeting organized at Aizawl's parade ground. The Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi inaugurated the new state of Mizoram as the 23rd State of the Indian Union. Hiteshwar Saikia was appointed as the first Governor of Mizoram.

3. Genesis and Development of Political Parties

In modern democratic society, the political parties have been acknowledged as wider, as well as, the least expensive platforms to ventilate people's grievances, and a convenient method to articulate the feelings and aspirations of the masses. As such,

⁸¹ Brigadier CG Verghese VSM (Rtd) & RL Thanzawna MCS (Rtd), op. cit., 265.

⁸² Dr. J.V. Hluna and Rini Tochwawng, op. cit., 360.

⁸³ Brigadier CG Verghese VSM (Rtd) & RL Thanzawna MCS (Rtd), op. cit., 266.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 267

⁸⁵ Teisi Thou, op. cit., 3-4.

the political parties in Mizoram had achieved the goal which they were organized for. Before discussing into the details of various political parties in Mizoram, it is better to highlight the genesis of their political background.

The political life was initiated in 1925 when a section of Mizos under Telala (of Ralte community) sought permission to take part in the political process of Assam, but ended in failure. Further, with the implementation of the Govt. of India Act, 1935, elections were held in Assam in 1937⁸⁶. But there was no representation from the Mizo Hills district in the Assam Assembly, which was resented to by a section of educated and politically conscious group of the Mizos. The British did not encourage the Excluded Areas to be involved in the state politics, thus it kept them away from the political waves surging inside the country and thereby it kept the areas as primitive. But, a few educated persons were keeping a close watch on day to day political happenings in India. Further, some common people also had voiced their demands for providing political representation in the Provincial Assembly of Assam in 1937⁸⁷, but the demand was suppressed once for all.

The British authority did not allow any political organization till 1935⁸⁸. But the surging aspirations of Mizo people induced them to organize a political party that marked the beginning of a new political life in Mizoram. A political party called the Mizo Common People's Union, with the permission of the Superintendent of Lushai Hills was formed on the 9 April 1946 so as to voice their people's aspirations and various demands, especially political rights and their administrative status. And, thus the name of the party was later changed to that of the Mizo Union.⁸⁹ The genesis and growth of other political parties in the state are discussed in the following paragraphs.

3.1. Mizo Union (MU): The oldest regional political party in Mizoram was formed on 9 April 1946, under the leadership of R. Vanlalawma, Lalbuaia and Hrangiaia⁹⁰. The main cause of its emergence was the resentment against the despotic rule of Mizo

⁸⁶ SN Singh, *Mizoram-Historical, geographical, Social Economic, Political and Administrative* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1994), 165-166.

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ Ibid., 165

⁸⁹ R N Prasad, op. cit., 76.

⁹⁰ SN Singh, op. cit., 166.

Chiefs. Secondly, it was the British administrator's reluctance to allow the Mizos taking part in the political activities. In the beginning, the party was named as 'Mizo Common Peoples Union'. But, the Mizo chiefs objected that they were not commoners. Accordingly, Vanlalawma changed the name of the party. In order to honour the sentiments of the chiefs whose help was essential to consolidate the grass-root level base, the name was given as 'Mizo Union'. But still, the chiefs did not join the party.

The Mizo Union (MU) held its first conference on 25 May, 1946 at Aizawl to approve the draft of the constitution. This was the first of its kind to conduct a conference as a political party. In this conference, the party had passed some important resolutions that demanded for two third representation in the District Conference to be by elected members from among the common people, instead of equal representation to the chiefs and the common people. After long deliberations over the issue of the future status of the Lushai Hills, the meeting resolved that,

“In the event of India attaining a complete Independence, and unqualified independence the Mizos are also to be included in it, within the province of Assam. The Mizo's are opposed to the retention of their district as an excluded area under Independent India, but wish to be included in the Provincial Legislature with a sufficient number of representatives who will represent them on concurrent subjects with the Provincial Government. Except on these subjects, no Legislation of the Provincial Legislature should apply directly to the hills and they reserve all rights and privileges of their internal administration with a Local Legislative and Executive body.”⁹¹.

In this Conference, the party also mentioned its desire to bring in all the neighboring territories inhabited by the ethnic Mizo, under the fold of the Mizo District. The party also submitted a memorandum demanding the Bordoloi Sub-committee, for the inclusion of areas inhabited by the Mizos in the adjacent areas such as Manipur, Cachar and Tripura, to grant power of autonomous administration in the internal affairs, within the general framework of the province of Assam, and a special provision for the liberal financial assistance from the Central Government. Thus, the

⁹¹ Contents of the resolution passed in the first General assembly of the Mizo Union held from 24 to 26 September 1946. Cited by K.M. Zakhuma, 58-59.

Mizo Union became more popular and received the support of commoners. In the first ever election of the Council members, the MU party won all the seats except two in Aizawl town, which were captured by the United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO).

3.2. United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO): While the Mizo Union fought for the abolition of the chieftainship rule by opting to join the Indian Union, there were people who viewed that the best option for Mizo survival was to join Burma. This led to the formation of a new political party known as the United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO) on July 5, 1947⁹². The dissident Mizo Unionist leader, Lalbiakthanga became its president. The party was backed and supported by the Chiefs alongwith their followers, because they were hostile to the Mizo Union. Since the Mizo Union decided had to remain within India, the UMFO opposed the MU's decision thereafter.

In the meantime, Lalmawia, an army officer of the Burma (retired) came to Mizoram and joined this new political party (UMFO). In the beginning, the party's aims were to merge Mizoram with Burma, to retain chieftainship and to resist the growth of the MU in the Mizo politics. Lalmawia also emphasized on the advantages of joining Burma citing the grounds of common customs, culture, dialects, common descent and common economic pattern. However, the Burmese Government did not encourage the idea of merging Mizoram with Burma on the ground that the Mizo Union had already opted for the Indian Union.

The Mizo Union became a mass party in the territory mainly because of its pledge to abolish the exploiting institution of the chieftainship and so it retained more popular support than the UMFO. Ultimately, the movement died out. So, the UMFO later on, gave up the idea of joining Burma.⁹³ In the meantime, the first President Lalbiakthanga joined the service in a Government Department. So in his place, Lalmawia became the a second President of the UMFO.

⁹² K.M. Zakhuma, op. cit., 77.

⁹³ R N Prasad, op. cit., 255.

3.3. Tribal Union (TU): The third political party, known as the Tribal Union, was formed at Lawngtlai in the far south Lushai Hills in 1950,⁹⁴ in order to project the demand of a regional council for the Pawi-Lakher region within a framework of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Its genesis began in 1947 when Saprawnga, a powerful Mizo leader, paid a visit to the area and encouraged them to demand either a separate regional council or adequate representation in the District Council, which was under the process of formation. The Superintendent of Lushai Hills District also helped in the organization of Pawi-Lakher Tribal Council (PLTC). Thus, the Pawi-Lakher Tribal Union was formed in 1948.⁹⁵ The main aim of the party was to integrate the Pawi-Lakher tribes into one administrative unit and to obtain a regional council for all the tribes in the region in order to preserve their customs, culture, dialect and ethnic identity.

3.4. Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU): The Eastern India Tribal Union was formed by the UMFO and MU Right Wing on 2 October 1957, and its office was opened at the residence of Lalmawia, the President. Office bearers were elected in its assembly on 3 October 1957 at Dawrpui Middle School at Aizawl. The party wanted the carving out of a Hill State, consisting of all Hill districts of Assam within the Indian Union. The EITU party in Mizoram continued to exist till the outbreak of the MNF rebellion.⁹⁶ The party had its origin in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, besides the Garo Hills at a time when the State Reorganization Commission of Assam was being constituted.

3.5. Indian National Congress (INC): The Indian National Congress was formed in the Mizo Hills on 11 April 1961 and an adhoc committee was formed with A. Thanglura as President, Lalsawia as Vice President, Lalthankima as General Secretary and Hrangchhuana as Treasurer. In 1962, a conference of the Congress workers was held in Aizawl that formally constituted the Mizo District Congress Committee (MDCC)

⁹⁴ H.C. Thanhranga, *District Councils in the Mizo Hills* (Updated) (Aizawl: Dr. H.C. Thanhranga, MJS (Retd), 2007), 47.

⁹⁵ SN Singh, op. cit., 167.

⁹⁶ V. Venkata Rao, H. Thansanga and Niru Hazarika, *A Century of Government and Politics in North-East India, Volume III-Mizoram* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Company (Pvt) LTD, 1987), 142-143. For other version on the detail of the EITU party, see RN Prasad, *Government and Politics in Mizoram 1947-1986* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1987), 257-259.

and proceeded to elect its office bearers, A. Thanglura as President, Lalhangliana as Vice President, Hrangchhuana Treasurer and Zalawma as General Secretary.⁹⁷

From the very beginning, the Congress party had been faced with some internal problems, besides others. As such, a step was taken to revitalize the party by conducting the organization elections in 1967. Denthuama was elected as the President, Zalawma, General Secretary and Hrangchhuana, Treasurer. This was done in the absence of Tahnlura, the incumbent president of Congress. As the Congress party was incurably ailing with internal strife, it performed very poorly in the first elections to the Legislative Assembly of Mizoram Union Territory.

Following the replacement of Mizo district with the Union Territory status in 1972, the jurisdiction of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee over the Mizo District Congress Committee came to an end. Since then, the Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee came into existence, and the party enjoyed more autonomy in their political administration. However, the fight for leadership continued as usual within the party. The Mizo Labour Party and the Mizo Socialist party agreed to merge themselves with the Congress party, and the merger was finalized on 18 October, 1972. As soon as the new organizational set-up was drawn up in 1973, the party elected its new leaders, namely, Lal Thanhawla-president, Sakhawliana -vice president, Lalruala – Treasurer and Lalkunga –General Secretary.⁹⁸ These leaders worked more actively than their predecessors, and under their leadership, the party gained much in strength, and Lal Thanhawla continued to be very popular as the party president till date.

3.6. Mizo National Front (MNF): The Mizo National Front, another political party, was formed on 28 October 1961 at Aizawl. This party was the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF), in its initial phase, which was established in 1960 as a welfare organization to relieve the people of great distress due to famine-induced problems that were created by Mautam (Flowering Bamboo). Subsequently, it was converted

⁹⁷ V. Venkata Rao, H. Thansanga and Niru Hazarika, 144. Also see K.M. Zakhuma, *Political Development in Mizoram from 1946 to 1989-Atudy with special reference to political parties in Mizoram* (Aizawl: Sangkungi, 2001),83-92.

⁹⁸ K.M. Zakhuma, op. cit., 84-89.

into a political party, the MNFF dropped the word 'Famine' from its name and became a refined political party with the main objective of creating of an independent and sovereignty state of Mizoram.⁹⁹ The Office bearers were- Laldenga- President, Lalnumawia- Vice President, S. Lianzuala- General Secretary, P.B. Rosanga-Asst. Gen. Secretary, Rochhinga-Treasurer and Lalkhawliana-Finance Secretary.¹⁰⁰ After the declaration of Mizoram to statehood on 20 February 1987, as the provisions contained in the Memorandum of Settlement, the MNF party's constitution was amended and reorganized accordingly. Following the death of Laldenga in 1990, Zoramthanga became party President, Tawnluia, Vice President, and Tlanghmingthanga-Treasurer. In 1998 and 2003 MNF won the state Assembly elections, and Zoramthanga became Chief Minister for 10 years.

3.7. Mara Freedom Party (MFP): The Mara Freedom Party was established in April 1963 by the Mara (Lakher) people in the Pawi-Lakher Region. The office bearers were: President-Vanluaia Hlychho, Vice President-M.Z. Hiphei, General Secretary-Mylai Hlychho, Treasurer-Leiko. It was the first regional party to be formed in the Lakher Region. The main aim of the party was to obtain a separate Lakher District Council for the people in order to safeguard their cultural and racial identity.

3.8. Mizo National Union (MNU): The Mizo National Union was formed on 13 December 1971 at Aizawl headed by H.K. Bawihchhuaka as President and R. Dosanga as General Secretary. The objective of the party was to achieve full statehood for Mizoram, alongwith the creation of greater Mizoram. However, the party could not make any headway since a large majority of the partymen was in favor of the Union Territory status. As such, they were not in a position to contest the first Mizoram Assembly elections in April 1972, and decided to merge with the Mizo Labour party in March 1972¹⁰¹. The party ceased to exist thereafter.

3.9. Socialist Party of India: This party was established on 3 November 1971 and it was nearly shrouded in obscurity had it not contested in the first general elections of

⁹⁹ Ibid., 92-93.

¹⁰⁰ H.C. Thanhranga, op. cit., 48.

¹⁰¹ K.M. Zakhuma, op. cit., 119.

the Legislative Assembly on the Union Territory and also for the Lok Sabha. The party was mainly concerned about the under-privileged people of the society. Hence, it could not gain popularity in the state, and finally it had to merge with the Congress in 1972.¹⁰²

3.10. Mizo Labour Party (MLP): The Mizo Labour Party was established in March 1972, with the main aim of establishing socialist society, which was aimed at improving the life of peasants, workers and weaker section of the society.¹⁰³ The party also made its stand clear to oppose the conversion of Mizoram into Union Territory status. Rather it demanded for creating full statehood. The party stressed upon ethnic unity and implementing socio-economic programme. The party participated in the election of 1972, and secured 13.4 per cent votes in the Mizoram Assembly. The party finally merged into the Indian National Congress¹⁰⁴

3.11. United Pang People's Party (UPPP): The party was established on 10 January 1974. It was formed by a combination of the Pang community. They felt that it was necessary to form a political party of their own to express their political rights. In 1975, the party submitted a memorandum to the government of the Union Territory, demanding for the creation of autonomous district council for their areas¹⁰⁵.

3.12. People's Conference (PC): Prior to the People's Conference, and its formation as a political party, the Human Rights Committee was formed on 1 June 1974 in the Mizo Hills headed by Brig. T. Sailo (Retd). The committee subsequently transformed itself into a new political party, called the People's Conference on 17 April 1975¹⁰⁶. The office bearers were President-Brig. T. Sailo (Retd), Vice President-Rev. Sakhawliana, General Secretary- Zairemthanga and four secretaries-Thangliana, K.M. Biaksailova, K. Thansiamia and K. Biakchungnunga. Consultants were Dr. Rothuama, J. Kapthianga and Thangridema. The PC party was guided by the six basic needs, namely, food, water supply, power, communication, transport system and rural

¹⁰² K.M. Zakhuma, op. cit., 120.

¹⁰³ H.C. Thanhranga, op. cit., 50

¹⁰⁴ SN Singh, op. cit., 168.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 50

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 51.

development. The party won the state Assembly elections in 1979¹⁰⁷, and T. Sailo served as Chief Minister of Mizoram from 1979 to 1984. The Mizoram People's Conference (MPC) party was founded when the concerned Mizo citizens came together to fight for the human rights in Mizoram. Under the leadership of its Founding President, Brigadier T. Sailo, MPC fought for the Mizo people. Currently, the party President is Lalmangaiha Sailo son of T. Sailo, the former party president.

3.13. Mizo Democratic Front (MDF): The party was established in April, 1976. The office bearers were, President-Sanglianchhungi, Vice President-Thanhawla, General Secretary-A.V. Pakunga, Secretary-Vanlalhruaia, Finance Secretary-Sangthanga, and Treasurer-Lalchhanchhuaha. The party had twenty four members on its central working committee.¹⁰⁸ The political objective of the party is same as was in line with other regional parties. And, it demanded a solution for political disturbances that occupied their utmost attention.

3.14. Mizoram Janata Party (MJP): For the first time in the history of independent India, Congress lost power in 1977, and Janata party came into power at the centre. This event led to the breakup of Congress party in Mizoram and the breakaway group along with members of other political parties joined hands to form the Mizoram Janata Party in 1977. Its first president was J. Thanghuama. The party contested in the 1978 Assembly elections, and it won two seats by securing 15.35¹⁰⁹ percent of the total votes polled in Mizoram.

3.15. Mizo Convention (MC): The three political parties such as the P.C (B), Janata, and the MDF dissolved themselves and formed a new political party called, the Mizo Convention on 8 April 1982. The main issue on which the party capitalized was the support and patronage that it expected from the underground MNF.¹¹⁰ As soon as the underground MNF came to the political settlement with the Government of India, the party merged itself with the MNF in 1986.

¹⁰⁷ R N Prasad, op. cit., 54.

¹⁰⁸ H.C. Thanhranga, op. cit., 51

¹⁰⁹ K.M. Zakhuma, op. cit., 123.

¹¹⁰ H.C. Thanhranga, op. cit., 124.

3.16. Mizo Peace Forum (MPF): This political party came out of the fierce conflicts among different political parties of Mizoram, and it was incited by the peace-talks between the MNF and the Government of India. It was formed by the students on 30 December 1982¹¹¹. The party members consisted of young students, mostly those supported the cause of MNF.

3.17. Mizo National Union (MNU): The party came into existence mainly due to the split in the ruling Congress party in 1986. On 14 May 1986 the two parties, the Mizo Union Democratic Socialist party and the Mizoram Congress for Peace were merged to form a new political party called, the Mizo National Union. The party contested in the general elections to the Legislative Assembly held in 1987 and 1989.¹¹² The party merged with the People Conference on 12 July 1989 to form a new political party called the Democratic Party.

3.18. Bharatya Janata Party (BJP): The Bharatya Janata Party Mizoram Pradesh was formed on 3 February 1993. The office bearers were President-Vanlalrawna, Vice President-Chawngzika Rieng, General secretary- C. Thanngura, Secretary-Rualpawla. In 1994 the president was P.L. Chhuma and in 1998 Harry H. Vanchhawng, in 1999 Lalramtiana. And, he received the official appointment of the presidentship on 31 July 2001. The party was reconstituted on 13 September 2004 and V.F. Lalzarliana has been the President.¹¹³ Currently, Lalhluna is the state Unit President and Lalchhanhima as Secretary. The party contested 11 seats in Mizoram Legislative Assembly elections 2013¹¹⁴, but failed to seem any seat.

3.19. Lairam Congress Party (LCP): In 1992, the political party called Lairam Congress Party was born at Lawntlai. The founder President was C. Thanghluna, one of the veteran politicians among the Pawi (Lai) people in the Chhimtuipui District. The Lairam Congress Party had contested the elections to the Pawi District Council

¹¹¹ K.M. Zakhuma, op. cit., 125.

¹¹² Ibid

¹¹³ H.C. Thanhranga, op. cit., 52-54.

¹¹⁴ *BJP to contest 11 seats in Mizoram*, The Mizoram Post, Vol.11 Issue No. 157, 2 November 2013.

which was held after the formation of its party and also contested the elections to the Mizoram Legislative Assembly elections.¹¹⁵

3.20. Maraland Democratic Front (MDF): The Maraland Democratic Front was formed in 1997 at Saiha. The office bearers were President-P.P. Thawla, Vice President-H.C. Vanhnuna, and Treasurer- L. Patha.¹¹⁶ The party is active amongst the Mara people in the southern part of the state. The party had run the Mara Autonomous District Council (one of the three autonomous districts in Mizoram) together with the Indian national Congress in the previous term. In the state Assembly elections in Mizoram 2003, the MDF put up two candidates in two constituencies. The party president and founder PP Thawla was elected from Tuipang constituency. In 2008 Assembly elections, he was elected in Palak constituency. The current President of the party is M. Laikaw, one of the founding members of MDF.

3.21. Mizoram Congress Party (MCP): A good number of veteran Congress members of Mizoram left the INC and they formed a new political party named as the Mizoram Congress Party (MCP) headed by J. Lalsangzuala on 17 August 2005 at Aizawl. The Office bearers were President-J. Lalsangzuala, Vice President-Saikapthianga, Treasurer-R. Thangliana, General Secretary- Liansuama.¹¹⁷ The main objectives of the party are, to have a corruption-free society, to safeguard and promote Mizo culture and tradition, social reformation, economic self-sufficiency, empowerment of youth and women, and national integrity and peace.

3.22. Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP): The Zoram Nationalist Party was born out of the Mizo National Front (Nationalist) on 29 July 2000 at Aizawl. Its founder President was Lalduhawma, who was the top most leader of the MNF (N). The office bearers were President-Lalduhawma, Vice President- Dr. James Dokhuma, Treasurer-Lianhmingthanga and six General Secretaries.¹¹⁸ The party won two seats in the state Assembly in both the 2003 and 2008 elections. The main objective of the party is to establish ‘Zoram Thar’ or ‘ a new Mizoram’ for a just and sustainable socio-

¹¹⁵ H.C. Thanhranga, op. cit., 53.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 54

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 55.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 54-55.

economic development, and to maintain Christian ethics and principles to ensure good governance in the state.

4. Electoral Process from District Council Era to Statehood Era

Elections in a democracy are political means through which the political opinions and awareness level of the masses are moulded and promoted. Election involves people into politics or public affairs through participation and mobilization as it provides political linkages, resolves conflicts and of course it also brings about peaceful and orderly change of authority or leaders through the periodic elections. The political parties, as per the rules of representative democracy had also to accept the election results¹¹⁹. Hence, a good election system is regarded as the life-belt of genuine representative government, serving an important function for the citizens and the political system as well. Elections to the legislative bodies are conducted on the basis of adult franchise, single member constituency, one vote for one person, secret ballot, direct election and election by simple majority. Mizoram had experienced elections at different levels since 1948, such as, Lushai Hills Advisory Council, District Council, Regional Council, Village Council, Municipal Council, Legislative Assembly, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. However, it was from the first District Council elections held in 1952ⁱ that the Mizo people were actively involved in electoral politics. The electoral processes in Mizoram from District Council era to statehood are given as below.

4.1. Election to Mizo District Council era

4.1.1. The first Mizo District Council elections were held on 4 January 1952. There were 37 candidates contesting in the elections, out of which 18 candidates were from the Mizo Union (MU), 16 from the United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO), two from the Tribal Union (TU) and one Independent candidate. The election was contested among three political parties namely, the MU, the UMFO, and the TU in the Pawi-Lakher region. The MU won all the seats except one, which was won by the UMFO. Regarding the nominated six seats, one went to the MU, two to the government officials and two seats to the chiefs' Council and one seat to the minority

¹¹⁹ RN Prasad and AK Agarwal, *op. cit.*, 43.

group.¹²⁰ The election manifesto of the MU party was on abolishing the chieftainship institution and the Chief's Council. That was a controversial issue during the elections, and it was supported by the common people.

4.1.2. The second general elections of the Mizo District Council were held on 25 January 1957. This time, the number of elected seats was increased from 18 to 22, and the number of nominated seats was reduced from 6 to 2, but the total number of seats remained the same. In this election, four political parties viz., the MU, the UMFO, the MU (Right wing) and the TU contested for the 22 seats. On the whole, there were 47 candidates in the poll fray. The UMFO captured 7 seats. The TU, two and the MU, 13 but the TU backed the MU and as such the 15 seats were captured by the MU.¹²¹ In this election, the MU did not get full public support as the party had enjoyed in the previous District Council elections held in 1952, but it managed to retain political power. The abolition of chieftainship in 1954 was the main factor that helped the party to win the elections.

4.1.3. The third Mizo District Council general elections were held on 5 February 1962. Besides the four parties that contested the election of 1957, a new party came into existence, the Mizo National Front (MNF). And, the Congress party for the first time in the Mizo Hills contested in this election. Thus, the election was contested by five political parties. Besides 5 Independent candidates, there were altogether 62 candidates in the poll fray. The Mizo Union party won 18 seats and defeated the EITU (UMFO was emerged to EITU) and of the successful MU candidates there were only two candidates of the EITU returned and a few Independent candidates.¹²² Thus, the Congress and MNF were badly defeated in this election. The election atmosphere was changed due to the entry of two new political parties namely, Congress and the MNF. These parties began to outshine the MU party, and the trend continued thereafter.

4.1.4. The fourth elections to the Council were supposed to be held in 1967, but due to some disturbances since broke out in the district in 1966, it was not held. As such, the fourth general election were held on 23 April 1970, in which the MU and the

¹²⁰ H.C. Thanhranga, op. cit., 102.

¹²¹ Ibid., 103-104.

¹²² Ibid., 104.

