

**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF  
MIZORAM STATE  
COMMISSION FOR WOMEN**

**A Dissertation Submitted to Mizoram University for  
The Award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in  
PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

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# I

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## CERTIFICATE

Certified that Ms. Lalremruati Vanchhong, a student of M.Phil programme in the Department of Public Administration, Mizoram University has prepared the present Dissertation titled 'Women Empowerment: A Study of the role of Mizoram State Commission for Women,' this is an original work of research which has not been used previously and which has not been submitted to any other University for any purpose.

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### **DECLARATION**

I, Lalremruati Vanchhong, do hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to do the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

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### III

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## IV

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## VI

### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AWF	All Women's Federation
BPFA	Beijing Platform For Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
ICED	International Conference on Environment and Development
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
LAP	Legal Awareness Programme
MHIP	Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl
MHT	Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual
MNREGA	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
MSCW	Mizoram State Commission for Women
NCW	National Commission for Women
NHM	National Health Mission
NFLS	National Forward Looking Strategies
NPA	National Plan of Action
NCPCR	National Commission for Protection of Child Rights
OSC	One Stop Centre
PMSA	Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan

POCSO	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act
RITC	Residential Institute and Training Centre
SCPCR	State Commission for Protection of Child Rights
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRCW	State Resource Centre for Women
SSWAB	State Social Welfare Advisory Board
SWD	Social Welfare Department
UNDAW	United Nations Division for Advancement of Women
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNINSTRAW	United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
UNPIN	United Nations Population Information Network
WCW	World Conference on Women
YWCA	Young Women Christian Association
Nularim	Courtship
Puithiam	Priest
Ramhual	Village Officer in charge of land distribution
Sadawt	Special Priest
Thirdeng	Blacksmith
Tlawmngaihna	Sacrifice oneself for the good of others
Upa	Elder
Zalen	Village Officer
Zawlbuk	Bachelor's Dormitory



## CHAPTER-I INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. A Brief Profile of the land “Mizoram

Mizoram is one of the States in North East India occupying a geographical area of 21,097 sq. km constituting only 0.64 percent of India’s total area. It is located between 21° .58 ‘N to 24° .35 ‘N Latitude and 92° .15 ‘E to 93° .29 ‘E Longitude.<sup>1</sup> Mizoram is a mountainous and hilly region and has a rugged topography with high ranges trending from north to south. The hills are steep and are separated from one another by narrow and deep river valleys. The average height of the hill is about 1,000 metres. The highest peak in Mizoram is Blue Mountain (*Phawngpui*) with a height of 2,157 metres which is located in the southern part of the state. The main rivers of the state are *Tlawng*, *Tuirial*, *Tuivawl*, *Tiau*, *Chhimtuipui*, *Khawthlangtuipui*, *Tut*, *Tuivai* and *Tuichawng*.

It is surrounded by Myanmar in the east and south, Bangladesh and Tripura in the west and Assam and Manipur in the north. It has a long international boundary of 404 km length with Myanmar and 318 km length with Bangladesh.<sup>2</sup> It therefore occupies an area of strategic importance due its geographical location.

Mizoram has a moderate climate, which is neither too hot nor too cold throughout the year. The climate is humid tropical with short winter and long summer with heavy rainfall. The entire area is under the direct influence of the monsoon. It receives a fairly heavy monsoon rain from May to September and the average annual rainfall during 2016 (January-December) is 2381.4 mm per year.<sup>3</sup>

According to the 2011 Census, Mizoram has a population of 10, 97,206 and density of population is 52 persons per sq.km. Out of the total population, 5, 55,339 are males and 5, 41,867 are females.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that almost half of the total population in Mizoram are females.

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Mizoram, *Statistical Handbook Mizoram, 2016*, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 159.

<sup>4</sup> Government of Mizoram. *Statistical Handbook of Mizoram, Op. cit.*, p. viii.

## 1.2. Administrative Development in Mizoram

Administrative development in Mizoram officially began in 1890 when the territory then known as the Lushai Hills or Mizo Hills has been divided between Assam and Bengal province during the British rule. The North Lushai Hills has been under Assam province and the South Lushai Hills has been under the Bengal province. A political officer was in charge of the North Lushai Hills with headquarter at Aizawl while the South Lushai Hills with headquarter at Lunglei was under the charge of Superintendent. For the administrative convenience, the North and South Lushai Hills were amalgamated as one district known as the Lushai Hills District and was placed under Assam province on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1898.<sup>5</sup> The Lushai Hills District has remained a part of the Assam till its formation into a Union Territory of Mizoram in 1972 under the North Eastern Area (Re-organisation) Act, 1971.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, after the signing of the Mizoram Peace Accord by the Government of India and the Mizo National Front (MNF) supremo, Laldenga, Mizoram had been elevated from the status of a Union Territory into a full-fledged State to become the 23<sup>rd</sup> State of the Indian Union on 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1987.<sup>7</sup> By breaking normal Constitutional practice, Mizoram has been given only 40 Seats in the State Legislative Assembly. It is represented by one member each in both the Houses of the Union Parliament. The state of Mizoram is now divided into 8 districts, namely, *Aizawl*, *Lunglei*, *Saiha*, *Lawngtlai*, *Mamit*, *Kolasib*, *Champhai*, and *Serchhip* districts. *Aizawl* is the capital city of the State of Mizoram.

## 1.3. Social Practices of the Mizos

Mizoram means the land of the Mizos. The word '*Mizo*' is made up of '*Mi*' meaning people and '*Zo*' meaning hill, therefore '*Mizo*' means men of the hill or hill people. The history of the origin and coming of the *Mizo* to their present habitat is not known as no systematic research has been made. Moreover, there is no written record of history. But historians believe that the Mizos are mongoloids stock who had migrated to their present habitat from Southern China through Myanmar.

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<sup>5</sup> Chatterjee, Suhas. (1985), '*Mizoram Under The British Rule*,' Delhi: Mittal Publications, p.127.

<sup>6</sup> Chhuanawma, L.H. *et al* (2015), *Government and Politics of Mizoram*, Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, p.75.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

The *Mizo* language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family of language.<sup>8</sup> The land is inhabited by various clans such as *Hmar*, *Lai /Pawi*, *Lusei*, *Mara/Lakher*, *Paite*, *Ralte* who have many sub-clans, who are collectively known as '*Mizo*.' All these groups have separate dialects which are closely akin to each other. However, the most common language used as a *lingua franca* is Lusei dialect which is now called *Mizotawng*. According to 2011 census, 87.16 percent of the people in Mizoram are Christians.<sup>9</sup>

The Mizo society is a close-knit, classless and casteless society. In the traditional Mizo Society, the entire population relied on agriculture for their sustenance. They grew rice, maize, sweet potato and other vegetables. Jhumming cultivation or Shifting cultivation had been practiced by the Mizo society. The role of men, such as clearing the jungle, harvesting and transferring the harvests, was considered to be more important than the role of women which included growing vegetables, making cloths for the whole family, domestication of animals and others.<sup>10</sup> Besides, women were also involved in the process of jhumming cultivation. In addition to their normal works in the jhums, women had to carry all the agricultural tools and firewood on their way home while men returned home empty handed. The household chores and other works which they did from dawn till late at night for the survival of their families were not considered hard labour. In fact, the division of labour between men and women in the Mizo traditional society did not favour women.

The special feature of the Mizo society is the practice of '*Tlawmngaihna*' which means 'service above self' or 'to sacrifice oneself for the good of others.' *Tlawmngaihna* is having a sense of altruism and has traits of sympathy, compassion, empathy, and fellow feelings which are very fondly cherished by the Mizo.<sup>11</sup> A man is said to have the spirit of '*Tlawmngaihna*' when he is unselfish, zealous, courteous,

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<sup>8</sup> Pachuau, Rintluanga. (1994), *Geography of Mizoram*, Aizawl: R.T.Enterprise, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> [www.census2011.co.in](http://www.census2011.co.in) accessed on 5.11.2017.

<sup>10</sup> Lalrinchhani, B. (2004), 'A Gender Study of the Socio-economic History of the Early Mizo,' in Sangkima (Ed.) (2004), *A Modern History of Mizoram*, Guwahati: Delhi: Spectrum Publications, pp. 34-35.

<sup>11</sup> Lalthansangi. (2004), *Report on Situational Analysis of Women in the State of Mizoram*, National Commission for Women, New Delhi, p. 19.

considerate, courageous, industrious, kind, generous, and preserving. The *Mizo* have a deep respect for their elders. *Tlawmngaihna* is what the Mizo valued most in life.<sup>12</sup>

Courtship or *Nularim*, as it is called, is an indispensable institution in the Mizo society which exists till today. Men could freely court any girls they like. They could go to the girl's house to court her but if the girl was displeasing to them or if entry of the girl's house was not permitted by her parents, then the menfolk would first discuss about the matter at *Zawlbuk* and then bring his friends and tear down the verandah of the girl's house.<sup>13</sup> This shows the fact that girls were not supposed to show their feelings or preference towards men while men could clearly show their favour to any girl.

Prior to democratisation of their polity in the Indian post-Independence from the British yoke, every Mizo village was ruled over by its own *Lal* or Chief who was independent of other Chiefs governing other villages. Chieftainship was the only indigenous institution for the administration of local affairs in the village. The Chief was initially selected, elected and at times invited by the people at large.<sup>14</sup> In the course of time, Chieftainship became hereditary and, in most cases, the youngest son succeeded his father as the Chief. This unwritten law of succession of Chieftainship indicates that the chance for women to become Chief was very bleak. As a result, there were few women Chiefs among the Mizos, the most popular one was Ropuiliani.

Most of the historians of Mizo origin trace back the origin of Chieftainship to Zahmuaka who had six sturdy sons. Although there were Chiefs from other Mizo Clans, *Sailo* Chiefs had become the most powerful Chiefs at the time of the advent of the British. The Chief used to exercise all the powers at his disposal and the people of his village were hardly given the right of participation in the Government. In spite of this curtailment of the common people for participation in the Village Government, the Chief would rule over his subjects in accordance with the Mizo customs.

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<sup>12</sup> Sangkima. (2004), *Essays on the History of the Mizos*, Guwahati: Delhi: Spectrum Publications, p.70.

<sup>13</sup> C.Lalhmingpuii, Janet *et. al.*, (2014), 'The Status of Women in Mizo Society' in *the Journal of North East India Studies*, Vol. 4(1), Jan.-Jul. 2014, pp. 30-42.

<sup>14</sup> Lalrintluanga (2009), *Mizoram: Development of Politico-Administrative System and Statehood*, New Delhi: Serials Publications, p.37.

While discharging his multifarious roles and functions, the Chief would be assisted by a Council of Elders, who were appointed by him at his discretion. Besides the Council of Elders, there were other important officials such as *Zalen*, *Ramhual*, *Tlangau*, *Thirdeng*, *Puithiam* and *Sadawt*.<sup>15</sup> These village officials were appointed by the Chiefs from among the successful cultivators.

The Chief enjoyed a number of rights and privileges at the cost of the people that they ruled. The various rights and privileges enjoyed by the Chiefs were:<sup>16</sup>

- 1) The Chiefs land or *Ram*: All lands were owned by the Chiefs.
- 2) *Fathang* or Paddy Tax: The Chiefs were entitled to a traditional paddy tax commonly known as *Fathang*.
- 3) *Sachhiah* or Flesh Tax: Anybody who shot or trapped a wild animal had to make over to the Chief a leg of the animal.
- 4) Building or repairs of the Chief's house: The Chief had the right to requisite the services of the villagers to build his house and repair it periodically free of cost.
- 5) *Salam*: As a court fee, the Chief and his *Upas* received *Salam* or Rs.5/- out of every fine imposed on the villagers.
- 6) *Khuai chhiah* or Bee Tax: Certain quantity of honey from a particular bee's nest used to be paid to the Chief by his subjects.
- 7) *Chi chhiah* or Salt Tax: The Chief was entitled to a due on salt collected by his villagers from the salt wells or '*Chi khur*.'
- (8) *Boi* Custom: Among the Mizos, only a Chief could have three types of *Boi* or dependents.

Inter-tribal clashes, feuds and raids were common among different sections of the Mizo clans. These constant clashes among them had urged the need to have leader who would lead them at times to the warpath. Hence, Chieftainship appears to have emerged out of the collective needs of group life characterized tribal living.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Shakespear, J. *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, Part I, (Macmillan & Co. Ltd., London, 1912), pp.45-49.

<sup>17</sup> Patnaik, J.K. *et. al.* (2006), 'Mizoram: A Profile,' in J.K.Patnaik (Ed.), *Mizoram: Dimension and Perspectives*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, p. 4.

Besides, the Mizo Chiefs occasionally conducted raids towards the people in the plains of Cachar, Manipur, Sylhet, Tripura and Chittagong Hill Tracts. On 23 January 1871, a Haulawng Chief, *Bengkhuiaia*, raided Alexandrapore tea garden in Cachar area of Assam and killed a British gentleman named James Winchester and his six year old daughter, Mary Winchester, was kidnapped.<sup>18</sup> But, the kidnapping of Mary Winchester had announced a new era in the history of the Mizo people. A Missionary Society, called the ‘Arthington Aborigines Mission,’ came to know about the incident and also about the condition of the Mizo people. At the end of the day, the Missionary Society had, for the first time, sent two Christian Missionaries, Rev. J.H. Lorrain and Rev.F.W.Savidge, to the Lushai Hills, now called Mizoram, in the year 1894 to preach the gospel.

Before the advent of the Christian Missionaries, there was no formal education in the traditional Mizo society. The family and *Zawlbuk* (Bachelors’ Dormitory) served as the informal educational institutions in the earlier Mizo society. Besides, *Zawlbuk* served as a training centre for the young boys where they were taught moral ethics, cherished values of the society and strategies for warfare, shaped and nurtured into responsible adults by their elders or the *Valupa*, who had high experience in this field. All male members who attained puberty were required to stay in *Zawlbuk*. All the married and unmarried men would spend their nights at *Zawlbuk* for recreation, sleeping and exchange of ideas. The inmates of *Zawlbuk* served as a standing army of the Chief who himself was the Commander-in- Chief. Girls and women had no place in *Zawlbuk* which was preserved purely for men. In fact, not even a single woman was allowed to visit the *Zawlbuk* which was virtually considered ‘a forbidden house’ for women.

The Mizos did not have written scripts until the coming of the two Christian Missionaries, Rev.J.H.Lorrain and Rev. F.W.Savidge, to Aizawl on the 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1894.<sup>19</sup> As their first work, the two Missionaries had adopted the Roman script or alphabet for the Mizo language.<sup>20</sup> Thereafter, they introduced formal education in

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<sup>18</sup> Ray, Animesh. (2002), *Mizoram: Dynamics of Change*, New Delhi: National Book Trust, India, p.35.

<sup>19</sup> Government of Mizoram, *Mizo Women Today* (1991) Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, Directorate of Art and Culture, p.20.

<sup>20</sup> Lalrimawia (2004), ‘British Policy and the Education of the Lushais upto 1947,’ in Sangkima (Ed.) book *A Modern History of Mizoram*, Guwahati: Delhi: Spectrum Publications, p. 95.

Mizoram by opening a small school to impart primary education which was later closed as they had to go back to their country. However, the school was re-opened in 1898 by Rev. D.E.Jones.

Most of the students attending the school were boys as they had more freedom. The girls, who attended the school, usually carried their siblings on their back. In fact, girls were not encouraged by their parents to attend the schools as girls were supposed to do the household work and help their mothers at home.<sup>21</sup> Girls helped their mothers in various domestic works like cooking, fetching water, fetching for firewood, cleaning the house and carrying the baby and so on. Earlier, the Mizo parents trained their daughters to be good housewives as well as expert jhum cultivators right from their childhood. When the *first* Lower Primary School Examination was conducted in June 1903, nineteen students passed, out of which only two were girls.<sup>22</sup>

Mizoram is a highly educated state with high literacy rate and the level of literacy among women is also high. According to the 2011 Census, the percentage of literacy in Mizoram is 91.58 percent. This is much higher than the national literacy rate of 74.04 percent. Mizoram occupies the *third* position in literacy rate in India next to Kerala and Lakshadweep. The sex ratio of Mizoram as per 2011 census is 975 females per 1000 males.<sup>23</sup>

#### **1.4. Women in Mizo Society**

The traditional Mizo society was strictly patriarchal where men were the heads of the family and the decision makers. Even today, hereditary and lineage continue to pass through the males. Men were the supreme authorities in their respective families and in the society at large. All major decisions were taken by men and women were destined to be the followers. In spite of this fact, women occupied an important position in the family in terms of responsibilities particularly in matters relating to household or domestic affairs. Women had to work the whole day in the field with others and they had no time for rest even when they reached

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<sup>21</sup> Colbert, Irene. (2008), 'Women and Politics in Mizoram,' in J.K.Patnaik (Ed.) book *Mizoram: Dimensions and Perspectives*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, p. 359.

<sup>22</sup> Government of Mizoram. *Mizo Women Today*, Op. cit., p.20.

<sup>23</sup> Government of Mizoram, *Statistical Handbook Mizoram*, Op. cit., p. viii.

home late in the evening. Mizo women did a lot of hard work for the family and the society but they did not receive due recognition and were given an inferior status. The attitude of the Mizo society towards women was reflected in popular sayings of the Mizo like “Women and old fence can be replaced,” “A crab’s meat is no meat, so also a woman’s word is no word” and “Unthreatened wife and unthreatened grass of the fields are both unbearable.”

Right from childhood days, the tiny girl made herself available to her parents. She assisted her parents as much as she could. She had to take care of her younger brothers and sisters, draw water from the fountains, cook and do any other works. Sometimes, accompanying her mother, she had to fetch firewood from the jungle. In this way, the Mizo girl used to help her parents even when she was young<sup>24</sup>. As mentioned before, when the first primary school was opened by the Christian Missionaries, only few girls carrying their siblings attended to receive education. There are traditional Mizo sayings like ‘Educating girls is not good as it will be used for writing love letters only’, ‘Educating girls makes them lazy,’ ‘Educating females is not useful, it will be taken away with marriage.’ All these Sayings show the negative attitude of the parents and the society towards their daughters in the field of education. Though women did a lot of hard works and spent all their energies and time for their family, these works were not considered as labour. The household chores like cooking, cleaning of the house, fetching water, collecting firewood etc. were not counted as important works.

According to the Mizo Customary Law, the bridegroom would give, at the time of marriage, a bride-price of about Rs.420/-.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, women can be divorced at husband’s wish by saying ‘*Ka ma che*’ meaning I divorce you. In case a *Mizo* woman is divorced by her husband, she has no rightful claim over the properties in the family except those brought along with her at the time of her marriage. Even in the absence of a male child, a daughter could not claim, as a matter of rights, the family property, but would normally go to the nearest male relative. Mizo women have no right of inheritance or ownership either in their

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<sup>24</sup> Sangkima (2004), *Op cit.*, p.90

<sup>25</sup> *Mizo Customary Law* Compiled by The Committee on Mizo Customary Laws officially set up by the Government of Mizoram, p. 14.



parents' home or after their marriage. Similarly, they have no right of their own income, over their children or over their properties. Fortunately, the position of women has been elevated after the passing of the Mizo Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance of Property Bill on 4<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2014 by the Mizoram Legislative Assembly.<sup>26</sup> This Act gives the legal right to women to have a share of the family's property. It provides that

“if a man divorces his wife on the ground of adultery or deprivation of his conjugal rights except on health ground, the wife will have a share over the acquired property not exceeding 25% alongwith her personal property brought in at the time of her wedding.”<sup>27</sup>

Although there was practically no room for political participation for women in their traditional power structure, the Mizo women have been participating in the political process as voters in every election held under the Constitution of India since 1952. According to the final voters' list published by the State Election Department on 1<sup>st</sup> Nov., 2016, Mizoram has 7, 22,739 voters including 3, 68,757 female voters. Even though, women outnumber men by 14,775 votes, women continue to be either silenced or deprived in terms of political representation.<sup>28</sup> It will not be an exaggeration to point out that the number of women leaders in politics is almost nil.

In Village Council which is the grassroots- level governing body, women are hardly given membership. The higher level body like the State Legislative Assembly very seldom has a woman representation and not even a single Mizo woman has been given a chance to become a member of the Parliament so far. Few women get candidature in the election of the State Legislature and only 4 (four) women have been elected so far since 1972. Unlike what had happened before, there were *nine* women candidates in the 2008 State Assembly election<sup>29</sup> and *six* women candidates in the 2013 elections. Unfortunately, all of them lose in the elections.<sup>30</sup> This can be

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<sup>26</sup> Government of Mizoram. *The Mizo Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance of Property Act, 2014*.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Act. No. 9.

<sup>28</sup> [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com) accessed on 18.10.17.

<sup>29</sup> Government of Mizoram. *Statistical Report 2000*, Directorate of Election.

