

**ELECTIONS IN MIZORAM: A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF
THE MIZORAM PEOPLE FORUM**

**BY
ZARZOSANGA**

**DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**



**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
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DECLARATION

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

Date: 16th December 2013

Zarzosanga

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Mr. Zarzosanga, a bonafide research scholar having Enrollment No. F.17-1/2002 (SA-1), 22nd November, 2012, attached to the Department of Political Science has completed his work for the *Degree of Master of Philosophy (M. Phil) in Political Science* under my supervision on the topic: **Elections in Mizoram: A Study of the Role of the Mizoram People Forum**. The work carried out by the researcher is original and no part of the dissertation has been published in the form of paper or part of a book.

On the completion of all the formalities, I am pleased to forward the dissertation for evaluation and further necessary action.

Dr. AYANGBAM SHYAMKISHOR
SUPERVISOR

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Glossary

Aii Puk	Name of a cave near Sihphir Village. It is nearby this area that former Chief Minister Pu Zoramthanga bought land and established Aii Puk Farming Society, which later emerged as the center of corruption controversy.
Hnamchawm	Common people, everyone excluding the ruling clan is referred to as <i>Hnamchawm</i> in traditional Mizo society ruled by the Chiefs.
Intodelh	Self-sufficient
Khawnbawl	A group of elders handpicked by a Chief to assist him in administering the day to day affairs of the village in the traditional Mizo society. They are the main advisers to the Chief in all his decision-making. A Chief seldom makes decisions without the consent of this group of elders.
Lusei	An old name of Mizo. The British referred the Mizo tribe as Lushai Tribe and the area they inhabited as Lushai Hills. This term 'Lushai' has been re-interpreted by the Mizo as 'Lusei'.
Mau tam	Periodic dying down of bamboos which occur almost every fifty years in Mizoram.
Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm	
Pawl (MHIP)	MHIP is a women organization founded on 6 th July, 1974. The organization has emerged as one of the most influential civil society organizations in Mizoram which fought for the upliftment and welfare of Mizo females in the society.

Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP)	MZP is a student organization established on 27 th October, 1935. With the motto “Unity is Strength”, the main objectives of MZP include developing unity among different clans and sub-clans of Mizo society, to assist the government in the development of Mizo society as well as to initiate administrative reforms. MZP is one of the most vocal organizations among the civil society organizations in Mizoram.
Mizoram Upa Pawl (MUP)	MUP is an association of the senior citizens. The association was founded on 1960 as ‘ <i>Zoram Upa Pawl</i> ’. The name was changed to <i>Mizoram Upa Pawl</i> in 1992. Senior citizens, above the age of 60 years are eligible to be members of MUP.
Pa	Father
Phutlaih Kuli	The British, after their annexation of the Lushai Hills in 1891, used to demand the Mizo Chiefs to provide strong and able men to carry their belongings when they travel. Neither the Chiefs nor the youths are forbid to deny or make excuses. The Mizo labeled this demand of the British as a kind of forced labor and used to refer as ‘Phutlaih Kuli’ meaning forced labor..
Pi	It is the title given to married women.
Pu	It is the title given to married men
Thawhhona Thuthlung	A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by the MPF and the major political parties in Mizoram in 2008. This MoU served Election Guidelines of the MPF in the elections.
Thuneitute	Office Bearers to be elected by representatives of the Chief’s Council and the common people to run the administration of the Lushai Hills, as per the Constitution

drafted by Superintendent A.R.H Macdonald in 1946,

Upa

Elders of the church. Church Elders are elected by members of the church.

Zawlbuk

A bachelor's dormitory in traditional Mizo society. All Mizo villages have *Zawlbuk*, where male youths, 14 years and above and middle-aged men gathered. Zawlbuk is the place where elders teach the young ones about manners, etiquettes, courage, work ethics, etc. It also served as a security center for the whole village. All unmarried youths slept in Zawlbuk every night in case of surprise attack from enemies.

Abbreviations

APCC	Assam Pradesh Congress Committee
BCM	Baptist Church of Mizoram
ECI	Election Commission of India
EITU	Eastern Indian Tribal Union
FLAM Members	Former Legislative Assembly
INC	Indian National Congress
KSU	Khasi Student's Union
MC	Mizo Convention
MCC	Mizoram Congress Committee
MDCC	Mizo District Congress Committee
MDF	Mara Democratic Front
MDF	Mizo Democratic Front
MHIP	<i>Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl</i>
MIP	Mizoram <i>Intodelh</i> Project
MJD	Mizo Janata Dal
MJP	Mizo Janata party
MLTP	Mizoram Liquor Total Prohibition
MNF (D)	Mizo National Front (Democratic)
MNF (N)	Mizo National Front (Nationalist)
MNF	Mizo National Front
MNFF	Mizo National Famine Front
MNYF	Mizo National Youth Front
MPC 'B'	Mizoram People's Conference 'B'
MPC	Mizoram People's Conference

MPCC Committee	Mizoram Pradesh Congress
MPF	Mizoram People Forum
MU	Mizo Union
MZP	<i>Mizo Zirlai pawl</i>
NBCU	Naga Baptist Church Union
PPVs	Progressive and Protected Villages
SEC	Synod Executive Committee
UMFO	United Mizo Freedom Organization
UNC	United Naga Council
UPC	United Pentecostal Church
YLA	Young Lushai Association
YMA	Young Mizo Association
ZNP	Zoram Nationalist Party

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Elections and democracy are like two wheels of a cycle. If one wheel is removed, the cycle cannot move forward. Democratic rule is inconceivable without elections. A ruler who does away with elections is either a dictator or an authoritarian leader. Moreover, the classical form of direct democracy is not possible in the modern world. Hence, indirect democracy through open, free and fair election is one of the most important means for strengthening and sustaining the principles of democracy. India is as the biggest democracy in the world. Hence, with its huge population, multi-ethnic society and large size of the country, free and fair election is very important (and difficult) for India as well as to maintain and ensure the realization of the basic principles of democracy.

The Mizo people have been living in their present territory for nearly two hundred years before the British occupied the region in 1891. The traditional Chiefs managed and looked after the daily administration of the society. Under the rule of their respective Chiefs, each village and the society tried to become self-reliant, self-governing and self-dependent. These Chiefs or rulers ruled over their subjects based on the hereditary principle. Before the introduction of Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, the whole of Assam as constituted in 1874 was declared to be a Scheduled District under the

Scheduled District Act, 1874.¹ However, a majority of the Hill Districts, of which the Lushai Hills was one of them, were deregulated in two ways. First, by section 14 of the Assam General Clauses Act, 1915 which authorized the exclusion of the operation of the Acts passed by the Assam Legislative Council, unless specifically extended under the Scheduled Districts Act, 1874. Second, under the Assam Frontier Tract Regulation, 1880, the Local Administration, with the sanction of the Governor-General-in-Council could direct that any enactment in force in any tract to which the regulation has been applied, shall cease to be in force therein.² Hence, after the British annexation of the Lushai Hills, the British administration classified the Lushai Hills as ‘Backward Tracts.’

In 1917, the Montague-Chelmsford Report recommended that the typically backward tracts should be excluded from the jurisdiction of the Reformed Assam Legislative Council.³ Besides, the declaration of the area as one of the ‘Tribal Area’ by the Government of India Act 1935 and the subsequent declaration of the area as ‘Excluded Area’ in 1936 under the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas Order, 1936,⁴ had rendered the Hill District to a period of isolation and political turmoil for a long time. Moreover, the foundations of Mizo society rests upon the mercy and goodwill of the local Chiefs had further prolonged the absence of normal administrative and political functioning within the area until the first District Council election in 1952.