Congress contested. The Congress captured 10 seats, whereas the MU captured 9 seats and the Independents 3 seats. There were two nominated seats. Thus, the INC formed the government for the first time in the political history of Mizo District Council.¹²³ Before the completion of the fourth term of the Council, the Mizo District was dissolved and ceased to exist when the Mizo District became a Union territory of Mizoram in April 1972 and as such no more elections were held thereafter for the District Council. This election marked the beginning of decline of Mizo Union as an active political party. The main factor that helped the Congress to get power was due to its emphasis on de-grouping of those grouping centers owing to the political turmoil in the district. The party also focused on the importance to restore peace and harmony in the state.

4.2. The Legislative Assembly Elections during the Union Territory

As it had been mentioned, prior to the completion of its term, the fourth Mizo District Council was dissolved. The Mizo District was upgraded to Union Territory in July 1971 and the Union Territory of Mizoram was inaugurated on 21 January 1972.¹²⁴ However, the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (PLRC) was trifurcated into three Regional Councils, namely, Pawi Regional Council (PRC), Lakher Regional Council (LRC) and Chakma Regional Council (CRC) on 2 April, 1972 and the three Regional Councils were subsequently upgraded to the status of full-fledged Autonomous District Councils on 29 April 1972.¹²⁵

4.2.1. The First Union Territory Assembly Elections (1972): Mizoram witnessed the first General elections to the State Legislative Assembly, which was held on 18 April 1972, three months after Mizoram became a Union Territory (UT) on 21 January 1972.¹²⁶ Altogether 125 candidates had contested for the 30 seats of state Assembly. The Indian National Congress (INC) and the Socialist Party, both the recognized parties contested for 29 and 18 seats respectively. Two unrecognized parties, Mizo Union (MU) and Mizo Labour Party (MLP) contested for 25 and 27 seats

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ P. Lalnithanga, *Emergence of Mizoram* (Aizawl: P. Lalnithanga, 2005), 33-34.

¹²⁵ Jangkhongam Doungei, *Genesis and Development of Electoral Politics in Mizoram*, Paper, presented in Seminar on 'Socio-Political History of Mizoram', organized by Mizo History Association, Aizawl, 28-29 November, 2013, 5.

¹²⁶ Mangjangam Touthang, *Mizoram Election Scenario*, Press Information Bureau, Aizawl 28 November, 2008, 1.

respectively. While 56 Independent candidates were there in the poll fray. The Mizo Union won 21 of the 30 seats and formed the first Union Territory government that was headed by Ch. Chhunga on 3 May 1972¹²⁷. There were three Cabinet Ministers and two Deputy Ministers in his ministry.

The response of the citizens in the first general Assembly elections was quite positive, with a good turnout of the voters. The average percentage of voter turnout was 72.55¹²⁸ and the average percentage of voter turnout in all constituencies was over 55. However, there was a new political development in the Mizoram politics as the Mizo Union merged with the INC on 24 January 1974, which was readily approved by the Congress High Command. After the merger, the Council of Minister was expanded from 5 to 7 with the induction of one Cabinet Minister and one Deputy Minister. From that time, the Congress and MNF became the two main political parties in the state till today. It was from these Assembly elections that the involvement of the Church in the electoral process was noticed. The Church had made an appeal to the political parties, candidates and voters for ensuring free and fair elections. As such, this had become a regular practice with the Church since then.

4.2.2. The Second General Assembly Elections for the Union Territory was held in May 1978. The political parties in the fray were, the INC, Janata party, People's Conference, Mizo Union and Mizo Democratic Front. The People's Conference (PC) won 22 seats out of the total 30 seats, while the Independent candidates and the Mizoram Congress Committee (MCC) shared four seats each. The PC Government with Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo as the second Chief Minister of Mizoram was formed. The PC party, however, suffered a major split in October 1978 when 8 PC MLAs withdrew their support to the Chief Minister. They decided to form an alternative government replacing the PC rule.¹²⁹ The PC party was split into PC (A) and PC (B). Subsequently, after a period of five months, Mizoram was placed under the President's Rule, on 10 November 1978, and then fresh elections were held on April 24 and 27, 1979.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Ibid., 5

¹²⁸ General election to the Seventh Mizoram Assembly, 2013, Aizawl: Directorate of Election, 72

¹²⁹ <http://elections.in/assembly-constituencies/1978-election-result.html> 7/14/2014

¹³⁰ <http://elections.in/assembly-constituencies/1979-election-result.html> 7/14/2014

4.2.3. The Third Union Territory General Elections for the Mizoram Assembly were held on 24 and 27 April 1979, and there were 6 political parties in the electoral fray, namely, INC, Janata Party, PC (A), PC (B), Mizo Union and Mizo Democratic Party. The PC (A) led by Brigadier T. Sailo won 18 seats, INC won 5, Janata Party won two seats and PC (B) managed to get only for 4 seats and one seat was won by Independent. Brigadier T. Sailo was sworn in again for the second time as the third Chief Minister of Mizoram and lasted full term of five years.¹³¹

4.2.4. The fourth and the last General Assembly Elections of the Union Territory elections were held on 25 April 1984. A total of 138 candidates had contested in the fourth General elections. There were six political parties in the poll fray, namely, Indian National Congress (INC), Mizoram People's Conference (MPC), Mizo Convention (MC), Mizo Democratic Front (MDF), Mizo Peace Forum (MPF) and Mizo Union (MU). The Indian National Congress (INC) won 20 seats, while the People's Conference secured 8 seats in the elections, the Mizo Convention one seat and the remaining seats by Independent candidates. Lal Thanhawla was sworn in as the Chief Minister on 4 May 1984, as a consequence of the signing of the Peace Accord between the Mizo National Front (MNF) and the Government of India on 30 June 1986¹³². However, Lal Thanhawla had stepped down from office to make way for the MNF-Congress (I) coalition government on 2 January 1986¹³³. Thus, Laldenga was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Mizoram and Lal Thanhawla as the Deputy Chief Minister, till the conduct of first State Legislative Assembly Elections of Mizoram in 1987. One of the main factors why the Congress won the elections was that the party promised had to restore peace and normalcy by bringing underground MNF and the Union Government to settle the long political turmoil in the state. Thus, the fourth Assembly election was significantly important in the political history of Mizoram.

Another noteworthy in these elections was that, the leaders of Mizo Union, Mizo Convention and Mizo Peace Forum were for the election boycott. Thus, the Zoram

¹³¹ Ibid

¹³² J.V. Hluna and Rini Tochhawng, op. cit., 327.

¹³³ <http://elections.in/assembly-constituencies/1979-election-result.html> 7/14/2014

Kohhran Hruiatu Committee (ZKHC) or the Zoram Church Leaders Committee observed that the atmosphere in the poll process was an unhealthy. As such, the ZKHC invited leaders of all political parties in Mizoram on 29 March, 1984 at Synod Conference Room to discuss about the forth-coming Assembly elections. The ZKHC appealed to the political parties, to conduct free and fair elections. It also requested all the political parties and their candidates not to defame their opponents, not to buy votes and not to appease voters by election feasts.¹³⁴

4.3. The Legislative Assembly Elections in the Post Statehood Period

With a view to elevating the Union Territory to the statehood of Mizoram, the Union Government introduced the Mizoram Statehood Bill, 1986, with special safeguards and provisions for the forty seats (38 reserved for scheduled tribes and 2 unreserved) in the Mizoram Legislative Assembly. And, the 53 Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 1986 in the Parliament was passed by an absolute majority of votes. The President of India also assented to the Mizoram Statehood Bill, 1986 on 14 August 1986¹³⁵. On 20 February 1987 Mizoram was inaugurated as the 23 State of the Indian Union. The Legislative Assembly was held on 16 February 1987¹³⁶. The elections to the Mizoram state Assembly in the post statehood period are given as below:

4.3.1. The first General Elections to the Mizoram State Assembly were held on 16 February 1987. There were four political parties contesting in the elections, namely, the Indian National Congress, the People's Conference, the Mizo National Front and the Mizo National Union. There were also some Independent candidates contesting in the elections. There were 145 candidates, out of which the Congress set up all 40 candidates, including one woman candidate. The MNF had fielded 37 candidates including one woman. One of them (Laldenga) filed his nomination paper in two constituencies. The Mizo National Union (MNU) nominated 21 candidates including a woman. Rochhunga Ralte, who left the Congress and joined the MNU filed his nomination papers in two constituencies. Besides, 11 Independent candidates filed their nominations. While four parties and independents were involved in the election fray, the main contest was to be witnessed between the Congress and the MNF. The

¹³⁴ ZKHC Election Communiqué in April, 1984.

¹³⁵ R N Prasad, *op. cit.*, 41.

¹³⁶ J.V. Hluna and Rini Tochhawng, *op. cit.*, 327

MNF for the first time entered the Assembly polls of 1987¹³⁷, after Mizoram attained statehood.

Election Manifestos: The political parties which were in the contest, issued their election manifestoes raising public issues and divergent approaches so as to address manifold problem of the people. The Congress in its election pledges had promised to achieve the national programmes and political policies like, democracy, socialism, secularism and non-alignment among others. The Mizo National Front fought the elections mostly on the local issues. The party laid emphasis in its election promise to uplift Mizoram. The People's Conference promised to eradicate the political evils like, party favoritism, nepotism, corruption of all sorts, and strive for ensuring justice in the expenditure of public money and also promised to consult the Church some leaders and voluntary organizations that were committed to the social reforms. The Mizo National Union promised that the MNU ministry would create the people's ministry, instead of the party ministry so as to safeguard the Mizo society and protect the poor Mizos from exploitation and insecure conditions. The party further promised to strive, for ensuring economic justice and improving the socio- economic conditions of the weaker sections among the Mizos.¹³⁸

Election Campaign: Regarding the election campaigns in 1987, the political parties had adopted all sorts of formal and informal campaigning means to mobilize voters in their favour, which are usually observed in the election in the rest of country. The parties had also adopted other traditional means, such as street processions, public/street corner meetings and the door-to-door campaigns by the candidates and their supporters.¹³⁹

Election Result: The table No. 1 shows the details of seats contested by each party, seats won, valid votes polled in their elections.

Table No. 1. Election Result at a Glance

¹³⁷ RN Prasad and AK Agarwal, *op. cit.*, 75-78.

¹³⁸ RN Prasad and AK Agarwal, *op. cit.*, 83-84.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

Name of Party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Valid Votes Polled	Percentage	Source: Report on General Elections to Mizoram State
Indian National Congress	40	13	76,152	32.98	
Mizo National Front	37	24	84,549	36.62	
People's Conference	36	3	53,717	23.70	
Mizo National Union	21	Nil	7,688	3.33	
Independents/others	11	Nil	7,759	3.36	

Assembly, 1987¹⁴⁰

The first MNF Government with Laldenga as the Chief Minister was formed with 6 Cabinet Ministers and 5 Ministers of state¹⁴¹. Despite enjoying a comfortable majority in the Assembly, dissident activities cropped up within the MNF party. As such, 8 MNF legislators led by Chawngzuala caused a split in the legislature party and formed the Mizo National Front (Democratic) or MNF (D). The MNF (D) withdrew its support to the government of Laldenga, and staked its claim to form a coalition government with the INC on 31 August, 1988. In the midst of an ongoing political crisis, Hiteswar Saikia, the Governor of Mizoram having closely observed the political development in the state and recommended dissolution of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly.¹⁴² After Mizoram was kept under President's Rule, mid-term polls to the State Legislative Assembly were held on 21 January, 1989.¹⁴³

4.3.2. The second General Elections to the Legislative Assembly were held on 21 January 1989. The counting of votes was held on 23 January 1989. There were seven political parties in the fray, the Congress (I), the People's Conference, the Mizo National Front (recognized), the Mizo National Union, the Chakma Jati Parishad, Hmar People Conference and the Mizo National Front (D), (unrecognized) besides, some Independent candidates. Of the total 162 candidates, the Congress put up 34 candidates for 40 seats. While the MNF (Laldenga) put up 40 candidates, including

¹⁴⁰ Report on General Elections to Mizoram State Assembly, 1987 Chief Electoral Officer to the Government of Mizoram, Aizawl. Cited by RN Prasad and AK Agarwal, Political and Economic Development of Mizoram, 79.

¹⁴¹ Laldenga was elected from two constituencies. He submitted resignation from Sateek Assembly constituency in which Bye-election was held on 26 April, 1987 and Thankima from MNF was elected.

¹⁴² Jangkhongam Dounyel, op. cit., 7.

¹⁴³ Ibid

one woman, the People's Conference had fielded 38 candidates including three women. There were some other parties that had also contest in the election. The Mizo National Union nominated 36 candidates. The Mizo National Front (Democrats), an ally of the Congress set up 6 candidates. The Chakma Jati Parishad set up one candidate. The Hmar People Conference had 3 candidates¹⁴⁴. Besides, 4 Independent candidates also filed their nominations¹⁴⁵.

The Congress secured 23 seats, the MNF (D) two seats, the MNF 14 seats and the People's Conference one seat. The main feature of this election was that the Congress with its poll ally, the MNF (D) captured political power from the Mizo National Front led by Laldenga. A new Congress ministry headed by Lal Thanhawla was sworn in as the Chief Minister on 24 January 1989¹⁴⁶, and the Government lasted its full five year term. The second General Election to the Legislative Assembly poll witnessed the growth of clan-based political parties in elections. For instance-the Hmar People's Convention and the Chakma Jatiya Parishad contested the elections and started projecting their demands in various forms. This marked the entry of community-based or clan-based politics in the state. The second elections also noticed the first successful coalition politics in Mizoram.

4.3.3. The third General Elections that were scheduled to be held in 1994, but these were preponed owing to the Gospel Centenary Celebration (Hundred years of Christianity in Mizoram). As such, the elections were held on 30 November 1993. A significant political development took place in this period, as the PC was merged with the Janata Dal, but it could not reach to any understanding with the party high command at the centre. As such, it transformed itself into the Mizoram Janata Dal (MJD), as a regional political party, and agreed to have electoral understanding with the INC. The INC, MNF and MJD were the main contenders for political power in this election. The result was that, INC won 16 seats, MNF won 14 seats and MJD won 8 seats. Subsequently, a coalition government known as the United Legislature Party

¹⁴⁴ RN Prasad and AK Agarwal, *op. cit.*, 146-147.

¹⁴⁵ Of the total 232 nominations for 40 seats were file, 68 candidates withdrew their candidature. Of the total 232 nominations papers 2 nomination papers were rejected. Finally, a total of 162 candidates contested in the Assembly elections.

¹⁴⁶ RN Prasad and AK Agarwal, *op. cit.*, 150-151.

(ULP) was formed by the INC and MJD with Lal Thanhawla as Chief Minister and Lalhmingthanga as Deputy Chief Minister.¹⁴⁷

Other than the Chief Minister, the ministry comprised of 10 INC Ministers 5 MJD Ministers. But the rift started in the ULP Government within the first five months. Lal Thanhawla then instructed all his ministers to tender their resignations, which was accordingly followed by the ministers. However, he accepted the resignation of only two MJD Ministers, namely, Lalhmingthanga and H. Thangkima. Subsequently, he inducted Hrangthanga Colney and F. Lawmkima from the MJD in place of the dropped Ministers. That way, a tactical game was shrewdly played by Lal Thanhawla to create a rift in the MJD. On the other hand, 5 MNF legislators led by Lalruata after having split the MNF, joined the INC¹⁴⁸. Thus, the INC could now form the government on its own through the game of manipulation and political defections. Indeed, the third government of Lal Thanhawla completed its full five year term, despite the political crisis, as the ministry was reshuffled three times during his tenure.

4.4.4. The fourth General Elections to the Mizoram State Legislative Assembly were held on 25 November 1998. In this election various political parties declared their candidates. These include, National parties like the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), the INC (Indian National Congress), the JD (Janata Dal), the SAP (Samata Party), state parties like the LS (Lok Shakti), the MNF (Mizo National Front), the RJD (Rashtriya Janata Dal); registered (unrecognized) parties like the MDF (Maraland Democratic Front), the MNF (N) Mizo National Front (Nationalist), the MPC (Mizoram People's Conference), besides some Independent candidates. The MNF-MPC combine captured 32 seats (MNF 21, MPC 12), the INC 6 seats and Independent one seat. Lal Thanhawla was also defeated even from his traditional Serchip constituency by a lesser known engineer-turned politician, Thangzuala who was a MNF candidate. Zoramthanga was sworn in as the Chief Minister on 3 December 1998.

Lalhmingthanga, the working president of the MPC became the Deputy Chief Minister. The coalition ministry came to an end on 9 December 1999. With the exit

¹⁴⁷ Jangkhongam Dounge, op. cit., 8.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid

of the MPC MLAs, the strength of the MNF became 22 with one Independent supporter. The MNF government however lasted its full five year term¹⁴⁹. The elections witnessed a total of 221 candidates, out of which 10 candidates were women.¹⁵⁰ The emergence of coalition politics in Mizoram since the second State Legislative Assembly elections in 1989 witnessed and experienced inter-party and intra-party conflicts in the state politics. However, a few coalition regimes were formed, usually not on the basis of shared ideology, principles, policies and programmes, but with sole intention of having a share in the government power.

4.3.5. The Fifth General Assembly Elections were held on 20 November 2003. In this election, Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were used for the first time in the state. Political Parties had joined the poll fray included: national parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Indian National Congress (INC), the Communist Party of India (CPI); state parties like the Mizo National Front (MNF), the Mizoram People's Conference (MPC), the Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP); other parties like the Janata Dal (United) (JD) (U); and registered (unrecognized) parties like the Ephraim Union (EU), the Hmar People's Convention (HPC) and the Maraland Democratic Front (MDF). When the election results were declared, the MNF won 21 seats, INC won 12 seats, MPC won 3 seats, ZNP won 2 seats, MDF and HPC one each respectively. Zoramthanga of the MNF party was sworn in as the Chief Minister for the second time on 4 December 2003.¹⁵¹ The total contestants in the 2003 elections were 192, out of which 7 were women. The MNF Government with Zoramthanga as Chief Minister was formed with 7 Cabinet Ministers and 6 Ministers of state. But, the ministry was downsized after the enactment of the Constitutional Ninety First Amendment Act by the Indian Parliament. The Second Zoramthanga Government also lasted its full five year term and he became the first Chief Minister of Mizoram who completed consecutively two terms in office.¹⁵² This election brought an end to the dominance of coalition politics in the state for the time being.

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.elections.in/mizoram/assembly-constituencies/1998-election-result.html>, 7/9/2014.

¹⁵⁰ Lalremruata Khiantge, *Mizo Year Book 2014* (Aizawl: Lalremruata Khiantge, 2014), 325-328.

¹⁵¹ <http://www.elections.in/mizoram/assembly-constituencies/2003-election-result.html>, 7/9/2014.

¹⁵² P. Lalnithanga, *Mizoram Politics Inlumleh Chhoh Dan* (Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press, 2008), 118-218.

Mizoram had experienced peaceful conduct of electoral process since the first Union Territory Assembly elections to fourth Assembly elections in the post statehood period. The Church and civil society organizations involved indirectly in the electoral process by issuing the 'election guidelines'. The Church had appealed to political parties, candidates and voters for ensuring clean, free and fair elections. As such, due to the constructive guidance and indirect involvement of the Church and civil society organizations, conduct of elections was peaceful in the state. However, unusual political developments took place during the fifth Assembly elections. The incidents like numerous allegations of the use of insurgent groups, use of money power and muscle power were reported during these elections. As a matter of fact, the Church had played a more pro active role in the electoral process thereafter.

4.3.6. The Sixth General Elections were held on 6 December 2008. The Indian National Congress (INC) led by Lal Thanhawla won against the ruling Mizo National Front (MNF). The total candidates in 2008 elections were 206 (male 197 and female 9). The INC- 40, MNF -39, MPC -16, ZNP -17, BJP- 9, NCP- 6, JDU -2, LJD -38, Lok Bharati- 5, besides, 33 Independent candidates. The Congress captured 32 seats of the 40 member state Assembly, whereas the ruling MNF managed to win only 4 seats, and the third force, MPC and ZNP continue managed to get only 4 seats. Lal Thanhawla was sworn in as the sixth Chief Minister of the state. No one before him has ever been elected as the Chief Minister for four times in the state¹⁵³. In this election, the NLUP card had indeed helped the INC to capture 32 seats. After a gap of ten years, the INC Government led by Lal Thanhawla was formed with 9 Cabinet Ministers and two Ministers of state. Moreover, the Chief Minister also inducted 7 Parliamentary Secretaries to assist the Cabinet Ministers. The ministry lasted its full term and the NLUP became the main public policy agenda of the government.

As a consequence of 2003 Assembly elections, no untoward incidents were permitted to happen due to the establishment of Mizoram People Forum (MPF), an election watchdog. This was sponsored by the Church and civil society organizations who had taken pro active interest in 2008 Assembly elections onwards. The Church and civil society organizations formulated the 'election guidelines' for all the political parties,

¹⁵³ Lalremruata Kiangte, *op. cit.*, 332-333.

candidates and voters, to ensure free and fair elections in the state. The MPF had also requested the armed group to refrain from Mizoram Assembly elections.¹⁵⁴ Besides, the MPF had an Memorandum of Understanding with the political parties in the state and organized some Joint Platforms with the political parties and their candidates. As such, the Sixth Assembly election was conducted peacefully on 2 December 2008.

To sum up, introduction of a democratic institution was probably the most important administrative change in Mizoram. The institution of chieftainship was abolished and was replaced by popular elections. The Mizos had experienced electoral politics following the formation of the Mizo Union in 1946. But, it was from the first District Council elections held in 1952 onwards that the Mizo people were actively involved in the electoral politics. The battle for political power in the District Councils was a struggle between the MU and the UMFO. After that, the UMFO was replaced by Eastern Indian Tribal Uio (EITU) and the INC emerged, with the exit of the UMFO in the political scene of Mizoram. Thus, electoral process in the District Council era could be described as struggle for power between the MU and other parties, such as, UMFO, EITU, MNF and INC. The MU continued to dominate the political scene even in the first general elections to Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory of Mizoram. Whereas, the contest for power in the first Union Territory Assembly elections was focused between the MU and INC. However, following the MU merger into INC automatically led to the exit of the MU from the political scene of Mizoram. After that, the struggle for power in the Union Territory era was witnessed between the INC and the People's Conference (P.C). And, with the upgradation of Mizoram to the status of statehood in 1987, the MNF emerged as a force to reckon with and the struggle for power also changed to that between the INC and MNF. Even today Mizoram can be described as the two parties' dominant political system. Because, it is unlikely that government can be formed without the participation of either MNF or INC.

Since the formation of Mizoram state the Church had played a vital role in every aspect of political life as whole in the state. The Church had made a lot of

¹⁵⁴ For instance, the MPF leaders met the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN-IM) leaders at Kolkata. The MPF leaders requested them to refrain from involving in Mizoram elections, as well as to issue directive guidelines to its friendly insurgent groups, so as not to meddle in the Legislative Assembly elections of Mizoram.

contributions to bring about peace and normalcy in the state during the movement of statehood. The Church continued its role for the socio-political development in the state. The visible engagement of the Church in the electoral process was noticed, when Mizoram held its first Union Territory Assembly elections in 1972. The Church appealed to all the political parties, candidates and voters to ensure free and fair elections. This sort of practice with the Church had become a regular feature since then. The Church had played a more pro-active in the electoral process after the fifth Assembly elections of 2003, due to the untoward electioneering activities reported during the fifth Assembly elections in the state. The involvement of armed groups, use of muscle power and heavy election expenditure were witnessed in this election. As a result, the Church took a more pro-active role in the electoral process, to reform electoral politics in the state that led to the formation of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) in 2006. Consequently, the MPF played a greater role of reforming and cleansing Mizoram the politics since the sixth Assembly elections.

CHAPTER III

THE ROLE OF CHURCH IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

In Mizoram, the Church has been regarded as the foremost factor for the socio-political and economic modernization and development. The social values in the Mizo society were strongly founded upon Christian faith and principles. Hence, the Church which the western missionaries had established greatly influenced the general perception about social and political values of the people as a whole. The Church is also highly regarded as the forerunner of the establishment of various civil society organizations in the state.¹⁵⁵ As such, the Church played a vital role in shaping the socio-cultural lives of the people, as well as their political inclinations.