<sup>30</sup> [eci.nic.in/MizoramAE\\_2013\\_stat\\_report](http://eci.nic.in/MizoramAE_2013_stat_report) accessed on 26.11.2017.

taken as a proof that the patriarchal Mizo social structure does not encourage women to be active in politics till today.

The first democratic election to the Aizawl Municipal Council (now the Aizawl Municipal Corporation) was held in the year 2010. In all, there are 19 wards out of which 6 wards are reserved for women. This is done in accordance with the 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act 1993 which provides that 33% of seats should be reserved for women. This is a significant landmark in the history of women empowerment in the State of Mizoram.

During the year 2014-15, there were 756 Village Councils in Mizoram and the total number of members of the Village Councils was 3,594, out of which 3,312 were male members and only 282 were female members. With the enactment of the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Amendment Bill by the Mizoram Legislative Assembly on 12<sup>th</sup> Nov.2014, seats have been reserved for women in the Village Councils. Hence, the total number of female members has increased from 282 in 2014-15 to 870 in 2015-16.<sup>31</sup> This is an important step taken by the Government of Mizoram to elevate the position of women by involving them in the decision making process. In spite of this effort, no woman member has ever been elected in the State Legislative Assembly since 1988 till March 2014. On 11<sup>th</sup> April 2014 a lady candidate *Vanlalawmpuii Chawngthu* has been elected as a member of the Mizoram legislature in the By-poll election from *Hrangturzo* constituency. Recently, *Vanlalawmpuii Chawngthu* has been appointed as the Minister of State, Cooperation, Fisheries and Sericulture Departments under the Government of Mizoram.

In patriarchal societies like the Mizo society, voters see women candidates as less qualified than men to run for public office. Moreover, political parties appear to be male dominated. They have not genuinely taken up the issue of political participation by women which is reflected by the near total absence of women in party leadership. As long as political parties do not support and promote women's candidacies, the political representation of women will continue to lag behind.

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<sup>31</sup> Government of Mizoram. *Statistical Handbook Mizoram, Op. cit.*, p. 106.

The society does not think women are capable of being leaders not only in politics but also in the realm of religion. Even though the Church leaders are pressurized to include qualified women theologians as Pastors, Mizo women are not ordained as pastors till today though there are a large number of qualified theologians.

The mindset of the present society confines women's duties to the realms of the home and regards household activities as the most important duties for women. This is the impact of male dominated patriarchal society where there is a clear division of labour between men and women. All the household chores are in the hands of women whereas hunting, jhumming and other outside works are in the hands of men. Many members of the Mizo society still feel that the place of women is her home. Further, women themselves have largely accepted this attitude without question.

Many women are still unaware of the rights and opportunities available to them. The safeguards provided for women and children are not disseminated to the persons concerned. Moreover, sometimes these rights, opportunities and safeguards could not be used or exercised by the victims.

### **1.5. Statement of the Research Problem**

The Mizoram State Commission for Women (MSCW) was set up under the Social Welfare Department by the Government of Mizoram on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1998. Keeping the provisions contained in the National Commission for Women Act, 1990, the MSCW has been made a Statutory Body on 8<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2004 by an Act, that is, 'The Mizoram State Commission for Women Act, 2004.' Being the only Commission of its kind, the Commission has become an Apex body to work for the cause of women in the State of Mizoram.

The Commission aims at protecting and promoting the rights and interests of women and dealing with violence against women in the State of Mizoram and especially in situations where women are in need of help of the Commission. To stop violation of the rights of women, it is important to spread awareness among the people regarding the rights available to women. Hence, the Commission has taken

up a number of activities to spread awareness among the people about the rights of women.

For its effective functioning as the Commission, the MSCW has created a Legal Cell which consists of Experts in the field of law. The Commission has taken up a number of cases including demand for maintenance grants for wife and children, marital disputes, sexual harassment of women at workplace, crime against women and others. The Commission has helped many women in distress by giving solutions to their problems. However, it is relevant to note that the MSCW is merely a recommendatory body and does not have the power to implement its recommendations. In spite of this limitation, the duties and responsibilities of the Commission are increasing day by day.

Any organisation or body cannot properly perform its functions without adequate finance. Similarly, the proper functioning of the Commission depends upon the adequate finance which comes from the Government of Mizoram in the form of grants and other sources for organising seminars and legal awareness programmes and so on. The existing staff strength of the Commission is inadequate to handle all these responsibilities given to it by the relevant Acts and Laws. Besides the Commission is only functioning as a part of the Social Welfare Department, Government of Mizoram.

As stated above, the MSCW has taken up a number of activities to improve the condition of women and children. However, no research work has been done till date on the organisational structure and functions of the Commission which plays a significant role for the improvement of the condition of women and children constituting the weaker section of the society. Keeping the above mentioned facts in view, this research activity is being undertaken.

#### **1.6.1. Review of Literature**

There are a number of books in relation to State Commission for Women; however, the books and articles relating to Mizoram State Commission for Women (MSCW) and its contributions to 'women empowerment' are few in number. In spite

of this, the researcher has undertaken review of the following books and articles which are found directly or indirectly relevant to the context.

Mira Seth (2001)<sup>32</sup> in her book *Women and Development (The Indian Experience)* traces the roots of women's development issues in India and points out a number of policies and programmes for the socio-economic development of women. The author has highlighted an assessment and evaluation of the efforts made to accelerate women's development in India since Independence. The author also mentions the need for sensitising and promoting the understanding of women's development issues among the intelligentsia, the policy makers, the voluntary organisations and the great Indian public for further development of Women.

Vibhuti Patel (2002)<sup>33</sup> in her book *Women's Challenges of the New Millennium* examines several socio-economic problems of women in India. The author has highlighted the challenges brought by globalisation on women, the economic parameters, their health and educational problems, rape laws and justice, women in decision-making and women's movement in India. The author also discusses women's survival struggle in the political economy perspective and offers worldwide and analytical vision for engineering each and every area of human existence.

Usha Sharma (2004)<sup>34</sup> in her book *Gender Mainstreaming and Women's Rights* has focused on 'gender issues' which means looking at both women and men, whilst recognising that it is women who suffer from gender inequality and discrimination. She discusses how greater emphasis is being put on empowering women to be able to develop and realise their full potential and contribute to the society and nation as well. The author also deals with the burning issues of gender in-equalities in almost all walks of life and emphasises the importance of planning and implementation process of gender mainstreaming programmes for effective human development.

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<sup>32</sup> Seth, Mira. (2001), '*Women and Development: The Indian Experience*,' New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt.Ltd., pp. 256-266.

<sup>33</sup> Patel, Vibhuti. (2002), '*Women's Challenges of the New Millenium*,' New Delhi; Gyan Publishing House, pp. 1-10.

<sup>34</sup> Sharma, Usha. (2004), '*Gender Mainstreaming and Women's Rights*,' Delhi: Authorspress, pp. 151-179.

R.C. Mishra (2006)<sup>35</sup> in his book *Women in India (Towards Gender Equality)* discusses the changing status of women in Indian society from ancient India to medieval period and the decline in the status of women in Indian Society begins with the Muslims rule of India. The author has highlighted the government reports regarding political, economic, social and educational position of women and girls in modern India. The author also discusses the constitutional rights and freedom given to women for their empowerment. The author has pointed out that despite the steps taken by the Government and UNOs, gender gaps still remain.

M.Lakshmi Narasaiah and Smt. S.A.Haseena Sulthana(2007) in their book *Women Development Programmes* point out that India, a male dominated society, is where women are described as the ‘second sex’ and the ‘second creature’ who live on surplus. The authors mention that women subordination is manifested in the form of division of labour between men and women, but this subordination has not been able to prevent women from playing a vital role in the overall development of the society.

Anupama Singh (2008)<sup>36</sup> in her book *Women Empowerment and Sustainable Development* discusses about the indispensability of women empowerment to attain the goals of sustainable development, as development must be gender sensitive if it is to be equitable, sustainable and effective. She also examines how women empowerment issue is encountered in the lives of women as an agent of change and development, socio-economic profile of rural women, and implications of political empowerment amongst women. She further points out that to meet the challenges of sustainable development, it is crucial that women be empowered and involved in local government as decision-makers, planners and managers.

Rashmi Sharma (2009)<sup>37</sup> in her book *Women Development* discusses how the exalted position of women in ancient India has become deteriorated during the Mughal’s rule in India. The author mentions certain efforts made to improve the conditions of women by both the educated Indian elite and the Britishers. The author

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<sup>35</sup> Mishra, R.C. (2006), ‘*Women in India: Towards Gender Equality*,’ Delhi: Authorspress, pp. 1-10.

<sup>36</sup> Singh, Anupama. (2008), *Women Empowerment and Sustainable Development*, New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, pp. 1-15.

<sup>37</sup> Sharma, Rashmi. (2009), *Women Development*, New Delhi: Regal Publications. p. 32.

also deals with how the Indian Women Movement has approached the suffrage campaign as a means of achieving social reforms, the issues of rural women, urban working women, the role of media, the importance of health in women development, education, religion etc.

Sumanlata (2010)<sup>38</sup> in her book “*Towards Empowering Women*” examines two major world conferences in the 1990s namely the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 which have revolutionised the international standards for the rights and health of women of the entire world. She further points out that both these agreements stress equality between men and women and ensure development of a sustainable and equitable society. The author also has stated that women’s rights are universal, indivisible and inalienable human rights that must be protected and promoted; and only by supporting and advocating for women’s full empowerment at all stages of their lives can gender equality be achieved.

E.A.Narayana and E.V.Lakshmi (2011)<sup>39</sup> have dealt with wide range of issues relating to women’s development in their book, *Women and Development in India*. They also discuss various women development policies and programmes and examine institutional mechanism for women development in India. As India ranks 114 in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index 2009 rankings, out of 134 countries, the authors express the necessity to take a serious look at the development profile of women, assess the empowerment index, and attempt a critical analysis of the existing policy responses including those related to implementation.

Aminur Rahman (2013)<sup>40</sup> in the article ‘Women’s Empowerment: Concept and Beyond,’ in the *Global Journal of Human Social Science* tries to clarify the concept of Women Empowerment based on several scholars’ views. Gender empowerment is a broad category which includes empowerment of women without creating a misgiving of emasculation of men. It stands for fostering a balance in

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<sup>38</sup> Sumanlata (2010), *Towards Empowering Women*, New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, pp. 1-20.

<sup>39</sup> Narayana, E.A. et. al. (2011), *Women and Development in India*, New Delhi: Regal Publications. pp. 229-256.

<sup>40</sup> Rahman, Aminur. (2013), ‘Women’s Empowerment: Concept and Beyond.’ *Global Journal Of Human Social Science Sociology & Culture*, Vol. 13 Issue 6.

gender relations as against the one-sided women empowerment approach. Furthermore, empowerment is not just a question of rearrangement of power both economic and political; it is a matter of change of values. To the author, men need gender sensitization as much as women do and in fact men need it even more, for they still are in a position of domination on account of the perpetuation of patriarchy.

Prachi Singh et al,<sup>41</sup> (2013) in their article ‘A Conceptual Study on Women Empowerment – Facts and Realities’ in *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Sciences* are of the view that in spite of the enactment of many constitutional and legislative provisions for empowerment of women, the position of women in India still leaves much to be desired. Top priority should be given in developmental plans for improving female literacy and creating skills and capability among women for enabling them to stand on their own feet. But, it is the social practices and male attitudes that are making an effective and invisible barrier preventing women from rising above a certain point. Empowerment of women could only be achieved if their economic and social status is improved. This could be possible only by adopting definite social and economic policies with a view of total development of women and to make them realize that they have the potential to be strong human beings. They stress that the first and foremost priority should be given to the education of women.

Pranjali (2016)<sup>42</sup> in her article ‘Empowerment of Women in the North Eastern State: Assam’ in the *Indian Journal of Social Development* deals with the status of women in the north eastern region which is slightly different in comparison to the rest of the country. The author further discusses poverty, violence and lack of participation of women as the main issues of concern for Assam. The author has stressed the necessity of bringing the girl child to the mainstream of education as education is considered a gateway towards empowerment.

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<sup>41</sup> Singh, Prachi. *et. al* (2013), ‘A Conceptual Study on Women Empowerment – Facts and Realities.’ *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* Vol. 11, Issue 4 (May-June), p.54-63.

<sup>42</sup> Pranjali (2016), Empowerment of Women in The North Eastern State: Assam,’ *The Indian Journal of Social Development*,’ Vol.16. No.1. (Jan-June), p.67-75.



Ajailiu Niumai (2016)<sup>43</sup> in her article ‘Unspoken voices of Trafficked Women and Children in Manipur’ in the *Economic and Political Weekly* discusses that illiteracy, ignorance, gender inequality, non-implementation of policies, lack of awareness of human rights and women rights, problems stemming from insurgency etc. have pushed many children and women in Manipur to move to other states in India in search of education, shelter and jobs. These children and women have been forced to work in the sex industry and they have become victims of human trafficking. The author further mentions the crucial role played by social activists, NGOs and community leaders in the rescue operation of the trafficked victims.

Lalchatuanthangi (2016)<sup>44</sup> in her article ‘Empowerment of Women in Mizoram’ in *State and Participatory Governance in North East India* examines the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and mentions that the goal to reduce gender disparities is unique because it is not specific to any one sector or issue, such as health, education, or access to water and if it is not achieved, none of the goals under MDGs can be fully met. The author discusses about gender discrimination or injustice which is still prevailing in the Mizo society especially in the public and church leadership and there is a clear cut division of work between male and female.

Nabanita Dutta et al (2017),<sup>45</sup> in their article ‘Women Empowerment: Dimensions, Needs and Hurdles in India,’ in the *International Journal of Commerce and Management Research* state that the concept of women empowerment was introduced at the international women conference at Nairobi in 1985. They point out that education is a milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. In recent years, the empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in the status of women. The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women. The international agencies work to ensure that women have a real voice in all governance institutions, from judiciary to the civil service, as well as in the private sector and

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<sup>43</sup> Ajailiu Niumai (2016), ‘Unspoken Voices of Trafficked Women and Children in Manipur,’ in *The Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.LI No. 44 & 45, 5<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2016, p. 69-76.

<sup>44</sup> Lalchatuanthangi (2016), Empowerment of Women in Mizoram: Problems and Prospects, Lalneihzovi (Ed.) *State and Participatory Governance in North East India*, New Delhi: Mittal Publications, p. 88.

<sup>45</sup> Dutta, Nabanita. *et. al* (2017), Women Empowerment: Dimensions, Needs and Hurdles in India, *The International Journal of Commerce and Management and Research*, pp. 48-52.

civil society. The article advocates society to take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and women have full opportunities of self-decision making and participating in social, political and economic life of the country with a sense of equality.

Lakhimi Nath (2017)<sup>46</sup> in her article ‘The status of Women Empowerment in Nagaon of District Assam’ in the *Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities* has mentioned that decision-making process and freedom of movement for women are the two most important constituents of women empowerment because different types of empowerment such as economic empowerment, social empowerment, political empowerment etc. are related to decision making power and freedom of movement. The author further discusses that women should be encouraged to participate in social and economic decision making process through organising economic literacy training, providing access to mass media and new information and communication technologies.

No doubt, the above works under review are commendable. However, none of them has directly dealt with the “Role of State Commission for Women” for women empowerment in Mizoram. Therefore, the present study has been taken up with the following objectives.

### **1.6.2. Objectives of the Study:**

The objectives of the study are:

- 1) to examine the organisational structures, functions and working of Mizoram State Commission for Women for women empowerment
- 2) to find out the problems, issues and challenges of the Mizoram State Commission for Women and to explore the scope for improvement of its role in women empowerment

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<sup>46</sup> Nath, Lakhimi. (2017), ‘The Status of Women Empowerment in Nagaon District,’ *The Asian Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, Vol. 7, No. 4, April 2017, p. 78-86.

### **1.6.3. Scope of the Study:**

The study provides a conceptual overview on the Mizoram State Commission for Women and analyse its role in Women Empowerment in Mizoram. The main focus of the study is on the origin, organisational structure, functions, activities and programmes of the Commission for women empowerment. Various schemes and programmes taken up by the Commission are also analysed. The study gives attention to the activities undertaken by the MSCW in spreading awareness among women about their rights and protections. The study tries to explore the scope for improvement in the functioning of the MSCW.

### **1.6.4. Research Questions:**

The following research questions have been formulated and answered in the present study:

- (1) What are the organisational structure, functions and main activities of the MSCW for women empowerment?
- (2) What are the major problems, issues and challenges faced by the MSCW in achieving its objectives?
- (3) What are the possible solutions and measures to be undertaken to improve the working of the MSCW?

### **1.6.5. Methodology:**

The methodology of the study is based on primary data and secondary data. The primary data has been collected from personal interview with the Chairperson, Member-Secretary and other officials and functionaries associated with the Mizoram State Commission for Women. A number of observations have been drawn from these interviews. The Secondary data has been collected from available literature in the form of reports, books, journals, newspapers, handbooks, pamphlets, magazines, official records of the MSCW, Department of Social Welfare and related websites.

#### **1.6.6. Chapterization**

The whole study is divided into five Chapters. The *first* chapter is an introductory chapter which has given a brief profile of the land “Mizoram” and the people living in Mizoram with a focus on the status and position of women in the Mizo society. It has also brought out Review of literature, Objectives of the study, Scope of the study, Research Questions and Chapter-wise breakups.

In the *second* chapter, the concept of “Women Empowerment” has been studied in the light of various definitions of “Women Empowerment” given by different thinkers and authorities on the subject. It also contains an operational application of the concept of Women Empowerment at different levels-international level, national and state level, that is, Mizoram.

In the *third* chapter, an attempt has been made to study the organisational structure of the Mizoram State Commission for Women (MSCW) and its role for the empowerment of women in the State of Mizoram. It has also taken up the study of the powers and functions of the MSCW and how these functions are performed by the MSCW. It has also studied the working of the MSCW and a number of activities taken up by it for the protection and promotion of women’s rights.

The *fourth* chapter has identified and looked into the main problems faced by the MSCW for the empowerment of women. It has also studied various challenges being faced by the MSCW.

The *final* chapter is the concluding Chapter which has brought the summary and major findings of this research. It has also made some relevant suggestions for improvement of the working of MSCW for the benefit of womenfolk irrespective of their colours, creeds and religions in Mizoram.

### **1.6.7. Conclusion**

To conclude, it is strongly believed that the above discussion would serve as a background for an exhaustive study of “Women’s Empowerment” with reference to the Mizoram State Commission for Women. It is pertinent to point out that, since the work of this kind has not been done by any scholars from within and outside Mizoram, the findings of this research would be very helpful not only to the academicians but also for the policy makers at the State level.

## CHAPTER-II

### WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT-A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

#### 2.1. Introduction

Gender discrimination is a universal phenomenon. It is manifested in various forms in every society. As a result of gender discrimination, women are denied equal access to education, food, nutrition, healthcare, employment and wages with men. They are also denied the opportunities to participate in the decision making process. Therefore, empowerment of women is indispensable as it involves the improvement of the status of women in the family and the society. The concept of 'Women Empowerment' was introduced at the International Women's Conference in 1985 at Nairobi.<sup>1</sup> The Conference concluded that women empowerment is a redistribution of power and control of resources in favour of women through positive intervention 'Women Empowerment' has become one of the most important concerns of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century not only at the national level but also at the international level.

#### 2.2. Conceptual Meaning of Women's Empowerment

The term 'Empowerment' literally means 'to enable' or 'to authorize.' Women's Empowerment in its simplest form means the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal structure and the male dominance. It may call for the transformation of structures or institutions that are in forces. It is the process of enabling women to have access to and to have control over materials as well as information resources. Hence, women empowerment points to the process of strengthening the hands of women who have been suffering from various disabilities, inequalities and discriminations and to enable them to control their own lives. It refers to the process of providing powers to women to become free from the control of others and also providing equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities to women so that they are able to play a role on par with the men in society.

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<sup>1</sup> Aruna Goel (2009), *Empowerment Women: Myth or Reality*, New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd. P. 37.

The term ‘ Women Empowerment’ has been defined differently by a number of writers in their own ways. According to Kate Young (1993), “Empowerment enables women to take control of their own lives, set their own objectives, organize to help each other and make demands on the state for support and on the society itself for change.”<sup>2</sup> She summarizes the concept of ‘Empowerment’ from individual to wider political perspectives and puts sufficient importance to Collective Action.

According to Sushama Sahay (1998), “Empowerment is an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life.”<sup>3</sup> The objective of women empowerment is to create large scale awareness with the active cooperation of women themselves.<sup>4</sup>

Naila Kabeer (1989) interprets ‘Women Empowerment’ as a redial transformation of power relations between women and men “so that women have greater power over their own lives and men have less power over women’s lives.” She further adds that “such power cannot be given; it has to be self-generated.”<sup>5</sup>

Vanessa Griffen (1987) explains ‘Empowerment’ as having control, or gaining further control; having a say and being listened to; being able to define and create from a women’s perspectives; being able to influence social choices and decisions affecting the whole society (not just areas of society accepted as women’s place) being recognized and respected as equal citizens and human beings with a contribution to make.<sup>6</sup>

According to Pillai (1995), “Empowerment is an active, multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. Power is not a commodity to be transacted; nor can it be given away as alms.