¹Rao, V. Venkata (1976). *A Century of Tribal Politics in North-East India 1874-1974*. New Delhi: S. Chand & Company Ltd.p.46

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.,p.47

⁴Zamawia, R. (2007). *Zofate Zinkawngah Zalenna mei a mit tur a ni lo (The spirit of freedom should not wither in our journey)*. Aizawl: R.Zamawia. p.104

Brief Profile of Mizoram

Mizo Hills was a district of Assam before it became a Union Territory of India in 1972. Later on, Mizoram was upgraded to full-fledged state as the 23rd state of the Indian Union on February, 1987. The state is located at a strategic location, sharing international boundaries of 630 miles with Bangladesh and Myanmar.⁵ The Tropic of Cancer runs through the state and is geographically situated between 21°.58'N to 24°.35'N Latitude and 92°.15'E and 93°.29'E Longitude. Mizoram has a total area of 21,081 Sq. Km.⁶ According to 2011 census, there are 1,091,014 people in Mizoram.⁷ Mizo is the official language. There are numerous clans and sub-clans in the Mizo society. Some of the major sub-clans of the Mizo are *Sailo*, *Pachauau*, *Hmar*, *Chhangte*, *Ralte*, *Khiangte*, *Hnamte*, etc. The people are mainly *Lusei* (Mizo) ethnic group, while Chakmas in the southern-most part and Bru along the western border of Tripura constitute a substantial portion of the population. A majority of the population of the state are Christians (87%). The Hindus formed a small minority (3.5%) and around 8.3% Buddhists, who are mostly from Chakma community.⁸ There are numerous Christian denominations in Mizoram. The Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod is the largest church denomination in terms of members, with a total membership of 484,433. Baptist Church of Mizoram is the second largest denomination with 151,587 members.⁹ Other major churches are United Pentecostal Church, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist, Evangelical

⁵Patnaik, Jagadish K. (ed.) (2008). *Mizoram: Dimensions and Perspectives- Society, Economy and Polity*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.p.1

⁶Mizoram Statistical Handbook 2012.p.xvii

⁷Ibid.,p.1

⁸http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Mizoram

⁹Mizoram Statistical Handbook 2012.*op.cit*.p.136

Church of Maraland, *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran* (Lai Baptist Church) and Roman Catholic. The literacy rate of Mizoram is 91.58%, the second highest in India behind Kerala.¹⁰

Before the advent of the British, Mizoram, then the Lushai Hills was under the control and authority of numerous local tribal Chiefs. Tribe and clan distinctions and classifications had a great bearing in the setting up of villages. Village administration tends to differ from village to village and from clan to clan. The Chiefs tried to protect and maintain their territorial integrity, security, authority and supremacy by defeating and destabilizing their enemies. As a reason, wars were frequently fought between the Chiefs. Thus, weaker clans had to take refuge from stronger clans. The Chiefs were the ultimate source of authority and as such the prosperity, strength or weakness of each clan and society greatly depended on the administrative capabilities and qualities of their respective Chiefs. The powers and authorities of the Chiefs were slowly and gradually reduced with the annexation of the Lushai Hills by the British in 1891.

As a result of the British expedition in 1889-1890, the administration of Mizoram, then Lushai Hills was divided into two districts, namely, North Lushai Hills District and South Lushai Hills District.¹¹ The North Lushai Hills District was under the control of the Chief Commissioner of Assam, while the South Lushai Hills District was under the supervision and control of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal. After the Chin-Lushai Conference, 1892, the

¹⁰Ibid. p.152

¹¹Lalnithanga, P. (2005). *Emergence of Mizoram*. Aizawl: P.Lalnithanga. p.24

two districts were amalgamated into one district in 1898, with a Superintendent designated as in-charge of the district. Since then, there had been several socio-political developments within the district. The Mizo Hills had transformed itself into a democratic order from the authoritarian Chiefs. During the period, people developed ethnic and political consciousness. As a result, the people formed the Young Lushai Association (YLA) in 1935. Later on, it changed its nomenclature as the Young Mizo Association (YMA).

After the formation of YMA, several other influential civil society organizations came into existence and played an important role in the electoral process and politics of the state till today. The *Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl* (MHIP), the *Mizo Zirlai Pawl* (MZP), the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and recently, the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) are the most notable among them.

During the British rule, the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills prohibits politics in the Lushai Hills till the early 1940s. Immediately, after lifting the ban, Mizo formed a political party known as Mizo Union in 1946. The Mizo Union was the first political party in the Lushai Hills. Mizo Union was followed by other political parties such as United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO), etc. These political parties are no longer in existence today. Some of them merged with other political parties, while others slowly and gradually died a natural death. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

With the elevation of the Lushai Hills to the status of District Council in 1952 and the consequent conferment of the Union Territory status in 1972, the

socio-political administration of Mizoram as a whole had greatly moved forward. Democratic ideals and principles have now occupied an integral part in the administrative and political functioning of the state.

Elections

An election is a formal decision-making process by which an electorate chooses an individual to hold public office. It is through elections that offices are filled in the Legislature and sometimes in the Executive of a country, as well as in regional and local governments. The process is also used in many other private and business organizations such as trade unions, sport organizations, civil society organizations etc. Election is not a new phenomenon. Elections were used in ancient Athens and in Rome in the selection of Popes and Holy Roman emperors. The origin of elections in the contemporary world however, lies in the gradual emergence of representative government in Europe and North America which began in the 17th century.¹² Nowadays, election is the most reliable means for electing representatives in a liberal democracy. A free, fair and open election is one of the most important pre-requisite for the full realization of the principles of democracy. In fact, it is the presence of election in a democracy that distinguished it from other forms of government and authority such as authoritarian and dictatorial regimes, socialist States, etc. In other political systems, people became leaders by reason of birth, lot, wealth, violence, co-optation, learning, appointment or examination. The central procedure of democracy is the selection of leaders

¹²Heinz, Eulau. "*Elections*."

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/182308/election#toc229014>. Accessed on 6.9.2013

through competitive elections by the people they govern.¹³ In fact, election, by its very nature of participation on the part of the people and competition on the part of the candidates rendered the possibility and realization of the methods and structures of democracy. In other words, as Joseph Schumpeter puts it, “The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.”¹⁴

Importance of Elections in Democracy

Electoral system and its dynamics are one of the most important mechanisms for the realization and materialization of the basic principles of democracy. Election constitutes the heart of democracy. The exercise of popular voting, or in other words, election, gives political legitimacy to the people's representatives. This legitimacy is highly essential for the stability of democratic constitutional order. The importance of elections cannot be undermined in any democratic country. In fact, it is one of the most important cornerstones for the successful working of democracy in the world. In Australia, authorities paid huge importance to elections that they enforced a policy of compulsory voting in elections. Citizens are obliged to vote in elections, failing of which may result in punishments such as fines or community service. Elections are taken very seriously in the democratic countries of the world.

¹³Huntington, Samuel P. (2010). *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. New Delhi: Adarsh Books. p.6

¹⁴As cited by Samuel P. Huntington. Ibid.

A political system could be considered as democratic, if its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest and periodic elections. In such elections, candidates freely compete for votes and virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote. Similarly, a system is undemocratic to the extent that no opposition is permitted in elections, or that the opposition is curbed or harassed in what it can do, or that votes are manipulated or miscounted.¹⁵ Hence, an open, free and fair election is the essence of democracy. In fact, it is the most efficient and reliable means for ensuring a representative democracy in the world.