The first visible engagement of the Church in the electoral process was in the year 1972, when elections were held for the first time, in the newly formed Union Territory of Mizoram. The Church had made an appeal to the political parties, candidates and voters for clean, free and fair elections. This had become a regular feature with the Church since then. Further, the need for electoral reforms was noticed by various civil society organizations in the state. As a matter of fact, civil society organizations gradually joined and these supported the Church in reforming the electoral politics in Mizoram¹⁵⁶. This chapter deals with the role of Church in the electoral process. The chapter highlights, various denomination of Church in elections, conduct of elections and the political parties. Besides, election manifestos of political parties, campaign methods in the poll process, and voting behavior had been observed. The main aim of the chapter is to investigate the role of Church in all these processes that brought

¹⁵⁵ It was the early Mizo pastors and few intellectuals, who founded the Young Lushai Association, now known as the Young Mizo Association (YMA), which became one of the most influential NGOs in the state. Further, another notable pressure group, the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) could be considered as an offshoot of the education that was brought about by the Christian missionaries.

¹⁵⁶ In 1987, when the Second General Assembly elections were held, the Central Young Mizo Association (YMA) joined the movement. In the subsequent elections, it was involved itself deeper and further played a pro-active role in the electoral process. Moreover, the Mizoram Presbyterian Church organized seminars and political education campaigns through one of its wings, the Synod Social Front. As such, the first State-level Co-ordination Committee on Elections was formed in 1993. It became more active and made an all-out effort in the electoral process that came after the 2003 General Assembly elections, which led to the formation of the Mizoram People's Forum (MPF) in 2006.

about peaceful elections in the state. The chapter mainly focused on the seventh Assembly elections.

Schedule of Seventh Assembly Elections

The Election Commission had prepared the Schedules for holding General Elections to the Legislative Assemblies of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Mizoram after taking into consideration all relevant aspects, like the climatic conditions, academic calendars, festivals, prevailing law and order situation in the states, availability of Central Police Forces, time needed for movement, transportation and timely deployment of forces, and assessment of other ground realities. The Commission after considering all relevant aspects had decided to recommend to the respective Governors of the States, to issue notifications for the General elections to the Legislative Assemblies of these States under relevant provisions of the Representation of the People Act, 1951¹⁵⁷. As such, the Seventh General Elections to the Mizoram Assembly were held on 25 November, 2013 that was scheduled as included in the Appendix I.

Conduct of Elections

As per the established practice, the Election Commission of India (ECI) scheduled the seventh general elections to the Legislative Assembly of Mizoram, held on 25 November 2013. Following the announcement of ECI, the election officials as well as political parties in State were given training on model code of conduct and on other electoral systems, as a part of poll preparations.

The conduct of elections includes, arranging Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) for the smooth conduct of elections, creating None of the Above (NOTA)¹⁵⁸, Communication plan to enable concurrent intervention and mid course correction on the poll day. And, election expenditure monitoring is enforced for the purpose of effective monitoring of the election expenditure of the candidates. Thus, certain mechanisms were created for the purpose. Some of these include formation of flying

¹⁵⁷ Election Commission of India, No. ECI/PN/43/2013 dated 4th October 2013 by Sumit Mukherjee Secretary reiterated from [WWW.eci.nic.in](http://www.eci.nic.in)

¹⁵⁸ Option in EVMs on the Ballot Unit (below the name of the last candidate), so that electors who did not want to vote for any of the candidates can exercise their option by pressing the button against NOTA,

squads, static surveillance teams, video surveillance teams, involvement of Investigation Directorates of Income Tax Department. State Excise Department and police authorities were engaged in monitoring production, distribution, sale and storage of liquor and other intoxicants during the electoral process. For greater transparency and for ease of monitoring of election expenditures, candidates were required to open separate bank accounts and incur their election expenditures from that very account.¹⁵⁹

The political parties were also advised not to incur any expenditure in cash beyond Rs. 20,000/-, and also advised not to carry cash above Rs. 50,000/- to the poll going States during the electoral process. Besides, to deal with the issue of 'Paid News', a mechanism has been laid out with the three tier of Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC) at District, State and ECI levels. Regarding the Police Observers, the Commission had deployed the IPS officers as Police Observers at district level in the poll, depending upon the sensitivity of the election areas. They monitored all activities related to force deployment, law and order situation and co-ordinate between civil and Police administration to ensure free and fair elections¹⁶⁰.

For the first time, the Commission had deployed certain Central (Awareness) Observers to oversee the efficient and effective management of the electoral process at the field level. The Commission also deployed some Micro Observers to observe the poll proceedings in the polling stations on the day in certain critical polling station. And, the Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) for ensuring comprehensive measures towards voters' education was taken up during the roll revision process in the State¹⁶¹. These were some measures that were undertaken during the electoral process.

For the smooth conduct of free and fair elections, training was provided for political parties and election officials at the state level as well as in district levels. The first level training on Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) was conducted in the presence

¹⁵⁹ Election Commission of India Press Note No.ECI/PN/43/2013 dated 4th October 2013 by Sumit Mukherjee "www.eci.nic.in"

¹⁶⁰ Ibid

¹⁶¹ Ibid

of representatives of political parties and the NGOs. The Joint CEO, H. Lalengmawia made special mention about the proposed deployment of static surveillance teams, flying squads, expenditure and accounting monitoring cells, and video surveillance teams. He further stated that the services of internet and cell phones, especially through the SMS would be employed to the maximum in the electoral process. The top officials of ECI viz., V.S. Sampath, Chief Election Commissioner; H.S. Brahma, Election Commissioner and Dr. Syed Nasim Ahmad Zaidi, Election Commissioner inspected the overall preparatory measures to ensure free and fair elections in the state¹⁶². Besides these inspections, the ECI officials also had held some important meetings concerning the election-related matters. The ECI officials have had interactive meeting with the political parties and NGOs at New Secretariat Complex, Conference Room. They also had few meetings with the DCs and the SPs of each of the eight districts in the state, during the course of electoral process. As per their election programme they also had conducted discussions with the state Chief Secretary, DGP and CEOs over the election matters¹⁶³ to ensure free and fair elections in the State.

Political Parties

The political parties in the fray were national political parties viz., the Indian National Congress (INC), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). While the regional political parties (recognized) were the Mizo National Front (MNF), the Mizoram Peoples Conference (MPC) and the Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP), the regional political parties (Registered Unrecognized Parties) were the Ephraim Union (EU), the Mara Democratic Front (MDF), the Jai Maha Bharat Party (JMBP), the Zoramthar Duhtute (ZTD)¹⁶⁴, besides, some Independent candidates were also there in the poll fray.

As usual political parties are very crucial in any elections, more so in the recently held Assembly elections in the state. The political parties having entered into different

¹⁶² "ECI officials arrive in Aizawl to inspect overall preparation for Assembly polls", The Mizoram Post, Vol. 11 Issue 161 dated 6 November 2013.

¹⁶³ The Mizoram Post, Vol. 11 Issue 161 dated 6 November 2013

¹⁶⁴ General Election to the seventh Mizoram Legislative Assembly, 2013, Statistical Report (Aizawl: Directorate of Election, Government of Mizoram), 2.

electoral alliances, tried to emerge stronger in the poll contest. Obviously, the political parties were engaged in mutual bickerings so as to score some political points over their rivals in the elections. As such, “The 7th Assembly Elections in Mizoram was a landmark in the history of Mizoram General elections as it was the battle between the devotees of Mizo nationalism and the leaders who want the Indianisation of Mizo nation”,¹⁶⁵ said the Opposition party alliance called the Mizoram Democratic Alliance (MDA), which comprised of regional political parties likes, the Mizo National Front (MNF), Mizoram People’s Conference (MPC) and Mara Democratic Front (MDF).

Emphasizing the need for propagation of Mizo nationalism as the urgent need of the time to safeguard and protect the integrity of Mizoram and continuity of Mizo as a nation, the MDA said it must win the upcoming Assembly elections for the protection and survival of ‘Zo nation’ adding that the upcoming election was to be an important and memorable event. The MNF-MPC-MDF alliance comes upon as the realization of the survival of Zo nation, was felt much among churches, NGOs and Employees in Miozram. As such, the triple alliance became more successful than the MNF-MPC alliance of 1998, where it won 32 seats out of the existing 40 seats, as the almighty God also heard the woes and cry of the people of Mizoram, MNF made the statement. The MDA alleged that the Congress party and Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP) had made secret alliance between them by jointly castigating the unity of MDA, that they did not expose it outwardly. Meanwhile, reacting to the allegation, ZNP said that they did not confederate with the Congress party for the forthcoming polls, adding the accusation made by leaders of MDA alliance that, ZNP aligned with the Congress was unfounded and was a false accusation¹⁶⁶.

Another noteworthy development in the 2013 Assembly Elections was that the Congress faced strong anti-incumbency factors in Rajasthan, Delhi, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh states in north India, retaining Mizoram was a matter of greater importance for the party, where the Congress government, headed by Lal Thanhawla was also trying to retain power. In 2008, the Congress swept the polls with an

¹⁶⁵ The Sangai Express and Newmai News Network dated 17 November, 2013.

¹⁶⁶ 7th Assembly Election as battle between Mizo nationalism and Indian Nationalist: MDA, The Mizoram Post, Vol. 11, Issue No. 172, 17 November 2013.

overwhelming majority, riding on the back of anti-incumbency wave. And, it also alleged rampant corruption about the MNF-led government and thus they promised to the revival of the New Land Use Policy (NLUP), a direct cash transfer scheme that was aimed at village farmers to develop self-sufficiency in agriculture.

Hence, the poll preparations were in full-swing, various political parties had announced their candidatures. All the political parties in the State were in jubilant mood and enthusiastic to face the celebration day after the announcement of their candidates for all the 40 Assembly seats. The Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) President Lal Thanhawla and Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP) President Lalduhawma contested for two constituencies each. Lal Thanhawla was contesting from his home town Serchhip constituency and Hrangturzo constituency, and similarly the ZNP President Lalduhawma had contested from the Kolasib constituency and the Aizawl West-I constituency. The District and Constituency-wise of the political party candidates were given as below:

Table No. 1: District and Constituency-wise Party Candidates

DISTRICT	ACs	INC	MNF	MPC	ZNP	BJP	IND. & OTHERS
MAMIT	3	3	3	0	3	3	2
KOLASIB	3	3	2	1	3	2	0
AIZAWL	14	14	10	4	14	6	0
CHAMPHAI	5	5	4	1	5	3	1
SECHHIP	3	3	2	1	3	0	3
LUNGLEI	7	7	6	1	7	2	1
LAWNGTLAI	3	3	3	0	2	1	0
SAIHA	2	2	1	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	40	40	31	8	38	17	8

Source: 2013 Election Analysis: Mizo Year Book 2014¹⁶⁷

The main contest for the 40 seat Legislative Assembly in 2013 was between the incumbent Indian National Congress (INC), and the Mizo National Front-led Mizoram Democratic Alliance. The MNF, MPC and MDF had forged an electoral

¹⁶⁷ Lalremruat Khiangte, "2013 Election Analysed" *Mizo Yearbook 2014* (Aizawl: Lalremruata Khiangte, 2014), 182.

alliance under the banner of Mizoram Democratic Alliance (MDA). Under the MDA Alliance, the MNF contested 31 seats, MPC contested 8 seats and the MDF contested one seat. The INC fielded candidates in all the 40 seats. ZNP contested 38 seats, BJP fielded 17 seats, NCP contested two seats, one Jai Maha Bharat Party and 4 Independent candidates. The INC canvassed votes on the NLUP card, whereas the MNF campaign slogan was economic development as well as the issue of the application of Tilak in Lal Thanhawla's forehead during Durga Puja festival at Kolkatta, meanwhile the ZNP also made many tall promises in the elections.¹⁶⁸

Major Electoral Issues during the Poll Process

Almost all the political parties had raised several public policies as part of debating in the elections. Thus, these became the main election issues in the state. While the NLUP has achieved some measure, there were some allegations of corruption. However, in an effort to dilute any advantage that the Congress might have reaped from the NLUP, the three regional parties had announced their intention to replicate the success of the NLUP should they come to power and promised to add on to it. The main opposition party, the MNF had announced what it calls a Socio-Economic Development Programme (SEDP), which aims to make Mizoram an economically self-sufficient state in agriculture and power generation.

The party president and former Chief Minister Zoramthanga added that the SEDP incorporated certain points from the 'Six Basic Needs', the 30 year old policy of Brig. T. Sailo's party MPC, which remained unfulfilled.¹⁶⁹ The MPC, now headed by Brig. T. Sailo's son and retired civil servant Lalmangaiha Sailo, had reiterated its commitment to work towards the fulfillment of the 'Six Basic Needs' programme and would ensure self-sufficiency in the generation of power. In addition, the MPC had added a 'Social Security' scheme in its manifesto, which would help small farmers carry their products to the market, provide support prices to the farmers and also ensured adequate nutrition cover for families having young children.

¹⁶⁸ Jangkhongam Doungel, op. cit., 9.

¹⁶⁹ The Shillong Times. <http://www.theshillongtimes.com/2013/06/19/> cited by Laldinkima Sailo, Focus on Policies and Personalities in Mizoram Assembly Elections 2013, ISAS Brief No.302-15th November 2013, 2-3.

The ZNP had some reservations about an idea of cash transfer schemes, yet it had also echoed similar support policies in the form of an Immediate Economic Package (IEP) and the Urban Poor Package (UPP), both aimed at providing market access to the poor in the rural areas and helping the urban poor to gain meaningful employment through technical education.

As a matter of fact, like several other states in the mainstream India, the Mizoram too witnessed emerging trends in the context of socio-economic and political processes. For instance, at one level, the politics of packages and economic development has been noticed in the recent polls. Despite religious appeals that significantly influenced the electorate, the ruling Congress has benefited in elections on account of its flagship scheme of the New Land Use Policy (NLUP) that was promised in the wake of 2008 elections later on got financed by the Union Government. As such, in spite of opposition criticism of its biased implementation, the scheme seems to have given a crucial advantage to the ruling party in this election¹⁷⁰.

Further, all the political parties had made tall electoral promises aimed at harnessing the youth in the state. The development of sports, infrastructure, educational reforms and the use of information technology in governance feature prominently in their election manifestoes. Despite the rise in unemployment, including large number of unemployed graduates, political parties had not articulated any clear plans on how they would create jobs. The regional parties had also espoused the strong Mizo-nationalist ideologies and promises to safeguard their cultural practices and keep immigration in check. The political party manifestoes are detailed in the subsequent paragraphs.

Election Manifestos of Political Parties

Raising some of the burning issues and their manifestations on the eve of and during the electoral process were a common practice of the contesting political parties. If successful in their political play, it was on the basis of these issues that the concerned political party or parties would ride on the crown of power. It is also a general

¹⁷⁰ K.V. Reddy, "Political Process in Northeast India: A case study of Mizoram", in *Socio-Economic Development and Governance in North Eastern Region of India*, Edited by, Jagadish K. Patnaik, Jangkhongam Doungel and Ayangbam Shyamkishor (Aizawl: Department of Political Science Mizoram, 2014),141.

phenomenon that in the parliamentary elections, important national issues were prominent, whereas local issues were prominent in the Assembly elections. The use of various electoral strategies during the elections by the contesting candidates as well as the political parties was to win the electoral that had battle become essential. Strategies were to be different from party to party, and candidate to candidate depending upon the location, situation, degree of consciousness and awareness of the voters, level of party competition.

According to an eminent political scientist and political analyst like, C.P. Bhambhri, “it is a reflection on the maturity of the Indian voter that he/she is involved in issue-based politics and he/she is expected to vote for or against a party on the basis of issues raised by a party. Hence, many factors operate during the elections but the importance of issues and party manifestoes and promises should never be underestimated”.¹⁷¹ The same was also true in the seventh Mizoram Assembly elections, wherein the election manifestoes issued by the political parties apart from giving a profile of their ideological stances and social worldview, focused on basic local issues and problems.

However, unlike the previous elections, this time the MPF had interfered even in the election manifestoes, and tried to restrain the political parties from making tall promises in the elections. “No political party should promise what seems impossible to achieve. The political parties or candidates should promise only what they would be able to fulfill”.¹⁷² This was one of the significant points of the 27-point Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was signed by the MPF and political parties in the Seventh Assembly elections. The following are some salient feature of the respective election manifestoes that were released by the contesting political parties in the seventh state Assembly elections in Mizoram.

Indian National Congress

The Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC), in its Manifesto for the state Assembly General Elections in 2008 assumed that they had made a number of

¹⁷¹ APK Singh, *Election Politics in Manipur* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2009), 100.

¹⁷² “Mizoram poll watchdog stricter than EC”, *The Mizoram Post*, Vol. 11 Issue 140 dated 16 November, 2013

promises to the people of Mizoram. According to their electoral evaluation about 75 percent of such promises were accomplished. The MPCC also mentioned that some of the promises still remained untouched, and some were being pursued vigorously for implementation. In their Work Programme 2013-2018, the party promised that if the people of Mizoram reposed their trust and faith in the Congress Party through this election, they pledged to form a clean, accountable and transparent government and ready to do their best to serve the people. The following are some important issues for ensuring administrative, social economic transformation of Mizoram, to be pursued urgently if they could retain the government after the elections.¹⁷³

The MPCC promised to continue with the initiatives that the present Congress Government had already taken during the last five years. The party admitted some other issues that are still relevant, but have not been pursued so far. The party continued to implement the flagship programme of the present Government, viz., the New Land Use Programme. Further, the party had also promised to conduct a fresh survey of the Below Poverty Line (BPL) list to ensure the inclusion of eligible families and exclusion of ineligible families and take up with the Centre, the issue of Indo-Myanmar and Indo-Bangladesh Border Trade to ensure that the illegal trade is effectively curbed and legitimate cross border trade with these countries prosper¹⁷⁴.

The party promised to establish an extensive skill development programme for the youth and continued to set up the world class sports facilities for the talented youth in various sports disciplines. And, it had also promised to introduce a new housing scheme called Chief Minister's Rural Housing Scheme, to address the acute housing problem being faced in the rural areas of the State. The MPCC further, assured that the recommendations of the Mizoram Education Reforms Commission and the provisions of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 are taken up for implementation in a phased manner. And, to set a target at the net enrolment ratio of 100:100 at Elementary stage; reduce student drop-out rate; and impart computer education in schools¹⁷⁵.

¹⁷³ Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee Election Manifesto 2013, www.aicc.org.in/manifesto-mizoram, 1-4.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid

¹⁷⁵ Ibid

Concerning health care, the party had promised to upgrade the State Referral Hospital from 150 to 400 bedded hospital, and ultimately to a Medical College and to establish a 50 bedded Mental Hospital in the State. To upgrade the existing Cancer Centre to a full fledged 100 bedded Cancer Hospital and to Bring down Infant Mortality rate in the state. The MPCC also, promised energy security for Mizoram by enhancing the installed capacity to at least 288 MW, and electrify all the census villages in Mizoram during the next five years. Further, it promised to construct new roads for east-west connectivity and improve the existing roads and to endeavour to connect all these census villages of Mizoram by truckable roads within the next 5 years through the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojan (PMGSY). And, to provide safe drinking water in towns and villages in the state by 2017. The MPCC had also promised to undertake on the implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act in Mizoram¹⁷⁶.

Mizoram Democratic Alliance (MDA)

The MNF, MPC and MDF had entered into an electoral alliance under the banner of Mizoram Democratic Alliance (MDA). The following are some of their common electoral promises incorporated in their Manifesto for the 7th Assembly elections.

The Alliance parties in their election manifesto had promised to attempt the Zo-reunification, and bring all of them under one political-administrative banner based on the United Nation (UN) Declaration of Rights of the Indigenous People on 13 September 2009¹⁷⁷, to organize the International Mizo Convention of all the Zo peoples in the world, to protect socio-religio-cultural identity of the state and to include the Mizo language in the Eight Schedule of the Indian constitution, also to reinforce the Inner Line Regulations strictly¹⁷⁸. The party also emphasized on the decentralization of power for ensuring good governance.

The MDA emphasized on the importance of quality education, and to provide the world class education in the state. As such, the party had promised to provide the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 3-4.

¹⁷⁷ MNF, MPC and MDF Common Manifesto MLA Election 2013, Aizawl: MNF MPC MDF General Headquarters, 2013

¹⁷⁸ Ibid

Computers (Laptops) for meritorious students in the HSLC, HSSLC and University examinations. In line with the Indian National Youth Policy of 2012, the party promised to empower the Mizoram Youth Commission to cater to the needs of the youths, in some fields like, Training in Automobile Engineering, Electronic, Building Construction, Food Processing, IT & Software's, Tourism & Hospital, Germs & Jewellery, Transportation/Logistics/Warehousing, Insurance banking, Entertainment, Broadcasting in collaboration with the National Skill Development Corporation¹⁷⁹. The party also promised to establish the Lok Ayukta/Vigilance Commission to fight corruption in the state that would investigate corruption in different positions, such as, Government employees, and political leaders, including the Chief Minister.

The MDA had also promised to work hard for getting natural resources like Oil and Gas allotted for the state, and to accomplish the ongoing Hydel projects, Chimmtuipui Hydel Project (Kolodyne) 635MW, Tuirial Hydel Project-60MW, Bairabi Hydel Project- 120MW and Tuivai Hydel Project-210MW in due time¹⁸⁰. The party also promised to take steps for the success of Socio-Economic Development Programme (SEDP). And, also for establishing communication with the neighboring states by Air, Railway and other means of communications.

Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP)

The ZNP, headed by Lalduhoma, an ex-bureaucrat has a lot of hype created surrounding the party among a lot of the youth and urban people. As a charismatic leader, he is a good orator but much remains to be seen, what his party can do for the people in Mizoram. The following were some of their salient features highlights of the party manifesto in the Assembly elections 2013.

The party promised to enhance the state economy by introducing market security, marketing and sale of farming goods, purchase of vegetables and fruits at minimum price by government. Move away from the shifting-jhum cultivation, and encourage terracing and organic farming system, cultivate land where possible for multi crop agriculture¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid

¹⁸¹ The Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP), MLA Election 2013 Manifesto,4-5

The party has committed to encourage the institution of Autonomous District Councils in Mizoram, and promised to support Shinlung Hills Development Council (SHDC). And, to set up border development wing to settle the Assam-Mizoram border dispute, and to promote unity among the ‘Zo’ community¹⁸².

The party has also promised to grant the following benefits for the youths in the state: Educational Loan for students, UPSC coaching center in Mizoram, free Wi-Fi-in facility, and free Laptop for the HSLC students. Further, career guidance to promote sports training and coaching gymnastic would be added to the school curriculum.

The ZNP promised to reduce unnecessary government expenditure, to have better fiscal management, and to reduce the duration of file process. Further, Budget and Planning to be achieved, aimed at the grass root level expansion by giving importance to constituency and village level development. The party has also promised that, the Chief Minister would not hold any major portfolio, but support other ministers. Further, public appearance as Chief Guest in functions be reduced to focus more time in work. Appoint Parliamentary secretary, Advisor, of the Board and that was to be based on expertise and skill, and not on political affiliation. And, to establish the Lok Ayukta to fight corruption in the state¹⁸³.

They had also promised to review the healthcare scheme, and to have special consideration for insurance cover for the poor people, for serious ailments such as, cancer, high blood and sugar. And, improve infrastructure in hospitals as well as skills of healthcare workers¹⁸⁴. The party also promised to strive towards self-reliance in all walks of life and to install a just and clean administration by introducing a new system of governance.¹⁸⁵ Apart from the highlights, the party had prepared a long list of attractive and tall promises in its election manifesto.