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<sup>2</sup> Pranjali (2016), ‘Empowerment of Women in the North Eastern State: Assam,’ *Indian Journal of Social Development*, Vol. 16 (Jan –June), 67-75. p.

<sup>3</sup> K.C. Mandal (2013), ‘Concept and Types of Women Empowerment,’ *International Forum of Teaching and Studies*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 17-30.

<sup>4</sup> Ramanaiyah ed. al (2007), ‘Women Empowerment: Issues and Concerns,’ in M.Lakhshmi pathi Raju (ed.,) book *Women Empowerment Challenges and Strategies*, New Delhi: Regal Publications. p.21

<sup>5</sup> <https://globaljournals.org>. Accessed on 19.10.17.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Power has to be acquired and once acquired, it needs to be exercised, sustained and preserved.”<sup>7</sup>

Valsamma Antony (2006) considers that “Empowerment of women is a multi-dimensional process which should enable the individuals or a group of individuals to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. Empowerment of women means enjoyment of equal rights, equal status and freedom with men.”<sup>8</sup>

Andre Beteille (1999) says that implicit in the idea of empowerment is a certain theory of social change, in particular, the change from a hierarchical to an egalitarian type of society. “It is about social transformation or radical social transformation and above all it is about power. Empowerment is both a means to an end and an end in itself.” He further adds that “the main point behind empowerment is that it seeks to change society through a rearrangement of power.”<sup>9</sup>

The above scholars have emphasized power, power redistribution and power relationship while defining ‘Women Empowerment.’ The term ‘Empowerment’ contains power and this power means control over resources and ideology. The resources may be categorized into physical, human, intellectual, financial, and self, including self-esteem, confidence and creativity. Ideology refers to beliefs, values, attitudes and ways of thinking and perceiving situations. In short, empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control, and is a transformative action.

The term ‘Women Empowerment’ has been defined not only by scholars but also by International Organizations. The United Nations Population Information Network (UNPIN) defines ‘Women Empowerment’ “as having five components: Women’s sense of self worth, their rights to have and to determine choices; their rights to have access to opportunities and resources; their rights to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside home, and their ability to influence

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<sup>7</sup> Shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in accessed on 16.10.17.

<sup>8</sup> Valsamma Antony, ‘Education and Employment- The Key to Women Empowerment,’ in *The Kurukshetra*, 54 No.4, February, 2006. P.27.

<sup>9</sup> <https://globaljournals.org> accessed on 19.10.17.



the direction of social change to create a more just, social and economic order, nationally and internationally.”<sup>10</sup>

From the above definitions, it has become crystal clear that ‘Women Empowerment’ involves the following:-

- (1) Women Empowerment is a multi-dimensional process that counteracts women’s oppression. It is the process which enables women to realize their full identities and potentials that leads them to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions.
- (2) Women Empowerment implies the transformation power relations between women and men where women have greater power over their own lives and set their own objectives so that they can transform their choices into actions.
- (3) Women Empowerment is the power to have equal access, opportunities and resources with men in the society for their personal development and for the development of the family and society.
- (4) When women are free of male dominance and can make independent choices, they are said to be empowered. Therefore women empowerment leads women to have self-confidence and self-worth.
- (5) Women Empowerment is a process that is both individual and collective. Sometimes it involves people as groups that most often begin to develop their awareness and the ability to organize to take action and bring about change. Creating large scale awareness amongst the people about the rights and protections available to women is indispensable for women empowerment.

There is no one person or institution or agency which alone can empower women. The creation of an enabling environment through strong polity support, the work of voluntary organizations, women’s groups, academicians and researchers,

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<sup>10</sup> A.Singh, (2008), *Women Empowerment and Sustainable Development*, New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, p.4.

committed bureaucrats can provide support to take forward the agenda of women empowerment. There are some women organizations which have been playing a dynamic role for women empowerment. Ultimately, it is the woman herself who has to empower herself within the family and outside the home. Women Empowerment is a multidimensional concept as it involves the upliftment of the economic, social and political status of women.

The operational definition of 'Women Empowerment' for the present study is more or less the same with Valsamma Antony's definition of 'Women Empowerment' as enjoyment of equal rights, equal status and freedom with men. If we look into the reality of the current situation in Mizoram, Kate Young's definition is also relevant so long as of 'Empowerment' enables women to take control of their own lives, set their own objectives, organize to help each other and make demands on the state for support and on the society itself for change.

### **2.3. Operational Application of the Concept of "Women's Empowerment"**

The concept of "Women's Empowerment" has been operationalised at different levels in the world. Hence, the researcher has made an attempt to look into different initiatives taken at the international, the national and the State level for "Women's Empowerment."

#### **2.3.1. Women's Empowerment at the International Level**

The Charter of the United Nations (UNs) signed in 1945 is the first International Agreement that proclaims gender equality as the fundamental right. The first Chapter of the UN Charter seeks international cooperation in "promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion."<sup>11</sup> On 21st June 1946, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UNs established a full Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) as the principal global inter-governmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The function of the Commission was to prepare Recommendations and Reports on the promotion of women's rights in political, economic, social and

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<sup>11</sup> *Article 1 (3) of the first Chapter of the United Nations Charter.*

educational fields and on urgent matters concerning women's rights. Consequently, on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1948, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 2 of this Declaration states that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration without distinction of any kind."<sup>12</sup> It further states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

The UNs is concerned about violence against women which is an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace. The UNGA has recognized 8<sup>th</sup> March as the International Women's Day since 1975 and proclaimed 1976-1985 as the UNs' Decade for Women. Consequently, attention and action on women's concerns have constantly increased with a focus on education of women. Women's organizations, governmental agencies and international donor agencies are of the view that when educated women understand their conditions and rights, empowerment would follow.<sup>13</sup>

A number of World Conferences on Women (WCW) have been conducted by the UNs with a view to the advancement of women worldwide. The *first* WCW was held in Mexico from 19<sup>th</sup> June to 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1975 which coincided with the International Women's Year to remind the world community that discrimination against Women continued to be a chronic problem throughout the world. The following goals were created.

1. Full gender equality and elimination of gender discrimination.
2. The integration and full participation of women in development.
3. An increased contribution by women in strengthening of world peace.

The Mexico Plan of Action adopted by the UNGA offered guidelines for Governments and international community to follow over the next ten years to achieve the above three objectives. The Conference had also reached a new consensus that development is not possible without the full participation of women. Hence, it has become necessary for women to have equal access to resources like

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<sup>12</sup> Article 2 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

<sup>13</sup> K. Visweswara Rao (2007), 'Empower the Women: Need of the Hour,' in M.Lakshmi pathi Raju ( ed.) book *Women Empowerment Challenges and Strategies*, New Delhi, Regal Publications, p. 393.

education, health services, nutrition, political participation, employment opportunities etc. along with men.<sup>14</sup>

The *second* WCW of the UNs was held at Copenhagen in 1980 whose main concern was inconsistency existing between universal legal rights for women and women's ability to exercise these rights. This Conference identified some barriers of women's empowerment such as lack of political will, lack of sufficient involvement of men in improving women's role in society, lack of recognition of the value of women's contributions to society, shortage of women in decision making body, lack of awareness among women about their rights and opportunities and so on.<sup>15</sup> This Conference had also signed the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which had been adopted in 1975 by the UNGA, giving special emphasis on improving women's employment and education.<sup>16</sup> The Convention targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations, and it is the first human rights treaty to affirm the reproductive rights of women. Hence, CEDAW is often described as an International Bill of Rights for Women.

The *third* WCW of the UNs held at Nairobi in 1985 had adopted the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies (NLFS) for the advancement of the status of women in national and international economic, social, cultural and legal development. After assessing the achievements of the UNs, Decade for women, the UNs had revealed that improvement in the status of women and efforts to reduce discrimination had benefitted only a small minority of women. Therefore, the NFLS had established the following steps as measure for achieving equality at the national levels.

1. Constitutional and legal steps to be taken.
2. Strive towards equality in social participation.
3. Strive towards equality in political participation and decision making.

The *fourth* WCW of the UNs at Beijing 1995 had adopted Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) as an agenda for Women

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ngocsw.org/2012/06> accessed on 7.10.2017

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*

<sup>16</sup> Rao, K.Visweswara. *Op. cit.* p.394.

Empowerment. Here, based on the Vienna Conference on Human Rights, that Women's rights are human rights, a shift of focus from 'women' to the concept of 'gender' recognizing that all relations between men and women in the society has to be re-evaluated. The BPFA has spelled out *twelve* solutions necessary for women's advancement. They are:<sup>17</sup>

- (1) Women and poverty
- (2) Education and training of women
- (3) Women and health
- (4) Violence against women
- (5) Women in armed conflict
- (6) Women and the economy
- (7) Women in power and decision making
- (8) Institutional mechanisms for advancement of women
- (9) Human rights of women
- (10) Women and Media
- (11) Women and the environment
- (12) The girl child.

In this regard, it is relevant to recollect the Declaration of the UNs Conference on Environment and Development (ICED) at Rio de Janeiro (1992) which provided that women have a vital role to play in environment management and development, and their full participation is essential for the achievement of sustainable development. The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna (1993) also urged the Governments and the UNs to ensure equal rights for women and stress on the importance of elimination of violence against women.

Further, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), in Cairo (1994) had declared that there are *four* requirements for any programme of population and development:<sup>18</sup> gender equality; empowerment of women; the ability of women to control their own fertility; and the elimination of

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<sup>17</sup> United Nations. (1996). *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995*, United Nations Publications, New York, Pp.18-118.

<sup>18</sup> *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo from 3-13 September 1994*, dated 18 October 1994, pp.25 -52.

violence against women. One of the main objectives of this Conference is to ensure the enhancement of women's contribution to sustainable development through their full involvement in policy and decision-making processes as active decision-makers, participants and beneficiaries at all stages and in all aspects of production, employment, income generating activities, education, health, science and technology, sports, culture and population-related activities and other areas.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2010, the UNGA unanimously voted to create a single UN Body which would strive to achieve gender equality and women empowerment. This new UN Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women merged four agencies and offices of the World bodies, namely, the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, and the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW).

The UNs is now focusing its global development work on the recently developed 17 (seventeen) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal number 5 (five) of the SDGs pertaining to achievement of gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls is known as the stand alone gender goal. Apparently, drastic and legislative changes are needed to ensure women's rights throughout the world. One of the Millenium Development Goals of the UN also attempts to promote gender equality and women empowerment.<sup>19</sup> The UNGA has also designated November 25 as the "International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The premise of the day is to raise awareness of the fact that women around the world are subject to rape, domestic violence and other forms of violence; furthermore, one of the aims of the day is to highlight that the scale and true nature of the issue is often hidden.

Since 1911, the Women's groups around the world have been celebrating March 8<sup>th</sup> as the International Women's Day. Each year, different themes relevant to global and local issues have been chosen by many Women's groups. Accordingly, the theme for the International Women's Day of 2017 as declared by the UNs is "Be

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<sup>19</sup> Bipin Kumar (2009), 'Empowerment of Women and Globalisation' in Bipin Kumar (ed.) book *Globalisation and Women Empowerment*, New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd, p.4.

bold for Change.” And the objective behind this declaration is to achieve full gender equality for women, since gender gap still remains.

### **2.3.2. Women’s Empowerment at the National Level**

In India, the concern for women’s political equality first emerged as a political issue during the national movement in which women were active participants. Mahatma Gandhi played a crucial role in creating a favourable atmosphere for women’s participation in the freedom struggle. Mahatma Gandhi was of the opinion that the struggle for women’s equality was an integral part of the movement for ‘*Swaraj*.’ This mass participation of women directly in the freedom struggle was a notable landmark in the history of women empowerment in India.<sup>20</sup>

In India, the need for ‘Women Empowerment’ was felt in the post-independence period. Though women who constitute half of the country’s population worked harder than their male counterparts, they were less paid as they did not have representatives in governmental institutions. The framers of our Constitution were aware of the historical position of women in Indian society. Therefore, the Constitution of India, under the Directive Principles of State Policy, emphasizes the importance of greater freedom for all and hence guarantees equal pay for equal work for both men and women<sup>21</sup> and has provided that men and women equally have the right to adequate means of livelihood.<sup>22</sup> The Constitution has also made a provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.<sup>23</sup> It is the fundamental duty of every citizen to renounce the practices derogatory to the dignity of women.<sup>24</sup>

The Constitution not only grants equality before law and equal protection to all women,<sup>25</sup> but also provides equal opportunity in matters of public employment.<sup>26</sup> It empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of

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<sup>20</sup> Prachi Singh and Shilpi Gupta(2013), ‘A Conceptual Study on Women Empowerment-Facts and Realities’, *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* Vol-11, Issue 4, p. 54-63.

<sup>21</sup> Article 39 (d) of *the Indian Constitution*.

<sup>22</sup> Article 39 (a) of *the Indian Constitution*.

<sup>23</sup> Article 42 of *the Indian Constitution*.

<sup>24</sup> Article 15 A (e) of *the Indian Constitution*.

<sup>25</sup> Article 14 of *the Indian Constitution*.

<sup>26</sup> Article 16 of *the Indian Constitution*.

women.<sup>27</sup> Further, it protects women against discrimination on the basis of sex.<sup>28</sup> In addition to the Constitutional provisions, the Government of India has passed numerous legislations for the protection and empowerment of women. It was against this background that some institutions have been created by the Governments for the improvement of the living and working condition of women and to end numerous problems faced by them both at the national and the state levels.

In 1953, the Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) was set up by a Resolution of Government of India with the object of promoting social welfare activities and implementing welfare programmes for women, children and the handicapped through voluntary organizations. The Board was given the dual responsibility of taking welfare services to the disadvantaged sections of the society especially women and children, and also developing a nationwide infrastructure of voluntary agencies through which these services could be made available. In 1964, the Government of India had also established the Department of Social Welfare to look after women issues from the welfare point of view, the primarily focusing on women in distress. The adoption of the National Plan of Action for women in 1976 is a clear proof for the concern of Government of India towards women's issues.

Within the framework of a democratic polity, the national laws, development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at Women's upliftment in different spheres. During the First to Fourth Five Year Plan efforts had been made to promote women and child welfare. From the Fifth Five Year Plan onwards, there was a shift in the approach to women welfare to development. The strategy of the Sixth Five Year Plan was threefold: education, employment and health of women. The Seventh Five Year Plan sought to generate awareness among women about their rights and privileges. In spite of all the positive measures taken the Government of India, women in India continue to be denied economic, social, legal rights and privileges. They also continue to face numerous problems including violent victimisation through rape, acid throwing, dowry killings and forced prostitution. India is ranked as the worst G20 country to be born a woman and one of the worst countries for

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<sup>27</sup> Article 15(3) of *the Indian Constitution*.

<sup>28</sup> Article 15 (1) of *the Indian Constitution*.



women in the world.<sup>29</sup> It is, therefore, imperative for the Indian society in general and the States in particular to provide the necessary conditions and support to enable women to perform their various roles successfully.

In 1971, the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, Government of India, appointed a Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) in India to study the status of women in India. Through its study, this Committee had highlighted the inequalities suffered by women in the spheres of employment, health and education and the failure of government to ensure the application of rights guaranteed by the Constitution to women. The Committee had pointed out that the Indian State had failed in its constitutional responsibility of not discriminating on grounds of gender. In 1986, the Indian Parliament adopted National Policy on Education for women's equality. Women themselves had become aware of their rights and thus started launching movements across the country against all sorts of social evils and practices. This was largely because of an increase in women's literacy. The Eight Five Year Plan had also focused on women's empowerment especially at the grassroot level through Panchayati Raj Institutions. Under the Ninth Five Year Plan, the Central Government had earmarked at least 30 percent of the funds for women specific programmes. The Tenth Five Year Plan also laid emphasis on translation of the National Policy for Empowerment of Women into action. In addition, the Eleventh Five Year Plan had laid stress on curbing violence against women.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, the CSW, in its first Comprehensive Report on the status of women in India, noted the absence of women's perspectives in the overall development process and the indifference of policy makers and planners. Meanwhile, many women's organizations had raised their demand for the setting up of a statutory body for protecting their rights in 1976. Accordingly, the Government of India has made institutional arrangements for the improvement of the living and working condition of women by safeguarding their rights and legal entitlements both at the national and the state level. At the national level, the National Commission for Women (NCW) was set up on 30th January 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act 1990 (number 20 of 1990) which came into force on 31<sup>st</sup> January

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.amnestyusa.org>. Accessed on 26.11.17.

<sup>30</sup> Aruna Goel, *Op. cit.*, p.23

1992. Except in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, the NCW Act, 1990 has its jurisdiction throughout India. However, the NCW Act 1990 has not provided for State counterparts. The State Governments are requested to set up similar State Commissions for Women (SCW) in their respective States.

The NCW consists of a full time Chairperson, five members and a Member-Secretary. They are all appointed by the Government of India for a period of three years. The goal of the NCW is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. Creating an environment where women are able to, realize their full potential, enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms in all spheres - social, economic, political, cultural and civil; have equal access to health care, employment, remuneration, occupational health and safety, social security and public office, etc. The NCW aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and violence against a girl child by strengthening the legal system. It further aims to build and strengthen partnerships with civil society, particularly women's organizations. NCW also intends to promote social awareness to gender issue and women's human rights, removal of all references derogatory to the dignity of women from all public documents and legal instruments.<sup>31</sup>

As the nodal agency for all matters pertaining to welfare, development and empowerment of women, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has evolved schemes and programmes for the benefit of women. These schemes are spreading across a broad spectrum such as women's need for shelter, security, safety, legal aid, justice, information, health, food, nutrition etc. as well as their need for economic sustenance through skill development, education and access to credit and marketing. The schemes of the Ministry like Swashakti, Swayamsidha, STEP and Swawlamban enable economic empowerment. Working Women Hostels and Creches provide support services. Swadhar and Short Stay Homes provide protection and rehabilitation to women in difficult circumstances. All these organisations are directed to ensure that women are empowered economically and socially and thus become equal partners in the national development along with men.

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<sup>31</sup> P.Arjun (2007), 'Women Empowerment (Socio-economic and Political),' in Bipin Kumar (ed.) book *Globalisation and Women Empowerment*, New Delhi: Regal Publications, p.149.

In 1992, the Union Parliament had passed the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts which ensure reservation of 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the seats for women in all elected offices of rural and urban local bodies. No doubt, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment Acts have provided access to women in the decision making process at the grassroot level but their representation in the Parliament and State Legislatures is still minimal.

After independence, the Government of India has taken the following measures for safeguarding women's interests. Some of them are mentioned below:<sup>32</sup>

- (1) The Special Marriage Act, 1954: This Act has fixed the age of marriage at 21 for males and 18 for females and provided right to women for inter-caste marriage, love marriage and registered marriage.
- (2) The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 which prohibits child marriage, polygamy, polyandry and provides equal rights to women to divorce and to remarry.
- (3) The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 which provides right to parental property.
- (4) The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 under which a childless woman can adopt a child and claim maintenance from her husband if she is divorced by him.
- (5) The Immoral Traffick (Prevention) Act, 1956.
- (6) The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 which prevents giving and taking dowry and women Exploitation.
- (7) The Suppression of Immoral Traffic of Women and Girls Act, 1956.
- (8) The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971.
- (9) The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 (25 of 1976).
- (10) The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983.
- (11) The Family Court Act, 1984.
- (12) The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986.
- (13) The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 (3 of 1988).
- (14) The National Commission for Women Act, 1990.
- (15) The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

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<sup>32</sup> Prachi Singh, *Op. Cit.*, p. 58

- (16) The Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act, 2006.
- (17) The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012.
- (18) The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.

In spite of the various measures taken by the Government of India, women have not been fully empowered in India where there are still so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry harassment, dowry death, domestic violence against women, human-trafficking and others. Female infanticide is one of the greatest crimes against humanity that is being practiced in India. Discrimination against girl child, adolescent girls and women persists in different parts of the country although the Government of India had ratified various International Conventions, namely, “The Mexico Plan of Action” way back in 1975, “The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies” in 1985 and “The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)” 1993 and “The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action” in 1995 and the Outcome Document of the UNGA Session on Gender Equality and Development and Peace for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, titled “Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action.” According to the 2011 Census, the sex ratio at the national level is 933 females per 1000 males.<sup>33</sup>

The Government of India had declared 2001 as the year for the empowerment of women (Swashakti) and, in the same year, the National Policy for the empowerment of Woman came into existence. The main goal of the National Policy for the empowerment of women (2001) is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women. The objectives of this policy include creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for full development of women, equal access to participation and decision making of women, equal access to women to healthcare, quality education at all levels, remuneration, social security and public office, and strengthening legal system aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and so on.