However, a democratically elected government may be inefficient, corrupt or characterized by nepotism, favoritism and other such unwanted qualities which may lead to inefficiency or maladministration. Nevertheless, these qualities may make such governments undesirable but they do not make them undemocratic.¹⁶ In other words, citizens could choose their political leaders through a free and fair election. Even if the elected leaders indulged in political malpractices, their actions may be undemocratic, but they do not necessarily render a political system or government undemocratic. The principle of democracy lies in conducting an open, free and fair election, where everyone has an equal opportunity for participation and contestation in the electoral process. Thus, in a democracy, elections provide a proper and systematic channel for expressing support or opposition that enabled governments and political leaders to work out public policies within the

¹⁵Ibid., pp.7-8

¹⁶Ibid., p.10

framework of democracy. It could therefore, be said that election is the foundation of democracy.

Elections in India

India is one of the biggest parliamentary democracies in the world. She had a long tradition of elections and it began during the British rule. The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 provided limited franchise based on property qualification. The Provincial election of 1937 was the first election in which large masses of the Indians were eligible and able to participate. When India became independent, elections in India are held on the basis of universal franchise. The first General election in India after independence was held during 1951-1952.

Elections are conducted in India by an independent and constitutional body known as the Election Commission of India (ECI). The Election Commission of India is established in order to conduct free and fair elections in the country. The ECI conducts and supervises all the elections in India. The role and function of the ECI is very critical in order to ensure open, free and fair elections. Its role is also very difficult and complex because of the size of the country and the number of electorates.

Moreover, India is a country of multi- ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual communities, with different and diverse communal as well as socio-economic interests and perceptions. The importance and function of the ECI has been further enhanced in order to maintain a uniform and well-defined

electoral process in the country. The electoral politics in India is influenced by many factors like caste, money and muscle power, religion, etc.

Elections in the North-East

Election is a new phenomenon in the North Eastern region of India, especially in the hill areas of India's north-east. During the British rule, the hill areas of Assam were administered in a limited way. The hill areas of Assam were first declared as Backward Tracts. Again, they were divided into Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas by the Government of India Act, 1935. The hill areas were not directly under the control of Assam Provincial Legislative Assembly. As a result, there were no provincial elections in the hill areas of Assam including the Lushai Hills. In other words, the north-eastern people, especially the hill people experienced democratic elections only after 1947.

The electoral politics in the North East is influenced by different civil society organizations operating in the region. There are many civil society organizations in the region. Some of them are Naga Ho, United Naga Council (UNC), Kuki Inpi, Young Mizo Association (YMA), etc. They are very powerful and influential in the state politics in general and electoral politics in particular. These civil societies deeply involved in the day-to-day affairs of the state and some of them become more active during elections. The involvement of these organizations has had adverse effect on the normal election procedures of different states in the region. The election trend is commonly witnessed in all the states of north-eastern region of India including Mizoram. The present

study mainly focused on the role of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) in the electoral process of Mizoram.

Methodology

The present study is based on the survey method of social science research. Survey research has special importance in the field of research. It is important for studying opinions, attitudes, viewpoints and social facts, etc. The data for the study are collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data are collected through unstructured interview and observation methods. Interview had been conducted on the leaders of the MPF, namely Upa Lalramthanga, General Secretary of the MPF¹⁷ and Dr. L.N. Tluanga, former Adviser of the MPF. Interview were also conducted on intellectuals and academicians, such as Prof. J.V. Hluna, Mr. N.B. Sachhei, Associate Professor, Mr. Chhawnvunga, Associate Professor (Retired), who was also a member of the expert committee set up by Mizoram Presbyterian Synod for the establishment of MPF. Student leaders such as Mr. James Thangmingmawia, former President of the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP)¹⁸ were also interviewed by the scholar. Political leaders like Mr. R. Tlanghmingthanga, Lt. Col. Z.S. Zuala, Parliamentary Secretary, Mr. P.C. Laltlansanga, President, Mizo National Youth Front (MNYF), leaders of eminent civil society organizations, such as Mr. Vanlalruata, General Secretary of the Central YMA, church leaders includes Rev. H. Sangchema, President-Elect of the Baptist Church of

¹⁷The interview was conducted by the Research Scholar at the MPF Headquarter office at Aizawl on 6.6.2013. During that time, *Upa* Lalramthanga was the General Secretary of the MPF.

¹⁸The interview was conducted by the Research Scholar at the MZP main office at Aizawl on 6.6.2013. During that time, Mr. James Thangmingmawia was the President of the Organization.

Mizoram, Major Saitluanga, Commanding Officer of the Salvation Army, Serchhip Corps are some of the eminent persons interviewed for the purpose. Official documents of the MPF like leaflets, pamphlets, press releases of the MPF, etc are collected and used them as primary sources. Both direct and indirect observation method has been adopted by attending various seminars and consultations organized by the MPF during the State Legislative Assembly elections, 2013 and primary information are collected for the study. Secondary data are collected from government documents, circulars and publications, political party documents, articles from journals, newspapers (both local as well as national), books, doctoral thesis and other research publications which are relevant for the study. Descriptive and content analysis are used for the analysis of collected literatures, clippings from various newspapers, particularly *Vanglaini*, Aizawl Post, The Hindu and The Times of India, apart from other local newspapers in order to have an insight into the subject of the study.

Statement of the problem

Electoral politics in Mizoram is very much influenced by civil society organizations like the YMA. The idea of ‘open, free and fair election’ is taken very seriously by them. Unlike the other states of India, the church and its affiliated organizations also play an important role in Mizoram politics. The activities of the church are not limited to spreading the gospel alone but also include the socio-political aspect of the society. The church played an important role in the overall development—social, economic and political arena—of the Mizo society. For instance, during the insurgency period in

Mizoram, the church worked tirelessly to bring peace and normalcy in the state. The leaders of the church act as a 'peace broker' to negotiate with the leaders of the insurgent groups and government officials. In fact, the church played the role of a 'catalyst' in bringing the Mizo National Front (MNF) over the negotiating table to negotiate and sign a peace agreement with the Government of India to bring normalcy in the state. In fact, virtually everything in Mizoram revolves around the church and politics is no exception particularly during elections. It is they who issue guidelines for elections—the Do's and Don'ts—both for the political parties and the electorate. The first visible engagement of the church and civil society in the electoral process of Mizoram was in the year 1972, when election was held in the newly formed Union Territory of Mizoram. In the subsequent years, the church and most of the prominent civil society organizations of the Mizo, particularly the Young Mizo Association (YMA) continuously and tirelessly worked together for an open, free and fair election in Mizoram. The role of the church still continues and become more prominent with the formation of Mizoram People Forum (MPF) on 21st June 2006. The main thrust areas of the organization are electoral reforms, political education and good governance in order to ensure a progressive, just and sustainable socio-economic development for the people.

The MPF has taken various steps to achieve its goals of establishing a democratic government through free and fair elections. The first important step taken by the MPF was the convening of consultative meeting with the representatives of various political parties within the state on 25th September, 2006. Based on the discussions and suggestions from this meeting, the MPF

came up with the 'Election Guidelines', which was later approved with slight modifications by all the political parties in another joint consultative meeting held on 30th April, 2008. These guidelines became the principles which both the MPF as well as political parties followed during elections.