Zoram Thar Duhtute (ZTD)

The Zoram Thar Duhtute (ZTD) was a new political group formed by intellectual circle under the leadership of S. Lalsailova, a retired I.A.S officer. In the press conference convened by the ZTD its leaders had announced the election Manifesto

¹⁸² Ibid

¹⁸³ Ibid

¹⁸⁴ Ibid

¹⁸⁵ Zoram Nationalist Party, Constitution, www.eci.nic.in, 16 November, 2014.

before media persons. Speaking to media, S.Lalsailova, Chairman of the ZTD said their main political and administration manifesto was to use any possible methods in fighting corruption and also to establish the Lok Ayukta which is free from State Government's control. He also mentioned that ZTD includes in its political manifesto such policies like Border Trade policy, Land Reforms to enable farmers to cultivate in their own land, establishment of Participatory Infrastructure Monitoring (PIM), Power Generation, New system for regulating urban and semi-urban areas.

Dr. Zodinpuia Pachuau, General Secretary of the party, told the media that the motto of ZTD was to give hope and empowerment to people. In its social manifesto, the ZTD mentioned to take steps to promote sports in the state, establish the Career Guidance and Information Center in every district, establish social security program for non-government employees and handicapped persons. Social security programme covers some vulnerable sections of the society. For instance, Health Insurance, Child Education, Old Age Care and Death Compassionate had been promised. The ZTD also promised to promote tourism and protect environment. In the field of economic affairs, the ZTD envisaged in its manifesto to set up the Free Market and Regulated Market. Building up activities of the youth and enhancing their capacity are also included in its economic manifesto.¹⁸⁶

The Emergence of Mizoram People Forum in the Electoral Process

In Mizoram, socio-political movement for ensuring electoral reforms was spearheaded by the Church. The Church played its due role to bring about certain changes in the mindset, life style and political culture of the society at large, for promoting some healthy electoral practices. Elections in Mizoram were clean and fair till the fourth Assembly elections, but somehow, certain malpractices were crept into the system gradually. In the history of electoral process in Mizoram, untoward electioneering activities were said to be noticed for the first time in the fifth Mizoram Legislative Assembly elections in 2003, in the form of indirect involvement of armed groups, rampant use of money and heavy election expenditure during the process of elections¹⁸⁷. Indeed, it was considered as a strange phenomenon in the political

¹⁸⁶ The Mizoram Post, Local Daily News paper in English, vol. 11 Issue 150 dated 26 October, 2013.

¹⁸⁷ Jangkhongam Doungei, "New Social Movement in Mizoram for Electoral Reform- A case study of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF)" Paper, presented in 'International Seminar on New Social

history of Mizoram. Hence, the matter was discussed by the Mizoram Synod Executive in 2004,¹⁸⁸ and it was resolved that the matter would be pursued in a right perspective. The Mizoram Synod Executive Committee was entrusted with the task so as to seriously pursue the matter. The Mizoram Synod Executive Committee had deeply deliberated upon the matter and it further proceeded with consulting other Church associations, civil societies, the Former Legislators Association of Mizoram (FLAM), besides some prominent citizens in the state.

The Mizoram Synod Executive Committee had also adopted various modalities for effective implementation of the decisions at a meeting of different Church associations, civil societies and voluntary associations that was convened on July 2005¹⁸⁹. The meeting accordingly resolved to initiate necessary steps for the implementation of electoral reforms in the society as well as for cleansing the Mizoram politics. After the joint meeting was conducted, another joint meeting was held again on 1 September 2005, and it was resolved to establish a non-political social reform body that would spearhead the electoral reforms in the state. Consequently, the newly formed civil society, the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) was unanimously accepted in the meeting. Hence, a Working Committee was appointed to prepare the rules and regulations of the forum. With the adoption and acceptance of the rules and regulations, prepared by the Working Committee, the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) was formally established on 21 June 2006.¹⁹⁰ The Church-sponsored MPF is a political, social reform body which was established with the sole intention of reforming and cleansing Mizoram politics. It was established not to encounter the government but to constructively help the government for enforcing workable administrative systems in the state.

The members of MPF are drawn from various denominational churches and the civil societies such as, Presbyterian Church of India (PCI) Mizoram Synod, Evangelical Church of Maraland (ECM), Catholic Church, Evangelical Free Church of India

Movements in the Era of Globalization, Rajiv Gandhi Chair in Contemporary Studies, University of Allahabad, 22nd-23rd February, 2013, 3.

¹⁸⁸ Synod Executive Committee of June, 2004.

¹⁸⁹ Synod Executive Committee of June 1-3, 2005.

¹⁹⁰ Mizoram People Forum, Constitution of the Mizoram People Forum, Lengchhawn Press, Aizawl, 2007, 1-2. Cited by Doungel, New Social Movement in Mizoram for Electoral Reform- A case study of the Mizoram People Forum, 4.

(EFCI), Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran (LIKBK) and Wesleyan Methodist Church. The affiliated members from the civil societies and voluntary associations are such as, Young Mizo Association (YMA), Mizoram Upa Pawl (MUP), Mizoram Hmeiche Insuikhawm Pawl (MHIP), Mara Thutlya Pi (MTP), Young Lai Association (YLA) and Young Chakma Association (YCA)¹⁹¹. The Mizoram People Forum stressed on reforming the society in general and the electoral system in particular, through the Christian ethics and biblical teaching. Mizoram being a Christian-dominated state, the Church urged the people to reform themselves morally and ethically through biblical teaching and to implement the Christian morality for cleansing electoral politics and good governance in the state¹⁹².

Organizational Structure of MPF

The organizational structure and hierarchical order of the MPF is set up in the following layers, such as, Headquarters, District Forums, Constituency Forum (i.e. MLA constituency) and Local Forums. The headquarters is located at Aizawl and it is also known as the Central Forum. All constituent members of the MPF are accommodated in the office bearer posts as well as the Governing Board membership. Their District Forums are there in all the Revenue Districts and Autonomous District Councils. And, the District Forum also has its Office Bearers and Executive Committee members. At present, there are no District Forums in Aizawl and Lunglei Districts. The reason being, Aizawl can be effectively mobilized by the Central Forum. Whereas, the District Forum cannot be established in Lunglei District because the largest Church association of the District, the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) is not a constituent member of the MPF. Constituency Forum is supposed to be established in each MLA constituency so as to effectively enforce the MPF guidelines during elections. Local Forum is a grassroots MPF unit, which is supposed to be established in every village and locality all over Mizoram. Local Forums are established in all the Village Council jurisdictional areas as well as Local Council

¹⁹¹ Mizoram People Forum, Inthlan Thianghlim leh Rorelna Dik –Mizoram People Forum (Aizawl: Lengchawn Press,2008), 67-68.

¹⁹² The MPF is also registered under the Mizoram Societies Registration Act, 2005 (Act No. 13 of 2005) as a registered body.

jurisdictional areas. However, in big villages and large Local Council areas, more than one Local Forum can also be established.¹⁹³ The Central Forum also collaborates with the Election Department of the state, State Election Commission and also with other allied departments of the state Government.

The vision and mission of the Mizoram People Forum is about establishment of good governance, peace and harmony in the state for the progressive, just and sustainable socio-economic development and freedom of the people. This is can be achieved by changing the value system and perceptions of the people through ensuring proper electoral reforms. The thematic focal areas of the organization are electoral reforms, political education, good governance, advocacy and political awareness.

The Role of MPF in the Electoral Process

The Church-sponsored MPF had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with all the political parties that comprised of 27 agreements as included in the appendix-II. Some of the contents of the agreements are: political parties should make an election manifesto which they could implement, every political party should try to enforce the free and fair election, no political party should drop the voters to their polling stations by means of arranging vehicle and restricting the house to house campaign, besides other earlier guidelines of the MPF are valid as usual. Further, the candidates were prohibited to distribute materials like, silpaulins, jerseys, football, mobile handset, government subsidy schemes. Besides, a fixed number of banners, flags, posters were to be used by the political parties.¹⁹⁴ If any political party violates any one of the 27 points, the MPF would declare that party 'invalid' in the election.

During the seventh Assembly elections, the MPF had geared up to keep vigilance on the political parties so as to ensure that political parties and candidates did not step out of the guidelines that it had laid down. The MPF signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with major political parties in Mizoram on 22 August, 2012 at Synod Committee Hall in Aizawl so that the free and fair poll could be held in the state. The political parties which signed a MOU with the MPF were Indian National

¹⁹³ Mizoram People Forum, Constitution of the Mizoram People Forum (Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press, 2007), 6-8.

¹⁹⁴ Mizoram People Forum, Records and Documents, Aizawl, 14 January, 2013.

Congress (INC), Bharatya Janata Party (BJP), Mizoram Peoples Conference (MPC), Mizo National Front (MNF) and Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP).¹⁹⁵

The MPF and political parties had also agreed in their meeting held on 28 September 2013 that all the MLA candidates for the 2013 Assembly Elections should participate at the MPF joint platforms in their respective constituencies. In pursuance of the MOU signed with the political parties, the MPF had organized a joint platform for political parties at Ignite Studio, Aizawl in which leaders of different political parties, viz., Zoramthanga, President MNF, Lalthan Hawla, President MPCC, Lalduhawma, President ZNP, H. Lalhluna, President BJP Mizoram Unit, B.T. Nghinglova, President Trinamol Congress Mizoram, Vanlalhlana, Vice President MPC had delivered their campaign speeches for 30 minutes each. The joint platform was moderated by Rev. Lalramliana Pachuau, President MPF¹⁹⁶. The MOU signed between the MPF and political parties was strictly enforced during the elections, for the conduct of free and fair elections in the State. The political parties had also cooperated well with the Church and civil societies. The MPCC President extended its support to the Church and other civil societies in their tireless efforts towards having free and fair elections in the state. He further said, “It deserve respect and prestige for one to be elected without the use of money power”.¹⁹⁷

The Role of Different Church Organizations in the Electoral Process

As was mentioned earlier, the Church had played an important role in Mizoram politics. Particularly during the electoral process, apart from the ECI Model Code of Conduct, the Church and other civil societies also set ‘election guidelines’ for political parties and voters to ensure free and fair elections. Demonstrating their role in the electoral process in the seventh Assembly elections, the Church had even asked the Election Commission to change the date for polling and counting that were already scheduled. A joint meeting was summoned on 17 October 2013 by the Election Department, wherein various political parties, churches and NGOs such as Mizoram Synod United Pentecostal Church, Mizoram People’s Forum, and Young

¹⁹⁵ Ibid

¹⁹⁶ “MPF-in joint platform a buatsaih” Vanglaini Local daily News paper in Mizo, dated 11 October, 2013.

¹⁹⁷ The Mizoram Post, Vol. 11 Issue 160 dated 5 November, 2013.

Mizo Association participated in the meeting to deliberate over the issue of election schedule declared by Election Commission of India. In its notification the EC declared that the date for voting of State Assembly elections was to be 4 December 2013 and the date of counting to be on 8 December 2013. Earlier, a petition or memorandum was also submitted to ECI to change the date of voting and counting by the Church related organizations, such as, Mizoram Synod, Mizoram Kohhran Hruaitu Committee (MKHC), Mizoram People's Forum (MPF), United Pentecostal Church (UPC) and other NGOs, as it clashed with the Synod Conference which was to be held between 3 to 8 December 2013¹⁹⁸. Further, the date of counting (8 December) since falls on Sunday which was religiously important, and restricted day for the Christian dominated state like Mizoram. As such, both the dates were sought to be changed.

Meanwhile, the major political parties in Mizoram such as the Congress, MNF, MPC, ZNP and BJP supported the Church appeal to re-schedule the date of polling as well as that of counting of votes.¹⁹⁹ Lalhlianzuala Sailo, General Secretary, MPCC stated, "All political parties never chose to disregard what the Church said"²⁰⁰. This opinion seemed to be shared by both the MNF and ZNP as well²⁰¹. Consequently,²⁰² the Election Commission of India had changed the dates of polling and counting of votes, where by the new dates were to be on 25 November and counting to be on 9 December respectively, in compliance with the appeal of the churches, civil bodies and NGOs from the State.²⁰³ Besides, Churches and civil society organizations circulated 'election guidelines' among political parties, candidates and electorate, for clean, free and fair elections in the state. Some of these guidelines are highlighted as follows:

¹⁹⁸ The Mizoram Post, Vol. 11 Issue 142 dated 17 October, 2013.

¹⁹⁹ The Mizoram Post, Vol 11 Issue 143 dated 19 October, 2013.

²⁰⁰ In an Interviewed with Lalhlianzuala Sailo, MPCC General Secretary at Mizoram Pradesh Congress Office, Aizawl by the Scholar on 25 September, 2014.

²⁰¹ In an interview with Tawnluia, Senior Vice President, MNF, at MNF Headquarters, Aizawl, by the scholar, 25 September, 2014 and J.V. Pahlira, Secretary ZNP, at ZNP Headquarters, Aizawl, by the scholar, 25 September, 2014.

²⁰² The ECI notification vide No.ECI/PN/47/2013

²⁰³ The Mizoram Post, Vol. 11 Issue 149 dated 25 October, 2013.

Presbyterian Church of Mizoram Synod

The Presbyterian Mizoram Synod gave certain declarations and notifications on this occasion of general elections. As the citizens of the state had obliged to those declarations, the Mizoram Synod thanked the people. The Synod requested all the people to take a serious note of their declarations. It was the desire of the Church that their pamphlets were to be read out in different local congregations so as to educate one another in their respective families and in any possible way to communicate to the people. Some of the main contents of the appeal includes: the candidate should be a person who have good reputation, reliable and mature, hardworking and honest, free from unfair and corrupt means and practices, free from immoral behavior and faithful and loyal to one's own faith, denomination

The Church had also appealed the political parties and candidates, to avoid deceiving the people with erratic information, not to have misunderstanding and quarrel, threat and petrifying, fairly declare one's manifesto, show piety and godliness in characters and speeches, show Mizo ethical values, not to make false promises, discourage any clan-based politics and regionalism in the wave of political development and avoid employing terrorist groups and violent means.

Further, the Church requested all the voters to cast their votes, as it is the right and duty of every citizen of the country. But, not to be party-biased in an extreme sense, avoid politicians who bribe the voters for vote, avoid taking advantage of the situation by taking some assets from a store to be repaid by the candidates later were also suggested in the appeal. And, the Mizoram People's Forum was established for ensuring a fair and just election, thus all the citizens are requested to give their full cooperation to the MPF.²⁰⁴

Baptist Church of Mizoram

The Baptist Church of Mizoram asked the law-abiding citizens, political parties and candidates to abide with their 'election guidelines'. The declaration of the Baptist Church of Mizoram includes: All the proper citizens of India must faithfully cast their

²⁰⁴ "Inthlan Chungchanga Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran Thuchah, 2013" (vide SEC 249:39) by Rev. Lalrinawma, Secretary and Rev. Lalramliana Pachuau, Moderator, Mizoram Presbyterain Kohhran Synod, Aziawl.

votes. Voters should not demand any benefits with selfish motives from political parties and candidates. As such, the candidates should not be disturbed by demanding free meal that would incur high expenditure for the candidates in the election.

The Church had appealed to the political parties that, they should first promote the interest of the state rather than the interest of their respective parties. And, they should formulate such election manifesto, policy and program which they would have actually carried out. Thus, they should educate the people to establish democratic government in the state. As such, political party must choose candidates who are blameless, who can faithfully and efficiently serve the people in the state. The Church also requested the candidates to avoid endorsing region/constituency based interests and gifts in a particular constituencies. For, candidates are the icons/models of the society, as such candidates should set an exemplary life in all walks of life²⁰⁵.

United Pentecostal Church (NEI)

The General Administrative Committee of the United Pentecostal Church, Northeast India (UPC-NEI) declared the election guidelines to the citizens and different political parties, they also requested the Church members and concerned political parties to take heed to their statement in the name of God. The UPC (NEI) stated that the election could affect the life of an individual and the church, as such the Church requested those persons who were involved in the politics to be careful.

The Church had also resolved that no political matters be discussed in any of the Church services and Church related gatherings. The UPC (NEI) opined that casting one's vote was the duty and responsibility of every responsible citizen. As such, it requested all voters to use their sober judgment in casting their votes. Further, the Church pointed out that, any person who indulged in alcohol consumption and unlawful sexual activity, corrupt and selfish practices are not fit enough to participate in the process of politics and governance. As such, any person who has had those qualities should not be voted if they had contested the elections. And, the UPC (NEI)

²⁰⁵ "BCM-in inthlan thuchah an tichhuak: Vote thlak vek turin mipuite an ngen," Vanglaini, Local Daily News paper in Mizo 15 October 2013.

Church had conducted prayer service in all the local churches so as to have a free and fair election and to have good candidates for good governance in the State.²⁰⁶

Mizoram Kohhran Hruaitu Committee (MKHC)

The MKHC is a joint Church organization in Mizoram, whose membership consists of different denominational churches like Presbyterian Church, Baptist, United Pentecostal Church, Salvation Army, Roman Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, Lairam Isua Baptist Kohhran, Evangelical Church of Maraland, Congregational Church of India (Maraland), Methodist, Evangelical Free Church of India, Evangelical Baptist Convention and Zomi Baptist Church.²⁰⁷ The organization had made a declaration on 'election guidelines' for the 2013 general assembly elections. Some of the content declarations include: candidate should be person with good reputation who is God-fearing, one who is free from intoxicating, free from immorality (unlawful sex) and loyal to one's denominational Church and party.

The Church leaders had also appealed to the political parties and voters to enable citizens freely exercising their franchise, not to employ any form of violent means. Further, political parties and candidates are requested not to make any promises that are not realistic. As such, voters should not make any candidate to promise for the interest of one locality, party, clan-based, region based issues.

The Mizoram church leaders also wished the newly elected leaders to occupy the office for full term. It is expected from them that they should respect the people who voted for them and God who elevated them to the position of a leader. They should also know that they were to represent not only their party alone, but the whole Mizo community. They are expected to give equal treatment to all the denominational churches and cooperate with the leaders of different denominational churches.

Further, the Church leaders had stated that any political party that get into power were expected to continue the policy what had been initiated by the former government even though they belonged to different political party. As such, the people were also

²⁰⁶ "UPC (NEI)- in inthlan thuhah a tichhuak: Vote thlak vek turin mipuite an ngen," Vanglaini Local Daily News paper in Mizo 13 &14 October, 2013.

²⁰⁷ "MKHC-in intlhan thuchah a tichhuak," Vanglaini, Local Daily News paper, 18 October, 2013.

expected to accept any newly elected leaders as God-given leaders for the state. Hence, cooperate with them, rather than engaging in backbiting and criticism. Even the elected leaders are also expected to be loyal and honest rather than switching over from one denomination to another. It is the desire and prayer of the different churches that any government once it was formed should be stable, stated the MKHC appeal.

Mizoram Baptist Federation (MBF)

The MBF consists of different Baptist churches in Mizoram and churches which follow the Baptist principles, strives together for a common bond, ecumenical ties and common mission as were established on 13 April 2012. For the first time in the history of electoral politics, the MBF issued ‘election guidelines’.²⁰⁸ The ‘election guidelines’ issued by the MBF includes: No political topic issue should be discussed in the Church. Candidate should be one who truly loves the state, hard working and one with visionary leadership. Distribution of certain goods and filling of someone’s Bank Account should be avoided. Unnecessary criticism of one’s opponents’ personal life should be avoided by political parties and candidates.

The MBF had also appealed to the political parties to plan their election Manifesto and political policy by keeping the interests of the whole Mizo society. To enable the voters to cast their votes freely, no violent means should be used during the electoral process. As such, all the political activity should be ethically sound for Christian candidates and Christian state.

The MBF also urged the voters to cast their votes in accordance with the declaration made by Church, various civil society organizations and the Election Commission of India. No one should accept any personal gain and materials from the contesting candidates. Further, community feasts and other social gatherings that could disturb the electoral process and give financial burden to the family of the candidates should be avoided.

The main ideas in formulating the ‘election guidelines’ by the Church were to ensure free and fair elections as well as to enable the law-abiding citizens to exercise their

²⁰⁸ Rev. H. Lianggaia & Rev. Dr. L.H. Lalpekhlua, “Mizoram Baptist Federation 2013 MLA Election Thuchah,” Baptist Today: BCM Weekly News, 24 November, 2013, 4.

franchise freely and without the influence of money and muscle powers. Therefore, the appeal was made to the political parties to put up honest, upright and blameless persons with integrity as their party candidates. And, the watch-dog electioneering activities of the Church were based upon the guidelines of the Model Code of Conduct, issued by the Election Commission of India. Besides, there are several Churches and other civil society organizations that issued 'elections communiqué' in the recent Assembly elections.

Process of Election Campaign

The election campaign in India, as elsewhere in other democracies of the world, was the period when political parties put forward their manifestoes and arguments with which they hope to get votes for their candidates and parties. However, during the campaigning period, the political parties and contesting candidates are expected to abide a model code of conduct evolved by the EC²⁰⁹, candidates to organize a series of public meetings, processions, postering, through which its policies and programmes are widely disseminated among the people. Besides, an election campaign provides to all the parties and candidates an opportunity for educating the people on public issues, policies and programmes.

In India, the period between the last date for the withdrawal of candidatures and the day of the poll (it is a minimum period of twenty days) is devoted by the parties and candidates to the process of electioneering in the form of public meetings, processions, posters and demonstrations. The basic purpose of the election campaign is to enthuse and educate the electors. Formally, the election campaign generally starts with the announcement of election schedule. However, informally election canvassing starts long before the election schedule is announced and continues till the last moment of polling.

According to an election study analyst, D.N. Pathak, "Campaign constitutes a vital phase of the electoral process. It arouses voter's curiosity, identifies issues of debate, spreads information, mobilizes voters into the system, helps their politicization, facilitates voter's choice and performs an educative function. Its major aims are to

²⁰⁹ Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed, Joydeep Baruah and Ratna Bhuyan, *Election Politics in Assam*, (New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2006), 220-221.

strengthen loyal voters, win as many as undecided voters as possible and convert or demoralize rival party supporters, campaign also produced a greater degree of politicization and involvement ultimately leading to political participation”.²¹⁰ As usual this has been the practice of parties and their candidates in any election in the country.

However, the process of canvassing varies from context to context. The amount of campaign expenses that were involved would also vary from context to context. Also, the means employed in the process of canvassing can vary from context to context, various methods and techniques come into poll campaign play. They may include a door-to-door campaign, a person-to-person, telephone campaign, telegram campaign, newspaper, television, meetings, and rallies among others. During the election campaigning period, usually the ruling party defends its performance and the opposition party accuses the ruling party on its non-performance.

The process of formal election campaign to the Seventh Legislative Assembly in Mizoram began with the announcement and issuance of election notifications by the Election Commission of India. Both national and regional parties along with a few number of Independents were in the electoral battle. As usual, when the schedule of elections was declared in the state, the EC announced the model code of conduct for the candidates and their parties so as to ensure free and fair poll. Reviewing preparatory measures that had been taken so far for the electoral process included, the EC Awareness Observer conducted a meeting with Media Certification and Monitoring Committee (MCMC) at the Office Chamber of Aizawl District Officer. The meeting looked into the issue whether there had been any ‘paid news’ item that was issued by any political party or its candidates as a means of election campaign. The EC Awareness Observer called for cautiousness against and speech or writing that might incite or disturb the peaceful atmosphere in the election during campaigns.²¹¹

²¹⁰ APK Singh, op. cit., 152.

²¹¹ The Mizoram Post, Local Daily News paper, dated 29 October, 2013.

As such, to ensure free and fair electoral process, the Mizoram People's Forum (MPF), had organized some joint platforms during the course of the election campaigns. All the candidates of a particular Assembly segment debated on poll issues, development works and other matters. These poll debates were conducted in a fixed place moderated by an MPF member. The people assembled at these debates asked questions to the candidates belonging to various political parties and Independents. The MPF platform at state, district and local levels kept a close observance over the prevailing electoral situations.²¹² The Church was gearing up to keep a watchful eye on the political parties to make sure that none of the candidates step out of the Model Code of Conduct and the guidelines it had laid down for their campaigns. Unlike before, this time, forgetting about road shows, door-to-door campaigns, public rallies and throwing election feasts the political parties and candidates have had a new set of 'don'ts' imposed on them by the MPF. The MPF restrained the political parties from making tall promises that seem impossible in achieving through their campaigns.