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<sup>33</sup> [http://censusindia.gov.in/Census\\_Data\\_2001](http://censusindia.gov.in/Census_Data_2001) accessed on 24.10.17

### 2.3.3. Women's Empowerment at the State level- Mizoram

The status of women in the Mizo society is slightly different in comparison to other societies in the country. Women have always played an important role in the socio-economic life of the society. Mizo society is characterized by a deeply communitarian nature where social life is free and men and women mix together freely. In spite of their social freedom and their significant contributions in the family, Mizo women are not liberated and they are regarded inferior to men and discriminated against in various aspects of life.<sup>34</sup>

The social evils like purdah system, sati-system, child marriage and female infanticide are absent in the Mizo society. But this does not mean that Mizo women are free from discriminating social practices. However, the status of women in the past, especially in the pre-Christian days was very low both in the family as well as in the social life. In the case of divorce, Mizo women had no legal claim on the family property except a small share which they brought with them at the time of their marriage. If the divorce was, however, due to adultery she had nothing to claim including her own properties. The marriage price was also to be given back to the husband. All the children legitimate or illegitimate belonged to the father.<sup>35</sup> Even in the absence of a male child, a daughter could not claim, as a matter of right, the family property, but would normally go to the nearest male relatives.

Mizo women did not possess any rights in matters of succession and inheritance despite their hard labour both inside their house and in the fields. This is seen as an extreme case of deprivation for women. Today, some educated parents have begun dividing their property among the sons and daughters. But most of the parents maintain the traditional practice.<sup>36</sup>

In the Mizo traditional society, the husband-wife relationship was never reciprocal but avoidance. Mizo men mistreat their wives as helpers, subordinates or

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<sup>34</sup> Lalhriatpuii (2007), '*Gender and Economic Development: A case study of Mizoram*' (Unpublished Ph.D Thesis submitted to the Mizoram University, Department of Economics, Mizoram, Aizawl, p. 36.

<sup>35</sup> Sangkima (2004), *Essays on the History of the Mizos*, Guwahati: New Delhi: Spectrum Publications, pp.93-94.

<sup>36</sup> Lalthansangi (2016), '*A Baseline Survey on Social, Political and Economic Empowerment of Women in Mizoram*', New Delhi: National Commission for Women, pp. 14-42.

as servants and do not think of them as partners. In traditional society, peaceful conversation between husband and wife was considered degrading for the man and till today, if a man is found helping his wife in household chores, he is dubbed as henpecked, not only by the males but also by the females themselves.<sup>37</sup> Women were often subjected to violence and other hardships. They had to face beatings and other abuse especially if the husband was a drunkard. Men often beat not only their wives but also their children too and they often damaged household properties. If a husband beat his wife, other people hardly interfered since they did not want to get involved in another's domestic problem. Thus, it can be assumed that marriage life was not a pleasant one for many women.<sup>38</sup>

A popular belief was that when human beings died, on their way to the place of the dead, a man called 'Pawla' would try to shoot anyone who passed by with a pellet. He, however, would not shoot anyone who had had a physical relationship with a woman, and a woman who was still a virgin. It can be known from these beliefs that the society expected women to be pure and chaste till she was married. Thus, a woman's position in society would be a difficult one since men would try to take advantage while the girls would try their best to remain chaste. Women therefore always had to follow the norms which the male values of the society expected of her.<sup>39</sup>

Many women run small family business or micro enterprises which require very little capital and often involve in the marketing of food articles and handicrafts produced under the domestic system. They are engaged in different activities and small entrepreneurship - handloom and handicraft, floriculture, tailoring, beauty parlour and others. In most parts of Mizoram there are more females than males to be seen managing and running shops, tea stalls, restaurants and other variety stores. The main bazaar in Aizawl, the capital city looks like a women's market. But being a patriarchal society, the father or the husband is the head of the house and most business is usually registered in the name of the father or the husband. Though the

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<sup>37</sup> Colbert, Irene (2008), Women and Politics in Mizoram,' in J.K.Patnaik (Ed.), book *Mizoram: Dimension and Perspectives*: New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, pp. 341-344.

<sup>38</sup> Lalrinchhani, B. (2004), 'A Gender Study of the socio-economic History of the Early Mizo,' in Sangkima (Ed.), book *Modern History of Mizoram*, Guwahati: Delhi: Spectrum Publications, pp. 35-36.

<sup>39</sup> Lalrinchhani, B. *Ibid*, p.37.

contribution of women to their family is substantial, they do not get their due recognition.<sup>40</sup>

Women are excluded in the decision making process in all the important bodies in the State of Mizoram. Ever since the coming of Christianity and establishment of the church in Mizoram women played an important role in evangelization work and in various aspects of life. They continue to be the limbs of the church in various ways. Women continue to play assisting roles only and even trained women do not get their right job and responsibilities in the church as they are excluded from various decision making bodies, ordination and other responsible positions.

The whole political process in the traditional Mizo society was completely dominated by men. The women folk did not have right to rule as rightful heirs. However, a woman had a chance to become a chief if her husband (who is the reigning chief) had died. The chief's wife acted as a regent, and reigned on behalf of her minor son and occupied the vacant throne left by the husband on account of death.<sup>41</sup> This practice was followed until the abolition of chieftainship in Mizoram in 1954.

There was practically no space for women to participate in the village administration in the traditional Mizo society. With the abolition of chieftainship, the political functions of the chief were taken over by the democratically elected District Council and the Village Councils. And each village is governed by the Village Council. The members of the Village Councils are elected by the people wherein women are hardly elected. The mindset of the people in Mizo society is still governed by the notion that women are not worthy to be leaders.

Despite the increasing numbers of educated women only few women hold important positions in government jobs. Therefore, it can be said that Mizo women continue to suffer discrimination in the field of politics as well as in decision making process. Women's equal participation in the decision making process, policy making, planning and administration is extremely important to ensure their equality

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<sup>40</sup> Colbert. Irene, *Op. cit.*, p. 349.

<sup>41</sup> Sangkima, *Op. cit.*, p.160.

while participating in the development process. It is therefore, necessary to do something so that women's participation in politics and decision making can be improved to cause women's development in society.

In 1954, the State Social Welfare Advisory Boards were set up in the States and Union Territories to implement the programmes of the Board and assist the Central Social Welfare Board in expansion and development of welfare services. During 1973-1974, the Department of Social Welfare was established in Mizoram as a Wing of the Department of Education. It was expanded and upgraded into a full-fledged department in the year 1980-81. The Department of Social Welfare is responsible for the welfare, social, justice and empowerment of the disadvantaged and marginalized sections of the society. It has been instrumental in bringing about major improvements and social justice to those in need of its services. To ensure that women are uplifted, protected and empowered, a number of steps have been taken by the Department.

Since 11<sup>th</sup> August 1998, the State of Mizoram has its own State Commission for Women, called "Mizoram State Commission for Women (MSCW),"<sup>42</sup> which is an important institutional arrangement for monitoring women welfare and development. This Commission has become a Statutory Body with the enactment of "The Mizoram Commission for Women Act 2004." The Commission consists of a Chairperson and seven members who are nominated by the Government of Mizoram for a term of three years. In addition, there is a provision for a Member-Secretary to be nominated by the State Government. The main function of the Commission is to investigate and examine of all matters relating to the safeguards provided for women under the Constitution and other laws and recommend steps to be taken by the State government for effective implementation of such safeguards.

The Commission is protecting and promoting the rights and interests of women and dealing with violence against women in the State of Mizoram and especially in situations where women are in need of help of the Commission. The Commission has taken up a number of cases including maintenance grant for wife and children, sexual harassment of women at the workplace, crime against women

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<sup>42</sup> Government of Mizoram, *Notification* No. A.14011/5/95-SWD Dated 11/8/98.



like rape, attempt to rape, domestic violence against women, cruelty by husband, molestation, kidnapping and property dispute. The Commission has helped many women in distress by giving solutions to their problems.

The MSCW has also organized a number of legal awareness programmes on topics like the Immoral Human Trafficking Act, 1956, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and the Protection of Children From Sexual Offences Act, 2012, in different parts of the State. Moreover, Women Cell of *Aizawl* Police Station, Women at the Central Jail and Protective Home at *Maumual* are visited by the Commission from time to time in order to know the condition of women at these places. However, the Commission is only a recommendatory body and does not have the power to implement.

In addition to the above, the Department of Social Welfare, Government of Mizoram has been implementing several schemes which are given below:-

**(1) Socio-Economic Rehabilitation Programme and Destitute Women:**

The department is implementing the scheme of Economic Rehabilitation to Poor and Destitute Women like widows, divorcees, unmarried women with minor children. Women in need of care, protection and economic upliftment are provided with fund for poultry and piggery under the scheme.

**(2) Residential Institute and Training Centre (RITC):**

This centre imparts a one year course training on Tailoring and Knitting to those women who are poor and destitute in order for them to have gainful employment and to look after themselves.

**(3) Protective Home Under The Immoral Traffick (Prevention) Act, 1956 (SIT Act):**

Under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 (SIT Act), Protective Home was established by the Government of Mizoram. This home is a place wherein convicted victims of immoral trafficking are provided care and counseling for correction, protection and treatment. The capacity of this home is 25.

**(4) Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005:**

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 provides for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the Constitution who are the victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 has been in operation since 2006 in Mizoram. There are at present 6 Protection Officers in six districts to look after the implementation of this Act.

**(5) State Resource Centre for Women:**

The State Resource Centre for Women (SRCW) was set up at Aizawl as per the recommendation made by the National Mission for Empowerment of Women. The SRCW is working towards implementing gender sensitive programmes, laws and schemes through effective coordination at the state level. It may review and evaluate existing policies, programmes and legislations so that activities which are cross-cutting and multi-disciplinary in nature synergise harmoniously to reach women beneficiaries.

**(6) One Stop Centre (OSC):**

The OSC will support all women including girls below 18 years of age affected by violence irrespective of caste, class, religion, region, sexual orientation or marital status. The OSC will be integrated with 181 and other existing helplines. Women affected by violence and in need of redressal services could be referred to OSC through these helplines. A new building for OSC is under construction at Durtlang. In the meantime, the centre is located at Khatla near Universal Women Helpline.

**(7) Universal Women Helpline (181)**

Universal Women Helpline was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Minister Pu P.C.Lalthanliana on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2016. This is a scheme to provide immediate help to any woman affected by violence of any kind. It has been in operation in Aizawl since April 2016. Any needy woman who suffers from violence, oppression, discrimination of any kind may contact the helpline 181 at any time. It is open for 24 hours, seven days a week and can be contacted at all times.

**(8) The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012**

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012 was formulated in order to effectively address sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children. This Act was notified in the Gazette of India on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2012. The Act has been passed to address the issue of Sexual Offences against the children. Sexual Offences are covered under different Sections of IPC. However, the IPC does not provide for all types of sexual offences against children and more importantly does not distinguish between adult and child victims.

In Mizoram, the Guidelines under Section 39 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 was notified.<sup>43</sup> The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 defines a child as any person below the age of 18 years and provides protection to all children under the age of 18 years from the offence of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography. These offences have been clearly defined by law for the first time. The Act provides for stringent punishments which have been classified as per the gravity of offences. The punishment ranges from simple to rigorous imprisonment of varying periods. There is also a provision of fine which is to be decided by the Special Court.

It is the duty of the Central and State Governments to spread awareness through media including the television, radio and print media at regular interval to make the general public, children as well as parents and guardians aware of the provision of this act. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights

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<sup>43</sup> *The Mizoram Official Gazette* on 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb. 2012.

(NCPCR) and the State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR) have been made responsible to monitor the implementation of this Act.

**To uplift the status of women, the Government of Mizoram has made the following legislations:**

As per the Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, Part IX-A and the *Twelfth* Schedule has been added to the Constitution of India. The Act gives Constitutional status to the Municipalities and binds the State Governments to constitute Municipalities in accordance with the Provision of the Act. Therefore, the Government of Mizoram has enacted the Mizoram Municipalities Act, 2007 and constituted the Aizawl Municipal Council on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2008. Under this Act, the Aizawl Municipal Council consisting of 19 seats out of which 6 seats are reserved for women. This is an important landmark in the history of women empowerment in Mizoram.

With the enactment of the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act 2014 by the Mizoram Legislative Assembly on 12<sup>th</sup> Nov., 2014, seats are reserved for women in the Village Councils. If a Village Council has 3 (three) to 5 (five) seats, 1 (one) seat will be reserved for women. If a Village Council has 7 (seven) seats, 2 (two) seats will be reserved for women and if the Village Council has 9 (nine) seats, 3 (three) seats will be reserved for women. Thus, this Act enables women at the grassroot level to participate in the decision making process which is an important step towards women empowerment in Mizoram.

Another important step taken by the Government of Mizoram is the enactment of the Mizo Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance of Property Act, 2014 (Act No. 9 of 2014) by the Mizoram Legislative Assembly. Chapter VI (26) of the Act has provided that-

- (1) If the husband divorces his wife on *mak* except on ground of adultery or deprivation of her husband of his conjugal right, she will have share over the acquired property of any kind. The personal property of the woman shall not be disturbed.

- (2) If a man divorces his wife on ground of adultery or deprivation of his conjugal right except on health ground, she will have a share over the acquired property not exceeding 25% alongwith her personal property.

The above Act has changed the position of women in the Mizo society. In the past, under the Mizo Customary Law, Mizo women did not have any legal right to claim the property of the family, but now they have the legal right to claim over the family property. This Act is protecting and promoting the rights of women in the family in particular and in the society as a whole.

Since 1972, there have been only six women members in the State Legislative Assembly of Mizoram. They are Saptawni, nominated member during 1972-77, L.Thanmawii, elected twice in 1978 and in 1979, K.Thansiami, nominated member during 1979- 84 and elected in 1984, Rokungi, nominated in 1984- 87, Lalhlmpuii, elected in 1987 and recently Vanlalawmpuii Chawngthu has been elected as a member in the Mizoram Legislative Assembly from the Hrangturzo Constituency on 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2014.<sup>44</sup> Lalhlmpui has become the first woman Minister under the Government of Mizoram. This is followed by Vanlalawmpuii Chawngthu, who has been appointed as the Minister of State, Cooperation, Fisheries and Sericulture Departments, Government of Mizoram in September 2017. Out of forty Members of Legislative Assembly of Mizoram, only one (1) is a woman member, when according to the final voters' list published by the State Election Department, women voters outnumber men voters, and when half of the population in Mizoram are women.

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<sup>44</sup> Lalchatuanthangi (2016), 'Empowerment of Women in Mizoram: Problems and Prospects' in Lalneihzovi (Ed.,) book *State and Participatory Governance in North East India*, New Delhi: Mittal Publication. pp.100-101.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

From the above points, it is clear that the position of women has changed for the better, but the process of the development, promotion and protection of women's rights which is a prerequisite of women empowerment is very slow. The steps taken both at the international level and at the national level for the empowerment of women are numerous, but still there are many more steps to be taken in order to reach the goals of women empowerment. Moreover, the involvement of international organizations and governments worldwide is not enough, everyone has a role to play as a citizen, as a member of the family, as a member of the community and as a member of social groups or voluntary organizations. What is needed is attitudinal change of the whole society based on patriarchal structures.

**CHAPTER – III**  
**ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE AND ROLE OF THE MSCW**  
**IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

**3.1. Introduction**

The creation of the National Commission for Women at the national level and the State Commissions for women at the state level for the protection and promotion of women is one of the significant steps taken by the Government of India as well as the State Government for the empowerment of women. The Mizoram State Commission for Women (MSCW) was constituted by an executive order of the Government of Mizoram on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1998. Since its inception, the Commission has been functioning as a part of the Department of Social Welfare, Government of Mizoram. The office of the Commission is located at *Khatla*.

**3.2. Organizational Structure of the MSCW**

As per the Executive Order issued by the Government of Mizoram in 1998, the composition of the Mizoram State Commission for Women (MSCW) consisted of a Chairperson, a Member-Secretary and other *five* Members.<sup>1</sup> The Chairperson and all other Members of the Commission were nominated by the Government of Mizoram.<sup>2</sup> The *first* Chairperson of the Commission appointed by the State Government was Pi Lalnipuii, an M.Sc degree holder. Though she was a highly qualified Master degree holder in the physical science stream, she did not have any specialisation in women's studies. However, she got herself actively involved in the largest Mizo women's organisation in Mizoram, called *Mizo Hmeichhe Inzawmkhawm Pawl* (MHIP) and became its President. Her deep and extensive involvement in the Women's Organisation had given her an opportunity to have an understanding of the true position of women. In fact, her rich experience in the women's organisation had greatly helped her to make a new beginning in setting up the MSCW- the first of its kind in Mizoram. The original composition of the first MSCW is mentioned below:

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Mizoram, *Notification* No.A.14011/5/95-SWD Dated 11/8/98  
<sup>2</sup> Government of Mizoram, *Notification* No.A.14011/5/95-SWD Dated 11/8/98.

**Table 3:1 Composition of the *First* MSCW as on 21<sup>st</sup> Aug., 1998**

Sl.no.	Name of Member of MSCW	Name of Locality	Position
1.	Lalnipuii w/o Pu Lalfakzuala	Khatla, Aizawl	Member
2.	Lal Riliani w/o Pu Lal Thanhawla	Tuikhuahtlang , Aizawl	Member
3.	Lalrintluangi w/o Pu R.Thansanga	Tuikual , Aizawl	Member
4.	Lawmzuali w/o Pu B. Sanghnuna	Tuikhuahtlang, Aizawl	Member
5.	Lalmalsawmi Sailo, Gynaecologist	Chaltlang , Aizawl	Member
6.	Lianngengi w/o Rev.K.D. Siamliana	Bara Bazar, Aizawl	Member
7.	Lalzarliani Hmar , Joint Director, Government of Mizoram	Zotlang, Aizawl	Member- Secretary

### 3.2.1. Enlargement of the Organizational Structure of the MSCW

With the enactment of the Mizoram State Commission for Women Act 2004 which received the assent of the Governor of Mizoram on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec., 2004, the MSCW became a statutory body. According to this MSCW Act, 2004, the number of Members of MSCW has been raised from *five* to *seven*.<sup>3</sup> The Act has also prescribed, in clear term, the qualification for the Chairperson and other Members of the Commission. According to the Constitution of the Commission, a Chairperson should be-

- (a) a person committed to the cause of women.<sup>4</sup>
- (b) any person who has not attained the age of *sixty-five* years may be appointed as the Chairperson or as a Member of the Commission.<sup>5</sup>

According to the Constitution of the Commission, the Chairperson and all other 7 (seven) Members are to be nominated by the State Government from amongst persons of ability and integrity who have served the cause of women or have had experience in Law or Legislation, Trade Unionism, Management of owned industry or organization committed to increasing the employment potentials

<sup>3</sup> Act No.12 of the Mizoram State Commission for Women Act 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Section 3(2) of the Mizoram State Commission for Women Act 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Section 5(i), of the Mizoram State Commission for Women Rules, 2008,



amongst women, women's voluntary organization, administration, economic development, health, education or social welfare.<sup>6</sup>

Consequent upon the appointment of incumbent Chairman of the Commission, Ms. Vanlalawmpuii Chawngthu, MLA, as the Minister of State i/c Cooperation, Fisheries and Horticulture departments, Government of Mizoram on 22<sup>nd</sup> Sept., 2017, Pi Margaret Zohmingthangi, IAS (Rtd.) has been appointed as the new Chairperson of the MSCW by the Government of Mizoram for a period of three years or till she attains the age of 65 (sixty-five years) whichever is earlier.<sup>7</sup> The composition of the Commission as on 11<sup>th</sup> Nov., 2017 is given below:

**Table-3:2 Composition of the present Commission as on 11<sup>th</sup> Nov., 2017**

<b>Sl.no</b>	<b>Name Members of the Commission</b>	<b>Designation</b>
1.	Pi Margaret Zohmingthangi I.A.S.(Rtd)	Chairperson
2.	Pi Sylvie Z.Ralte, Chief Judicial Magistrate, Kolasib	Member
3.	Dr. Lalrindiki T. Fanai, Mizoram University	Member
4.	Dr. Zokaitluangi, Mizoram University	Member
5.	Pi Lalrosangi, Social Worker	Member
6.	Dr. T. Vanlaltlani, ATC, Durtlang	Member
7.	Pi Tlangthanmawii, Social Worker	Member
8.	Dr. Lalneihzovi, Mizoram University	Member
9.	Pi Zodinthangi, DSWO, Aizawl West	Member-Secretary

### **3.3. Tenure of Office**

With regards to tenure of office, the Chairperson and other Members of the Commission shall hold office for a term not exceeding 3 (three) years at a time or till he or she attains the age of sixty-five years, whichever is earlier.<sup>8</sup> The Chairperson and other Members of the Commission, besides the Member-Secretary, can resign from office at any time by writing to the Government of Mizoram. Apart from this, the State Government can also remove the Chairperson and any one of the Members if that person<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Notification 16.12.2004, *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Government of Mizoram, Letter No.B.12011/11/2013-SWD Dated 26<sup>th</sup> September 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Section 5(ii) of the MSCW Rules 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Government of Mizoram, Notification No.A.14011/5/95-SWD Dated 11/8/98

- (a) becomes an undischarged insolvent.
- (b) is convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for an offence which in the opinion of the State Government involves moral turpitude;
- (c) becomes an unsound mind and stands so declared by a competent court;
- (d) refuses to act or becomes incapable of acting;
- (e) is, without obtaining leave of absence from the Commission, absent from three consecutive meetings of the Commission; or
- (f) in the opinion of the State Government has so abused the position of Chairperson or Member as to render that person's continuance in office is detrimental to the public interest.