After the approval of the Election Guidelines, the MPF started organizing seminars, consultative meetings and public awareness programmes throughout the state during the elections. Moreover, the MPF appealed to the political parties to put up honest, reliable and fair candidates and to stick to the election code of conduct. The appeal of the MPF was taken seriously by the political parties and candidates. The political parties and the candidates stop organizing feasts, musical concerts, rallies, public meetings, etc. without the permission of the MPF. Candidates no longer engage in door to door campaigns without the supervision of the MPF. The MPF even fixed the number and size of banner(s) and poster(s) to be put up by the candidates and political parties. The election scenario in Mizoram is already changed and the state is no more witnessing the festive mood during the election. The MPF distributed the party leaflets, manifestos, bio-data of candidates and other information related with the parties and their candidates. These activities are done by MPF volunteers. The MPF organized public meetings and invites all the party leaders and candidates and provides equal opportunities to them so that they can express their views and convince the electorates. In the public meeting organized by the MPF, the political leaders highlighted their manifestos and try to clarify any allegation against the candidates or the party, if there is any. The MPF also provides the opportunities to the voters to ask

question(s) to the party leaders or candidates. In other words, the MPF provides a forum for discussions between the political actors and the electorates. It means that the MPF is playing an important role in the election process of the state of Mizoram. Hence, the role played by the MPF can be studied and examined from various dimensions, political and otherwise, in order to identify its relevance, legitimacy as well as the merits and shortcomings.

Scope of the Research

The scope of the present study is limited to the elections in Mizoram and particularly, on the role of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) in the electoral process of the state. It studies the various activities of the MPF during the elections as well as in the post-poll period. The study also covers the history of political development in Mizoram in brief. It also traces and studies the influence and contribution of the church in the political developments as well as in the electoral politics of the state. The main focus of the research is on the contributions and roles played by the MPF in the electoral process as well as on the overall electoral politics of the state. Hence, the various activities of the MPF during and after election are thoroughly examined. Conclusions are then drawn on the contributions and roles of the MPF in the electioneering process of the state. The opinions of the people on the role and influence of the MPF are discussed in details. The reactions of the people (both positive and negative) are examined thoroughly.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the electoral politics in the State of Mizoram in general and the role of the church in particular.
2. To examine the role and function of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) in the electoral politics of Mizoram.

Research Questions

There are two main Research Questions for the study. They are:

1. How important is the role of MPF in the conduct of free and fair elections in Mizoram?
2. In what way is it possible to follow the Mizoram model of election process in other parts of India?

Review of Related Literatures

K. S. Padhy and P. P. Tripathy (1994) *Voting behavior of Tribals in India* analyzes the various patterns of voting behavior and the factors affecting the electoral behavior of the tribal electorates in India. The book examines the voting behavior and political participation of the Kondhs, a tribal community of Orissa. It further analyzed the various socio-economic factors that had greatly influenced the tribals of the North-east. Besides, it discussed the various factors which are needed for reforming the electoral behavior of the tribals in India as a whole.

India's 1999 Elections and 20th Century Politics (2003) is a book edited by Paul Wallace and Ramashray Roy consisting of various articles which examine the consequences and results of the 1999 general elections in the light of the political developments that was beginning to unfold at the start of the 20th Century. It provides a comparative analysis of the 1999 general elections with the various elections that had taken place in the preceding years, since the country's independence. It also addresses several issues and factors that had affected electoral politics down the years such as caste, ethnicity, religion etc. The book also discusses how regional political parties at the States make inroads into the mainstream electoral politics, thereby necessitating coalition politics at the Centre as well as at the States. The importance of regionalism in Indian politics occupied an integral place in this book with 15 chapters dedicated to focus on the dimension of electoral politics in various States.

A book by Samuel P. Huntington (2010), *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* gave a well-defined definition and analysis of elections and its role and importance in democracy. It examines how democratic ideology developed and progressed, and how it was revived towards the end of the twentieth century, particularly in Europe. It also discussed the various factors, theories and principles that characterized the essence of democracy and clearly defines the line of distinction between a political system based on democratic ideals and principles from that of the other forms of political systems existing worldwide. It also provided a vivid explanation of the linkage as well as the difference between democracy and various other political principles and ideals.

Electoral Politics in Indian States: Lok Sabha Elections in 2004 and Beyond by Sandeep Shastri *et.al*, (2009) is a collection of articles concerning the various dimensions of electoral politics of different States in India. It is important for data collection as well as analysis for electoral democracy in the country. It traces the events and developments that followed the 14th Lok Sabha elections in 2004 and its subsequent impact in the electoral politics. It further discusses the trend that had influenced the electoral politics of different Indian States and also discussed the ideologies or factors that are behind it. Moreover, it draws conclusions from theoretical analysis and findings. The book tries to provide theoretical apprehensions, suggestions or trends which would probably have deep impacts on the electoral politics of the country as a whole as well as the different States within the realm of their own peculiarities.

J. V. Hluna's (1985) work, *Church and Political Upheaval in Mizoram* gives a glimpse of the past Mizo society and their administration. It traces the growth of the church and examines its role in bringing about social change, which further brought political awareness and consciousness among the people, thereby leading to the emergence of a politically oriented intellectual class, and how they started to initiate separatist politics in the State thereafter. More importantly, the book makes a due note of the role of the Christian churches and Christian missionaries in developing and upgrading the socio-economic conditions of the Mizo people through their various social works and contributions towards the society. It analyzes and explains how the church acted as a political mediator and negotiator between the underground MNF government and the Indian government respectively, trying to bring about

political settlement within the framework of the Indian Constitution, thereby to bring about lasting peace in the area.

Robert L. Hardgrave and Stanley A. Kochanek (2008), *India, Government and Politics in a Developing Nation* is a comprehensive work on Indian political framework as a whole. It gives a detailed account of the ideological basis and legacies that had shaped the framework of governance and the federal political structure of India down the years. The chapters deal with the political behavior and elections of the country. It examines and scrutinizes in detail the outstanding factors that had an everlasting influence in electoral outcome since Indian independence till 2008. Besides, the later portion of the chapter contains suggestions and prospects for India's political future. In short, the entire book is worth studying for a scholar who wants to have a theoretical analysis and in-depth insight into the very heart of Indian electoral framework and politics as a whole.

R. Zamawia's (2012) work, *Zofate zinkawngah zalenna mei a mit tur a ni lo (The spirit of freedom should not wither in our journey)* is an important book written in Mizo dialect. It analyzes and studies about the ideological and political structural framework of Mizoram. It traces the origin of the Mizo as a whole, right from the last known historical records as well as the myths that surrounded it. It proceeds from there and gives a vivid account and analysis of how politics evolved in the State and how the spirit of Mizo nationalism emerged in the political sphere. Besides, it also reveals how certain civil society organizations played a crucial role in nurturing the political framework and structure of the State in its formative years, before ultimately arriving into

the period of insurgency, apart from the political and other notable events that took place during the period. It also discusses how insurgency and Mizo nationalism affected the political discourses of the State in the later years.

Indian Government and Politics by D. C. Gupta (2004) is another notable work which deals with the various dimensions and perspectives of India becoming a Republic. It provides a detailed account of the bureaucratic structure of the government, the importance and contributions of the opposition politics in the political framework of the country. Moreover, it thoroughly analyses and studies the electoral politics in the country as well as in the States. It further discusses crucial factors and determinants of electoral politics in the country-coalition politics at the Centre and in the States, the impact of communal, language, regionalist politics etc.

P. Lalnithanga (2006), *Political developments in Mizoram* examines the history of political developments in Mizoram. It mainly discusses the genesis of Mizoram politics as a whole and the emergence of political parties and party politics within the State. The book also focuses on some of the notable elections that had taken place in the history of the State, the role of the church and other civil society groups in the political stage as well as their relations with the political parties. It also provided an insight into the Mizoram People Forum (MPF), which had emerged in the political scene in 2006.