The MPF also asked supporters of candidates not to use Caps, T. Shirts, Badges and stickers bearing party symbols, and party flags during the course of election campaign. The number of flags, banners and posters that a candidate used were restricted, based on the number of local council members or village council members in each locality or village. Three banners, 30 flags and 20 posters for an area that had more than seven local/village councils; three banners, 30 flags and 15 posters for an area having more than five but less than seven local/village councils; and three banners, 10 flags and 10 posters for an area having less than three village/local councils. And no election banner should be larger than 18x4 feet,²¹³ for instance.

Meanwhile another NGO that worked in the state, the Mizoram Corruption Watchdog, the People's Right to Information and development Implementing Society of Mizoram (PRISM) also declared that they had temporary halt on its 'Anti Corruption' campaign and started an exclusive study of the background of different candidates in different aspects and exposed the same before the public. In case of any faulty or wrong information in the nomination paper (self declared affidavit) filed for the assembly elections, the PRISM group decided to take stern measure against the

²¹² The Mizoram Post, Local Daily News paper, Vol 11 Issue 179 dated 24 November, 2013.

²¹³ The Mizoram Post, Local Daily News paper, Vol 11 Issue 140 dated 16 October, 2013.

unlawful candidates to bring right awareness over the case. The Church had also asked the voters to shun poll prophets. The Presbyterian Church of India, Mizoram Synod in its poll message, urged the voters to reject the so-called prophecies and predictions through which party would win the Assembly Elections in the state. The Synod stated that such self-proclaimed prophets did not believe in God. Thus, in a poll bound activity during the seventh Assembly elections, the Church, alongwith civil society organizations and the Election Commission had all worked in tandem to make electoral process a free and fair process.

During the election campaigns, the anti-Congress wave was gradually sweeping in the state that was picked up and escalated by the non-Congress parties. They were to some extent made it aggressive by raising sensitive anti-Congress slogans instigating ethnic affinities and dimensions, partisan appeals while the Congress was on the defensive line of position. Particularly, the MDA and ZNP strongly played upon the local issues. In fact, issues and problems of local concerns were pin-pointed and hammered out by the opposition/non-Congress parties such as shortage of power supply, LPG gas, failure of law and order in the state, Assam and Mizoram boundary conflict issues. Though there were some national parties in the state, all the parties had paid their attention to the local issues. Apart from others, main strategy of the ruling Congress party was to counter the political attacks of MNF and other opposition parties. The State BJP Unit also charged the Congress for causing economic insolvency, corruption, underdevelopment, unemployment and failure of law and order in the State. However, the popularity of Congress was so much that it was not to be defeated by the opposition parties in these elections.

Voting Behaviour in the Poll Process

Voting is a means of aggregating individual preferences into collective decisions. The voting behavior refers to the choice exercised by a voter at the time of elections in deciding to cast his/her vote for a certain party or candidate. For each and every State Assembly election, the patterns of voting behavior of the electorates do not always remain the same. As V.M. Sirsikar stated that, "There would not be one but many theories of Indian voting behavior depending on the region, community or the specific

interest of the researcher”.²¹⁴ For the purpose of this study the researcher pointed out two determining factors that had influenced the voting behavior in the electoral process of Mizoram elections were, the political factors and non-political factors. The political factors are such as influence of party and its organization, party affiliation/membership; party ideology; party programmes/manifestoes; issues and problems that were faced in the State. Whereas the non-political factors included were role of money-power; friendship or intimate relations with the candidates; labour and dedication of the candidate to do social work; kinship-ties; sympathy wave; political consciousness of the voters; pressures and influences from local elites; personal loyalty to the candidates and private promises.

Thus, voting behavior of electors can be influenced by multiple factors, such as charismatic leaders; personal quality of the candidates; promises of the party during elections; personal contact with the candidate; ethnic loyalty; ethnicity issues; community background; socio-economic background of the electors; religion, language and denominational Church. This opinion seemed to be shared by Tawnluia, Senior MNF Vice President.²¹⁵ Apart from these multiple factors, the Church denomination could be one such common factor in Mizoram that influenced the voting behavior. For instance, if a candidate belongs to the Presbyterian or Baptist churches the majority of electors were likely to cast their votes to the candidate who belonged to their denominational Church. The result could be seen in the political scenario of the state. For, the majority of the legislative members were from the Presbyterian Church, which is the biggest denominational Church in Mizoram. According to Nurliantluanga, “when the person was elected and come to power the particular Church or denomination also enjoy the power because the elected candidate can extend financial help to the Church where he/she took membership for which he/she was favoured”²¹⁶ Other factors in the voting behavior could be the party influence. Besides, the elites such as village money-lenders; businessmen; prominent citizens; and high-salaried class and government employees had also played a great

²¹⁴ Matamgi Yakairol, English Daily (Imphal, 29 January and 1 February 2000) cited by APK Singh, *Election Politics in Manipur*, 297.

²¹⁵ According to Tawnluia, Senior Vice President, MNF, there are people who obey the Church, but at the same time there were people who stood for the party. He stated ‘party fanatic and Church fanatic’. Interview by the scholar at MNF Gen. Hqrs, Aizawl, 25 September, 2014.

²¹⁶ An interview with Ngurliantluanga, Lawngtlai III, Lawngtlai District by the Scholar on 22 September 2014, aizawl

role in shaping the voting decision of the electors. As a matter of fact, the Church undertakes preventive measure by issuing ‘election guidelines’ so as to influence the voting behavior of the masses with right perspectives.

Performance of Political Parties

Since the Mizo National Front (MNF) have had an electoral alliance with the Mizoram People Conference (MPC) and Mara Democratic Front (MDF), it was expected to perform better than the last elections. However, the MNF and its electoral allies did not secure the support of masses. During the poll process the party had raised the non-political issues and slogans so as to score some political points against the ruling party, but it was in vain.²¹⁷ Besides, the Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP) that claimed to have offered a new alternative to both the ruling and opposition parties through its electoral performance had been dismal in this election. As such, the ZNP lost both the seats that won in the last Assembly.

Further, despite its campaigning on ‘anti-incumbency’ of the ruling Congress, the opposition parties did not cash in on in this election. As such, the electoral alliance of MNF, MPC and MDF called, the Mizoram Democratic Alliance (MDA) lost the election badly, in both vote-share and seat-share, the ZNP drew blank in the elections²¹⁸. In, consequence, the ruling MPCC got absolute majority (34/40) in the Assembly. The total number of electors in 2013 elections was 6,90,860 and total valid of votes polled was 5,73,417²¹⁹. The detailed performance of political parties in the General Elections to the Legislative Assembly of Mizoram in 2013 was as given in the table No. 3, as shown below.

Sl. No	Name of Political Parties	No.of Seat Contested	Seats Won	Votes Polled	Percentage
1	National Parties i) Indian National Congress	40	34	255917	44.63

²¹⁷ K.V. Reddy, op. cit., 141.

²¹⁸ .Ibid

²¹⁹ General Election to the Seventh Mizoram Legislative Assembly, 2013 Statistical Report, (Aizawl: Derectorate of Election, Government of Mizoram, 2014), 70.

	ii)Bharatiya Janata Party	17	-	2139	0.37
	iii)Nationalist Congress Party	2	-	4835	0.84
2	State Parties				
	i)Mizo National Front	31	5	164305	28.65
	ii)MizoramPeople’s Conference	8	1	35269	6.15
	iii)Zoram Nationalist Party	38	-	99916	17.42
3	Registered Unrecognised Party				
	i)Jai Maha Bharat Party	1	-	29	0.01
	ii)Maraland Democratic Front	1	-	5433	0.95
4	Others				
	i)Independents	4	-	1764	0.31
	ii)NOTA	40	-	3810	0.66
5	Total	182	40	573417	

Table No. 3: Performance of Political Parties in 2013

Source: Seventh Mizoram Legislative Assemble elections, 2013 Statistical Report²²⁰

The INC was returned to power with three-fourth majority by capturing 34 out of 40 Assembly seats. The MNF could win just five seats and MPC got sole seat. Parties, such as, ZNP, MDF, NCP and BJP could not win even a single seat. It is also an interesting feature to note that the Zoram Thar Duhtute (ZTD), which was a new political party formed by intellectual circle fielded one candidate, namely, Lalsailova, a retired I.A.S officer from Lunglei South constituency. But, he lost his security deposit by obtaining just 208 votes²²¹.

Prominent losers in this election were Zoramthanga the former Chief Minister, President of the MNF, Lalduhawma, President of the ZNP, Lalmangaiha Sailo, President of the MPC, PP Thawla, the lone MDF legislator in the last two terms, Liansailova, Finance Minister and S. Hiato, Industry Minister of INC Government in the previous term. The INC Government led by Lal Thanhawla as Chief Minister was formed along with 7 Cabinet Ministers and 4 Ministers of State, and there were also 7 Parliamentary Secretaries.²²² In comparison with other states in India, the Mizoram Assembly elections was remarkable in achieving peaceful elections. The

²²⁰ Ibid

²²¹ Jangkhongam Dounge, op. cit., 9.

²²² Despite the fact that women outnumber men in the count of eligible voters, as per the latest electoral roll prepared by ECI, only 6 women had represented the womenfolk in this election. Of the 1126 polling stations, 94 were declared as under sensitive zone. A voter-verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) system was used for the first time in the state in 10 constituencies in Aizawl District. Of the 40 Assembly constituencies all were reserved for Schedule Tribe (ST) nominees except Lunglei South which meant for general candidates.

state witnessed a high poll percentage in the country. Although, the MPF was established in 2006, it had played the role of voluntary election watchdog and implemented some electoral reforms even in the remote parts of the state, since 2008 elections. Thus, the political parties were under the obligation of implementing the Election Commission's norms and regulations, as such role played by the Church and civil society organizations became convenient for them in this election as well.

To sum up, the Church had been instrumental in shaping and nurturing the electoral politics of Mizoram. The Church issued its elections guidelines since the first Union Territory Assembly elections held in 1972. The Church continued its role to reform the electoral process in the state. And, gradually the electoral reforms initiated by the Church had been joined by other civil society organizations in the state. That led to the formation of the Mizoram People Forum in 2006. The constructive role of the Church in the electoral process has been appreciated by various sections in the society. Mostly the role played by the Church in the recent elections had great impact in electoral reforms in the state. The election guidelines by the Church meant that the political parties in the state for the Assembly elections have to follow not only the Elections Commission's Code of Conduct, but also another institution looming over them, which cannot be ignored at all.

The 'election guidelines' issued by MPF were as per the Memorandum of Understanding between the MPF and the political parties. It has been noted that the MPF and other civil societies established by churches for cleansing electoral politics and political activities that were taken up in the form of requests and appeals. Hence, as per the first hypothesis of this study on the role of Church in the electoral process has been accepted as the Church played an influential role in ensuring electoral reforms in Mizoram politics. The constructive role of the Church in electoral process was acknowledged by the media and even the Election Commission. The Church and civil societies may have their own limitations and shortcomings, but it contributed a lot in the electoral process of Mizoram elections. Perhaps, if this Mizoram practice is emulated in other parts of India, then there would be no ground for disappointment with the electoral process in the country.

CHAPTER IV

IMPACT OF CHURCH ON ELECTORAL PROCESS

In Mizoram, the Church is considered to be older than the government. The state was formed in 1987 after the Church facilitated the peace process. Until recently, the Church looked after the people's education and healthcare. The Church is not just a religious institution in the state, it is accepted as a way of life, the centre of social activities. As such, somehow the political scenarios in Mizoram were similar to that of the eighteenth century Europe where religious doctrines got mixed up with political administration. The common people were also very pious and they respected the Church issued-guidelines in the elections. The Church and civil societies were working hard to convince the people not to accept any gifts from the political parties and their candidates during the electoral process. Hence, the role played by Church in the electoral process to a great extent had been considered a very positive impact in the recent Assembly elections.

The Church, civil societies and Election Commission share a common goal for free and fair elections. The Church had issued certain guidelines and urged the political parties to put up honest candidates, to refrain from buying votes, not to make unrealistic promises and other illegal means. They had also appealed to the political parties for conducting a peaceful election campaign. At the same time the Church had requested the people to exercise their franchise without fear or favour, and urged them not to sell their votes. This Chapter discusses the impact of Church on the electoral process in terms of influencing a range of electoral activities such as, campaign method, election expenditure, voting behavior and voter participation.

Impact of Church on Election Campaign

The Church has both a duty and right to seek attention towards the moral and religious dimensions of public issues. The Church can encourage the citizens to involve in election campaigns and discussions on public policy issues, so as to ensure

peace and harmony through electoral reforms. At the same time, it tried to clarify what activities and efforts were appropriate for the Church members and citizens so as to be involved in electoral reforms. In this regard, the Churches in Mizoram did very well to a certain extent. As a result, the Mizoram Assembly elections in 2013 witnessed the most peaceful campaign in Mizoram elections under a close watchful eye of the Church and civil society organizations in the state. The election watchdog, MPF, had set certain 'dos and don'ts' for all the political parties, so that these were complied with quite effectively in the state for conducting the peaceful election campaigns.

As such, the political parties, the Church and civil society organizations cooperated well in the course of poll process. The political parties were supportive with the Church initiated electoral activities. For instance, Lalhlianzuala Sailo, Secretary, MPCC stated, "All political parties never chose to disregard what the Church said"²²³. As such, the poll process went off peacefully. According to the Mizoram Police Chief Amulya Patnaik, "during the campaigning, not a single untoward incident was reported from anywhere in the state, the violence-free campaign might be due to the strict observance and guidelines of the MPF"²²⁴ Unlike in other parts of the country, the campaign was mostly organized on joint platforms that were coordinated by the MPF, where all the candidates in a particular Assembly segment had debated over the poll issues, developmental works and other matters. These poll debates were conducted at a fixed place and were moderated by the MPF members. The people assembled at these debate centers had straightway asked pertinent questions to the candidates belonging to various political parties, besides some independents.

The MPF platform at state, district and local levels kept a close observance over the situations, any kind of unlawful activity and against any attempt to instigate violence. The MPF had banned the door-to-door campaigns by the candidates and their supporters in the last ten days before the polls so as to prevent voters being influenced in any manner. The political parties were supportive of the MPF and its electoral

²²³ In an Interviewed with Lalhlianzuala Sailo, MPCC General Secretary at Mizoram Pradesh Congress Office, Aizawl by the Scholar on 25th September 2014

²²⁴ [zeenews.india.com/...elections.../Mizoram,\(timesofindia.indiatimes.com/...elections\)](http://zeenews.india.com/...elections.../Mizoram,(timesofindia.indiatimes.com/...elections)) 16 October, 2014.

initiative. For instance, the MNF Senior leader, Biak Thansanga told the PTI “We try our best to make total use of these joint platforms to single out poor development work and corruption of the present Congress regime. We try to expose the present state government in these platforms”²²⁵. Subsequently the campaign head of Mizoram Pradesh Congress, David M Thangliana, also told the PTI, “We use these platforms as a medium to reach out the people seeking answers. Apart from door to door campaign, this is the best way to spread the party message and the government’s achievement and the policies it would like to pursue after coming into power”²²⁶. The electors also felt that it helped them ask the contesting candidates a lot of questions on their electoral promises.

As prohibited in the ‘election guidelines’ issued by the Church, the supporters of candidates to certain extent did not use the caps, T shirts, badges and stickers bearing the party symbols and party flags during the course of election campaigns. The number of flags, banners and posters that a candidate were to use in the elections were based on the number of local council members or village council members in each locality or village. The candidates were strictly prohibited from arranging transportation of their supporters, distributing materials to voters or throwing community feasts in the elections. Apart from all these ‘don’ts’, the political parties in Mizoram have had a new set of ‘don’ts’ being imposed on them by the MPF in the seventh Assembly elections.

During these elections, the MPF interfered even affecting certain changes in the election manifestoes, to refrain the political parties from making tall promises. No political party was permitted to promise what seems to be impossible to achieve. The political parties or candidates were expected to promise only what they would be able to fulfill, was one of the significant points of a 27-point Memorandum of Understanding that was signed by the MPF as well as the political parties in the state. For instance, the MOU signed between MPF and political parties on Policy implementation states that “Only realistic and do-able policies and programmes must

²²⁵ Presbyterian Church keeps an eye polls in Mizoram PTI Aizawl November 17, 2013. www.hindustantimes.com 16 October, 2014.

²²⁶ Ibid

be included in the party manifesto, more than the personal and individual life of the candidates, election campaigning should revolve around the party policy and programme. Campaigning by the use of false propaganda, unproven truth and scandalous issues must be avoided”²²⁷ The Church initiatives had evoked positive response from the public and political parties.

As a result, the election guidelines observed by the political parties and the contesting candidates to a great extent toned down the election campaign tempo in the State. As such, there was some change in the campaigning methods of candidates and their political parties. Not only the candidates, even their workers and supporters were not able to canvass openly. In brief, the usual practice of use of posters, banners, public meetings was reduced to a great extent due to the influence of the Church in the course of electoral process.

Impact of Church on Election Expenditure

Charges of corruption in election are an all India affair. The voter-bribing is an open secret. The following were supposed to be the fixed election expenses of the MLA candidates from the Mizoram Assembly elections in 2013. According to the Section 78, of the Representative of People Act, 1951, every contesting candidate has to lodge a true copy of his/her election expenses within 30 days from the date of declaration of result of election, with the District Election Officer in all States and Union Territories. Election Expenses’ limit for the Mizoram Assembly elections 2013 was set at 8 Lakh Rupees. Accordingly, the Mizoram Election Watch (MEW) and the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) had analyzed the election expenditure affidavits of 39 out of the 40 newly elected MLAs in the Mizoram Assembly Elections. The election expenditure included, the details of expenses on public meetings and processions, campaigning through electronic and print media, expenditure on account of engaging campaign workers, besides the expenses on the vehicles used and purchase of campaign materials²²⁸.

²²⁷ Articles of Agreement between Political Parties and Mizoram People Forum
<http://www.miracleofdemocracy.org>, 16/10/14

²²⁸ Analysis of Election Expenses of MLAs from the Mizoram, 2013 Assembly Elections, CEO website:
<http://ceomizoram.nic.in/CandidatesExpenditure/2013> & www.adrindia.or, www.myneta.info,
16/10/14, 1.

Highlights of Election Expenses

The following highlights showed the election expenditures of Mizoram Assembly elections in 2013. The records were taken from the press release on analysis of election expenses of MLAs in Mizoram Assembly elections 2013²²⁹.

Less than 50% of the Limit: Candidates have constantly claimed that the election expenditure limit set were very low. However, based on the election expense declarations of the 39 elected MLAs of Mizoram to the ECI, 16 MLAs (41%) had declared their election expenditure that were less than the 50% of the expenditures limit i.e. Rs. 8 Lakh.

Average Election Expenditures: Based on the election declarations of 39 out of the 40 elected MLAs of Mizoram to the ECI, the average amount of money spent by them in the elections was only about Rs. 4.39 Lakhs, which is 55% of the total expenditure limit i.e. 8 Lakhs

Party-wise Average Election Expenses: The Party-wise average election expenses show that the average spending of 33 MLAs of INC was Rs. 4.19 Lakhs (52% of the expenditure limit), for MNFs 5 MLA it was Rs. 5.70 Lakhs (71% of the expenditure limit) and for one MLA of the MPC it was Rs. 4.45 Lakhs (56% of the expenditure limit)²³⁰.

Election expenditure of Chief Minister: Lal Thanhawla had declared the election expenditure of Rs. 4.45 Lakhs (58% of expenditure limit) and Rs. 3.50 Lakhs (52% of the expenditure limit), from Hrangturzo and Serchhip constituencies respectively.

Election expenditure of Ministers: The average expense declared by 11 Ministers including Chief Minister were Rs.3,81,147. 8 out of 11 Ministers have declared election expenditures of less than 4 Lakhs, i.e. 50% of the expenditure limit. Lalthanzara has been declared as the one who incurred highest election expenditure of Rs. 4.52 Lakhs (57% of expenditure limit) among ministers while Lalsawta had

²²⁹ Ibid

²³⁰ Ibid

declared the lowest election expenditure of Rs. 3.18 Lakhs (40% of expenditure limit that he spent on that occasion)²³¹.

Expenditure on Public Meeting and processions: Out of the 39 MLAs accounts analyzed, 23 (59%) have declared that they had not spent any amount on public meetings and processions.

Expenditure on Campaigning through electronic/print media: About 26 MLAs (67%) have declared that they had not spent any amount on campaigning through electronic/print media²³².

Expenditure on Campaign Workers: About 11 MLAs (28) have declared that they had not spent any amount on campaign workers²³³.

Expenditure on Election Vehicles: About 3 MLAs have declared that they spent less than Rs. 20,000 on use of vehicles.

Expenditure on Campaign Materials and Election of gates, arches, banners etc.: All the 39 MLAs analyzed have declared that they had incurred some expenditure on campaign materials and erection of gates, arches, banners etc.

Party-wise Average expenditure declared by MLAs

As usual, political leaders nowadays show less than what they had spent in the elections. Yet, the Mizoram politicians as well as contesting candidates had spent lesser amounts in their recent elections than their counterparts in other states in India. Certainly, this is a very positive trend that could be emulated elsewhere in the country.

Hence, the Churches in Mizoram contributed tremendously in this regard. The party-wise average election expenses incurred show that their average spending of all the ruling party (33 MLAs of INC) was declared Rs. 4.19 Lakhs (52% of the expense limit). Whereas, for the MNF's five MLAs the expenditure was Rs. 5.70 Lakhs (71%

²³¹ Ibid

²³² Ibid

²³³ Ibid

of the expense limit) and the same for a one MLA of the MPC was Rs. 4.45 Lakhs (56% of expense limit)²³⁴.

The table No. 1 gives the party-wise average election expenses that were declared by the MLAs after Mizoram Assembly elections 2013.

Table No. 1: Average expenditures declared by MLAs (party-wise)

Sl.No.	Party	No of Analyzed	Average Limit	Average Expense	Average Limit
1	INC	33	8,00,000	4,19,575	52.4%
2	MNF	5	8,00,000	5,70,308	71.3%
3	MPC	1	8,00,000	4,45,968	55.7%
Total		39	8,00,000	4,39,576	55%

Source: Analysis of Election Expenses of MLAs from the Mizoram, 2013 Assembly Elections²³⁵

In fact, increasing excessive, illegal and illegitimate expenditure in the elections is the root cause of rising levels of corruption. The election expenses are needed invariably, be they legal or illegal, which come from the cash donations or otherwise. Mainly, the expenditure is shown in the course of setting up of election offices, posters, banners, gifts, provision of petrol and diesel for campaigners, daily paid party workers, poll-managements, transportations, poll-related feasts, public meetings and processions. Aware of these many ways, the Church played a crucial role to control excessive expenditure in the seventh Assembly elections in Mizoram.²³⁶

For instance, the MPF and Political parties had arrived at a joint agreement on the Election expenditure. A close look at some of the following points gives an

²³⁴ Ibid., 5.

²³⁵ Ibid

²³⁶ Ibid

impression that the Church was determined to check the poll expenditure in the State that, no political party or candidate would indulge in huge and wasteful election expenditures. Election expenditure should be kept to the minimum. The MPF functionaries had not accepted money or donations from the political parties and the candidates.

Usually certain activities which are corrupt practices and offences under the election law can crop up during the house-to house-campaign. Therefore, the house-to-house visits by candidates and their supporters were prohibited during the period of 10 days, prior to the polling day, to allow the electors period of calm and caution to decide their options. Influencing voters through money or other incentives or inducements must be avoided. General public, organizations and individuals were requested not to ask or expect any favour from the candidates. Similarly, candidates and political parties were also requested to refrain from announcing any financial grants, distribution of inducement articles like silpouline, jersey, football, mobile handsets, NLUP money, or any other monetary promise thereof. Community feasting, picnic and processions are expected to escalate the election expenditure unnecessarily. Thus, they could be avoided. Further, Banners, flags and posters also escalate the election expenditure. Therefore, the maximum number of banners, flags and posters were restricted within each locality.²³⁷

As a result, the state of Mizoram witnessed a nationally-acclaimed low-profile and largely inexpensive Assembly elections in 2013. Throughout the electoral process, the Church and civil societies had kept a watchful eye on the political parties to make sure that none of the candidates step out of the guidelines it had laid down. The Church also observed that the voters had a bigger responsibility to have ensured a clean, fair and inexpensive election. Thus, it appealed to the organizations and individuals that they should not expect any benefits in the form of money or materials from the contesting candidates or their political parties.