The MSCW shall hold quarterly meeting to evaluate and monitor the progress for the development of women and to report to the Government. The Commission shall meet as and when necessary and shall meet at such time and place as the Chairperson may think fit. The Commission shall also submit its Annual Expenditure Report duly authenticated by the Auditor of Accounts and Treasuries Department to the Government within two months from closing of the financial year.<sup>10</sup>

### **3.4 Legal Cell of MSWC**

The MSCW has been empowered by its Constitution to appoint a Committee or Committees as it may consider necessary in the discharge of its functions under the MSCW Act 2004. Accordingly, the Commission has the power to co-opt as members of any committee and the persons so co-opted shall have the right to attend the meeting of the Committee to which they have been co-opted and take part in its proceedings but shall not have the right to vote in any of the meetings of such Committee or Commission. Being empowered by its Constitution, the MSCW has set up within its organization a Legal Cell for the effective functioning of the

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<sup>10</sup> *Notification 16.8.2008, Op. cit., p.7.*

Commission.<sup>11</sup> The first Legal Cell was created in the year 2012 and had its first meeting on 5.10.2012. The following persons are the incumbent Members of the Legal Cell of MSCW, who were appointed by the Commission for a term of three years on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

**Table-3:3 Incumbent Members of Legal Cell of MSCW**

Sl.no.	Name	Designation & Address
1.	Mrs. Lucy Lalrinthari	District and Sessions Judge
2.	Mr. Joel Joseph Denga	Member Secretary, Mizoram State Legal Services Authority, Mizoram
3.	Mr. L.H.Lianhrima	Senior Advocate, Aizawl
4.	Mr. Lallianzuala Sailo	Advocate, Aizawl
5.	Mr. T.Lalnunsiam	Advocate, Aizawl
6.	Mr. J.C.Lalnunsanga	Advocate, Aizawl
7.	Pi Vanlaldini	Ramhlun North, Aizawl
8.	Dr. P.C.Lalramenga M.D	Medical Doctor

The meetings of the Commission and its Legal Cell are called as and when necessary and at such time and place as the Chairperson may think fit. All important decisions are made collectively by the Members of the Commission. Sometimes, Joint meetings of the MSCW and Legal Cell are also held.

### **3.5. Administrative Structure of MSCW**

The Member Secretary is the administrative head of the office of the MSWC and is responsible to implement the decisions of the Commission and its Legal Cell. According to the Notification issued by the Government of Mizoram, the Member-Secretary of the Commission should be nominated by the Government of Mizoram from among persons who shall be

- (i) an expert in the field of management of non-governmental organization, or social movement, or
- (ii) an officer of the State Government with adequate experience.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Chapter II Section 8(1) of the Act 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Government of Mizoram, *Notification* No. H. 12018/146/04-LJD/4, Dated 16.12.2004

If an officer in the service of the State Government is going to be appointed as the Member-Secretary of the Commission, he/she shall be an Officer of the rank of Joint Director and shall be deputed from amongst officers of Social Welfare Department of the State Government with appropriate experience. This qualification for the appointment of Member-Secretary was amended by the MSCW Rules, 2010 which has come into force since 13<sup>th</sup> August, 2010. In this Amendment of the MSCW Rules, 2010, it has been provided that the words ‘Joint Director’ shall be substituted by the words “Group ‘A’ Officers.”<sup>13</sup> It has also been provided by the MSCW Rules 2008, that the Member-Secretary shall be a full time official of the Commission,<sup>14</sup> and he or she shall be entitled for all the usual pay and allowances and other facilities as admissible under the Rules relating to his or her service. The administrative staff of the Commission are as follows:

**Table-3:4 Administrative Staff of MSCW**

<b>Sl.no</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Number</b>
1.	Upper Divisional Clerk	1 no.
2.	Lower Divisional Clerk	1 no.
3.	Fourth Grade	2 nos.
4.	Driver	1 no.

It is also provided that the staff other than the Chairman and the Member-Secretary shall be appointed by the Commission with prior approval of the Government. However, the Government may depute its officers and staff to the Commission<sup>15</sup>.

From the above, it is clear that the strength of staff members in the Commission is only 5(five). Moreover, the staff members are either on deputation or Muster Roll. The administrative functions of the Commission have been discharged by the 5(five) staff members under the supervision of the Member-Secretary. The present strength of the staff members is not adequate to meet the needs of the

<sup>13</sup> Government of Mizoram, *Notification* No. B.14011/3/05-SWD Dated 2.12.2010

<sup>14</sup> Government of Mizoram, *Notification* No. B.14011/3/05-SWD Dated 16.10.2008

<sup>15</sup> *Notification* 16.10.2008, *Op. cit.*

Commission. Shortage of adequate and competent staff is a big obstacle for the effective and efficient functioning of this Commission.

### **3.6. Functions of the MSCW for Women's Empowerment**

The main functions of the MSCW are provided in Chapter III of 'The Mizoram State Commission for Women Act 2004' and those functions are mentioned below:<sup>16</sup>

(a) to investigate and examine all matters relating to the safeguards provided for women under the Constitution and other laws and recommend steps to be taken by the State Government for effective implementation of such safeguards;

(b) to review from time to time, the existing provisions of the Constitution and other laws affecting women and recommend amendments thereto so as to suggest remedial legislative measures to meet lacunae, inadequacies or shortcomings in such legislation;

(c) to take up the cases of violation of the provisions of the Constitution and of other laws relating to women with the appropriate authorities;

(d) to look into complaints and take *suo moto* notice of matters relating to-

(i) deprivation or women's rights;

(ii) non-implementation of laws enacted to provide protection to women and also to achieve the objective of equality and development;

(iii) non-compliance of policy decisions, guidelines or instructions aimed at mitigating hardships and ensuring welfare and providing relief to women; and to take up the issues arising out of such matters with appropriate authorities;

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<sup>16</sup> Chapter III of The Mizoram State Commission for Women Act 2004 (Act No. 12 of 2004) Vide *Notification 16.12.2004, Op. cit.*

(e) to call for special studies or investigations into specific problems or situations arising out of discrimination and atrocities against women and identify the constraints so as to recommend strategies for their removal;

(f) to undertake promotional and educational research so as to suggest ways of ensuring due representation of women in all spheres of life and identify factors responsible for impeding their advancement, such as, lack of access to housing and basic services, inadequate support services and technologies for reducing drudgery and occupational health hazards and for increasing their productivity;

(g) to participate and advise on the planning process of socio-economic development of women;

(h) to evaluate the progress of the development of women under the State;

(i) to visit jail, remand home, women's institution or other place of custody where women are kept as prisoners or otherwise, and take up with the concerned authorities for remedial action, if found necessary;

(j) to fund litigation involving issues affecting large group or groups of women;

(k) to make periodical report to the Government on any matters pertaining to women and in particular various difficulties under women toil;

(l) any other matter which may be referred to it by the Central Government or the National Commission for Women.

The Commission shall while investigating any matter referred to in clause(a) or sub clauses(i) and (ii) of clause (d) of sub-section (1) have the powers of a Civil Court trying a suit under the existing laws and, in particular, in respect of the following matters, namely :-

- (a) summoning and enforcing the attendance of any person from any part of India and examining him on oath;
- (b) requiring the discovery and production of any document;
- (c) receiving evidence on affidavits ;
- (d) any other matter which may be prescribed.

The Commission has the power to utilize the services of certain officers and investigating agencies for conducting investigation. Such officer or agency or the person shall investigate into the matter as directed by the Commission and submit a report to the Commission within such period or extended period as may be specified or extended by the Commission in this behalf. Simultaneously, the State Government should consult the Commission on all major policy matters affecting women at large.

In addition to the above functions, the Commission is to furnish comments and recommendations on any Report of the National Commission for Women on any matter with which the State Government is concerned. It is significant to note that all Orders and decisions of the Commission shall be authenticated by the Member-Secretary or in his/her absence, by any other officers of the Commission as may be authorized in writing by the Chairperson.

Any voluntary organization for women within the State may seek registration with the Commission for the purpose of the Act. The Commission may maintain a register of voluntary organizations within the State and more particularly Women's organizations whose assistance it may seek for the discharge of its functions. A list of such organizations registered with the Commission shall be made available to any court or authority or, on request, to the members of general public. Simultaneously, the Commission has the power to cancel the name of any organization from its register for any reasons to be recorded in writing, after giving such organization a reasonable opportunity to be heard. The decision of the Commission about such cancellation shall be final.

### **3.7. Finance for the Commission- Sources and Management**

The Commission has been given grants by the State Government after due appropriation made by the State Legislature, such amount of grants from the Consolidated Fund of the State as the State Government may think fit for being utilized for the purposes of this Act. The Commission may spend such sums as it thinks fit for performing the function under this Act, and such sums of money shall be treated as expenditure payable out of the grants.

The Commission shall maintain proper accounts and other relevant records and prepare an annual statement of accounts in such forms as may be prescribed by the State Government in consultation with the Accountant General of the State of Mizoram. The annual accounts of the Commission shall be audited by the Accountant General of the State at such intervals as may be specified by him. The accounts of the Commission as certified by the Accountant General or any other person duly appointed or authorized by him, together with the audit report shall be forwarded annually to the State Government by the Commission.

The Commission shall prepare, in such form and at such time for each financial year, its annual report giving a full account of its activities during the previous financial year and forward a copy thereof to the State Government. The Annual Report shall be laid down before the State Legislative Assembly.

### **3.8. Working of the MSCW for Women Empowerment**

The second part of this Chapter focuses on the working of the MSCW with reference to Women's Empowerment. It will not be an exaggeration to state that empowerment of women can be ensured by the Commission through the performance of its role and functions for the protection and promotion of women's rights in Mizoram. Accordingly, the working of the Mizoram State Commission for Women have been examined with reference to its role and functions as laid down by the MSCW Act, 2004.



1. The most important function of the MSCW is to investigate and examine all matters relating to safeguards provided for women under the Constitution and other laws like violation of women's rights, look into complaints either on the basis of the complaints filed or take *suo moto* notice on the issues. Unfortunately, it is found from the records available at the office of the MSCW that the Commission has registered only a few cases of women's rights violations in the State. To be more accurate, since its establishment in the year 1998 till November 2017, the Commission has registered only 200 cases out of which 159 cases have been disposed within that period. This means that only 79.5% of cases have been disposed by the Commission during the period under reference

An analysis of the cases under study shows that though the Commission is only a recommendatory body, its Chairperson and other Members go to different places- where violation of women's rights takes place-to get a deep insight into the cases. The Commission tries to solve problems by investigating and having discussion with the victims and sometimes with the accused as well. If necessary, the Commission gives necessary recommendations to the concerned authority. The number of cases registered and disposed off by the MSCW since 2000 to 2017 can be seen from the following table.

**Table 3.5 (i): Number of Cases registered and disposed by the MSCW since 2000**

Sl. No.	Crime Head	2000		2001		2002		2003		2004		2005	
		No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.
1	Rape	3	3	2	2	7	6	1	1	3	2		
2	Attempt to Rape			1	1	1	1						
3	Kidnapped/Abduction			1	1	2	1						
4	Molestation												
5	Cruelty by Husband												
6	Maintenance of Mother & Child					1	1	1	1				
7	Sexual Harassment at Work Place												
8	Domestic Violence Against Women											1	1
9	Murder	6	5					1	1	1	1		
10	Property dispute												
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

**Table 3.5 (ii): Number of Cases registered and disposed by the MSCW since 2006**

Sl. No.	Crime Head	2006		2007		2008		2009		2010		2011	
		No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.
1	Rape	2	1	1	1	1		1		1	1	1	
2	Attempt to Rape									2	2		
3	Kidnapped/Abduction												
4	Molestation	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	3				
5	Cruelty by Husband					2	2	1	1	4	4		
6	Maintenance of Mother & Child			1	1			9	9	5	5	7	7
7	Sexual Harassment at Work Place												
8	Domestic Violence Against Women	2	2	1	1	6	6	5	4	2	2	3	3
9	Murder	1		1						1		1	
10	Property dispute					3	2	4	2	1		3	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</b>

**Table 3.5 (iii): Number of Cases registered and disposed by the MSCW since 2012 up to October 2017.**

Sl. No.	Crime Head	2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017 (Oct)	
		No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.	No. of cases regd.	No. of cases disp.
1	Rape	1						2					
2	Attempt to Rape	2	2	2	2								
3	Kidnapped/Abduction												
4	Molestation	1	1			2	2	3	3	3	3		
5	Cruelty by Husband			6	3	3	3	6	6	2	2	1	1
6	Maintenance of Mother & Child	6	6	4	2	4	3	2	2	10	10	2	2
7	Sexual Harassment at Work Place	1	1			1				1		1	
8	Domestic Violence Against Women	5	4	5	2	2	2	3	3	1	1	1	1
9	Murder	1		2		1		1		1			
10	Property dispute							1		3	2		
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>

**Source: Office of the MSCW**

regd. = registered  
disp. = disposed

2. It is true that protection of women’s rights alone cannot stop violence against women. It is, therefore, important to spread awareness among the people regarding the rights available to women in order to stop violation of women’s rights. Hence, the MSCW is taking up a number of activities to spread awareness among the people about the rights available to women. The Commission has been organizing various programmes for the awareness on Women’s rights in different parts of the State. The topics of these ‘Awareness Programmes’ include -

- (a) the Immoral Human Trafficking Act, 1956,
- (b) Participation of Women in Politics,
- (c) Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005,
- (d) Rights and Privileges of Women under the Laws in existence,
- (e) Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO Act) 2012,
- (f) Rape and Human Trafficking,
- (g) Positive Living and others.

A State Level Consultation Meeting on National Policy has been organized by the MSCW on 23-24 March 2004 wherein a number of scholars presented their papers on different topics concerning women related issues. Some of the Awareness Programmes organized by the MSCW for spreading Women’s Empowerment and the need for protection of their Rights are mentioned in the following Table.

**Table-3.6: Seminar/Workshop Conducted by the MSCW since 2009**

Sl.No	Date	Title of the Seminar/ Workshop Awareness Programme	Host Institution/ Venue/Place
1.	25/4/2009	Legal Awareness Camp. Women’s Right	MSCW, Conference Hall Social Welfare
2.	31/7/2009	Training of Trainers on Social Legislation	MSCW, PIB Hall
3.	7/10/2009	Women in Politics: Hopes Prospect	MSCW, I&PR Auditorium

4.	8/9/2010	Empowering the Mizo Women through Legal Education	MSCE, Conference Hall of College of Teacher Education, Aizawl
5.	15/3/2011	Role of Women in Governance and Leadership	MSCW in collaboration with NCW, Aijal Club
6.	1/2/2013	Rape and Human Trafficking	NCW & MSCW, Aijal Club
7.	15/3/2016	Human Trafficking, Rape & Domestic Violence Act	MSCW, Saikuti Hall, Lunglei
8.	28/3/2013	Rape and Human Trafficking	MSCW, Kolasib
9.	2/4/2013	Rape and Human Trafficking	MSCW, Hnahthial
10.	2-4/4/2013	Rape and Human Trafficking	MSCW, Serchhip
11.	4/4/2013	Rape and Human Trafficking	MSCW, Chamring
12.	6/1/2014	Legal Awareness Campaign on Rights & Privileges of Women under the Law in Existence	MSCW, Kawrthah
13.	22/1/2014	Legal Awareness Campaign on Rights & Privileges of Women under the Law in Existence	MSCW, Khawbung
14.	5/2/2014	Legal Awareness Campaign on Rights & Privileges of Women under the Law in Existence and Status of Women Acc. to Mizo Customary Law	MSCW, Ngopa
15.	13/2/2014	Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 & Women in Politics: Hope Prospects	MSCW, E. Lungdar
16.	27/3/2014	Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 & Women in Politics: Hope Prospects	MSCW, Zawlnuam
17.	13/3/2014	Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 & Women in Politics: Hope Prospects	MSCW, Vairengte
18.	27/3/2014	Rights & Privileges of Women under Law in Existence & Status of Women Acc. to Mizo Customary Law	MSCW, Reiek
19.	17/6/2015	Legal Awareness Seminar on Domestic Violence & Women in Politics	MSCW, I&PR Auditorium
20.	2/12/2016	Legal Awareness Campaign on POCSO Act 2012, Immoral Traffick Prevention Act and Domestic Violence act	MSLSA & MSCW, Siaha

21.	16/2/2017	POCSO Act 2012 Immortal Traffick Prevention Act and Domestic Violence Act	MSCW, East Lungdar
22.	17/2/2017	Human Trafficking POCSO Act	MSCW, Khawbung

Source: Office of the MSCW

3. One of the important functions of the MSCW is to review, from time to time, the existing provisions of the Constitution and other Laws affecting women and, at the same time, recommend amendments thereto so as to suggest remedial legislative measures to meet any lacunae, inadequacies or shortcomings in such legislation.<sup>17</sup> In this regard, the MSCW has been pressurizing the Government of Mizoram to make amendment to the Mizo Customary Laws in favour of women. To get the said Law amended in favour of the protection and advancement of women, the Chairperson and other Members of the MSCW have made all efforts by meeting and talking to the concerned officials, like the Secretary of the State Law Commission and the Minister and the concerned officials of Law Department of the State. In fact, it was against this background that the Law Commission of Government of Mizoram invited the MSCW to take part in the ‘Consultation Meeting on the Mizo Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance of Property Bill, 2013’ organised by it at the Information & Public Relations Department’s Conference Hall on 9<sup>th</sup> Sept., 2013.

When the Law Department was carrying out the drafting of the Mizo Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance Bill, the MSCW, after a thorough examination of the drafted Bill, submitted its suggestions and recommendations to the concerned Department. In this way, the MSCW has played a significant role for the enactment of this Bill. Accordingly, the Mizo Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance of Property Act had been passed by the Mizoram Legislative Assembly in the year 2014. The enactment of the said Act by the State Government is an important landmark for the empowerment of Mizo women. The Act has been published in the Mizoram Gazette on 18<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2014. According to this Act, divorce can only be granted by the Court and women could now have a share in the family property as follows:

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<sup>17</sup> Chapter III Section 10(1) (b) of the Act.

**(a) Ownership right of head of family over properties:** All movable and immovable properties inherited and acquired, which are not registered in the name of any member of the family living under the same roof are deemed to be the property of the head of the family.<sup>18</sup>

**(b) Right of head of family to dispose property:** The head of the family may dispose any of his/her properties except service/pensionary benefits by way of sale, barter, gift, charity or endowment. However, a woman's personal property shall not be disposed without her consent.<sup>19</sup>

**(c) Share of Divorced Wife on ground of Adultery:** If a man divorces his wife on ground of adultery or deprivation of his conjugal right except on health ground, the divorced wife will have a share over the acquired property not exceeding 25% along with her personal property.<sup>20</sup>

**(d) Share for a Woman leaving Her Husband:** A woman leaving her husband on *mak* or *kawngka sula mak* shall have a share of the acquired property and she shall be given a share not exceeding 50% of the acquired property.<sup>21</sup>

4. Again, one of the functions of MSCW is to visit jail, remand home, women's institution or other places of custody where women are kept as prisoners or otherwise, and take up with the concerned authorities for remedial action, if found necessary.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, the MSCW has visited Protective Home, Remand Home, Crime Against Women's Cell at the Aizawl Police Station, Women's Cell at the Central Jail, Maternity Ward and Female Wards at the Aizawl Civil Hospital from time to time with a view to understanding the condition under which women are kept at these places. When they visit these places, the Chairperson and other Members of the Commission usually give gifts like water filters, buckets, brooms, biscuits, medicines and others, and have fruitful discussion with the inmates, listens to their problems and grievances. The problems and grievances of these inmates have been brought to the notice of the concerned authority by the Commission.

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<sup>18</sup> Chapter VI(23)

<sup>19</sup> Chapter VI (24)

<sup>20</sup> Chapter VI(26)(2)

<sup>21</sup> Chapter VI (27)(1)

<sup>22</sup> Chapter III Section 10(1)(i) of the Act,



5. The MSCW builds relationship with concerned Departments of Mizoram Government. In pursuance of the request expressed by 'Crime Against Women Cell,' Aizawl Police Station, the MSCW had constructed a 'link road' between Aizawl Police Station and Aizawl Civil Hospital during the years 2015 so that victims of rape, domestic violence and others who require immediate medical attention may be taken to the Hospital through this direct link road.