A book edited by Ramashray Roy and Paul Wallace (1999), *Indian Politics and the 1998 Election: Regionalism, Hindutva and State Politics* is an analysis of the 1998 General Election which provides comparative data on

previous general elections. It analyzes the changes that had evolved within the Indian party system besides emphasizing the importance and significance of regionalism. Moreover, the book also discusses the role played by different social factors such as caste, ethnicity and religion in influencing the voting patterns and electoral behavior of the Indian electorates in different parts of the country.

Mizoram People Forum (MPF) was established only in 2006 and hence, its activities have been a new and recent phenomenon. As a result, there are very less literatures and research works which directly deal with the role and contributions of the MPF in the state politics. Therefore, the present study is aimed to an in-depth analysis of the role played by the MPF in the electioneering process of the state so that it can contribute some new information and literatures to the existing one.

CHAPTER II

ELECTIONS IN MIZORAM TILL 2006

Elections have become an integral part of the political process of Mizoram. The Mizo, as a result of their omission from formal legislative procedures by Acts of the British Government, as well as their prolonged subordination under the Chiefs until the abolition of Chieftainship in 1952, were devoid of political and civic consciousness. However, with the introduction of formal political administration by the British and the subsequent conduct of democratic elections with the first District Council elections in 1952, the level of political consciousness of the people slowly developed along with the growth and development of electoral politics in the state.

In this chapter, the electoral politics of Mizoram as a whole would be discussed and analyzed. The first section will trace the origin of political consciousness among the Mizo people as well as political developments in the state. Besides, it also discusses the establishment of civil society organizations in Mizoram. The second section examines the birth of political parties in Mizoram and the political deliberations that occurred in the following years. The last part of the chapter analyzes the various elections beginning from the first District Council election in 1952 till the establishment of the Mizoram People Forum in 2006.

Mizo society was under the rule and administration of the tribal Chiefs till 1952. Almost in every aspect of social and political life—day to day

administration, trade, tax, law and judiciary, defense, rituals and other practices etc, the Chiefs and their selected elders known as '*Khawnbawl*' in their respective villages were the supreme source of authority. Societal organization and bondage was strong and customs and traditions had a great psychological influence on the minds and attitudes of the Mizo people. After the Lushai Expedition of 1889-1890, the British kept the Lushai Hills under their control. However, the tribal Chiefs continued to exert their dominance over their subjects. The Mizo Chiefs ruled over the society and the people on the basis of heredity and lineage. There was no sign of electoral politics during that time. It was only when Superintendent A.R.H. Macdonald constituted the first District Conference, comprising the representatives of the Chiefs and the Commoners (*Hnamchawm*) in 1946 that the people witnessed the first election in the then Lushai Hills.

Before the establishment of the District Conference, no political activity was permitted. It was Superintendent A.R.H. Macdonald who lifted the prohibition. It is evident that Superintendent Macdonald was deeply concerned with the future administration of the Lushai Hills once the British had left the country.¹⁹ He felt that some proper guideline or instruction was needed to be left behind for sustaining the administrative set up in the future. Besides, he was also greatly concerned about the strained relations between the Chiefs and their subjects which had developed as a result of the oppressive nature of rule by some

¹⁹Zamawia, R. (2007), *Zofate Zinkawngah Zalenna mei a mit tur a ni lo (The Spirit of freedom should not wither in our Journey)*. Aizawl :R.Zamawia.p.58

of the Chiefs over their people.²⁰ The prevalence of such situation could lead to further tensions and disturbances in the future. He, therefore, divided the Lushai Hills into 20 Circles and circulated an order to elect two representatives from each Circle - one representing the Chiefs and the other representing the people. Hence, election was conducted for the first time in the whole District on 26th January, 1946.²¹ Representatives were elected on the basis of Household Suffrage. There were 26 candidates from Aizawl area and 24 candidates from Lunglei area.²² After India got independence, the Lushai Hills was granted the status of District Council in 1952.

Emergence of Political Consciousness among the Mizo

Political consciousness or civic consciousness is an important and necessary pre-requisite for the successful building of any political order. It is the psychological driving force that operates silently behind all the political and social formulations of countries worldwide. Political consciousness may be defined as developing the knowhow for decision making by summarizing and analyzing a political situation, and thereby arriving to certain conclusions based on one's such observations. In a democratic country, political consciousness is one of the basic factors that provides the thrust for the establishment and sustenance of the principles of democracy.

²⁰Khuma, V.H. (1999). *Political History of Mizoram*. Aizawl :3J Publication.p.26

²¹Ibid. p.26

²²Ibid.

Political consciousness on democratic lines developed among the Mizo during the British period, particularly in the early 1900s. After the Lushai Expedition in 1871-72 and especially after the Expedition of 1889-1890, the British Government extended its rule and jurisdiction over the Lushai Hills. This paved the way for the Christian missionaries to enter the Lushai Hills with the objective of popularizing and preaching Christian doctrines among the Mizo people. The Christian missionaries and their missions played a crucial role in the emergence of political consciousness on democratic lines. The introduction of western education to the Mizo by the missionaries and their contact with western civilization resulted in the emergence of a new educated class in the Mizo society. The educated Mizo slowly and gradually started realizing their social and political conditions, and became more and more conscious about their social and political life.

The missionaries continued to serve the people based on Christian faith, goodwill and peace. They even continued to serve as one of the major peace-brokers at times of crisis and political turmoil in the latter years. As a result, the church has become an important and most active civil society organization in Mizoram, exerting psychological influence and presence in the politics of the state even today.

During the middle of the 1920s, there had been an increasing awareness about representative institutions and a corresponding unhappiness about the

autocratic rule of the Superintendent and Chiefs.²³ The decline of *Zawlbuk*, the most efficient institution in the Mizo society for imparting social values had bothered some of the Christian missionaries and the educated Mizo. They decided to discuss the problem under the guidance of Reverend Lewis Evans and Reverend D.E. Jones, Reverend Chhuahkhama, Pasena, D. Thianga, Muka, L. Kailuia, Vankhuma, Hrangiaia and Chawngzika at the house of Katie Hughes, a Welsh Missionary on 5th June, 1935.²⁴ In the discussion, they decided to form a social organization known as the Young Lushai Association (YLA) on 15th June, 1935. Later on, the YLA changed its nomenclature to the Young Mizo Association (YMA) on 7th October, 1947.²⁵

The aims and objectives of the YMA are:²⁶

1. Good use of leisure (Hun âwl hman that)
2. Development of the Mizo society (Zofate hmasawna ngaihtuah)
3. Revere Christian ethics (Kristian nun dan tha ngaihsân)

The first Office Bearers of the Young Lushai Association are:²⁷

President : Rev Lewis Evans (*Pu Niara*)

²³Zorema, J. (2007). *Indirect Rule in Mizoram 1890-1954*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications. p.109

²⁴Ibid. p.110

²⁵http://centralyma.org.in/ymachanchin.php?page_id=19 “YMA History.” Retrieved from the official website of the Young Mizo Association.

²⁶YMA History. *op.cit*

²⁷<http://mizoram.nic.in/more/yma.htm> Retrieved from the official website of the Government of Mizoram.

http://centralyma.org.in/ymachanchin.php?page_id=26 *op.cit*.