²³⁷ For instance, VC/LC with a maximum of seven members-upto 3 banners, 30 flags and 20 posters; VC/LC with a maximum of five members-upto 3 banners, 20 flags and 15 posters; VC/LC with a maximum of three members-upto 3 banners, 10 flags and 10 posters. The maximum size of a banner shall be 18x4 and that of the poster shall be 4x3. Caps, badges and stickers with political symbols may not be used as the election materials. MPF functionaries requested the political parties to remove excessive banners, flags and posters.

On the other hand, the organizations of joint platforms during the election campaigns for candidates of political parties instead of the traditional independent campaigns in the public domain were instrumental in reducing election expenditure to a large extent. The MPF even restricted and prescribed the topics for the candidates in their public speeches or in such electoral platforms. As a result of such efforts of the Church, the election expenditure had considerably come down, and thus, elections had become more peaceful, free and fair affair. According to Rev. James Chuaukailiana, “due to the Church’s intervention this time elections’ expenditure were less, the Church have always tried to influence electoral process but the influence and impact of Church-polity is felt most in 2013”²³⁸. Similar opinion was shared by some respondents in an interview. Hence, the election expenditure in the seventh Assembly elections was remarkably reduced, due to the constructive role of the Church.

Impact of Church on Voting Behavior

Voting behavior is generally considered as a form of political behavior. The voter behavior can be explained during the process of electioneering and also when certain decisions were made about questions of public policy either by policy makers or by the electorates. There were also certain other factors that would influence the voting behaviour such as, gender, race, tribe, ethnicity, culture or religion. Making emotional appeals in the political campaigns so as to enlist their support for a candidate or a party is widely a recognized practice and a common element of any campaign strategy. However, in the national elections, people usually exercise their votes based on their political beliefs. Whereas, in local and regional elections, voters differ as they seem to be more concerned about voting as per local interests²³⁹. The voters were also notably influenced by factors such as the family relation, community and religious leadership, civil society groups. To some extent, these factors appear to be true in the electoral process in Mizoram elections as well.

Before studying the impact of voting behavior in the recent Assembly elections in Mizoram, there is a need of highlighting the emerging trends in the electoral behavior in India. The process of election campaigns in India has been influenced by the

²³⁸ In an Interview with Rev. James Chuaukailiana, a Baptist pastor, at AICS, Aizawl on 22 September, 2014, Evan. H. Lalrinsanga, United Pentecostal Church (NEI), Aizawl and Major Lalmuanpuia, Salvation Army, Aizawl by the Scholar on 19 September, 2014.

²³⁹ “Voting behavior” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voting_behaviour, 10/17/2014.

dynamics of caste and community in the electoral politics. Meanwhile, a theoretical framework of election studies in the developed countries, like the United States, has also inspired an upward trend in election studies in India. Party identification, poll issues, political candidates, electoral campaigns, socio-economic status of voters, and other internal dynamics have been recognized as very important for studying the voting behavior.

But, there are certain peculiar elements that are characteristic of Indian society, such as caste and community, which became very crucial in the electoral studies. Most of the studies which examined the confidence level of people in the election system or efficacy, as citizens showed that people had faith in the election system. Socio-economic factors like gender, caste, religion, education, and income were important in raising political awareness, exposure to political propaganda, sense of personal effectiveness in politics, and their party preferences. Further, caste, religion, and to a lesser degree, economic status, are also important variables for explaining their party preferences. The most important issues of the electorate are those that related to the daily lives of people such as rising prices or unemployment²⁴⁰. Thus, similar opinions were shared by many other political analysts in the country. As such, these were some of the undercurrents affecting the party preferences of voters.

Voting behavior in the hills, as well as in some north eastern hill regions were influenced by factors such as chieftainship, Tribe/clan and Insurgency. For instance, in the hill areas of Manipur, particularly among the Kukis, the institution of chieftainship has virtually been misused by the present day centrally-sponsored schemes.²⁴¹ Another powerful and common voting factor was the insurgency, which became an undeniable fact. The old maxim says that the development of human

²⁴⁰ K.M. Sajad Ibrahim, Emerging Trends in the Studies of Electoral Behaviour in India, <http://creative.sulekha.com.,10/10/14>.

²⁴¹For instance, the voters used to buy a plot of land somewhere they could resembles few families and make a village to sipped funds in the name development. During the elections the voters of that village were calculated in terms of money payable in lump sum to the chiefs by the contesting candidates in the form of donation for celebration/function, community hall construction, chief guest donations, and secret deals being made with the chiefs on the election eve. Further, tribe-based concepts were practiced during elections. Besides, some of the minority groups among the tribes/clan were marginalized and suppressed by the numerically larger groups. The election manifestoes and party affiliations have had very less to do with hill people in terms of choosing candidates.

civilization since ancient times was shaped and propelled by the brains of scholars and scientists.²⁴² However, in the hill areas of Manipur, the educated and eligible leaders were overshadowed by the activists of insurgency. In short, influences of insurgents in the elections were open secret, which laymen and statesmen had no choice but to follow the order. The selection of candidates was not necessarily because of their educational qualifications, but on account of their financial contributions towards the organization.²⁴³

In Mizoram, where there were no such caste systems as were prevalent on the same lines as it were in other parts of the country among the Hindus. So, the caste system did not influence the electoral behavior of the Mizo voters²⁴⁴. And, there was no such extremist threat on insurgency factors as in other parts of the states in India. But, somehow in the last Assembly elections, there was a sort of report that there were political parties and candidates who worked together with an insurgency groups that disturbed the voting behavior in the process. As a consequence, different civil society organizations requested, the people of Mizoram to oppose any political parties or candidates that had connections with such insurgent groups. For instance, the six NGOs, such as the Central YMA, MUP, MHIP, MZP and MSU made a public circulation and passed a common resolution against any political party that worked together with any insurgent groups and requested the people not to cast their votes to such parties or candidates²⁴⁵. It had also reported in the local daily news paper, Vanglaini, “that some insurgent groups shot B. Zahunga of Khawlian that injured him”. Consequently, the Church and civil society organizations earnestly appealed to the people not to cast their votes for any candidate who worked in collaboration with the insurgents. The six NGOs had also resolved that any violent acts, threat and unjust practices should not be done in the state of Mizoram. Further, to comply with the report the government had sent C. Zorammuana, DIG (NR) and Lalbiakthanga Khiangte 1st Bn. MAP and one CID addl. SP to the eastern part of the state. As there

²⁴² Ceety Khongsai, “Voting Behaviour in the Hills” The Sangai Express, Mainpur. The article was posted on February 27, 2012. <http://e-pao.net>, 10/17/2014

²⁴³ Ibid

²⁴⁴ RN Prasad & AK Agarwal, op.cit., 155.

²⁴⁵ ‘NGO parukin hel thawkpui party hnawl turin Mizo mipuite an ngen’, Vanglaini, Local daily News paper, 23 November, 2013.

was also a report that some voters had been threatened, the CIDs were sent to two villages, called Saipum and Saiphai²⁴⁶ to observe the situation.

Meanwhile, the central YMA condemned the insurgents who fired their gun at B. Zahunga. They asked the Mizoram government to be sincere in maintaining law and order so as to have free and fair elections in the state. The central YMA declared that it opposed any clan-based politics and region-based sentiments as it could be detrimental for peaceful and democratic proceedings in the region. This showed that the recent Assembly elections in Mizoram were not completely free from all malpractices. But the Church and Civil society organizations confronted any untoward electioneering activities in the course of poll process, to ensure free and fair elections in the state.

Further, some sort of communal/clan loyalty, and that of denominational churches became operative in the elections, though the Mizo community is predominantly belonged to Christianity. Further, wealth status had also influenced the electoral behavior of voters after the emergence of the market economy in the state. This had helped the rise of a neo-middle rich class in the society such as, rich contractors, businessmen, bureaucrats and educated elites. But, in spite of these factors, the Church and civil society organizations through its 'election guidelines' and 'appeals', the poll process was peaceful. As such, the seventh Assembly elections were conducted under peaceful atmosphere, under the watchful eyes of the Church and its alike. Perhaps, electoral process has had a sense of divine edict to a great extent as was observed by some respondents in an interview²⁴⁷.

According to Dr. Lalbiakmawia, "The main idea behind formulating the 'Election Guidelines' were to have free and fair election and to enable the law abiding citizens to exercise their franchise without fear of favor and to prove that elections in India are

²⁴⁶ Ibid

²⁴⁷ In an interview with Rev. Joe Laldinpuia, Kolasib District, 10 October, 2014; Ramdinpuui, Bru Baptist Church, 18 September, 2014; Pastor, Rupentu Chakma, Chakma Autonomous District Council, 17 Septmeber, 2014 and J. V. Pahlira, Secretary, Zoram Nationalist Party, Aizawl, 25 September, 2014 by the Scholar.

not about money and muscles alone”²⁴⁸ The Church-sponsored MPF had appealed to all the political parties to put up upright, honest and reliable candidates and to stick to the election model code of conduct. As such, the lavish feast, the musical band, road shows, door-to-door campaigns, separate public rallies and meetings, excessive use of flag and posters were almost avoided. Distribution of the party leaflets, candidate’s bio-data and joint platforms were undertaken by the MPF. A number of flags and posters/banners in each locality were jointly decided by the representatives of all political parties in the presence of MPF leaders.

The MPF organized a common platform in each locality of the constituency and that were regularly shown on the local cable television channels. Rev. Dr. H. Vanlalauva, the former President of MPF stated “the objective of the forum is to ensure that the elections did not vitiate the peaceful atmosphere in the state and that the polling is free and fair.” Of course, there was a possibility of disturbance from outside the state during the elections. Thus, to ensure that the armed groups did not interfere in the elections, the MPF representatives met the leaders of various militant groups, even in the neighboring states, and requested them to stay away from the election process in their state.

Further, to lessen the burden of voters, members of the youth, which were the constituent members of the MPF, had even arranged a few benches at the polling booths for the voters to sit down and relax, while waiting for their turn to cast their votes. In some places, cadres of the MPF even served tea to the voters. The voters exercised their franchise under the watchful eyes of the MPF. The voters across the state cast their votes peacefully. As such, there were no reports of any untoward incident from any part of the state. In such way the voting behavior was influenced by the Church and the active civil societies during the course of elections. The voters have had actual freedom in making their choice to select their candidates in these elections.

As a result, the role of Church in bringing about electoral reforms in terms of changing voting behavior was very positive. Thus, the Election Commissioner of

²⁴⁸ “Church and Election in Mizoram: The Role of Mizoram People Forum” Article written by Dr. Lalbiakmawia Ngente, www.mizorampeople.org.in, 15/10/2014

India had invited the representatives of the civil society organizations for the National Consultation on voters' participation, wherein a number of activities and the role played in the Mizoram elections was appreciated.²⁴⁹ In fact, the drive for clean and clear electoral process in the state also got a boost when Mizoram became the first state in the country to have completed the issuing of photo identity cards to the voters. Another first success in the election history was that the Election Commission had opened its doors to the civil society organizations in its poll review meeting preparedness as well.

Impact of Church on Voter Participation

Voters are the central actors in the democratic poll process. Voters' participation in the democratic electoral process was integral to the successful running of any democracy and the very basis of true democracy. Thus, voter participation became an integral part of the election process. In India, the imperative of enhanced voters' participation in elections were no more a matter of debate, but a serious assignment. In recent decades, however, the world has seen a decline in voters' participation in elections, which would inevitably point to a democracy deficit. In India, constitutional mandate of the EC for Superintendence Direction and Control of elections contains the in-built high responsibility. In order to have every eligible voter on the electoral roll as well as to get everyone on the electoral roll to voluntarily vote the EC played a crucial role.

However, a large number of voters were not turning out at polling booth for the elections and large number of eligible citizens, whereas still found missing from the electoral roll does not fetch credit to the great Indian democracy. Decades of electoral experience in India showed that even greater awareness did not necessarily get converted into greater voter participation. As such, questions can be raised as to how the EC can improve or enhance the voter participation. There were a lot of gaps between what the voters' should know and what they actually know, in some important matters like voter-registration, EPIC or identity proofs, polling station locations, use of EVMs, timings of the poll, 'do's and don'ts' with regard to the

²⁴⁹ Besides the ECI, some other reputed organizations like, the Transparency International, the Gandhi Peace Foundation, the Jindal Foundation had also come forward to recognize the works undertaken by the Mizoram People Forum, as was observed Dr. Lalbiakmawia Ngente.

Model Code of Conduct, use of money/muscle or other electoral inducements by some candidates or their associates to influence the vulnerable sections of electorate. These electoral concerns need to be addressed by the election managers with a sense of urgency, lest the voter participation would not be encouraging.

Viewed in this backdrop, voter education is not only correct but seems to be the most appropriate way to improve voter participation in the electoral process. Realizing these problems, several countries in fact have included the voter education as part of their constitutional mandate. In India, these were implicit in the overall mandate of EC. In the year 2010, when the EC observed its Diamond Jubilee, focused on the theme of “Greater Participation for a Stronger Democracy”.²⁵⁰ Realizing that it needed to tread the last mile, major issues like incomplete electoral rolls, urban apathy, gender gap and youth indifference were to be tackled. Hence, voter participation has to be based on voluntary inclination (motivation) of the individual voters, and this has to be encouraged. For this to happen, voter education holds the main key, backed up by higher levels of poll facilitation. The Commission thus decided to bring the voter education to the center stage of election management and paid it necessary attention and resources.

Hence, to improve the voter participation from among all sections of the electorate, awareness levels have to be enhanced, especially the newly enrolled youth, the uneducated, residents of inaccessible and remote areas, socially and economically weaker and deprived sections of the society. The EC’s decision to adopt a sustained and systematic voter education and electoral participation strategy so as to increase people’s participation in the electoral process got reflected in a range of policy initiatives, programmes and activities, by now, providing the Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP). These were planned on the basis of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) interventions in the Jharkhand Assembly elections of the 2009²⁵¹.

²⁵⁰ “Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP)”, Compendium of Instructions February 2014 (New Delhi: Election Commission of India), 1. <http://eci.nic.in>

²⁵¹ Ibid

Subsequently this was carried forward in the form of SVEEP in other elections²⁵². Thus, the EC had envisaged a systematic strategic and scientific process in understanding the voter participation and engagement dynamics so as to facilitate the processes of increased and informed participation in the elections. The EC had focused on a large segments or sections of the electorate that were not covered by formal educational system or those who had developed an apathetic attitude or those who were physically cut-off from the mainstream due to various reasons. Such segments or sections of the society were planned to be reached out through the civil society organizations and also with the help of special agencies of volunteers.

In this regard, the Church and civil society organizations of Mizoram played a significant role in the state. For instance, the Church, Mizoram People Forum, Young Mizo Association, Mizo Ziralai Pawl, Mizoram Kohhran Hruaitu Committee, Mizoram Baptist Federation and others were very active in the election. They all had worked together during the process of elections by issuing ‘election guidelines’ for promoting voter education and encouraging electoral participation so as to increase people’s involvement in the electoral process. The Church and civil societies urged all the eligible citizens to cast their votes as it is their constitutional right and as well as duty of the citizens. The Church had also advised the people not to be biased in any extreme sense, not to vote for selfish and corrupt candidates, but to avoid taking any such offers from the candidates, repeating casting votes or on other’s behalf that undermine the poll process. The MPF had conducted Seminars and Consultations at different levels, concerning voter education. In consequence, Mizoram experienced a very peaceful electoral process, as the voter participation had been increased comparatively.

According to the record of General Election to the Mizoram Seventh Assembly in 2013, the overall percentage of votes cast in the election of 40 members to the Mizoram Legislative Assembly was 83.41.²⁵³ The larger scale participation of the voters shows that the people in the state were cautious of casting their franchise. And

²⁵² Since the introduction of the programme (SVEEP), elections to the State Assemblies of 23 States have taken place till December 2013 they were such as Jharkhan-2009; Bihar-2010; Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam, West Bengal, Puducherry-2011; Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Manipur, Himachal Pradesh – 2012; Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Karnataka, Delhi, Mizoram, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan-2013.

²⁵³ *General Election to the Seventh Mizoram Legislative Assembly Statistical Report*, 73.

the elector's votes were cast not only in favour of a particular party but also for peace, stability, progress and electoral reform in the state.

The following table shows how the voter participation had been recorded as per the data related to the General Elections for Mizoram Legislative Assemblies held in 1998 and 2008 (fifth & sixth respectively). This is a comparative picture on the increase of voter participation in the last two terms, and with that of the Seventh Legislative Assembly elections in 2013.

Table No. 2: Total Number of Voter in the Electoral Roll

Year	1998	2003	2008	2013
Men	223252	264726	302489	340527
Women	222104	267736	309129	350333
Total	445356	532462	611618	690860

Source: Elections to the Seventh Mizoram Assembly, 2013 Statistical Report²⁵⁴

Table No. 3: Total Number of Votes Polled

Year	1998	2003	2008	2013
Men	170619	208550	238273	270709
Women	169283	209932	251147	287676
Postal Votes			14245	17874
Total	339902	418482	503665	576259
Percentage of Votes Polled	76.32	78.59	82.35	83.41

Source: Elections to the Seventh Mizoram Assembly, 2013 Statistical Report²⁵⁵

²⁵⁴ Ibid

²⁵⁵ Ibid,73

Both the tables show that the data comparison of the last three Assembly elections had showed that the voter participation in Mizoram Assembly elections was increased. The increase of voter participation in polls shows that the citizens became more aware and cautious about their franchise. Further, the distinctiveness of and credibility of the voter participation in Mizoram Assembly elections was to a certain extent due to the role of Church that prevented the election process from muscle power, money power and other malpractices.²⁵⁶ And, the main factors behind these were attributed to the active role of the Church through various civil society organizations in the poll process. As such, this opinion was shared by the EC, the eminent citizens, and the political parties in the state as well. For instance, the CEO, Ashwani Kumar told that, “Polling was completely peaceful throughout the state. The turnout is most likely to be more than in 2008”²⁵⁷.

Hence, the fact that the Church and its activities had largely influenced the voter participation in the elections was acknowledged in the state. Though the Church did not have any legal binding or authority to enforce the people, its demands and expectations that were made in the form of appeals and requests during the electoral process had certainly influenced the voters.

The Impact of Church brought Peaceful Elections

The Seventh Assembly elections witnessed a very keen and tough contest. But, the polling was conducted peacefully as no report of untoward incident during the polls was reported. Further, there were no reports of any untoward incident anywhere during the course of Assembly polls. Undoubtedly, this was considered to be a significant success that occurred due to the role of Church in electoral process during the elections. Obviously, the CEO of the Mizoram state, Ashwani Kumar, expressed gratitude towards the electoral process as the Churches and NGOs in the state made their concerted efforts in ensuring fair and peaceful elections. No major problem was witnessed that could perturb the election process across the State. And, it was successfully completed in peaceful atmosphere, which was really appreciable, as was

²⁵⁶ For instance, the votes polled percentage may be higher in some other parts of India, but it could be because of muscle power and money power. The researcher had observed these malpractices in the recent Manipur Assembly elections. The researcher also observed the Mizoram Assembly elections 2013 but there were no such malpractices that could be noticed.

²⁵⁷ The Telegraph, National News Paper, 27 November, 2013.

observed by the Chief Electoral officer.²⁵⁸ He also thanked all the people of Mizoram, the Churches and the voluntary organizations for all the steps that were taken in ensuring free and fair elections in the state. The role of Church was considered very positive, as was assumed in the second hypothesis of this study. And then, its role was crucial in the smooth and fair conduct of elections in the state. But it has to be noted whether or not this trend would be sustained in the future elections so as to maintain peaceful electoral process in the state as was observed by some political parties in an interview²⁵⁹.

To sum up, The impact of the Church in the electoral process in the state lay basically, not in the nature and extent of its various activities, but on the status and respect from the people by virtue of being a Church, which thereby render the same with regards to its activities in the minds of the common people that often yielded with positive results. On the one hand, the Church-sponsored MPF, acted on the basis of the ‘Election Guidelines’, and on the other hand, with a Memorandum of Understanding, jointly agreed by the MPF and political parties, it had reduced to a certain extent such as buying votes, public feasts, house to house campaign, providing transportation, hiring singers and other entertainers, the overwhelming use of party flags, posters and banners by fixing the size and numbers of banners and posters. These greatly helped and contributed in doing away with many of the usual electoral malpractices and misconduct that often characterized the past elections.

Further, the election expenditure had considerably come down, elections had become more peaceful, free and fair. This opinion seems to be shared by citizens and political parties in the state as well. Hence, the second hypothesis that the Church and its activities influenced the electoral process in the elections was proved beyond doubt. Though the Church did not have any legal binding or authority to enforce the people, its demands and expectations made in the form of appeals and requests during the

²⁵⁸ “CEO lauds people of Mizoram for fair and peaceful MLA Election” The Mizoram Post, Vol 11 Issue 182 dated 27 November, 2013.

²⁵⁹ According to J.V. Pahlira, Secretary, ZNP, the political parties respect the voice of the Church, but the Church did not reach political parties expectation, he further stated, this trend might continue but as of now it is difficult to say. Interview by the scholar at ZNP Gen. Hqrs, Aizawl, 25 September, 2014. Similar opinion seemed to be shared by Tawnluia, Senior Vice President, MNF, stating that “the Church influences some, but not all”. Interview by the scholar, at MNF Gen. Hqrs, Aizawl, 25 September, 2014.

electoral process had influenced the voters to certain extent. Of course, the spirit of close social binding and the voice of the Church still dwell in a great sense of honor and respect among the people of Mizoram in every aspect of life. And, the importance of Church and civil society support for ensuring electoral reforms on long-term basis of a democratic political system is strengthened in the state. Besides, the Church-polity relation in the state is also strengthening. Thus, one should note that the civil society support for ensuring electoral reforms as essential as for the functioning and long-term survival of free and fair elections.

CHAPTER V

CHURCH AND ELECTORAL PROCESS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

In a democratic system, the electorate plays the most significant role by exercising the selective and instructive powers. It discusses and decides upon the selection of candidates. The selective function of the electorate involved not only a choice between the candidates but also between parties and their programmes. The whole process requires free elections, an effective electoral system, an impartial machinery for ensuring fair, free and clean elections, besides a good electoral law so that the verdict of electorate or the results of elections would guide the actions of legislature. Besides, electoral process and electoral system form an essential part of democratic government with a view to fashioning and moulding of the electorate, the leaders of public and the prevalent political parties.

In Mizoram, Church and politics have depended on, and influenced each other since the formation of the statehood. Their relations were mutual and multifaceted, mutual because Church and politics have evolved over the years, taking material and symbolic support from each another. Historically, it is true that the weight of Church influenced the socio-political arrangement in Mizoram. In the same measure, any change in the political order, leading to political reforms in the electoral process will certainly alter the impact of religion on politics, providing new pressures, problems, and models so as to initiate proper actions. This chapter discussed the problems and prospects that prevailed in the context of Church and electoral process in Mizoram. The Chapter also discussed the importance of keeping the Church and politics in a dynamic and dialectical balance, giving full and equal weight to each other.

Church in Electoral Process-Problems and Prospects

The importance of religion in elections is not new especially in the Christian-dominated state of Mizoram where a Church body acts as a watchdog to ensure the smooth and fair conduct of elections. The Church played constructive role in the electoral process and good governance in the state. The Church along with likeminded

civil society organizations joined together in a popular alliance, even generated strong voice in the poll process. This would mean debating the issue internally, drawing up and implementing the codes of conduct to guard against such unlawful practice in the elections, which is the root cause of corruption in politics. Churches, both in the developed and the developing world are well-placed to make a high-profile stand against corruption. Again, they would have to ensure that their own organizations were to be kept in order. An appropriate starting point for the Church action would be preaching, discussion on the issues, among the social congregations.

A key role for the Church could be in the form of monitoring government to implement its public policies. Transparency and access to information are main prerequisites for such a programme. Donor governments could insist on such transparency access as part of the aid packages. This would lead not only to effective use of aid money, but also to empowering of the local people and strengthening of democracy. Similarly, a key issue for the Church and civil societies in the UK, as well as in the EU, is about the tightening anti-corruption legislations.²⁶⁰ Thus, the Church is to ensure the victory of democratic projects in the long run. All that the Church does is to provide various actors with the values, space and inspiration to battle for strengthening democracy.