6. The MSCW has also visited a number of victims of rape, violence against women and, sometimes, paid Rs. 2,000/- each to the bereaved families of those who were murdered. On many occasions, the MSCW would ensure that actions were being taken by the concerned Department according to the Law when these things happened.

7. According to 'The Mizoram State Commission for Women Act 2004,'<sup>23</sup> the MSCW may be called upon to any other matter which may be referred to it by the Central Government or the National Commission for Women. So, in pursuant of the Letter received from the NCW,<sup>24</sup> the MSCW had, on 15.09.2014, appointed an Expert Committee on Social, Economic, Political and Legal Empowerment for a period of one year which would study the status and position of Mizo women and make policy Recommendations for the development and empowerment of women in Mizoram on social, economic, political and legal issues. On the basis of its study, it would suggest a strategy for implementation of the existing policies, select programmes and schemes like MNREGA, NHRM, Schemes for widows/single women for welfare of women in North East India. Following are the Chairperson and Members of the Expert Committee of the MSCW:

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<sup>23</sup> Chapter III Section 10 (1)(1) of the Act

<sup>24</sup> Chairperson of NCW's Letter No.4-160(19)/2014-NCW (NEC) Dated 01.08.2014 and dated 25.08.2014.

### 3:7 Composition of the Expert Committee of MSCW

Sl.no.	Name of Member of MSCW	Name of Locality	Position
1.	Ms. Vanlalawmpuii Chawngthu, MLA		Chairperson
2.	C.Lalhriatpuii, Social Worker	Ramhlun South	Member
3.	Lalrotluanga Sailo, Advocate, D.C. Office	Mission Vengthlang	-do-
4.	Dr.P.C.Lalramenga, Aizawl Civil Hospital	Bethlehem Vengthlang	-do-
5.	Vanlalzuiliana, Activitist	Dawrpui Vengthar	-do-
6.	Dr.Lalthansangi, Associate Professor, Department of Education	Government Aizawl College	-do-
7.	Dr.C.Vanlalramsanga, I.E.S	Ramhlun South	-do-

The Expert Committee in its meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> Sept., 2014 suggested and approved Dr. Lalthansangi, Associate Professor, Government Aizawl College as Resource Person for the study which was authorized to provide a comprehensive baseline survey on social, economic and political to be used as indicators covering the period of 2014-15 for the state of Mizoram. The study portrayed a brief evaluation of various women specific schemes currently being implemented in the State of Mizoram highlighting their major challenges and difficulties in terms of select social, economic and political indicators. The results of the study reflected gender differences and relative achievement in the State level as specific indicators on selected dimensions which reflected a strong need of special attention of the policy makers to bring about changes in budgeting for remedial measures of women's status related issues for the state.<sup>25</sup>

8. The Commission received a rare Case in 2016 regarding the discontinuation of Pastoral Wives from their service, which was decided by the Baptist Church of Mizoram in its Assembly 2008. It was decided that those Pastors' wives should discontinue their service after the year 2015. Unless the Pastor's wife gives up her regular job, the Pastor will have to face the consequences. Many of the Pastors' wives are having good jobs which have been contributing a lot to the household management. In fact, the Pastors are getting honorariums which are not much

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<sup>25</sup> *Project Report on Basic Survey on Social, Economic and Political Empowerment of Women in Mizoram*, prepared by Dr. Lalthansangi, Member of Expert Committee of the Commission was submitted on 4<sup>th</sup> Dec., 2015.

compared to those employed by the government. There is no proposal as to compensate the loss of income contributed by their wives. Moreover, some of the Pastors' wives have certain liabilities in their services which restrict them from resigning from their services. So, out of their unhappiness over the decision of the Assembly, six Pastors' wives submitted, in writing, their complaints to the MSCW with a request to solve their problems by upholding their rights. Consequent upon the initiative taken by the Commission to protect the Rights of Pastors' wives, this Case has been kept in abeyance.

9. The MSCW practically acts as the arms and hands of National Commission for Women (NCW). Smt. Rekha Sharma, Member, National Commission for Women (NCW), has been on a Five-Day Official Visit to Aizawl on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017. She has visited Protective Home, Women Cell at Central Jail and Crime against Women Cell at the Aizawl Police Station. She has interacted with the women prisoners and has discussed the problems faced by them. She interacts and has discussion with women organizations such as the Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual Pawl (MTP), All Women's Federation, Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan (PMSA) and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in a joint meeting, She also has interaction with the students at the Mizoram University. She has been accompanied by Pi Lalbiakkimi, Member-Secretary, MSCW, and two members of MSCW namely Dr. Lalrindiki Fanai, and Pi Sylvie Z.Ralte, Chief Judicial Magistrate, Kolasib. Smt. Rekha Sharma has mentioned that State Commission for Women in the North East India have very small budgets and are not sufficient to cater to the needs of women in the area. Funds are grossly insufficient for holding legal awareness programmes because North East region is difficult area due to its terrain, lack of infrastructure and so on. Moreover, the status of Chairperson and Members of the State Commission is not defined, and the salaries and honorarium of chairperson and members is low. Gender budgeting should be introduced in state budget too, to ensure dedicated flow of fund for women related issues and programmes. Police sensitization is needed to ensure pro-active and cooperation from their personnel. More shelter homes for girls are required.

10. The MSCW is supposed to maintain a register of Voluntary Organizations within the State and more particularly Women's Organizations whose assistance it may seek for the discharge of its functions.<sup>26</sup> But, the MSCW does not maintain such Register till date. In spite of this, the MSCW has been working with certain Women's Organizations like MHIP, YWCA, Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual, Women Welfare Front and others for the empowerment of women by organizing awareness campaigns among the people regarding women's rights and protection in different parts of Mizoram. Another important field of their collaboration is seen in pressurizing the Government for the upliftment of women in Mizo society.

### **3.9. Conclusion**

From the above discussion, it is clear that the Commission has been trying to carry out its functions as laid down in the Act. But there are some limitations on its way to realize its full potential. There are many more steps to be taken at its end. For this, the Commission itself needs to be empowered and strengthened in terms of human and financial resources.

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<sup>26</sup> Chapter III Section 14(2).

**CHAPTER - IV**  
**THE MIZORAM STATE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN: PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES**

**4.1. Introduction**

In the previous chapter, a discussion has been made on the structure, functions and role of the Mizoram State Commission for Women. It has stressed on how the various functions given by the Mizoram State Commission for Women Act, 2004 are implemented by the MSCW towards the empowerment of women in the state of Mizoram. It also focuses on the various activities undertaken by the Commission to ensure that women are aware of their rights and that their legal protections are available to them. The Commission has fulfilled many of the responsibilities laid down in its mandate, however, there are certain shortcomings in the working of the Commission which if rectified would lead to a more efficient and productive Commission.

**4.2. Organizational Problem**

According to the Mizoram State Commission for Women Rules 2008, No. 7(i), the Staff of the Commission shall include the Chairman and Member-Secretary and such other staff as the Government may from time to time determine in consultation with the Commission. Besides the Chairman and the Member-Secretary of the Commission, the strength of the staff members at present is as follows:

**Table 4.1: Strength of Office Staff of the MSCW**

<b>Sl.no</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
1.	Upper Divisional Clerk	1 no.
2.	Lower Divisional Clerk	1 no.
3.	Fourth Grade	2 nos.
4.	Driver	1 no.

It is also provided in the MSCW Rules 2008 that the staff other than the Chairman and the Member-Secretary shall be appointed by the Commission with prior approval of the Government. But, this power of the Commission can be overridden by the Government by deputing its officers and staff to the Commission.

From the above, it is clear that the strength of staff members in the Commission is only *five* (5). Moreover, the staff members are either on deputation or Muster Roll. The administrative functions of the Commission have been discharged by the *five* (5) staff members under the supervision of the Member-Secretary. The present strength of the staff members is not adequate to meet the needs of the Commission. Shortage of adequate and competent staff is a big obstacle for the effective and efficient functioning of this Commission. Further if the Commission had complete autonomy to appoint/recruit its own staff rather than getting staff on deputation basis from the State Government, the situation would have been better.

In order to discharge its functions as stated in Chapter III, Section 10 of the MSCW Act, it is essential for the Commission to have officers/experts and staff possessing specialized knowledge on a variety of subjects including law, counselling, socio-economic issues, custodial justice, development planning and research. Unfortunately, the Commission does not have permanent staff, who are experts or professionals in the field of law, counselling, socio-economic issues and the like which is required in the performance its mandates. The Commission also does not have any field staff since its inception. Therefore, creation of additional posts to cater the needs of the Commission is much needed.

The Mizoram State Commission for Women consists of a Chairperson, *seven* Members and a Member-secretary, who are nominated by the State Government. The main criticism levelled against the Commission is that its composition is basically of Government nominated Members. As a result, political considerations were bound to play an important part in these appointments. The Commission may not be able to function independently and effectively under these circumstances. And some of the appointed members of the Commission are not experienced in dealing with women issues and are not associated with women movements. Hence, the Commission becomes ineffective in the discharge of its functions for which it has been created. What is needed is selection of politically neutral members who

have contributed to or have a deep understanding of issues related to women's rights.

The MSCW Act is silent on the status of the Chairperson and Members of the Commission which is very important. Section 4 (iii) of the MSCW Rules 2008 provides that the Chairperson is eligible to draw TA/DA at the same rate as applicable to Minister of State. The rank and status of the chairperson is not mentioned in the Rules also except for TA/DA. It is clear that the Commission is required to interact with government officials in the discharge of its functions. The status is determined by the powers given to the Commission and the manner of appointment and qualifications laid down for the Members and Chairperson by the Act. A clear defining of the status of the Chairperson and Members would definitely help in their relationship with various officials. As the Commission has been functioning as a part of the Department of Social Welfare, it is felt that the Commission only acts as a subordinate agency. Clear specification to the rank and status of Chairperson of the Commission should be made in the MSCW Rules. Moreover, the honorarium given to Chairperson and the sitting allowance given to Members is extremely low which makes these posts look unattractive and less important.

Chapter III, Section 10(1)(d) of the MSCW Act, it is the function of the Commission to look into complaints and take *suo moto* notice of matters relating to deprivation of women's rights, non-implementation of laws enacted to provide protection to women and also to achieve the objective of equality and development; non-compliance of policy decisions, guidelines or instructions aimed at mitigating hardships and ensuring welfare and providing relief to women; and to take up the issues arising out of such matters with appropriate authorities. While the MSCW Act puts the responsibility on the Commission to take up individual cases of complaints of violence and discrimination against women, it left to the Commission to decide as to how it intended to approach the whole issue and what kind of mechanisms it needed to create to deal with such complaints. The Commission has been handling complaints of violence against women and other violations of the rights of women. But the Commission has no separate cell or unit to handle complaints. This is mainly because of lack of adequate and competent staff and lack of infra-structural facilities.

While investigating cases of violation of safeguards for women and complaints to deprivation of their rights, the Commission has the power of a Civil Court trying a suit. The Commission can summon a person or examine the person on oath. It can bring parties to a dispute face to face and try to resolve by mediating. In certain cases it can instruct the appropriate agency that had power to take some steps to attend to the matter and report back to the Commission. In pursuance of these provisions in the Act, the Commission has been performing various types of functions ranging from informal counseling to advice and formal action. The Commission has been trying to tackle these complaints at its end. But since May 2016, a resolution was made by the Commission in which certain cases of complaints are referred either to the Mizoram State Legal Services Authority, Aizawl, or the District and Sessions Judge, Aizawl District. Many of the complainants prefer not to go to court therefore do not register their complaints to the Commission.

The Mizoram State Commission for Women has been functioning as a part of the Department of Social Welfare, Government of Mizoram from the very beginning. This shows the position of the Commission and the expectation of the State Government which created it. There is a need for changing the status of the Commission so that it could take independent action without fear or favour in the implementation of its mandate. Hence it is felt that the Commission needs to be empowered so that it could fulfill its mandate more effectively and efficiently.

The reports of the Mizoram State Commission for Women are advisory in nature reducing the Commission into a mere recommendatory body. As the reports of the Commission are not binding to the Government, the Commission is not given importance and recognition by other departments under the Government of Mizoram. This has adverse affect on the fulfilment of its mandate effectively.

There is lack of awareness among the people about the existence and working of the Mizoram State Commission for Women Commission despite its existence for almost two decades. Those people living in villages do not know about the Commission and they are also not aware of the rights and protections available to women. Besides it is not enough to make women aware of the functioning of the Commission and about their rights. Women have to be motivated to be strong



enough to invoke their rights provided to them under various laws. Unless people are aware of the existence and role of the Commission, it is not possible for them to make use of the Commission.

Under Chapter III, Section 11 of the MSCW Act, it is mentioned that the State Government shall consult the Commission on all major policy matters affecting women at large. The MSCW is to be consulted by the State Government on all important policy issues concerning women. But hardly on any issues is the MSCW consulted. The State Government does not take into account the significance of the Commission while making policy.

The Mizoram State Commission for Women does not have its own building. At present, the office of the Commission is still located at Khatla in a rented building. Moreover, the office building does not have sufficient space to accommodate conference hall or counselling room where joint meeting of NGOs could take place or women in distress who come to the office for help would be given counselling.

Further, the only vehicle that the Commission has is the Chairperson's Gypsy (Hard Top) whereas the MSCW Rules, 2008 mentions that the Chairperson is entitled to the facility of official car. Besides, the Commission does not have any vehicle which is often required by the staff of the Commission especially in times of emergency.

The office of the MSCW is not well equipped with advanced technology such as internet facilities, video cameras and projectors which are required for the efficient functioning of the Commission, and for conducting seminars and workshops and also while visiting Women Cell at the Central Jail, Protective Homes and others.

#### **4.3. Financial Problems**

The chart given below explains that the Commission does not have adequate financial resources at its disposal, the Commission could barely meet its overhead costs of salaries, stationery, electricity, rent and others, leaving no substantial amount for actual activities that fall in the mandate of the Commission.

**Table 4.2: Information relating to Budget of Mizoram State Commission for Women**

Sl. No.	Financial Year	Amount Sanctioned	Expenditure
1.	1998- 1999	Rs. 10,00,000/-	Rs. 9,10,703/-
2.	1999-2000	Rs. 14,50,000/-	Rs. 12,73,528/-
3.	2000-2001	Rs. 13,00,000/-	Rs. 12,71,650/-
4.	2001-2002	Rs.10,00,000/-	Rs. 9,42,717/-
5.	2002-2003	Rs. 7,85,340/-	RS. 7,84,589/-
6.	2003-2004	Rs. 8,00,000/-	Rs. 7,94,714/-
7.	2004-2005	Rs.12,10,000/-	Rs.10,32,629/-
8.	2005-2006	Rs.10,51,000/-	Rs.10,33,767/-
9.	2006-2007	Rs.16,17,988/-	Rs.15,04,752/-
10.	2007-2008	Rs.17,43,000/-	Rs.14,21,618/-
11.	2008-2009	Rs.14,55,000/-	Rs.17,65,298/-
12.	2009-2010	Rs.26,15,000/-	Rs.22,31,656/-
13.	2010-2011	Rs.18,05,019/-	Rs.17,23,195/-
14.	2011-2012	Rs.28,80,488/-	Rs.18,89,714/-
15.	2012-2013	Rs.27,51,000/-	Rs.27,49,671/-
16.	2013-2014	Rs.42,10,000/-	Rs.37,96,436/-
17.	2014-2015	Rs.36,86,784/-	Rs.32,17,937/-
18.	2015-2016	Rs.35,22,000/-	Rs.34,70,998/-
19.	2016-2017	Rs.39,00,000/-	Rs.33,17,790/-

*Source: Office of the Mizoram State Commission for Women*

The Mizoram State Commission for Women has been financially depending on the State Government although grants are also received from the National Commission for Women (NCW) from time to time. But these grants received from the NCW are usually for conducting workshops/ seminars/ campaigns for spreading awareness of women rights. The Commission worked for socio-economic

development of women, conducted publicity campaigns to generate awareness in society against many social evils and, rights and legal protections available to Women and children. The financial powers are curtailed and it is not able to provide relief to victims in need and it is not able to organize legal awareness campaigns on women's rights as much as possible throughout the state. Since funds are grossly insufficient, the Commission could not function effectively and unable to do productive and meaningful work for the empowerment of women.

Under Chapter IV Section 18 of the MSCW Act 2004, it is written that the Commission shall prepare, in such form and at such time for each financial year as may be prescribed, its annual report giving a full account of its activities during the previous financial year and forward a copy thereof to the State Government. According to the constitution of the Commission, both the annual report and the audit report are to be placed before the State Legislative Assembly. But the Mizoram State Commission for Women does not submit its annual report to the State Government. As a result, the annual report of the Commission has hardly been discussed in the State Legislative Assembly.

The MSCW Rules 2008 fixed the honorarium of Chairperson at Rs. 8000/- per month, at the same time, the sitting allowance of members of the Commission is only Rs. 350/- per sitting subject to a maximum of Rs. 3000/- per month. The amount of honorarium and the sitting allowance given to the chairperson and members of the Commission is very low as compared to the amount of allowance/salary given to their counterparts in other states. In view of price hike, the qualification and commitment of the chairperson and members of the Commission, the amount of honorarium and sitting allowance needs to be raised.

#### **4.4. Challenges faced by the MSCW**

Following are the main challenges identified by this study as being faced by the MSCW:

##### **(1) Lack of Awareness about Women's Rights:**

The primary mandate of the Mizoram State Commission for Women is to safeguard and protect the interests of women. Many women are still unaware of their rights and legal protections for them, this lack of knowledge makes them the

most vulnerable sections of the society. Therefore, organizing large scale awareness campaigns on Women's rights covering all the villages across the state is much needed. The present Chairperson informs the researcher that the Commission is going to receive grants from the National Commission for Women, New Delhi for organizing legal awareness campaigns on Women's rights throughout the *eight* districts of Mizoram. She further adds that the Commission intends to complete these awareness campaigns within three months.<sup>1</sup>

## **(2) Low Level of Awareness about the Commission**

There is also low level of awareness among the people about the organization and the help that could be rendered by the Mizoram State Commission for Women. This is evident from the fact that the number of cases registered under the Commission is very low as compared to the number of cases on Crime Against Women recorded by CID (Crime Branch), Aizawl, Mizoram.

## **(3) Necessity of Building good Coordination with NCW and Other State Commissions for Women**

National Consultation with State Women Commissions, Regional Conferences on Women Issues, Interactive Meetings, Seminars, and Workshops are organized by the National Commission for Women, New Delhi, from time to time. These meetings are attended by the representatives of the Commission such as the Chairperson, Member-Secretary, and other Members of the Mizoram State Commission for Women. Sometimes, the Commission also conducts Seminars and Workshops on Women Issues in collaboration with the National Commission for Women in different parts of the state. Besides the NCW also gives grants to the MSCW for conducting Awareness Programmes on Women Rights from time to time. The Mizoram State Commission for Women needs to have a closer relationship with the National Commission for Women and other State Commissions for Women. In order to have a better coordination with the NCW and other State Commissions for Women, the Commission must take the initiative, cooperate with them and study the working of the NCW and other State Commissions for Women and how similar cases have been handled by them.

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<sup>1</sup> Zohmingthangi, Margaret. (27.11.2017), *Personal Interview*.

**(4) Lack of Proper Accommodation and the Need for a New Office Building:**

The Office Building of the Commission is not spacious and it could not accommodate conference hall or counseling room which are indispensable part in the functioning of the Commission. Moreover, the Commission does not have its own building. A New Building easily accessible by the people having more space to accommodate all the required halls and rooms is much needed.<sup>2</sup>

**(5) Insufficient Budget Allocation:**

Budget Allocation to the Mizoram State Commission for Women is very small. The present budget allocation is only able to meet the salaries of the staff, stationery, electricity, rent and others. The Commission requires more funds at its disposal otherwise it could not carry out its objectives for which it was created. A Human Rights Activist feels that the budget allocation is too small for the Commission to function properly.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the Commission has to be financially strengthened by the State Government only then it could function properly and effectively.

**(6) Lack of Legal Experts and Counsellors for Prompt Disposal of Cases**

The Commission should have legal experts and professional counselors among its permanent staff. The work of the Commission relates to legal issues, so legal expertise within the Commission is required. Apart from this, Counselors are also required as many cases of the Commission include marital dispute, handling of victims of rape/violence against women especially domestic violence against women.<sup>4</sup>

**(7) Full-time Member Secretary**

The Commission should have a full-time Member-Secretary as provided in the MSCW Rules. Instead of having a Member-Secretary on deputation from the

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<sup>2</sup> Lalrosangi, (20.11.2017), *Personal Interview*.

<sup>3</sup> Vanramchhuangi, (7.11.2017), *Personal Interview*.

<sup>4</sup> Vanlalawmpuii Chawngthu, (19.09.2017), *Personal Interview*.