Vice President : Miss Katie Hughes (*Pi Zaii*)

General Secretary : *Pu Ch. Pasena*

Assistant Secretary : *Pu Vankhuma*

Treasurer : Rev David Edwards (*Zorama Pa*)

The YLA was purely a non-political organization and had nothing to do with politics. During the time, there was no social organization in existence apart from the church and YLA. So, the YLA often discussed those issues which were political in nature during the formative years of its establishment. Thus, the YLA, later renamed YMA could be regarded as an important organization that had greatly contributed to the political development of Mizoram. As R. Vanlawma puts it, “The YMA is the harbinger of the political party.”²⁸

In the 1930s, Mizo became conscious of the political deprivations inflicted by the repressive system of colonial rule. The educated youths felt the need to form a united front to fight for their political rights. In the 1940s, they also realized that the departure of the British Government was imminent. However, the future of the Lushai Hills was undecided. Since Lushai Hills was part of the Excluded Areas under the Government of India Act 1935; it was not necessarily under the formal jurisdiction of the to-be-established Indian Union. At the same time, they do not have a proper guideline or provision for self-autonomy or self-administration after the departure of the British Government, who had

²⁸Sangkima (2004). *Essays on the History of the Mizos*. Guwahati: Spectrum Publications. p.257

administered them since the 1890s. Thus, some sort of constitution or provision was required for the continuance of administration in the Lushai Hills. During the time, A.R.H. Macdonald was the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, and he was greatly concerned about how the administration of the Lushai Hills would be carried on without a formal Constitution once the British left India.

Therefore, Macdonald prepared a Draft Constitution in 1946 for the future administration of the Lushai Hills. The Draft Constitution was discussed and approved at the District Conference which was attended by both the representatives of the Chiefs and the commoners (*Hnamchawm*) on April, 1947. Later, it was published on 3rd May, 1947.²⁹ As per the requirement of the Draft Constitution, elections were conducted at Aizawl on 14th January, 1946 and at Lunglei on July, 1946 to elect the representatives, who in turn would form the ‘Office Bearers (*Thuneitute*)’ to run the administration of the Lushai Hills.³⁰ This election was the first election conducted for representation in the history of the Mizo. The election was of great significance because it introduced a political system – District Conference, based on democratic principles, though in a limited form.

During the time, an YLA Conference was convened on 28th March, 1946 at Boys’ Middle English School, Aizawl. The Conference had a political agenda to discuss among others. It could be noted here that political activity was prohibited

²⁹R. Zamawia. (2007).*op.cit*.p.59

³⁰Ibid. p.66

in the Lushai Hills. Moreover, there was no political organization in the Lushai Hills during that time to discuss matters that are political in nature. The agenda that was to be discussed in the Conference was ‘The present administration in our Hills has become too complex and thereby proved to be a burden for the people. So, is it the right time for us to do away with such administration or not.’³¹ The Chairman of the Conference, Rev. J.M. Lloyd felt that the agenda was very much political in nature to be discussed in an YLA Conference which was purely a non-political organization. He therefore left the room saying that he would rather abstain from the discussion of such topic. The meeting continued under the chairmanship of Pastor Chhuahkhama, and the agenda was discussed. The meeting however, concluded that since the organization was not a political party, the agenda was very much political in nature for them to discuss about.³² So, they left the agenda without further discussion.

Emergence of Political Parties in Mizoram

The decision of the YLA Conference not to discuss issues concerning political matters further heightened the feeling and urge for the need to establish a formal political organization to deal with such important matters. The resolution of the Conference that they were not supposed to touch upon political matters had been felt by some politically conscious Mizo intellectuals such as Ch. Saprawnga, R. Dengthuama and others that there was a need to establish a political party to

³¹Ibid. p.73

³²Ibid.

deal with the political affairs of the Lushai Hills. Hence, on 8th October, 1945, they submitted a memorandum to the then Additional Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, requesting him to grant permission for establishing a political party by the name '*Mizo Hmasawn Pawl*' (Mizo Progressive Party).³³ Although their request was not granted, their efforts ultimately succeeded in the formation of the first political party in Mizoram in 1946.

Mizo Union

Some Mizo leaders who were politically conscious wanted to form a political party in the Lushai Hills in the early 1940s. Leaders like R. Vanlawma, Hrangaia, Lalbuaia and V. Rosiama took the permission to establish a political party from the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, A.R.H. Macdonald. So, they formed a political party on 9th April, 1941. It was named as the Mizo Common People's Union.³⁴ The name was later changed to the Mizo Commoners' Union. Again, on 9th April, 1946, they ultimately decided to name their party as the Mizo Union (M.U). The Mizo Union was the first political party that emerged in Mizoram. The M.U first attempted to settle the issue of equal voting rights between the Chiefs and the common people in the District Conference election in 1946. The issue was very serious and important because during the time, there were strained relations between the people and their Chiefs. Some policies laid down by the Chiefs for their subjects, particularly the high rate of taxes and forced

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid. p.74

labor had created frustrations and intolerance among the people towards the Chiefs. So, the Mizo Union took up the matter and settled it. As a result of the commendable work taken up by the M.U, the party gained huge popularity and got the support of the common people very quickly. As a result, the Chiefs did not favor the party and stated that the Mizo Union was meant for the common people only. The leaders of the Mizo Union realized the importance of including the Chiefs as members of the party. Subsequently, they deleted the word 'Commoner's' from the party's name. Even after the word 'Commoner's' was deleted and the name of the party changed to Mizo Union, the Chiefs, however, refused to join the party. Hence, a stiff political rivalry continued to persist between the M.U and the Chief's Council in the latter years.³⁵

It is important to highlight and mention here the circumstances that led to the formation of the Mizo Union. Firstly, there was general discontentment among the general public on the nature of the administration of the Lushai Hills by the Superintendent in-charge of the area. It was under his aegis and support that the Chief's Council was formed; who in turn collected high taxes, demanded impressed labor force (*Phutluih Kuli*) etc. Hence, the Chiefs in general and the Chief's Council in particular became a nuisance to the common people. Even if the people hated and disliked the Chiefs, the Superintendant did not wish to interfere in the administration of the Chief's Council. The British administration

³⁵Ibid. p.75

did not disturb the Chiefs as long as they carried out the order of the Superintendent properly. Besides, since the area was declared as an Excluded Area by the Government of India Act, 1935, they had no representatives to the State Legislatures, but were at the mercy of the British Government. A Superintendent was posted as the sole administrator of the area. Hence, the people felt the need for a political party in order to voice directly about their needs and concerns to the authorities. Moreover, before the Mizo Union, there were only voluntary associations, who prefer to keep themselves aloof from political matters. Thus, there was no organization which could put up the political discontentment of the people. Apart from this, the failure of R. Vanlawma to persuade the leaders of the YLA to convert themselves into a political party also greatly contributed to the birth of the Mizo Union as the first political party.³⁶

United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO)

The United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO) was formed on 5th July, 1947 as a second political party in Mizoram. The initiative to form the party was taken by Lalmawia, a former member of the Burmese military. The main objective of the party was to secure and support any government which could uphold and protect the status of the Mizo people and which could provide them with unfettered freedom.³⁷ To achieve their objectives, the party considered that joining

³⁶Ibid. p.74

³⁷Ibid.,p.79

the Burmese Government would prove to be more beneficial and effective for Mizoram, than merging with the Indian Union.³⁸

However, the party came into existence at a time when the wave of the Mizo Union was at its peak. So, it failed to consistently assert itself in the politics of the Mizo Hill District and ultimately merged with the Eastern Indian Tribal Union (EITU) in 1957 along with the Mizo Union Right Wing party.