When one talks about the role of Church in combating electoral reforms, one mainly looks at towards it more as a battle for free and fair elections. In a state like Mizoram, there is no doubt that the Church could create effective pressure for ensuring policy reforms in the electoral process.²⁶¹ The task of administrative accountability and procedural simplification could be achieved if vigilant and active civil society organizations undertake the responsibility of interacting with the government organizations and political parties. The Church could engage constructively to get needed support for ensuring the necessary reforms. The Church could play a significant role in the electoral process by using various methods and resources available. For instance, today, people's participation in elections and taking part in

²⁶⁰ Sanyay Kumar Jha, "Impact of Political on Democracy and Economic Development in India: Some issues and reflections". *The Indian Journal of Political Science* Vol. LXXIV.No. 1, January to March 2013, 39.

²⁶¹ Alaknanda Shringare, "Corruption: The Need for Civil Society Engagement" *The Indian Journal of Political Science*. Vol. LXXIV. No. 3, July-September, 2013, 466.

governance is acknowledged as a basic human right in every region of the world. “Universally, the right to take part in government is proclaimed and guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and is recognized in many other treaties and declarations”.²⁶²

The United Nations Human Rights had set up some standards regarding elections in general. The basic standards are certain international standards on elections that involve three central rights such as, the rights to take part in government, the right to vote and to be elected, and the right to equal access to public service. As such, the Church can apply all its resources to reform the electoral system in the state. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights further stated that the will of the people would be the basis of any authority of the government. The relevant charter paragraph reads as in the Article 21 of the Universal Declaration stated, ‘everyone has the right to take part in government of his/her country, directly or through chosen representatives. Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in the country. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government, this be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures’²⁶³.

The United Nations Human Rights charter also emphasize about non-discrimination that, the enjoyment of the rights listed shall be without distinction of any kind such as, race, color, sex, language, property, birth or other status. It also provides for equal enjoyment by women of these rights, and outlaw discrimination on the basis of race. Further, voters can also bring the cases of malpractices in the elections to the notice of the concerned authority so as to act effectively. Through its functions, the Church and other civil societies can pressurize the authority for ensuring polity reform and also improve governance, as well as explicitly monitor the state in the electoral process.

Like elsewhere in the mainstream Indian polity, in Mizoram as well, there is some need for initiating concerted and meaningful action towards the process of political modernization. In other words, the party system needs some sort of restructuring and

²⁶² Centre for Human Rights, Human Rights and Elections: A Handbook on the Legal, Technical and Human Rights Aspects of Elections, New York and Geneva, 1994, 13.

²⁶³ Ibid.,16.

proper re-orientation so as to make political competition healthy and genuinely democratic, and to void unhealthy issues in the poll process. For instance, during the recent elections, there was a heated debate between the Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee and the Mizo National Front upon the issue on surrender of the underground MNF. There was also a regular exchange of words between the two political parties in print and electronic media²⁶⁴. As such, the debate seemed to be developing into an unhealthy trend that could mislead the voters in the poll process.

Thus, the MPF urged both the political parties to refrain themselves from such unparliamentary debates so as to avoid unhealthy political development in the state²⁶⁵. Rev. Lalzuitahnga, Synod Senior Executive Secretary, told *The Telegraph* that, “The Political parties must debate political and administrative issues. They must be more concerned about development and administration rather than try to be holier each other”²⁶⁶. The Church also could promote political ethos among the voters and modernize through political education and socio-economic upliftment, which would ensure political awareness, strong political efficacy and reasonable degree of stable political affiliations and relationships.

Church Effort towards Socio-Political Reforms

The theology of social gospel movement in the twentieth century had awakened various churches and Christians to come out to participate in public life. The movement addressed different issues like political democracy, economic injustice, war and peace, racial equality. The movement also believed that the task of the Church is to prepare Christians to participate responsibly in the political structure as citizens, political leaders, bureaucrats and party workers. The concept of social action is understood as the corporate involvement of the Church in shaping and reforming politics and social structure.²⁶⁷ This theology of social reform movement influenced various Church leaders, including the Church leaders of Mizoram.

²⁶⁴ Mizoram People Forum, Records and Documents, 2013, Aizawl

²⁶⁵ Ibid

²⁶⁶ *The Telegraph*, National News Paper, Friday, April 11, 2014.

²⁶⁷ Martin H. Scharlemann, *The Church's Social Responsibilities* (London:Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 47.

Consequently, the Church had begun to raise her voice for the socio-political reform in the state. As stated by Sebastain Karotemprel, “In a number of States, Christians are holding the reign of government and in control of political parties. One would expect Christian administrations to have a heart of social justice, honesty in administration, social responsibility and accountability to the public. On the contrary, several Christian politicians and administrators have amassed huge amounts of wealth”.²⁶⁸ These have been true in the Christian dominated state of Mizoram.

With the growth of economy, money power had influenced the voters and elections become more and more expensive in the state. Politics has been commercialized and the entire political activity have been so twisted that the funds meant for the people have been showered on party workers. In the absence of proper development efforts for progress, poverty and unemployment increased in the rural areas, whereas a few privileged in the urban areas got most of the benefits. These resulted in discontent and loss of faith in the government. Political parties blamed each other on the issue of practicing corruption. As such, the Church could not set aside all the evil effects by corruption, and so came out to raise awareness level among the people.

Approach towards Political Reforms

In India, a number of consultations have been held by the Church leaders in various parts of the country to arouse a sense of political responsibility among the Christians since 1950s. One of the main finding of the consultation was that the Christians had to be involved in politics in order to fulfill its responsibilities for the emancipation and progress of all sections of people suffering from social disabilities. Further, the consultation affirmed that the Christian participation in the life of the State is a moral duty and a national obligation²⁶⁹. In Mizoram, the Church did not have any sort of restrictions to its members to participate in politics during the formation of political parties.

²⁶⁸ Sebastain Karotemprel, “Harmony and National Integration through Culture and Development”, in *Christian Contribution to Nation Building A third Millennium Enquiry*, edited by Selvester Ponnunmuthan (Cochin: Documentary Committee of CBC-KCBC National Celebration of the Jubilee of St. Thomas and St. Xavier, 2004), 60.

²⁶⁹ M.M. Thomas, *Christian Participation in Nation-Building* (Bangalore: The National Christian Council of India and the CISRC, 1960), 49.

However, the Church again considered that politics was to be mixed with impurity such as, party activities and corruption, as such the Church restricted its workers in political participation in the 1950s.²⁷⁰ Hence, people also felt that good Christian should not get involved in politics. Even today the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) followed the Baptist principle of the “separation of Church and State”. As such, the BCM held the view that the state should not interfere in the Church matters and vice versa. In this regard, it is appropriate to quote P.D. Devanandan, one of the most popular Indian theologians, “The Church, as the Church should not identify itself with any political party or program, of course but individual Christians should be free to take a stand”.²⁷¹

The Church in general and the Mizoram Presbyterian Church in particular had discussed this matter, and to reform the Mizoram politics many times in the Synod. Further, to classify the standpoint of the Church in the government and politics. In short, the matter was taken over by the Synod Social Front Committee as entrusted by the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram Synod. Since its inception, the Synod Social Front Committee took initiative to give political education to the people. One of the important guidelines for the framework is ‘to guide the Church members on socio-political-economic life to follow Christian principles’²⁷². The Synod Social Front gave awareness to the masses about politics through political education. The Church took different steps for ensuring political reforms like seminars, consultations and awareness campaigns and other activities²⁷³.

Political Education to Voters

In Mizoram, political education is a key method through which the Church addresses political issues in the state. Indeed, it is the urgent task for the Church to give political education to the voters. Through political education the Church emphasized the importance of clean administration of the state government through free and fair elections. The Church gave political education to the voters so that they could

²⁷⁰ H. Lalrinthanga, *Church and State Relationship in the Mizo Socio-Political Life 1952 to 2006* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), 260.

²⁷¹ P.D. Devanandan, *Christian Issues in Southern Asia* (New York: Friendship Press, 1963), 120.

²⁷² H. Lalrinthanga, op. cit., 262.

²⁷³ In an interview with Lalrosanga Colney, Synod Social Front, at Synod Office, Aizawl, by the scholar, 25 September, 2014.

participate in the government, through elections. The need of giving political education was stated by R. Chhuanliana, “Since the political situation and the state administration had great impact on the life of the people, and since our situation is now growing from bad to worse, the Church felt the need of sensitizing the people the need of right political system. Even many Church elders got deeply involved in such party politics, they therefore often lost the confidence of their congregations. Some dirty practices were heard in times of elections, thus nullifying ethical Christian principles”²⁷⁴. Hence, the Synod Social Front since inception had effectively contributed in the electoral reforms, through seminars, campaigns, publication of books and pamphlets.

Church against Political Party-Unit System

Another important attempt made by the Church was to abolish political party unit system in Mizoram. The political parties set up a local unit as they are useful instruments for the parties, particularly during the time of elections. It has strengthened their political parties and easy to access necessary information in the poll process. However, the Church felt that this unit system had a negative impact on the voters. Political party-unit system led to the rise of party feelings which again had divisive effects in the family and in the local social life. As such, it causes division among the voters.

Further, with the unit system the political parties and their candidates were more concerned about party politics, party members rather than implementating their election manifestos. And, the unit leaders are expecting immediate benefit from the elected leaders of their political party, which resulted in corrupt practices and misuse of government fund. As a consequence, the Mizoram Presbyterian Church had discussed the matter of negative impact on party unit system in the state. And, the matter was entrusted to Synod Social Front Committee, as such the Synod Social front organized consultations and seminars with representative of different pastorate, political party leaders and NGOs leaders at different times.²⁷⁵ In any case, the effort of the Church to abolish political party unit system in the state has a long way to go.

²⁷⁴ R. Chhuanliana, Synod Social Front, 173. Hereafter cited by Lalrinthanga, 162-163.

²⁷⁵ H. Lalrinthanga, *op. cit.*, 265.

Party Based Politics

In Mizoram, the political consciousness in the political party became downward trend and that was corrupting the minds of voters. The Church had taken its responsibility to work for the reformation of electoral politics since 1972 through the 'election guidelines'. Though the election communiqué had some impact among political parties and their leaders, the voters needed to be educated on electoral politics. As such, the Church had undertaken an intensive campaign through Synod Social Front since 1990. The Synod Social Front had conducted political education campaigns were more or less covered in the whole Mizoram.

The political education campaigns were aimed at educating the voters on the ethical and basic meaning of the term 'politics', what it encompasses, how it should function, what political rights they have as citizens of the state. It also emphasized the demerits and dangers of party politics, the need to elect candidates on the basis of personality rather than the party candidates.²⁷⁶ Further, the campaigns to cleanse the electoral system, political education have been continuing in the state. Hence, the political education campaigns had constructively contributed and it had influenced the voters to certain extent. And, it is also acknowledged by other denominational churches in the state as well.

The MPF and Electoral Reforms

It is widely noticed that the contribution of Church in electoral reforms were remarkable. From its inception, the Mizoram People Forum tried to tackle political corruption and malpractices, bribery, threats and enticement with money which were rampant in the elections, and to educate the voters. The MPF organized its first meeting with the representatives of all Mizoram political parties on September 25, 2006 in the Synod Committee Room, Aizawl. The MNF, MPCC, MPC, ZNP and Mizoram Congress party sent two delegates each to attend the meeting. The meeting discussed ways and means for clean, free and fair elections, to incur less expenditure in the election, stop practice of buying votes, muscle power and others²⁷⁷. Various suggestions and measure to be taken up were put forward. The Executive Committee

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 263.

²⁷⁷ P.C. Lalrani and K. Lalrinmawia, *Synod News: The Prebyterain Review* XII, 44, July-September, 2006, 4.

of the MPF took up the matter seriously, refined and filtered all the suggestions that were given. Consequently, it was followed by the political parties and their candidates in the state thereafter, with a few modifications and additions from time to time.

In a democracy, will of the people prevails and elections are accepted as an important political process of bringing about change in government. A bad electoral system can distort the people's will and destroy their faith and commitment to democracy. At the same time, no electoral system by itself can ensure effective working of democracy or full observance of its norms if its society was infected with hatred, jealousy, narrow-mindedness, ignorance, and lack of disciplined life. In this regard, an educational programme for building up the personality and character of the Church can play a constructive role, whereas in regard to the development of a workable and realistic electoral system it is the responsibility of such institutions as Assembly, political parties, the leadership, besides the political elite of the society. And of course, the Church and other civil societies at large have to work-out practicable solutions on the basis of popular consensus.

It is necessary to take some concrete steps for ensuring that the set of democracy in India was provided with in a rich soil and suitable atmosphere for its healthy growth. In spite of its traditional social structure, India had accepted the system of parliamentary democracy with the hope that social, economic and political transformation could be brought about in a peaceful manner. While India had established formal democracy, there were operational problems in the working of democracy and, also in the making of its popular will effective in the country having varied social structure, and rich diversity. The entire problem of electoral reforms can be viewed with a perspective of socio-economic structure of Indian society, its political system, and the political climate.

The absence of political freedom for the electorate, influence of the castes, community and money power, and the lack of integrity and discipline in the political parties and their leaders were some principal factors that hampered the process of electoral reforms. In this context, the Church has the responsibility to engage constructively to get the needed political and social support for ensuring the necessary reforms in electoral system. The task of administrative accountability and procedural simplification can be achieved if vigilant and active civil society organizations take up

the responsibility of interacting with the government organizations as well as political parties.

In this regard, the Church significantly contributed in reforming the electoral process in Mizoram. Specially, the contribution of MPF in initiating electoral reforms in the Mizoram politics is noteworthy. The MPF had performed great tasks by effectively supervising and surveying elections at different levels, starting from the Village Council to that of Member of Parliament. The MPF played a pro-active role in ensuring electoral reforms and good governance in Mizoram, through educating people by organizing seminars, workshops, consultations and talks, whereby the voter awareness was raised significantly²⁷⁸. In a telephone interview with Upa Lalremthanga, General Secretary, MPF, Gen., Hqrs, he stated that, it is necessary to take certain steps for electoral reforms in the state²⁷⁹.

Since its establishment, these MPF programmes have imparted ethical values and political integrity to the people of Mizoram. Further, the MPF consulted some leaders of various political parties on the eve of elections and concluded an acceptable agreement with them for conducting peaceful elections. As such, the Church-polity relations were coordinated with mutual respect for electoral reforms in the state, through the activities undertaken by the MPF. The awareness campaigns and seminars were conducted at different levels such as, State, District and Constituency levels, as well as local level.²⁸⁰ Besides, it had issued 'election guidelines' for political parties, candidates and voters to ensure free and fair elections in the poll process.

The fact that the role of the Church towards ensuring electoral reforms was witnessed quite evidently in the Seventh General Assembly elections in Mizoram. There was no report of any untoward incident from any part of the state. As such, democratic rights were fully exercised by the people, which seemed to be an impossible task in many

²⁷⁸ Mizoram People Forum Work Plan for 2013 MLA Election, Aizawl.

²⁷⁹ A telephone interview with Upa Lalremthanga, General Secretary, MPF, General Headquarters, by the scholar, 16 December, 2014.

²⁸⁰ For instance, in the 7th Mizoram Assembly elections, the MPF had conducted awareness campaigns and seminars in the following places, East Tuipui Constituency on 2nd July, 2013, Tuivawl Constituency on 17th July, 2013, Kolasib District on 24th July, 2013, Tawi Constituency on 24th July, 2013, Saitual Town on 27th -28th July, 2013, Lungpho Area on 3rd 4th August, 2013, Champhai District on 14th August, 2013, Tuichang Area on 15th August, 2013, Hachhek Constituency on 27th August, 2013, Mamit District on 28th August, 2013, Serchhip District on 4th September, 2013, Tuikum Constituency on 5th September 2013, Lengteng Constituency on 19th September, 2013 and Chalfilh Constituency on 18th September, 2013.

other parts of India. The MPF works with firmness and good sense through eliciting proper cooperation and compliance from the political parties, candidates and voters, so that neither money/muscle power nor political electoral violence hinder the free exercise of the people's franchise in the elections.

On the other hand, the organization of joint platforms during the election campaigns for candidates of political parties instead of the traditional independent campaigns in the public domain was responsible for reduced election expenditures to a large extent. The MPF even restricted and prescribed the election issues of the candidates for their public speeches in such platforms. As a result of such efforts of the Church, the election expenditures had considerably come down, elections had become more peaceful, free and fair. It was felt that, the Church's intervention this time elections' expenditure were less, the Church have always tried to influence electoral process but the influence and impact of Church-polity coordination was felt mostly in the recent elections. This opinion was shared by eminent citizens and political parties in the state as well. For instance, Lahliausual Sailo, General Secretary, MPCC and Upa Lalremthanga, General Secretary, MPF had shared similar opinion that 'the Church had been advocating such relationship for years' as such elections were conducted with peaceful atmosphere²⁸¹. Sailo, further stated, "this Church-polity relations will set a new trend in the electoral process". And, the fact that the Church and its activities had largely influenced the electoral process in the elections was acknowledged within and outside of Mizoram state. Though the Church did not have any legal binding or authority to enforce the people, its demands and expectations that were made in the form of appeals and requests during the electoral process influenced the voters.

The Contribution of MPF towards Church-Polity Coordination

The Church-sponsored MPF had tremendously contributed in ensuring free and fair electoral process at every level of elections starting from the Village Council up to the Member of Parliament (MP) Lok Sabha. Having achieved the towards desired election surveillance tasks to a great extent, the MPF also turned its attention to good governance, social reform and political education. As such, the MPF stressed its

²⁸¹ In an interview with Lahliausuala Sailo, General Secretary, MPCC, by the Scholar, 25 September 2014, and a telephone interview with Upa Lalremthanga, General Secretary, MPF, General Hqrs, Aizawl, by the Scholar, 16 December, 2014

interest to monitor the working of the government in a transparent and accountable manner. The MPF issued directions and constructive guidelines to the State Government from time to time so as to enable the government to work in the right direction. The MPF had consultative sessions with the leaders and urged the government to implement its manifestos. The MPF had acted as neutral umpire in many instances during the course of verbal and political conflicts among different political parties in the state.²⁸²

The MPF had also widened its political horizon so as to contribute more in the administrative work of the government. The MPF supervised and monitored the steps, taken up by government in certain public policies like New Land Use Policy (NLUP), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), besides such activities as monitoring Rural Development funds, Municipality funds and other developmental programmes of the government. The MPF had also organized the District Level Seminars in different places for promoting good governance. The MPF also met the state Chief Minister and other Ministers and appraised them about certain ongoing policies of the government. As a result, the yeomen service of the MPF is now recognized within and outside Mizoram State for its role in the electoral reforms as well as for good governance. Even the EC had appreciated the role of the Church and its social wing MPF.

The MPF received appreciation from civil society associations and governmental agencies outside Mizoram. Further, the MPF representatives were also invited into various panel discussions, convened by the Election Commission. They were also consulted by the State Election Commission with respect to role of conducting various local level elections from time to time. To observe and learn the constructive role of the MPF for electoral reform and good governance, the MPF was also invited by

²⁸² Jangkhongam Doungel, *New Social Movement in Mizoram for Electoral Reform- A case study of the Mizoram People Forum*, 11.

some organizations²⁸³. Indeed, the MPF has been spearheading Church-polity coordination by emphasizing electoral reform and good governance in the state²⁸⁴.

Critical Areas

Despite its constructive contributions in the electoral politics, there were some certain critical points that need further discussion with regard to the role of Church in the electoral process. Of course, it is not new that Church had played a big role in influencing the government through public activities. The MPF took strong measures for free and fair election with the help of its district and local forums. As such the role of the MPF at the time of election was recognized by the state government and even the Election Commission. But there are some denominational churches who did not participate in the Mizoram People Forum for certain reasons.

For instance, the Baptist Church of Mizoram, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Salvation Army and the United Pentecostal Church (NEI). The Baptist Church of Mizoram Assembly held in 2006 discussed the matter about the MPF whether to join or not. The matter was entrusted to Administrative Committee to make a careful study, consequently, the committee proposed not to join the MPF as Church. As such, the Assembly Executive Committee which met on August 16-17, 2006 resolved not to involve the BCM in the MPF for awhile.²⁸⁵ They regarded that the uniqueness of the Baptist Church from other denomination is the doctrines of 'separation of Church and State.

These various ecclesiastical denominations conceived different ideas on the relationship between Church and State. It might be mentioned that divergent conceptions among different ecclesiastical bodies on the relations between Church and State happened a serious obstacle among the churches. This showed that there was no unanimous decision of all denominational Churches in the state with regard to

²⁸³ For instance, the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) invited the MPF leaders to conduct consultation Workshop, as such Dr. Lalbiakmawia Ngente, Rev. Dr. Lalbiakmawia and J. Lalsailova visited Kohima on 25 -26 April 2011 and conducted consultative Workshop as requested. Following that, four members team of the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) visited Aizawl on 5 -6 September, 2011 and they studied in detail about the role and activities of the MPF.

²⁸⁴ Mizoram People Forum Annual Meeting Vawi 6-na, Mizoram People Forum, Aizawl, 2012, 6-14 &29-30. Cited by Doungel, 11-12.

²⁸⁵ Baptist Church of Mizoram Assembly Executive Committee Meeting, August 16-17, 2006.

the role Church in the electoral process. Further, this affected the unity of churches in Mizoram. And, there was no consensus among denominational churches to what extent, the Church should involve in the electoral politics.

Further, the MPF was considered as the genuine election watch-dog in Mizoram by the people. And, Mizoram Legislative Assembly General Elections, MP elections, Village Council elections, Aizawl Local Council elections, Aizawl Municipal Council elections and Autonomous District Council elections were accomplished under peaceful environment with the massive help of the MPF. During the electoral process, the political parties, candidates and voters exercised their franchise under the watchful eyes of the MPF. However, the participation of the churches in the MPF needs to be reconsidered as the present MPF is Presbyterian Church of India, Mizoram Synod dominated organization. As Rev. Dr. Rodingliana, Executive Secretary of the Baptist Church of Mizoram, stated, “If it goes with this trend, it is danger, because the Presbyterian Church dominated too much”²⁸⁶, he further says, the participation of the Church is not in balanced with the MPF.

Nevertheless, the MPF was still function as one of the most important organizations for ensuring electoral reforms in the state. The MPF had played a vital role in the Assembly elections. All political parties also cooperated well with the ‘Working Guidelines’ and public speeches on common platforms organized by the MPF. The MPF played a pro-active role ensuring electoral reform and good governance in Mizoram, educating people through organizing seminars, workshops, consultation and talks, and awareness have also propagated in the form of printed media. As a matter of fact, it is undeniable fact to admit that even the serious critics of the MPF, lauded its contribution because the Church-sponsored MPF worked selfless service without expecting any economic returns and political benefits in any form.

Another critical area is about distance between Church and polity. In a secular country, one should be aware and able to appreciate that whether religion or not, if someone played with constructive role in the electoral reforms in other parts of the states as well. Whether they are Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishva Hindu

²⁸⁶ In an Interview with Rev. Dr. Rodingliana, Executive Secretary, Baptist Church of Mizoram by the Scholar at Baptist House, Aizawl on 19 September, 2014.

Parishad (VHP), Church, Islamic bodies, when they do good thing at least one can respect and appreciate when they deserve. One might question, is it alright for a religious body to get involved in political affairs, covertly and overtly in a secular country like India. Of course, there would be potential connection between the Church and their involvement in politics, in some particular states like Mizoram. As there is nothing illegal or immoral about a religious body getting involved in politics, even if one intends to be secular.

For instance, there is no legal statement which says that religious people or institute should be out of politics. Religious body drives the moral of the people, and people drive the moral of the Religious body. They may be supporting some particular party, candidate but they did not have the right to stop political party or candidate to contest. Finally, despite a few problems there are several prospects due to healthy relations between Church and polity in Mizoram, as assumed in the third hypothesis of this study.