Social Welfare Department, it is felt that it would be better if the Member-Secretary is newly recruited.<sup>5</sup>

**(8) Annual Report:**

Annual Report of the Mizoram State Commission for Women has to be submitted to the State Government. This should be given importance by the Commission otherwise the report of the Commission can never be discussed in the State Legislature.

**(9) Needs for building Network with Women's Groups**

There is a need to network more with Women's groups for the better performance of the Commission. NGOs and civil society throughout the State may be requested to support the Commission in its working. In this regard, the President of Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkawm Pawl (MHIP) expresses her desire to know more about the functioning of the Commission and feels that people do not understand the working of the Commission. She further adds that the MHIP is ready to work with the Commission in the performance of its mandate. She has suggested that the Commission may conduct a joint meeting of all the women organizations in the State in which the role and working of the Commission may be explained.<sup>6</sup> If there is a good cooperation between the Commission and Women Organizations, the Commission would function more effectively and productively and more women would benefit out of the Commission.

**4.5. Conclusion**

The Commission has several functions to perform for the protection and promotion of women in the State. To perform all these functions, it is clear that the Commission is required to be strengthened by the State Government. Besides, the Commission needs the support and cooperation of the Women NGOs in carrying out its mandate. The Commission must take the initiative and organize a joint meeting with Women Organizations and have discussion with them. The whole hearted support of the State Government is the need of the hour.

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<sup>5</sup> Vanlaldini, (16.10.2017), *Personal Interview*.

<sup>6</sup> Saipuii, (7.11.2017), *Personal Interview*.

## **CHAPTER – V**

### **CONCLUSION**

The concluding chapter of this dissertation has been divided into two parts. The *first* part deals with a brief discussion on ‘Women Empowerment,’ Methodology of the Study, Objectives of the Study, Research Questions, Scope of the Study and, Chapterization of the dissertation. The *second* part deals with the Summary and Findings and Challenges including Suggestions for overcoming those problems and challenges.

#### **PART – I**

The need for ‘Women Empowerment’ has been realized and given utmost priority today, as women constituting half of the world population have been suffering from discrimination, disability, injustice and inequality all over the world for almost centuries. Sometimes, women work harder than men but their work is often unrecognized, unpaid or undervalued. Moreover, they are grossly under-represented in governmental institutions. They have been denied equal access to or opportunities for the attainment of their personal growth and social development. It is against this background that some institutions have been created by the Governments of different democratic countries to improve the living and working condition of women and to end numerous problems faced by them both at the national level and the state level.

Women Empowerment refers to the process of strengthening the hands of women who have been suffering from various disabilities, inequalities and discriminations and to enable them to control their own lives. It also refers to the process of providing equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities to women so that they are able to play a role on par with men in society. The objective of

women empowerment is to generate large scale awareness with the active cooperation of women themselves.

Women Empowerment has become one of the most important concerns of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century not only at the national level but also at the international level. Women Empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International Women's Conference in 1985 at Nairobi. The United Nations Population Information Network defines, "Women Empowerment as having five components: Women's sense of self worth, their rights to have and to determine choices; their rights to have access to opportunities and resources; their rights to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside home, and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just, social and economic order, nationally and internationally."

The framers of the Indian Constitution were aware of the historical position of women in Indian society. Therefore, the Constitution of India emphasizes the importance of greater freedom for all and contains a number of provisions for the empowerment of women. Women's rights to equality and non-discrimination on ground of sex are defended by the Constitution as justifiable fundamental rights. Equal pay for equal work for both men and women has also been clearly mentioned in the Constitution of India under the Directive Principles of State Policy. In this connection, the Government of India has enunciated various measures over the years for improving the conditions of women. Since independence, numerous legislations have been passed for the protection and empowerment of women. However, it remains an undeniable fact that women in India continue to be denied economic, social, legal rights and privileges. And they continue to face numerous problems including violent victimization through rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry killings, human trafficking, forced prostitution, acid throwing etc. There are several constraints standing on the way to women empowerment and development in India.

The Government of India has made institutional arrangements for the improvement of the living and working conditions of women both at the



national and the state level. At the national level, the 'National Commission for Women' was set up in 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act 1990 (number 20 of 1990) which has come into force on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1992. The Act is an important landmark to ensure legal safeguards for women and evaluate implementation of the schemes for women's development. The State Governments were also requested to set up similar State Commissions for Women in their respective States.

Since the Central Government considers it necessary to establish such a commission in every state, the Mizoram State Commission for Women was constituted in Mizoram on the 11<sup>th</sup> August 1998 by an executive order. This Commission has become a statutory body with the enactment of "The Mizoram State Commission for Women Act 2004."

With regards to its composition, the Commission consists of a Chairperson and seven Members who are nominated and appointed by the Government of Mizoram for a term of three years. In addition, there is a provision for a Member-Secretary to be nominated by the State Government generally from among the Officers of Social Welfare Department, Government of Mizoram. The day-to-day administration of the office of Mizoram State Commission for Women is run by the Chairperson assisted by a Member-Secretary and a skeleton staff drawn from the Department of Social Welfare, Government of Mizoram.

## **METHODOLOGY**

As the present study deals with both theory and practices related to Women Empowerment, the theoretical part has been collected from relevant literature like books, articles, research papers, internet sources and reports. The practical aspects have been collected by the scholar through field visits particularly to the office of Mizoram State Commission for Women. The informations, ideas and opinions have been collected from the old and present incumbent chairpersons, members and officials and functionaries of the

Mizoram State Commission for Women, and some leaders of Women NGOs and Social Activist, with the help of interview schedules consisting of open-ended questions.

Since the study is concerned mainly with the organization and functions of the Mizoram State Commission for Women, the methodology of data collection was based mostly on secondary data, which were obtained from the documents, official records of the Commission. Data were also collected from published and unpublished sources like books, journals, government reports, handbooks, newspapers and related websites. Descriptive design was used for the present study.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the organizational structures, functions and working of Mizoram State Commission for Women for women empowerment
2. To find out the problems, issues and challenges of the Mizoram State Commission for Women and to explore the scope for improvement of its role in women empowerment.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The present study has attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the organizational structure, functions and main activities of the MSCW for women empowerment?
2. What are the major problems, issues and challenges faced by the MSCW in achieving its objectives?
3. What are the possible solutions and measures to be undertaken to improve the working of the MSCW?

## SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The present study covers the origin and history of Mizoram State Commission for Women and the important role played by the Commission for the empowerment of women. The study brings out the backdrops of the Commission and the problems encountered in the process of its working. The study focuses on the organizational structure, functions and how these functions are implemented by the Commission for women empowerment. Various activities undertaken by the Commission to generate awareness of rights and legal protections available to women are also analysed in the study. The study has also highlighted the challenges faced by the Commission and brings out possible solutions and suggestions for effective functioning of the Commission.

The whole study is divided into five Chapters. The *first* chapter is an introductory chapter which has given a brief profile of the land “Mizoram” and the people living in Mizoram with a focus on the status and position of women in the Mizo society. It has also brought out Review of literature, Objectives of the study, Scope of the study, Research Questions and Chapter-wise breakups.

In the *second* chapter, the concept of “Women Empowerment” has been studied in the light of various definitions of “Women Empowerment” given by different thinkers and authorities on the subject. It also contains an operational application of the concept of Women Empowerment at different levels- International level, National and State level, that is, Mizoram.

In the *third* chapter, an attempt has been made to study the organisational structure of the Mizoram State Commission for Women (MSCW) and its role for the empowerment of women in the State of Mizoram. It has also taken up the study of the powers and functions of the MSCW and how these functions are performed by the MSCW. It has also studied the working of the MSCW and a number of activities taken up by it for the protection and promotion of women’s rights.

The *fourth* chapter has identified and looked into the main problems faced by the MSCW for the empowerment of women. It has also studied various challenges being faced by the MSCW.

The *final* chapter is the concluding Chapter which has brought the summary and major findings of this research. It has also made some relevant suggestions for improvement of the working of MSCW for the benefit of women folk irrespective of their colours, creeds and religions in Mizoram.

## **PART – II**

### **Summary and Findings:**

From the light of the present study, it may be ascertained that no specific study has been done so far, the researcher has taken up the present study on “Mizoram State Commission for Women” – its organizational structure and functions performed by it for generating awareness of women’s rights and legal safeguards available not only for women but also for their children. The present study has also taken an analysis of various activities of the Commission funded by the National Commission for Women (NCW), Government of India, for launching extensive awareness campaign for ‘Women Empowerment’ in different parts of the State.

An attempt is made to answer to the *first* research question: *What are the organizational structure, functions and main activities of the MSCW for women empowerment?* The Mizoram State Commission for Women was set up under the Social Welfare Department by the Government of Mizoram on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1998. The Commission has become a statutory body with the enactment of “The Mizoram State Commission for Women Act 2004.” Being the only Commission of its kind, the Commission has become an Apex body to work for the cause of women in the State of Mizoram. The Commission consists of a Chairperson, seven members and a Member-Secretary who are nominated by the Government of Mizoram for a term of three years. The Member-Secretary looks after the whole administration and is assisted by one UDC and one LDC

and IV grade staff. However, it is relevant to note that these staff members are not newly recruited by the Commission but are drawn from Social Welfare Department, Government of Mizoram. The size of the Commission is very small at present also. Besides the Chairperson and other members of the Commission, the staff members are not newly recruited by the Commission but they are personnel of the Social Welfare Department, Government of Mizoram.

The Commission has created a “Legal Cell” within its organization, to function on behalf of the Commission. So the Legal Cell consists mainly of Experts in the field of law, one Doctor Member and one Officer from the Social Welfare Department. This “Legal Cell” is expected to closely work in coordination with the Commission on various legal aspects. All cases of complaints of demand for maintenance fund, received by the Commission are forwarded to the Member Secretary of Mizoram State Legal Services Authority and such other cases registered under the Commission are forwarded to the District and Sessions Judge, Aizawl District, Aizawl.

The Office of the Mizoram State Commission for Women is located at Khatla, Aizawl. The Commission does not have any field agencies or field staff to assist the Commission in the discharge of its functions. The Commission has been endowed with the powers to protect and promote Women’s rights throughout the State and especially in situations where women are in need of help.

The Mizoram State Commission for Women has been taking a number of activities to disseminate awareness among the common people about the rights and legal protections available to women. In this regard, the Commission has been conducting seminars, workshops, consultation meetings, discussions, and others. Relevant topics such as Empowering the Mizo Women through Legal Education, Women in Politics, Domestic Violence Against Women, Rape and Human Trafficking, POCSO Act, and others are discussed in the appropriate platforms from time to time.

The *second* research question is: *What are the major problems, issues and challenges faced by the MSCW in achieving its objectives?* The study reveals that the number of cases or complaints received by the Commission is very less as compared to the number of cases registered in other State's Commissions. This implies that there is still low level of awareness among the common people about the rights of women as well as protective mechanisms available to women in cases of violations of their rights.

Another reason may be lack of awareness among the common people about the existence and functioning of the Mizoram State Commission for Women. Until and unless people are aware of the reason behind the creation of the Commission, the objectives of the Commission cannot be achieved.

The Mizoram State Commission for Women is a statutory body but does not have any autonomy. The Commission could not take any independent action even for the empowerment of women. The Commission itself is not empowered in terms of manpower, financial resources and equipments. There is lack of facilities and expertise required for the efficient functioning of the Commission. Since its inception, the Commission has been operating only as a part of the Social Welfare Department. The Commission is only a recommendatory body and its recommendations are not binding on the State Government.

The Chairperson and other seven (7) members are nominated by the State Government. For a Chairperson, a person who is committed to the cause of women is to be nominated by the State Government. Some of the appointed chairpersons have had no history of working on women issues. The total control of the government in the selection of the Chairperson and members of the Commission has affected the working and functioning of the Commission in many ways, whether it is the issues it chooses to work on or its manner of response to various issues or in dealing with the government and departments. It has also affected the day to day functioning of the Commission.

Most of the time, the Member-Secretary of the Commission is not appointed as full-time Member-Secretary. This curbs the effective functioning of the Commission because the Member-Secretary has to attend other important functions besides the functions of the Commission.

The amount of honorarium given to the Chairperson and the sitting allowance of Members of the Commission is too meager as compared to the amount of salary/allowances given to the Chairperson and Members in other State Commission for Women.

The proper functioning of any organization depends on adequate funds available at its disposal. More funds are required by the Commission so that the Commission would be able to organize more seminars, workshops and discussion to spread awareness among the common people throughout the State. The Commission would also be able to help victims of crime against women on time.

The third research question is: *What are the possible solutions and measures to be undertaken to improve the working of the MSCW?* There is an ample scope for the MSCW to enhance its effectiveness and ability to promote “Women Empowerment” in the State. However, there is no denying the fact that the existing organizational structure of the Commission is not adequate for the effective functioning of the Commission to take up more programmes for “Women Empowerment” in the State of Mizoram.

### **Challenges and Suggestions:**

Right from its inception, the Commission has been facing some challenges regarding personnel, financial, infrastructural facilities and others. The following suggestions have been made for overcoming the above problems and challenges:

**(1) Question of Autonomy:**

The Commission has been assigned a wide range of tasks, but it is not empowered to be able to perform all the tasks assigned to it. The Commission has to function autonomous of both the executive and the legislative wings of the State Government. On the contrary, the MSCW has remained a part of the Social Welfare Department, Government of Mizoram.

Therefore, the Mizoram State Commission for Women needs to be strengthened to work as a 'High Powered Autonomous Body' to protect the constitutional rights and legal entitlement or safeguards of women. The Commission must be given autonomous status and the status of the Chairperson and Members of the Commission may also be suitably enhanced and defined to make them work without fear or favour.

**(2) Shortage of Competent Staff Support:**

The present strength of the staff of the Commission is too small and inadequate. Among the permanent staff, there are no experts in the field of law, counselling, custodial justice, development planning, research and others which are very essential for this type of organization. As the main task of the Commission is to ensure legal safeguards for women and evaluate implementation of the schemes for women development, the existing Commission has to be restructured and strengthened by creating additional posts so that experts or technical staff are included among the permanent staff. Additional posts are required because the present strength of staff members does not allow the Commission to be divided into different cells like Complaint and Counselling Cell, Legal Cell, Research Cell and others which are essential for effectively carrying out its mandate.



**(3) Adequate Allocation of funds:**

It is also suggested that sufficient funds may be made available to the Commission regularly and on time so that the Commission would be able to organize more seminars, workshops and discussion to spread awareness among the common people throughout the State. Without sufficient funds, no organization is able to work properly. The Commission would be able to help victims of crime against women on time if there is an adequate allocation of funds for its working.

**(4) Method of appointment of Chairperson and Members of the Commission:**

Some Members of the Commission are appointed not because of their work in the field but because of their political and other connections. They generally have no links with the Women Movement and Women's Groups and therefore no deep concerns or understanding to carry the issues forward. Reputed persons in the field of women's rights or studies may be appointed as Chairperson and other Members of the Commission. A person who is a committed social worker having good academic and practical experience in women's issues and movements must be appointed as Chairperson of the Commission.

**(5) Required a Fulltime Member-Secretary:**

Most of the time, the Commission does not have a fulltime Member-Secretary which is against the Mizoram State Commission for Women Rules, 2008 Section 6 (ii). The present Member-Secretary of the Commission holds another position under the State Government, Social Welfare Department. This means that she has to attend her responsibility as a District Social Welfare Officer, Aizawl West, while she performs her duty as a Member-Secretary of the Commission. It is suggested that a fulltime Member-Secretary may be appointed by the State Government for the better functioning of the Commission. Or direct recruitment for the post of the Member-Secretary must

be made so that the Commission will have a full time and permanent Member-Secretary who can concentrate on the works of the Commission.

**(6) Freedom to appoint its own Staff:**

The Mizoram State Commission for Women Rules 2008, Section 7 (ii) provides that the staff other than the Chairperson and the Member-Secretary shall be appointed by the Commission with prior approval of Government. But the Commission has not utilized this power to meet its need of adequate staff. This curtails the efficient functioning of the Commission. It is necessary for the Commission to have freedom to appoint its own requisite staff to assist the Commission in its day to day functioning. At the same time, the Commission has to be strengthened financially to enable to appoint its own staff.

**(7) Office Building:**

The Mizoram State Commission for Women has not yet got its own office building even after nineteen (19) years of its existence. The office of the Commission is still located in a rented building at Khatla, Aizawl. As the office is not prominently displayed, it is not easily accessible for those who need its services. In view of the ever increasing role of the Commission, the State Government should take a positive step to provide a permanent office building to the Mizoram State Commission for Women (MSCW).

**(8) Wide Publicity about the Commission:**

For a wider publicity of the important role performed and the help rendered by the Mizoram State Commission for Women, radio and television talks, print media, citizens' charter and workshops may be useful. It is suggested that wide publicity of the activities of the Commission may be made by the Commission periodically through this media.

**(9) Annual Report of the Commission:**

It appears that the Mizoram State Commission for Women, Government of Mizoram, has never submitted its annual report to the State Government which has to be laid before the State Legislature as provided under the MSCW Act, 2004. It is suggested that annual report of the Commission may be prepared by the Commission itself and may be submitted to the State Government regularly. At the same time, the State Government should also ensure that the MSCW submits its annual report regularly and are placed before the legislature.

**(10) Gender Sensitization Programme:**

It is suggested that gender sensitization programme may be organized for police personnel, prison officials, public prosecutors, caretakers of women's rehabilitation and shelter homes and office bearers of NGOs and others. Besides, working groups at the village level, block level and district level may be created as agencies of the Commission so as to take gender sensitization programme.

**(11) MSCW to be consulted by the State Government:**

It appears that the State Government has hardly consulted the Commission on policy matters affecting women at large. The MSCW is to be consulted by the State Government on all important policy issues concerning women as provided by the MSCW Act, 2004. It is suggested that the State Government may give more importance to the Mizoram State Commission for Women especially while formulating policies.

**(12) Coordination between the MSCW and Women NGOs:**

There should be a better coordination between the Mizoram State Commission for Women and Women NGOs. As NGOs work at the grassroots level, the Commission should involve the NGOs in dealing with the cases relating to violence against women. Massive awareness campaign on women's rights may be conducted regularly throughout the State. Since Mizo Hmeichhe

Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP) is the largest women voluntary organization having 742 branches in the State as on 19<sup>th</sup> April, 2017, it could play a significant role in conducting awareness campaign among women. Other organizations like Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), All Women's Federation, Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan (PMSA) and others could also contribute to the awareness campaign. The advice and experience of these organizations may help the Commissions in dealing with the cases. In this regard, the Commission may take the initiative to have a discussion with women voluntary organizations in the State.

**(13) Regular visits to Women Cell/Protective Home/Remand Home:**

It is also suggested that the Commission may visit Women Cell/Protective Home/Remand Home more regularly and ensure that the conditions of women and children at these places are satisfactory. When these visits are made, the Commission may listen to the problems and grievances of both the inmates and the officials of these homes or cells, and may take the matter with the recommendations to the concerned authorities for remedial actions.

The Mizoram State Commission for Women, Government of Mizoram has achieved a number its objectives despite various challenges and problems. It has gone a long way in helping out women in distress by counselling, by providing support of different kinds and by protecting their rights. The Commission has also taken various steps to improve the position of women in the State. However, there are certain areas where the Mizoram State Commission for Women, Government of Mizoram needs to improve its working for effective implementations of its mandates. There are also problems that need to be addressed by the Government of Mizoram to strengthen the Commission for the empowerment of women in the State.

**Conclusions:**

After studying the origin, structure, functions and role of the Mizoram State Commission for Women, Government of Mizoram, it may be concluded that the State Government may take initiative to restructure the organization of the Mizoram State Commission for Women and the MSCW Acts and Rules may be revised and amended in view of the above mentioned suggestions for the productive functioning of the Commission. The Mizoram State Commission for Women must be taken seriously by the both the bureaucracy and the State Government, otherwise, the objective behind the creation of this Commission would go in vain.

## **APPENDIX – I(a)**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE OLD AND NEW INCUMBENT CHAIRPERSONS, MEMBERS AND OFFICIALS OF THE MSCW**

1. What is your experience while working in the MSCW?
2. What are the main functions of the MSCW?
3. Is the working of the MSCW sufficient for protecting women's rights?
4. What were the main cases registered to the MSCW? How did you handle these cases?
5. What do you think is the reason for less number of cases registered under the MSCW?
6. Do you think that people especially women are aware of their rights and legal safeguards?
7. What are the achievements of the MSCW for the empowerment of women?
8. What are the problems associated with the working of MSCW?
9. Are you satisfied with the working of the MSCW for the empowerment of women?
10. Do you have any suggestions for the improvement of the MSCW?