The Indian National Congress (INC)

A branch of the Indian National Congress (INC) was established in the Mizo Hills on 11th April, 1961 under the name of Mizo District Congress Committee (MDCC). The MDCC was a branch of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC).³⁹ The first President of the party was A. Thanglura. In the beginning, the party however, failed to gain popular support. Moreover, internal crisis cropped up within the party. In addition to it, the Indian National Congress (INC) at the Centre split between the supporters of Indira Gandhi and those who were against her, which further led to the split of the party in 1967. Hence, a new Congress Party led by Pu R. Dengthuama came into existence on 20th December, 1967.⁴⁰ They however, came together and contest the District Council election in 1970. The MDCC won 10 out of the 22 seats in the election and they formed the Council Government with the support of three independent candidates from the

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Rao, V. Venkata. *et.al.* (1987). *A Century of Government and Politics in North East India Volume-III*. New Delhi: S.Chand and Company Ltd. p.144

⁴⁰V.H. Khuma. (1999).*op.cit.* p.104

Pawi-Lakher region. After a while, internal differences again arose within the party which badly affected the status and performance of the party in the first General election to the Union Territory of Mizoram held in 1972. The Congress managed to win only six out of 30 seats. During the time, the name of the party had been changed to the Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) with the conferment of Union Territory status to Mizoram. In the meantime, Mizo Labour Party and the Mizo Socialist Party merged with the MPCC in 1972 and the Mizo Union in 1974 respectively. Subsequently, the MPCC slowly and steadily picked up stability and momentum in the politics of the state.

Mizo National Front (MNF)

The Mizo National Front (MNF) is one of the strongest political parties in Mizoram. In the formative years of the MNF, the party was one of the most vociferous of all political organizations in the north eastern Hill Districts of India. Laldenga, the first President of the party had organized it on military lines and imbued with secessionist tendencies.⁴¹ The birth of the MNF Party was preceded by the *Mautam* Famine (Famine caused by bamboo flower-eating rats) in the District in 1960 which inflicted great suffering and losses to the people. A civil organization called The Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) was set up in 1959 to assist and co-operate with the Assam Government in distributing relief materials. The extent of the plight caused by the famine was so severe that

⁴¹Varghese, Brigadier C.G and R.L. Thanzawna (1997). *A History of the Mizos Vol-II*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd. p.15

hundreds of people died of starvation and from diseases brought by the famine. Although the Central Government as well as the Assam Government took all possible relief measures to prevent the extent of damage caused by the famine, the people and the economy suffered badly. At this time, some politically conscious individuals under the leadership of Laldenga, in order to arouse their Mizo nationalist sentiment articulated and propagated among the common people, a particular feeling that from time immemorial, the Mizo never belong to Indian community, and that Mizoram was the land of the Mizo only, who inhabited it.⁴² The feeling continued to persist even after the end of the famine. Moreover, since the MNFF was formed only for the purpose of carrying out relief works during the famine, it had no purpose to serve after the famine. Laldenga seized this opportunity and persuaded the volunteers of the MNFF to transform it to a political party. Hence, the MNF party was formed on 28th October, 1961.

The main objectives of the MNF are freedom from all forms of external socio-political domination and administration, to integrate all the areas inhabited by the Mizo under a single state and single administration, and to safeguard, uphold and protect the political status and cultural identity of the Mizo people from the danger of assimilation by people outside the District.⁴³ Hence, the party put the objectives of political, economic and territorial independence from the Indian Union as their top priority. In fact, the main object of the Mizo National

⁴²R. Zamawia. (2007).*op.cit.* p.173

⁴³Ibid. p.177

Front was to make Mizoram politically free from the Indian Union and to achieve “Sovereign Independent Greater Mizoram.”⁴⁴

The MNF tried to achieve their aims and objectives, mainly independence for Mizoram under the leadership of their charismatic leader *Pu Laldenga*. They used non-violent methods to realize their goals. They considered that merely contesting election to the Legislatures would not yield their desired result of self-dependence and self-determination. In the beginning, the MNF however, made an effort to use non-violent means like prayers, sending memorandums etc. They repeatedly submitted memorandums to the then Assam Chief Minister B.P. Chaliha and the then Prime Minister of India Lal Bahadur Shastri, clarifying their standpoints of why Mizoram should secede from the Indian Union. The leaders of the party also met other important officials of the Indian Government now and then pleading for their demands. After some time, the leaders of the MNF realized that the Indian Government was unwilling to accept their demands. The party continued to fight for their demands through insurgency and armed movement which was directed against the Indian Government from March 1966. Subsequently, the MNF party was declared as outlaw by the Indian Government, and conflict started across Mizoram. The conflict between the MNF and the Indian Government brought the darkest period in the history of the state. The conflict was

⁴⁴Nag, Chitta Ranjan (1999). *Post-Colonial Mizo Politics: 1947-1998*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.p.87

however brought to an end with the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement, which is popularly known as the 'Peace Accord' in 1986.

Zoram Nationalist Party

Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP) was formed on 29th July, 2000.⁴⁵ In the beginning, the party was known as Mizo National Front (Nationalist) or MNF (N), a faction of MNF. The founder of this party was Lalduhawma, who was also the Founder President of MNF (N). ZNP contested its first election in the State Legislative Assembly election in 2003. Although the party is unable to effectively compete with the more established political parties in the state like the MNF and Congress, it had established itself as one of major political parties in the state as well as an effective ally for other political parties in elections. The main objective of the party is to establish '*Zoram Thar*' (A new Mizoram), which is based on the foundations of a just and sustainable socio-economic development, and to uphold Christian ethics and principles to ensure good governance.⁴⁶

Mizoram People's Conference

The Mizoram People's Conference (MPC) was formed on 17th April, 1975 by Brigadier T. Sailo.⁴⁷ The origin of the party could be traced with the formation of the Human Rights Committee by Brigadier T. Sailo on 1st June, 1974,⁴⁸ which

⁴⁵H.C. Thanhranga (2007). *District Councils in the Mizo Hills (updated)*. Aizawl: H.C.Thanhranga.p.54

⁴⁶Booklet (in Mizo). "ZNP Manifesto." Issued by ZNP General Headquarters.p.2

⁴⁷H.C. Thanhranga (2007).*op.cit*.p.51

⁴⁸Ibid.

he later converted to a political party. The MPC party contested its first election in the second Mizoram Union Territory election in 1978. They won the election and formed the Government with Brigadier T. Sailo becoming the Chief Minister. The party also won the third Union Territory election in 1979. However, since then, the MPC failed to sustain its stature as one of the strongest political parties in Mizoram and has been largely overshadowed by other political parties like the MNF and Congress. The main aims and objectives of the party are to embrace the Constitution of India, uphold the sovereignty, unity and integrity of the country and to uphold the freedom of Mizoram and the identity of the Mizo people, as well as to give utmost efforts for the development of Mizoram. The party also pledged to work for the re-unification of the Mizo living in different areas of the country through non-violent methods.⁴⁹

Elections in Mizoram

The First District Council General Election (1952)

The first District Council General elections were held on 4th January, 1952.⁵⁰ There were 37 candidates contesting the election from three political parties, namely, Mizo Union, United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO) and Tribal Union in the Pawi-Lakher region. The Mizo Union won the election overwhelmingly. They won 17 out of the 18 seats. The remaining seat was won by

⁴⁹Booklet. *“Mizoram People’s Conference Constitution.”* Edited and published by General Headquarters of Mizoram People’s Conference, Aizawl, Mizoram