To sum up, the fact that the Church played pro-active role in the electoral process was not new for the Mizos and the state of Mizoram as whole. The Church in general and the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram in particular had been involved for implementing political reforms in the state at different times. Due to the constructive contributions made by the Church towards electoral reforms, through free and fair elections, peace and harmony has been possible in the state. To be more contributive, there is also need for all the churches in Mizoram that they should come out from denominational bearers for greater deed. The main reason that some churches did not join the MPF seemed to be that of the divergent conceptions among different Churches on the relationship between Church and State. That brought disunity among the different denominational churches in Mizoram. It is suggested that if this could be reconsidered for ensuring the stability of Church-polity relations in the state, by creating electoral pressure groups outside the religious affairs where all sections of the society could join together without any bearers. Or find ways for churches and other civil society organizations who are yet not members to join the MPF. Henceforth, the focal areas of the MPF, such as electoral reforms, political education, good governance, advocacy and political awareness, perhaps would bring about long term church-polity relations, in turn peace and harmony would prevail in the state.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Democracy seeks to preserve the dignity of people through enforcement of their political rights in the country. And, the dignity of people can be ensured if justice, liberty and equality are secured through their active participation in political process and thereby activities. In spite of its diverse languages, beliefs, social inequalities, castes and creeds, India had opted for a democratic form of government. In any democratic form of government, the electoral process is considered the soul of polity. If this process is distorted or vitiated in the least, the democratic polity gets subsequently endangered. The vigour of democratic systems depends on the fair process of elections. However, the present elections in India are not being held in ideal conditions because of enormous amounts of money and muscle powers involved.

Though politics prevailed in the Mizo society since the chieftainship era, electoral politics was unknown during the period of British rule. Some authors held the view that politics began in Mizoram since 1946 with formation of the Mizo Union. However, it is to be noted that politics had prevailed very much in Mizo society even before the formation of the Mizo Union, since the chieftainship era. But, with the formation of political party, Mizo society can be identified with its association in electoral politics. As such, the present day Mizoram had experienced elections at different levels since 1948, such as, Lushai Hills Advisory Council, District Council, Regional Council, Village Council, Municipal Council, Legislative Assembly, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

However, it was from the first District Council elections held in 1952, that the Mizo people were somehow involved in the electoral politics. The District Council elections were held four times, and before the completion of the fourth term of the Council, the

Mizo District was dissolved and that ceased to exist when the Mizo District became a Union Territory (UT) of Mizoram in 1971, and as such no more elections were conducted for the Council thereafter.

The Union Territory of Mizoram was inaugurated on 21 January 1972 and the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (PLRC) was trifurcated into three Regional Councils, namely, Pawi Regional Council (PRC), Lakher Regional Council (LRC) and Chakma Regional Council (CRC) on 2 April 1972. And the three Regional Councils were subsequently upgraded to the status of full-fledged Autonomous District Council on 29 April 1972. Later, the Lakher Autonomous District Council and the Pawi Autonomous District Council were changed into the Mara Autonomous District Council and the Lai Autonomous District Council respectively by an act of the Parliament in 1989.

Mizoram witnessed the first Union Territory general elections to the State Legislative Assembly on 18 April 1972, three months after the UT became a state. Mizoram experienced four general elections in the Union Territory. Before the completion of the fourth Union Territory, the Assembly elections were held in 1984 as a consequence of signing of the Peace Accord between the Mizo National Front (MNF) and the Union Government on 30 June 1986. The Indian National Congress (INC) led by Lal Thanhawla stepped down from his office to make a way for the MNF-INC coalition government, on 2 January 1986.

With a view to elevating the Union Territory to the Statehood, the Union Government of India introduced the Mizoram Statehood Bill 1986, with special safeguards and provisions of forty seats in the Mizoram Legislative Assembly. Thus, on 20 February 1987, Mizoram was inaugurated as the 23rd State of the Indian Union. The first General Elections to the Mizoram State Assembly were held on 16 February 1987. As of the latest Assembly elections on 25 November 2013, Mizoram had experienced seven times State Legislative Assembly elections so far.

The first visible engagement of the Church in the electoral process was in the year 1972, when the Assembly elections were held for the first time to the newly formed Union Territory of Mizoram. The Church had made an appeal to the political parties,

candidates and voters for clean, free and fair elections. This had become a regular feature with the Church thereafter. As such, the Church had played vital role in electoral process, and thus it was not a strange phenomenon for the Mizos and the state of Mizoram as a whole.

Further, the Church that the western missionaries had established greatly influenced the general conception about social and political value of the citizens. The Church could be regarded as the foremost factor for the socio- political and economic modernization. The Church was also regarded as the precursor of the establishment of various civil society organizations as well as their political inclinations in Mizoram. One of the most noteworthy contributions in the political history of Mizoram by the civil society organizations, particularly, the Church was to be seen when the socio-political environment of the Mizo Hills District was changed during the period of prolonged insurgency since early 1960s. In fact, it was during the insurgency period that the Church had involved in the politics with certain objectives to bring about peace and normalcy. The Church played vital role in the promotion of socio-economic and political development of the state. The efforts and involvement of the Church in the politics of the State in general, and the electoral process in particular were noteworthy.

The Church involved itself deeper and further played pro-active role in the electoral process, when untoward electioneering activities were reported to be visible for the first time in the fifth Mizoram Legislative Assembly elections of 2003, in the form of indirect involvement of armed groups, rampant use of money and heavy election expenditure in the elections. The matter was discussed in the Mizoram Synod Assembly in 2004, and it was resolved to be pursued in the right perspective. As such, the Church felt the need to have a non-political and social reform body that would spearhead the electoral reforms in the society as well as for cleansing the Mizoram politics. Consequently, the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) was established in 2006, so as to change the mindset, life style, political culture of the society for ensuring healthy electoral practices. To work towards establishing a democratic government through free and fair elections.

As such, though the role played by the Church was not new in Mizoram electoral politics, its role was considered to be more critical in the conduct of free and fair elections in the state after the establishment of the MPF. For the first time, after its establishment, the MPF played pro-active role in the Mizoram Legislative Assembly elections in 2008. In view of the electoral politics for free and fair elections in the state, the Election Commission opened its doors to the Church and civil society organizations in its poll preparedness. As a result, the Church, civil society organizations and the Election Commission worked together in tandem in making the electoral process a truly democratic exercise in the Mizoram Legislative Assembly elections in 2013.

The Church and civil society organizations had issued an 'election guidelines' for political parties, candidates and voters to ensure free and fair elections in the state. The guidelines by the Church meant that the political parties in the state for the Assembly elections were to follow not only the Elections Commission's Code of Conduct, but also other electoral institutions that cannot be ignored it. The MPF and political parties had signed an agreement, which strictly prohibited the use of force, support of underground armed groups and any other undue influence to the voters to secure their votes. The use of banners, party flags and posters were restricted as well as the influence of voters through money or other incentives and inducements.

The Church-polity agreements had also prohibited conducting the house-to-house campaigns by the contesting candidates and their supporters, 10 days prior to the election. In addition, the parties were to ensure that their candidates were honest and hard working people with great integrity and free from the influence of alcoholic and other social immoralities. Political parties can include only realistic and practical policies and programmes in their manifestos, and no party or candidate should indulge in huge and wasteful election expenditure. However, the issued of 'do's and don'ts' in the 'election guidelines' by the Church and other civil societies for free and fair elections were taken up in the form of requests and appeals. It had no legal code binding. Yet, the role of Church in the electoral process was generally accepted by the political parties, candidates and voters for ensuring electoral reforms in Mizoram politics.

The Seventh Assembly elections had a very keen and tough contest. But, the polling was conducted peacefully as no untoward incident during the polls was reported. According to the record of general elections in the Mizoram for seventh Assembly in 2013, the overall percentage of votes cast in the election of 40 member Mizoram Legislative Assembly was 83.4. The participation of the voters showed that the people in the state were cautious of casting their franchise. And, their votes were not only in favor of a particular party but also for peace, stability, progress and towards ensuring electoral reforms in the state. As the Church influenced the electoral process, it was also experienced during the polls that most of the voters judged the contestants on their personal merits and individual image. Personality factor was a dominant consideration. The voters were hardly informed about the ideologies and programmes of the political parties and thus they were not that ideologically-oriented, but have had some information about their candidates.

Incidentally, the Seventh Assembly elections went off peacefully. This was vindicated when the Chief Electoral Officer of Mizoram Ashwani Kumar, had expressed gratitude to the voters, as well as the Church and civil society organizations in the state for their concerted efforts in ensuring fair and peaceful elections. Obviously, no problems were witnessed that perturbed the election process across the state. Thus, he had also thanked all the people of Mizoram, the Churches and the voluntary organizations for all the steps that were taken in ensuring free and fair elections in the state. The Church and civil society organizations took several precautions so as not to witness any violent incidents in any part of the state, which seemed to be an impossible task in many other parts of India.

The impact of Church on the electoral process in the state was observed because of its status and respect that it commanded from the people by virtue of being a Church, which thereby rendered the same with regard to its activities in the minds of common people that often yielded positive results. The Church-sponsored MPF acting on the basis of the 'Election Guidelines', with a Memorandum of Understanding jointly agreed by the MPF and political parties had minimized election expenditure to a certain extent, such as buying votes, public feasts, house to house campaign, providing transportation, hiring singers and other entertainers, the overwhelming use of party flags, posters and banners by fixing the size and numbers of banners and

posters. These Church sponsored activities greatly helped and contributed in doing away with many of the usual electoral malpractices and misconducts that often characterized in the past elections in the state. The organization of joint platforms during the course of election campaigns of candidates belonging to political parties instead of the traditional independent campaigns in the public was responsible for reducing election expenditure. The Church had even restricted and prescribed the electoral issues of the candidates for their public speeches in such platforms.

As a result of such efforts of the Church, the election expenditure had considerably come down, elections had become more peaceful, free and fair. This opinion seems to be shared by citizens and political parties in the state as well. Hence, the fact that the Church and its activities influenced the electoral process in the elections was well established. Though the Church did not have any legal sanction or authority to enforce its role on the people, its demands and expectations made in the form of appeals and requests during the electoral process had certainly influenced the voters to a great extent. And, the spirit of close social binding and the voice of the Church still dwell in a great sense of honor and commanded due respect from among the people of Mizoram. Further, importance of the Church and civil society initiatives for ensuring electoral reforms on long-term basis is quite remarkable. Thus, one could witness how the democratic political system was strengthened in the recent Assembly elections. Therefore, it is worth noting that the Church and civil society support for electoral reforms are essential for the effective functioning and long-term success of free and fair elections.

The fact that the electoral systems in India were polluted with various kinds of malpractices had been observed since the 1950s. The growth of electoral malpractices and the fact that none of the serious proposals for electoral reforms have ever got implemented. Thus, the issue of electoral reforms kept alive. Obviously, several malpractices such as, money power, muscle power, criminalization of politics, heavy election expenditure, electoral violence, casteism and communalism had been affecting the election process in the country. Thus, there is a need of conducting free and fair elections as that is one of the most essential features for successful working principle of democracy. However, it is yet to be seen as to when and how there would be healthy elections conducted in a democratic India.

Despite the acceptance of the model code of conduct by the political parties and candidates, the cases of malpractices in the electoral process became increasing. As such, electoral reforms continued to be one of the most important issues in the national politics. The political parties consistently and consciously neglected electoral reforms, in spite of highly sensible proposals on the subject of electoral reforms were submitted several times by the ECs, and other committees. On this point, civil societies can create pressure groups so as to reform the polluted electoral system in the country. Civil society groups have a key role to play in exposing and compelling the government towards improving the process of electoral reforms.

So far as the electoral politics in Mizoram is concerned, the Church and civil society organizations had played significant role for ensuring electoral reforms in the state. The Church had played a pro-active role ensuring electoral reforms and also to ensure good governance in Mizoram. The MPF imparted political education to the people, through organizing seminars, workshops, consultations and awareness also propagated in the form of campaigns. The dynamic role of the MPF was greatly appreciated and welcomed by different political parties, candidates and the citizens of Mizoram. And, it was also acknowledged by the media, Election Commission and the State government. Hence, the constructive role of Church and civil society organizations through the electoral process in Mizoram could be a model for reforming elections in other parts of India. And, the growth of pressure groups and watch-dog against outside the purview of political parties and institutions are a welcome development, as it is a mark of society's maturity. Further, this sort of positive trend of Church-polity coordination could also be encouraged to reform the electoral system in other parts of India, in the days to come.

As there is a need to make the law-abiding citizens aware of electoral reforms and the fact that they had an important role to fight the polluted electoral system has to be realized at any cost. The Church and civil society organizations had worked with firmness and good sense to induce cooperation and compliance from political parties, candidates and voters. So, neither money and muscle power nor electoral violence could confuse or hinder the free exercise of the people's franchise in the state. For instance, the drive for clean and clear electoral process has made Mizoram, the first state in the country to have completed the issuing of photo identity cards to the voters.

Another first in election history of the state was that the EC had opened its doors, to the civil society organizations in its poll preparedness as well as in the review meetings.

Critical view

Although there are numerous achievements with the active role of Church in the electoral process, there are also some critical points that need to be considered. The MPF stepped-in to oversee the conduct of free and fair elections. This had won the Church a great praise, but also generated unease about a religious institution issuing political diktats and enforcing them through its volunteers. Alongside, the Election Commission's code of conduct, the Church issued its own code, even put out election guidelines describing an 'ideal candidate'. Of course, the Church code had no legal binding. But the question is, should this model of allowing religious institutions playing an active role in elections be replicated elsewhere, in the religious multiple diversity country like India? Or should one consider that, Mizoram, a Christian-dominated state and the Church became so influential that it influenced everybody in the state. It is time one keep some distance between the Church and polity if true secular traditions are established in Mizoram, as observed by some critics in the country.

Further, one might consider that the Church, especially the Mizoram Presbyterian Church being pervasive force in Mizoram, and the MPF even put out guidelines describing 'ideal candidate' as non-secular development, as India being a secular democratic state. Perhaps, in modern democratic polity, the practice of secularism and secularization of the public domain have been debated internationally. In this, regard, the secularization of the public sphere is regarded as the basis for practicing secularism. And, for this rationale, in the Western and other European democratic countries, the practice of secularism is based upon the idea of separation of Church and State. In India, the idea of secularism is based upon the notion that State ought to be neutral towards different religions. It is noteworthy to mention that unlike western democracies in which secularism evolved from religious war, whereas, in India, it is within the framework of communal harmony that secularism is practiced and upheld.

Most importantly, one can note that the election guidelines issued by the Church for electoral reforms had no legal sanction. Further, the Church did not put up candidates of its own nor endorse any of the political party. They are simply issuing moral guidelines just to ensure that money power did play in the elections, which the ruling party had always manipulated in the past. The Church simply issued election guidelines like, to elect someone who is not corrupt, who does not have criminal cases, not to vote for those parties or candidates trying to buy votes, and voters not to accept money from the candidates and their political parties.

Such was the positive role played by the Church for ensuring electoral reforms and thus everyone appreciated it. Even the BJP had endorsed the Church role in Mizoram Assembly elections. Unlike in other states, where the BJP had campaigned on the Hindu issues such as the banning cow slaughter and conversions, the party leaders who had come to campaign in Mizoram have had avoided these controversial questions. Further, the senior BJP leader and government minister C.P. Thakur in an election speech said, “The BJP is not a threat to Christianity”. Of course, it will be very impartial guideline. The day Church puts up candidates or endorses any particular party that would be the end of its political role. Hence, the effort for electoral reforms will be respected if any religious institutions issue any election guidelines, without endorsing any particular party or candidate to reform the polluted electoral systems in the country.

The Church and civil societies may have had their limitations and shortcomings. It may also be noted that electoral malpractices and election expenditures may have decreased to certain extent, but it could not prevent such occurrences which are secretly done beyond the watchful eyes of the Church. But, one can note that any realistic approach to the electoral reform in the present electoral systems in India will go a long way to reach subtle perfection. Of course, the Church-sponsored watchdog MPF might be criticized for giving little freedom to the candidates during the election campaigns, as candidates were allowed to speak on few issues, unequal opportunity to share the joint platform by party candidates and Independents in the past, and the invalidation of the party on failure to abide by all the 27 points as a matter of remain apprehension for the political parties.

Despite these and other critics on the role of Church in the electoral process, it was generally accepted that the Church played a positive role towards ensuring electoral reforms in Mizoram. As such, the yeomen service of the MPF was recognized within and outside of Mizoram for its role in the electoral reforms in Mizoram. The Election Commission was happy with role of the Church, as it played helped the EC in ensuring clean and trouble-free polls. Many government officials over the years have termed the Mizoram elections as role model for the country. That is why the EC had agreed to change the date of poll and date of counting following the churches' request in the recent Assembly elections in Mizoram. Thus, no political party or candidate dare to antagonize the Church in Mizoram, because of its constructive role during the poll process. The activities that were covered widely in the whole state, working hard to reform electoral politics is not observed elsewhere in the country. If the Mizoram practice is emulated in other parts of India, then there would be no ground for disappointment with the electoral process thereon.

Suggestions

Although India had established formal democracy, there were operational problems in the working of democracy and, also in the making of popular will effective in the country having varied social and rich diversity. The growth in electoral malpractices, and the fact that, none of the serious proposals for electoral reforms submitted by the ECs and other Committees have not been implemented in any way so far. As such, civil societies and organizations can be encouraged to create pressure groups to reform the polluted electoral system in the country. It is also advisable that the elites, social scientists and civil society organizations to apply their minds earnestly towards the polluted electoral systems in their own capacity and try to reform the electoral system. There is also a need to make all law-abiding citizens aware of these problems and make them realize that they had an important role to play.

If the Church and civil society organizations in Mizoram had uniformity in issuing 'election guideline' then such practices can be adopted elsewhere in the country. Meanwhile, creating electoral reform pressure groups outside the religious areas also need to be encouraged in Mizoram. Further, the participation of the Churches in

electoral reforms in Mizoram need to be reconsidered for ensuring the stability of Church-polity relations, as the participation of Churches is not a balanced affair with the MPF. Thus, there is a need of finding ways for Churches and other civil society organizations who are not yet members to join the MPF thereafter. Finally, this Mizoram model can be encouraged and emulated in other states as well.

APPENDIX-I

Schedule of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly Elections, 2013

Date of Issue of Gazette Notification	1 November, 2013
Last Date of Filing Nominations	8 November, 2013
Date of Scrutiny of Nominations	9 November, 2013
Last Date for Withdrawal of Candidatures	11 November, 2013
Date of Poll	25 November, 2013
Hours of Poll	7: 00 AM-4:00 AM
Result of Elections	9 December, 2013
Date before which Election shall be completed	12 December, 2013
Total No. of Assembly Constituencies	40
Total No. Polling Stations	1126

APPENDIX-II

ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN POLITICAL PARTIES AND MIZORAM PEOPLE FORUM (Memorandum of Understanding)

The joint efforts of the political parties and the Mizoram People Forum in implementing the 'Articles of Agreement' for holding a clean, free and fair election in various elections within Mizoram such as – Mizoram Legislative Assembly General Election 2008, MP Election 2009, Village Council Elections 2009 & 2012, Aizawl Local Council Election 2012, Aizawl Municipal Election 2010 and Autonomous District Council Elections, have been a great success. The conduct of elections in Mizoram have become a role model for other states of the country, which is the result of the united effort of all the people concerned in the electoral process and the people of Mizoram.

Mizoram is facing Legislative Assembly General Election in 2013; buoyant by the past achievements and successes, and the desire to uphold the great election model, Political Parties of Mizoram and the Mizoram People Forum have come together and inked this 'Articles of Agreement' which will be in force for the Mizoram Legislative Assembly General Election 2013.

1. General conduct:

- i) For holding a clean, free and fair election every precautions and measures should be taken.
- ii) All the rightful citizens of the country enrolled in the electoral roll must cast their votes.
- iii) The conveyance and travelling expenditures of electoral voters, who are stationed on places other than the constituency where they have enrolled, shall not be borne by others such as political parties, candidates or their workers.

2. Election expenditure:

- i) No party or candidate shall indulge in huge and wasteful election expenditures. Election expenditures should be kept to the minimum. MPF functionaries shall not accept money or donations from the political parties and the candidates.

- ii) Activities which are ‘corrupt practices’ and offences under the election law can crop up during the house to house campaign. Therefore, house to house visits by candidates and their supporters is prohibited during the period of 10 days prior to the election day, to allow the electors period of tranquil to decide their option.
- iii) Influencing of voters through money or other incentives and inducements must be avoided. General public, organizations and individuals are requested not to ask or expect any favour from the candidates. Similarly, candidates and Political Parties are also requested to refrain from announcing any financial grants, distribution of inducement articles like silpouline, jersey, football, mobile handset, NLUP etc, or promises thereof.
- iv) Feasting, picnic and procession escalate the election expenditure unnecessarily; they must be avoided.
- v) Banner, flag and poster unnecessarily escalate the election expenditure; therefore the maximum number of banners, flags and posters is restricted within each locality as follows:
 - VC/LC with a maximum of seven members:
Upto 3 banners, 30 flags and 20 posters.
 - VC/LC with a maximum of five members:
Upto 3 banners, 20 flags and 15 posters.
 - VC/LC with a maximum of three members:
Upto 3 banners, 10 flags and 10 posters.
 - The maximum size of banner shall be 18’x4’ and that of the poster shall be 4’x3’.
 - Caps, badges and stickers with political party symbols may not be use as the election materials.
 - MPF functionaries will request the political parties to remove excessive banners, flags and posters, if any, if the case arises.

3. Free and fair election, and security issues:

- i) Use of force, intimidation and undue influence to the voters to secure their votes must be avoided.
- ii) Securing the support of underground armed groups and use of arms shall be prevented at all cost.

iii) Take all necessary actions to security and peaceful election, especially along the border and sensitive areas.

4. Policy implementation:

i) Only realistic and do-able policies and programmes must be included in the Party manifesto.

ii) More than the personal and individual life of the candidates, election campaigning should revolve around the Party policy and programme. Campaigning by use of false propaganda, unproven truth and scandalous issues must be avoided.

5. MLA Candidates:

While making the nomination, the political parties are requested to consider the following qualities in their prospective candidates:

i) Stable and upright person.

ii) Honest and hard working.

iii) Person with great integrity.

iv) Free from the influence of alcoholic and other drugs.

v) Abstain from unlawful sex

vi) Having great respect for law of the land.

vii) Dedicated to the welfare of the society and fellow human being.

viii) Committed to one's faith and religion.

6. Joint electioneering effort:

i) As and when possible, joint election campaign platform will be organized for various candidates, under the guidance of MPF Constituency Forum. These programmes may be widely publicized in the local TV and media; other than these, joint election campaign platform must be avoided.

ii) All public meetings, even those organized by individual party, may be held under the guidance of MPF. In the absence of MPF, individual political parties may make suitable arrangement.

iii) No tea or eatables shall be served on the Polling day. Giving out of election numbers or slips shall be undertaken by the MPF duty or in a joint effort with the party workers.

7. Conclusion:

i) MPF District Forum, Constituency Forum and Local Forum shall neither make additional agreement nor deviate from this 'Articles of Agreement'.

ii) If any political parties or candidates default or goes against the spirit of this 'Articles of Agreement' and if there is solid proof or documentary evidence to prove the same, it shall be widely publicise within the MLA Constituency where it has been committed.

iii) This 'Articles of Agreement' shall be widely publicised and circulated by the Mizoram People Forum and Political Parties.

Signed by the leaders of the said Political parties and MPF

Sd/-

(LAL THANHAWLA) President, Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee

Sd/-

(ZORAMTHANGA) President, Mizo National Front Gen. Hqrs.

Sd/-

(LALDUHOMA), President, Zoram Nationalist Party Gen. Hqrs.

Sd/-

(LALHMANGAIHA SAILO), President, Mizoram Peoples' Conference Gen. Hqrs.

Sd/-

(LALHLUNA) President, Bharatya Janata Party, Mizoram Unit

Sd/-

(REV. THANGZAUVA), President, Mizoram People Forum Gen. Hqrs.

Sd/-

(UPA LALRAMTHANGA), General Secretary, Mizoram People Forum Gen. Hqrs,

Aizawl

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