## **APPENDIX – I (b)**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR LEADERS OF WOMEN NGOs AND OTHERS**

1. What do you know about the working of the MSCW?
2. Do you think that people are aware about the MSCW and its functioning?
3. Do you think that women are aware of their rights and legal safeguards?
4. Have you ever worked together with the MSCW?
5. Is the working of the MSCW sufficient for protecting women's rights?
6. Do you think the MSCW is approachable by women in distress?
7. Do you think the right persons are appointed as the Chairpersons and Members of the MSCW?
8. What do you think are the problems associated with the working of MSCW?
9. Are you satisfied with the working of the MSCW for the empowerment of women?
10. Do you have any suggestions for the improvement of the MSCW?

## APPENDIX - II

### LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Name of Interviewees</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>
1	Lalnipuii	Chairperson MSCW (1998, 2011)	23.10.2017
2	Rozami	Chairperson MSCW (2008)	21.11.2017
3	Vanlalawmpuii Chawngthu	Chairperson MSCW (2014-2017)	21.9.2017
4	Margaret Zohmingthangi	Chairperson MSCW (2017)	27.11.2017
5	Lianggengi	Member – MSCW (1998)	20.11.2017
6	Sylvie Z. Ralte	Member – MSCW (2008, 2014, 2017)	20.11.2017
7	Lalrosangi	Member – MSCW (2014, 2017)	20.11.2017
8	Dr. Zokaitluangi	Member – MSCW (2014, 2017)	22.11.2017
9	Dr. T. Vanlaltlani	Member – MSCW (2014, 2017)	23.11.2017
10	Vanlaldini	Member - Secretary MSCW (2004, 2011)	25.9.2017
11	Lallianpuii	Member - Secretary MSCW (2014)	12.11.2017
12	Lalbiakkimi	Member - Secretary MSCW (2015)	9.10.2017
13	Saipuii	President, MHIP Hqtrs. 2017	7.11.2017
14	Angela Ch. Ralte	Secretary, Centre for Peace & Development	8.11.2017
15	Vanramchhuangi	Activist Writer/ Author	7.11.2017



## Appendix-III

### BIO-DATA

**Name** : **Lalremruati Vanchhong**

**Father's Name** : **V.Thangzama**

**Occupation** : **Associate Professor,  
Govt.Aizawl West College, Aizawl**

**Address** : **A/69, Dawrpui Vengthar**

### Educational Qualifications:

Class	Board/University	Year passing	Division
X	MBSE	1985	III
XII	Karnataka Board	1987	I
B.A	Delhi University	1991	II
M.A	NEHU	1994	I
M.Phil	Mizoram University	Course Work Completed in 2016	'O' Grade awarded. 10pt. Scale Grading system. 'O' corresponds to 7-10pts.

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# **ABSTRACT**

## **WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF MIZORAM STATE COMMISSION FOR WOMEN**

**A Dissertation submitted to Mizoram University for the Award of the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy in Public Administration.**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The need for 'Women Empowerment' has been realized and given utmost priority today, as women constituting half of the world population have been suffering from discrimination, disability, injustice and inequality all over the world for almost centuries. Sometimes, women work harder than men but their work is often unrecognized, unpaid or undervalued. Moreover, they are grossly under-represented in governmental institutions. They have been denied equal access to or opportunities for the attainment of their personal growth and social development. It is against this background that some institutions have been created by the Governments of different democratic countries to improve the living and working condition of women and to end numerous problems faced by them both at the national level and the state level.

Women Empowerment has become one of the most important concerns of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century not only at the national level but also at the international level. Women Empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International Women's Conference in 1985 at Nairobi. Women Empowerment refers to the process of strengthening the hands of women who have been suffering from various disabilities, inequalities and discriminations and to enable them to control their own lives. It also refers to the process of providing equal rights, opportunities, responsibilities to women so that they are able to play a role on par with men in society. The objective of women empowerment is to create large scale awareness with the active cooperation of women themselves.

The United Nations Population Information Network defines, "Women Empowerment as having five components: Women's sense of self worth, their rights to have and to determine choices; their rights to have access to opportunities and resources; their rights to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside home, and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just, social and economic order, nationally and internationally."



In India, the framers of our Constitution were aware of the historical position of women in Indian society. Therefore, the Constitution of India emphasizes the importance of greater freedom for all and contains a number of provisions for the empowerment of women. Women's rights to equality and non-discrimination on ground of sex are defended by the Constitution as justifiable fundamental rights. Equal pay for equal work for both men and women has also been clearly mentioned in the Constitution of India under the Directive Principles of State Policy. In this connection, the Government of India has enunciated various measures over the years for improving the conditions of women. Since independence, numerous legislations have been passed for the protection and empowerment of women. However, it remains an undeniable fact that women in India continue to be denied economic, social, legal rights and privileges. And they continue to face numerous problems including violent victimization through rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry killings, human trafficking, forced prostitution, acid throwing etc. There are several constraints standing on the way to women empowerment and development in India.

In India, the Government has made institutional arrangements for the improvement of the living and working condition of women both at the national and the state level. At the national level, the 'National Commission for Women' was set up in 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act 1990 (number 20 of 1990) which has come into force on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1992. The Act is an important landmark to ensure legal safeguards for women and evaluate implementation of the schemes for women's development. The State Governments were also requested to set up similar State Commissions for Women in their respective States.

Since the Central Government considers it necessary to establish such a commission in every state, the Mizoram State Commission for Women was constituted in Mizoram on the 11<sup>th</sup> August 1998 by an executive order. This Commission has become a statutory body with the enactment of "The Mizoram State Commission for Women Act 2004." The Commission consists of a Chairperson and seven members who are nominated by the Government of Mizoram for a term of three years. In addition, there is a provision for a Member-Secretary to be nominated by the State Government.

## **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The present study covers the origin and history of Mizoram State Commission for Women and the important role played by the Commission for the empowerment of women. The study brings out the backdrops of the Commission and the problems encountered in the process of its working. The study focuses on the organizational structure, functions and how these functions are implemented by the Commission for women empowerment. Various activities undertaken by the Commission to generate awareness of rights and legal protections available to women are also analysed in the study. The study has also highlighted the challenges faced by the Commission and brings out possible solutions and suggestions for effective functioning of the Commission.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the organizational structures, functions and working of Mizoram State Commission for Women for women empowerment
2. To find out the problems, issues and challenges of the Mizoram State Commission for Women and to explore the scope for improvement of its role in women empowerment.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The present study has attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the organizational structure, functions and main activities of the MSCW for women empowerment?
2. What are the major problems, issues and challenges faced by the MSCW in achieving its objectives?
3. What are the possible solutions and measures to be undertaken to improve the working of the MSCW?

## **METHODOLOGY**

As the present study deals with both theory and practices related to Women Empowerment, the theoretical part has been collected from relevant literature like books, articles, research papers, internet sources and reports. The practical aspects have been collected by the scholar through field visits particularly to the office of Mizoram State Commission for Women. The information, ideas and opinion have been collected from the old and present incumbent chairpersons, members and officials and functionaries of the Mizoram State Commission for Women with the help of interview schedules consisting of open-ended questions.

Since the study is concerned mainly with the organization and functions of the Mizoram State Commission for Women, the methodology of data collection was based mostly on secondary data, which were obtained from the documents, official records of the Commission. Data were also collected from published and unpublished sources like books, journals, government reports, handbooks, newspapers and related websites. Descriptive design was used for the present study.

## **CHAPTERIZATION**

The study is divided into five chapters:

Chapter I	:	Introduction
Chapter II	:	Women Empowerment – A Conceptual Study
Chapter III	:	Organizational Structure and Role of the MSCW in Women Empowerment
Chapter IV	:	Problems and Challenges faced by MSCW for Empowerment of Women
Chapter V	:	Conclusions

## MAIN CONTENTS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The whole study is divided into five Chapters. The *first* chapter is an introductory chapter which has given a brief profile of the land “Mizoram” and the people living in Mizoram with a focus on the status and position of women in the Mizo society. It has also brought out Review of literature, Objectives of the study, Scope of the study, Research Questions and Chapter-wise breakups.

In the *second* chapter, the concept of “Women Empowerment” has been studied in the light of various definitions of “Women Empowerment” given by different thinkers and authorities on the subject. It also contains an operational application of the concept of Women Empowerment at different levels-International level, National and State level, that is, Mizoram.

In the *third* chapter, an attempt has been made to study the organisational structure of the Mizoram State Commission for Women (MSCW) and its role for the empowerment of women in the State of Mizoram. It has also taken up the study of the powers and functions of the MSCW and how these functions are performed by the MSCW. It has also studied the working of the MSCW and a number of activities taken up by it for the protection and promotion of women’s rights.

The *fourth* chapter has identified and looked into the main problems faced by the MSCW for the empowerment of women. It has also studied various challenges being faced by the MSCW.

The *final* chapter is the concluding Chapter which has brought the summary and major findings of this research. It has also made some relevant suggestions for improvement of the working of MSCW for the benefit of womenfolk irrespective of their colours, creeds and religions in Mizoram.

From the light of the present study, it may be ascertained that no study has been done relating to the organization and functions of the Mizoram State Commission for Women, Government of Mizoram. The present study has articulated that the Commission has undertaken various activities to generate awareness of women’s rights and legal safeguards available for women and children among the people in different parts of the State, funded by the National Commission for Women (NCW), Government of India.

An attempt is made to answer to the *first* research question: *What are the organizational structure, functions and main activities of the MSCW for women empowerment?* The Mizoram State Commission for Women was set up under the Social Welfare Department by the Government of Mizoram on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1998. The Commission has become a statutory body with the enactment of “The Mizoram State Commission for Women Act 2004.” Being the only Commission of its kind, the Commission has become an Apex body to work for the cause of women in the State of Mizoram. The Commission consists of a Chairperson, seven members and a Member-Secretary who are nominated by the Government of Mizoram for a term of three years. The Member-Secretary looks after the whole administration and is assisted by one UDC, one LDC and IV staff. The size of the Commission is very small at present also. Besides the Chairperson and other members of the Commission, the staff members are not newly recruited by the Commission but they are personnel of the Social Welfare Department, Government of Mizoram.

The Commission has created a “Legal Cell” within its organization, to function on behalf of the Commission. The Legal Cell consists mainly of experts in the field of law, one doctor member and one officer from the Social Welfare Department. This cell is expected to coordinate with the Commission for various works mainly on legal aspects. Any applications on maintenance grants registered under the MSCW are forwarded to the Mizoram State Legal Services Authority and such other cases registered under the Commission are forwarded to the District and Sessions Judge, Aizawl District.

The Office of the Mizoram State Commission for Women is located at Khatla, Aizawl. The Commission does not have any field agencies or field staff to assist the Commission in the discharge of its functions. The Commission has been endowed with the powers to protect and promote Women’s rights throughout the State and especially in situations where women are in need of help.

The functions of the Mizoram State Commission for Women are: (a) to investigate and examine all matters relating to the safeguards provided for women under the Constitution and other laws and recommend steps to be taken by the State Government for effective implementation of such safeguards (b) to take up the cases of violation of the provisions of the Constitution and of other laws relating to

women with the appropriate authorities (c) to look into complaints and take *suo moto* notice of matters relating deprivation of women's rights (d) to visit jail, remand home, women's institution or other places of custody where women are kept as prisoners or otherwise, and take up with the concerned authorities for remedial action, if found necessary.

The Mizoram State Commission for Women has been taking a number of activities to disseminate awareness among the common people about the rights and legal protections available to women. In this regard, the Commission has been conducting seminars, workshops, consultation meetings, discussions, and others. Topics such as Empowering the Mizo Women through Legal Education, Women in Politics, Domestic Violence Against Women, Rape and Human Trafficking, POCSO Act, and others are discussed from time to time.

The *second* research question is: *What are the major problems, issues and challenges faced by the MSCW in achieving its objectives?* The study reveals that the number of cases/complaints received by the Commission is very less as compared to the number of cases registered in other State's Commissions. This implies that there is still low level of awareness among the common people about the rights of women as well as protective mechanisms available to women in cases of violations of their rights.

Another reason may be lack of awareness among the common people about the existence and functioning of the Mizoram State Commission for Women. Until and unless people are aware of the reason behind the creation of the Commission, the objectives of the Commission cannot be achieved.

The proper functioning of any organization depends on adequate funds available at its disposal. More funds must be given to the Commission so that the Commission would be able to organize more seminars, workshops and discussion to spread awareness among the common people throughout the State. The Commission would also be able to help victims of crime against women on time.

The Mizoram State Commission for Women is a statutory body but does not have any autonomy. The Commission itself is not empowered in terms of manpower, financial resources and equipments. There is lack of facilities and

expertise required for the efficient functioning of the Commission. Since its inception, the Commission has been operating only as a part of the Social Welfare Department. The Commission is only a recommendatory body and its recommendations are not binding on the State Government.

The Chairperson and other seven (7) members are nominated by the State Government. For a Chairperson, a person who is committed to the cause of women is to be nominated by the State Government. Some of the appointed chairpersons have had no history of working on women issues. The total control of the government in the selection of the Chairperson and members of the Commission has affected the working and functioning of the Commission in many ways, whether it is the issues it chooses to work on or its manner of response to various issues or in dealing with the government and departments. It has also affected the day to day functioning of the Commission.

Most of the time, the Member-Secretary of the Commission is not appointed as full-time Member-Secretary. This curbs the effective functioning of the Commission because the Member-Secretary has to attend other important functions besides the functions of the Commission.

The amount of honorarium given to the Chairperson and the sitting allowance of Members of the Commission is too meagre as compared to the amount of salary/allowances given to the Chairperson and Members in other State Commission for Women.

The *third* research question is: *What are the possible solutions and measures to be undertaken to improve the working of the MSCW?* There is an ample scope for enhancing the effectiveness and ability of the MSCW to promote “Women Empowerment” in the State. However, there is no denying the fact that the existing organisational structure of the Commission is not adequate for the effective functioning of the Commission to take up more programmes for “Women Empowerment” in the State of Mizoram.

## **Challenges and Suggestions:**

Right from its inception, the Commission has been facing some challenges regarding personnel, financial, infrastructural facilities etc. The following suggestions have been made for overcoming the above problems and challenges:

### **(1) Question of Autonomy:**

The Commission has been assigned a wide range of tasks, but it is not empowered to be able to perform all the tasks assigned to it. The Commission has to function autonomous of both the executive and the legislative wings of the State Government. On the contrary, the MSCW has remained a part of the Social Welfare Department, Government of Mizoram.

Therefore, the MSCW needs to be strengthened to work as a 'High Powered Autonomous Body' to protect the constitutional rights and legal entitlements or safeguards of women. The Commission must be given autonomous status and the status of the Chairperson and Members of the Commission should be suitably enhanced and defined to make them work without fear or favour.

### **(2) Shortage of competent staff support:**

The present strength of the staff of the Mizoram State Commission for Women is too small and inadequate. Among its permanent staff, there are no experts in the field of law, counselling, research and others which are very essential in this type of organization. As the main task of the Commission is to ensure legal safeguards for women and evaluate implementation of the schemes for women development, the existing Commission has to be restructured and strengthened by creating additional posts so that experts or technical staff are included among the permanent staff. Additional posts are required because the present strength of staff members does not allow the Commission to be divided into different Cells like Complaint and Counseling Cell, Legal Cell, Research Cell and others which are essential for effectively carrying out its mandate. Moreover, direct recruitment for the post of the Member-Secretary must be made so that the Commission will have a



full-time and permanent Member-Secretary who can concentrate on the works of the Commission.

**(3) Adequate Allocation of funds:**

It is also suggested that sufficient funds may be made available to the Commission regularly and on time so that the Commission would be able to organize more seminars, workshops and discussion to spread awareness among the common people throughout the State. Without sufficient funds, no organization is able to work properly. The Commission would be able to help victims of crime against women on time if there is an adequate allocation of funds for its working.

**(4) Method of appointment of Chairperson and Members of the Commission:**

Some Members of the Commission are appointed not because of their work in the field but because of their political and other connections. They generally have no links with the Women Movement and Women's Groups and therefore no deep concerns or understanding to carry the issues forward. Reputed persons in the field of women's rights or studies may be appointed as Chairperson and other Members of the Commission. A person who is a committed social worker having good academic and practical experience in women's issues and movements must be appointed as a Chairperson of the Commission.

**(5) Required a Fulltime Member-Secretary:**

Most of the time, the Commission does not have a fulltime Member-Secretary which is against the Mizoram State Commission for Women Rules, 2008 Section 6 (ii). The present Member-Secretary of the Commission holds another position under the State Government, Social Welfare Department. This means she has to attend her responsibility as a District Social Welfare Officer, Aizawl West, while she performs her duty as a Member-Secretary of the Commission. It is suggested that a fulltime Member-Secretary may be appointed by the State Government for the better functioning of the Commission. Or direct recruitment for the post of the Member-Secretary must be made so that the Commission will have a

full time and permanent Member-Secretary who can concentrate on the works of the Commission.

**(6) Freedom to appoint its own Staff:**

The Mizoram State Commission for Women Rules 2008, Section 7 (ii) provides that the staff other than the Chairperson and the Member-Secretary shall be appointed by the Commission with prior approval of Government. But the Commission has not utilized this power to meet its need of adequate staff. This curtails the efficient functioning of the Commission. It is necessary for the Commission to have freedom to appoint its own requisite staff to assist the Commission in its day to day functioning. At the same time, the Commission has to be strengthened financially to enable to appoint its own staff.

**(7) Office Building:**

The Mizoram State Commission for Women has not yet got its own office building even after nineteen (19) years of its existence. The office of the Commission is still located in a rented building at Khatla, Aizawl. As the office is not prominently displayed, it is not easily accessible for those who need its services.

In view of the ever increasing role of the Commission, the State Government should take a positive step to provide a permanent office building to the Mizoram State Commission for Women (MSCW).

**(8) Wide Publicity about the Commission:**

For a wider publicity of the important role performed and the help rendered by the Mizoram State Commission for Women, radio and television talks, print media, citizens' charter and workshops may be useful. It is suggested that wide publicity of the activities of the Commission may be made by the Commission periodically.

**(9) Annual Report of the Commission:**

It appears that the Mizoram State Commission for Women, Government of Mizoram, has never submitted its annual report to the State Government which has to be laid before the State Legislature as provided under the MSCW Act, 2004. It is suggested that annual report of the Commission may be prepared by the Commission itself and may be submitted to the State Government regularly. At the same time, the State Government should also ensure that the MSCW submits its annual report regularly and are placed before the legislature.

**(10) Gender Sensitization Programme:**

It is suggested that gender sensitization programme may be organized for police personnel, prison officials, public prosecutors, caretakers of women rehabilitation and shelter homes and office bearers of NGOs and others. Besides, working groups at the village level, block level and district level may be created as agencies of the Commission so as to take gender sensitization programme.

**(11) MSCW to be consulted by the State Government:**

It appears that the State Government has hardly consulted the Commission on policy matters affecting women at large. The MSCW is to be consulted by the State Government on all important policy issues concerning women as provided by the MSCW Act, 2004. It is suggested that the State Government may give more importance to the Mizoram State Commission for Women.

**(12) Coordination between the MSCW and Women NGOs;**

There should be a better coordination between the Mizoram State Commission for Women and Women NGOs. As NGOs work at the grassroots level, the Commissions should involve the NGOs in dealing with the cases related to violence against women. Massive awareness campaign on women's rights may be conducted regularly throughout the State. Since Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP) is the largest women voluntary organization having 742 branches in the State, it could play a significant role in conducting awareness campaign among women. Other organizations like Young Women Christian Association (YWCA),

All Women's Federation, Panchayat Mahila Shakti Abhiyan (PMSA) and others could also contribute to the awareness campaign. The advice and experience of these organizations may help the Commissions in dealing with the cases. In this regard, the Commission may take the initiative to have a discussion with women voluntary organizations in the State.

**(13) Regular visits to Women Cell/Protective Home/Remand Home:**

It is also suggested that the Commission may visit Women Cell/ Protective Home/Remand Home more regularly and to ensure that the conditions of women and children at these places are satisfactory. When these visits are made, the Commission may listen to the problems of both the inmates and the officials of these homes, and may take the matter with the recommendations to the concerned authorities.

The Mizoram State Commission for Women, Government of Mizoram has achieved a number its objectives despite various challenges and problems. It has gone a long way in helping out women in distress by counselling, by providing support of different kinds and by protecting their rights. The Commission has also taken various steps to improve the position of women in the State. However, there are certain areas where the Mizoram State Commission for Women, Government of Mizoram needs to improve its working for effective implementations of its mandates. There are also problems that need to be addressed by the Government of Mizoram to strengthen the Commission for the empowerment of women in the State.

**Conclusion:**

After studying the origin, structure, functions and role of the Mizoram State Commission for Women, Government of Mizoram, it may be concluded that the State Government may take initiative to restructure the organization of the Mizoram State Commission for Women and the MSCW Rules may be revised in view of the above mentioned suggestions for the productive functioning of the Commission. The Mizoram State Commission for Women must be taken seriously by the both the bureaucracy and the State Government, otherwise, the objective behind the creation of this Commission would go in vain.