⁵⁰H.C. Thanhranga (2007).*op.cit.*p.102

UMFO.⁵¹ The landslide victory of the Mizo Union may be attributed to the party's main election manifesto of abolishing the institution of Chieftainship and the Chief's Council. The promise of abolishing the institution of Chieftainship, which had often been at the center of conflict and controversy at that time, was warmly welcomed by the people. In fact, it had helped the party in drawing the unwavering support of a good majority of the Mizo society, particularly the *hnamchawm* (commoners), who felt deprived of various social and economic opportunities under the Chiefs.⁵² Mr. C. Rothanga, an eminent citizen who is now eighty four years of age, and who had casted his vote during the first District Council election back in 1952 from Chhipphir, also emphasized the same cause. He said that, "I voted on the basis of party preference. I also believed that the majority of the voters of the District (Mizo District) had done the same because the wave of the Mizo Union was very strong. Common people really liked their election manifestos, particularly the abolition of Chieftainship. The manifestos spread like wildfire throughout the District. So, we simply voted for any candidate who belonged to the Mizo Union party. We did not care about the quality or capacity of the candidate."⁵³

⁵¹Ibid.,pp.102-103

⁵²Malsawmliana and Benjamin Ralte (2011). *Social, Economic and Political History of the Mizo*. Guwahati: EBH Publishers. p.93

⁵³An interview with Mr. C. Rothanga by the scholar on 3rd June, 2013 at his residence. He was a resident of Dinthar Veng, Serchhip. During the first District Council election in 1952, Mr.Rothanga was residing at Chhipphir village.

The Second District Council General Election (1957)

The Second District Council General elections were held on 25th January, 1957.⁵⁴ Before the election, the Government increased the number of seats for the District Council in the Mizo Hills from 18 to 22. So, the second District Council General election was held for 22 seats. In this election, four political parties, namely the Mizo Union, the United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO), the Mizo Union (Right Wing) and the Tribal Union contested. There were 47 candidates in all. The Mizo Union won the election by capturing 13 seats out of the 22 seats. The M.U was supported by the Tribal Union. The Tribal Union party won two seats. So, the total number of seats won by the M.U was raised to 15 out of 22 seats.⁵⁵ UMFO managed to capture seven seats. In this election, the Mizo Union did not get the overwhelming support of the public that it enjoyed in the previous District Council election in 1952, yet it still remained the strongest of all the then existing political parties. Besides, the abolition of Chieftainship in 1954 had contributed significantly to the cause of the Mizo Union winning the Second District Council Election.

The Third District Council General Election (1962):

In the third District Council election held on 5th February, 1962,⁵⁶ there were six political parties contesting the election, namely, Mizo Union, MNF, Congress, UMFO, Mizo Union (Right Wing) and EITU. The Mizo National Front

⁵⁴H.C. Thanhranga (2007).*op.cit.*p.103

⁵⁵Ibid.,pp.103-104

⁵⁶H.C. Thanhranga (2007).*op.cit.* p.104

(MNF) and the Congress party contested election for the first time. There were 62 candidates, including five Independent candidates contesting the election. The Mizo Union won the election by capturing 18 seats, while UMFO captured two seats and the remaining two seats were won by two Independent candidates.⁵⁷ The entry of two new parties in the electoral fray changed the electoral dynamics of the state. They begin to overshadow the Mizo Union, the erstwhile dominant political party in Mizoram politics shortly after their entry into politics, the first evidence being the Congress party winning the fourth District Council election in 1970.

The Fourth District Council General Election (1970)

The fourth District Council General election was due to be held in 1967 but it was postponed due to the outbreak of insurgency in the District in 1966. So, election took place on 23rd April, 1970.⁵⁸ In the fourth District Council General election, the Congress captured 10 seats; the Mizo Union won nine seats while the remaining three seats were secured by Independent candidates.⁵⁹ The election had great significance in the political history of Mizoram because it marked the beginning of the decline of Mizo Union as an active political party. It also marked the emergence of Congress party as one of the strongest and most competent political parties in the state. The success of the Congress party could be attributed mainly due to its emphasis on de-grouping of Grouping Centers and Progressive

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid. p.104

and Protected Villages (PPVs),⁶⁰ restoration of peace, solving of unemployment and shortage of food problems rather than the long term political goal of ‘Statehood for the Mizo’ propagated by the Mizo Union.⁶¹ In the District Council elections, the dominance of the Mizo Union was evident until it was eventually defeated by the Congress in the fourth District Council General elections in 1970. Besides, the District Council elections also proved to be the first elections in Mizoram in which political parties keenly contested for political power.

The First Union Territory Legislative Assembly Election (1972)

The fourth Mizo District Council was dissolved before the completion of its term. The Mizo District was upgraded to Union Territory in July, 1971 and the Union Territory of Mizoram was inaugurated on 21st January, 1972.⁶² Hence, major administrative changes were required to ensure a swift transition from District Council administration to Union Territory Government. Accordingly, elections were held for the Mizoram Legislative Assembly on 5th May, 1972. The Mizo Union won 23 out of the 30 available seats.⁶³

Before Mizoram became a Union Territory, Mizoram politics was largely dominated by the Mizo Union party. The trend continued even in the Union Territory election of 1972. With the elevation of Mizo Hills District as a Union

⁶⁰In order to avoid civilian casualties as well as to cut food and other supplies of the MNF volunteers from the local people, the Indian army set up civilian camps/villages which they called as Progressive and Protected Villages (PPVs). Nearby villages were grouped together in such camps which were set up at different places across Mizoram. The villages were kept under tight security, with protective fences constructed all around the village.

⁶¹Brigadier C G Verghese and R L Thanzawna. (1997).*op.cit.*p.134

⁶²Lalnithanga, P. (2005). *Emergence of Mizoram*. Aizawl: P.Lalnithanga.pp.33-34

⁶³Vanlalhrauaia (2004). *Mizoram MLA leh MP Election Result (1972-2003)*.pp.18-29

Territory in 1972, the political participation of the people was extended both vertically and horizontally. The entire territory of Mizoram was divided into 30 Constituencies.⁶⁴ The public response during the election was very encouraging; the participation reflects a great enthusiasm, with a good turnout of voters in most of the constituencies.⁶⁵ The average percentage of voter turnout was over 74%, one of the highest in the history of elections in Mizoram, with more than 55% turnout recorded in all Constituencies.⁶⁶ This reflected the growing political consciousness of the people.

Although the Mizo Union won the election, from the next election after the first Union Territory election, it not only failed to regain its status as the dominant political party in Mizoram. But from that time onwards, the Mizo Union never emerged as a major political party. From then on, Mizoram politics till today has been primarily a history of tussle for political hegemony mainly between two main political parties— The Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) and the Mizo National Front (MNF).

The Second Union Territory Legislative Assembly Election (1978)

President's rule was promulgated in Mizoram from 9th May 1977 till 8th May, 1978. As a result, the second Union Territory Legislative Assembly election was held on 17th and 20th May, 1978.⁶⁷ The Mizoram People's Conference Party

⁶⁴Singh, S.N. (1994). Mizoram: *Historical, Geographical, Social, Economic, Political and Administrative*. Delhi: Mittal Publications.p.173

⁶⁵Mr. Rothanga (Interview). *op.cit*

⁶⁶Vanlalhruaia. (2004).*op.cit*.pp.18-29

⁶⁷V.H. Khuma (1999).*op.cit*.pp.120-121

(MPC), Mizo Union, Mizoram Congress Committee (MCC), Mizoram Janata Dal (MJP) and Mizo Democratic Front (MDF) contested the election.⁶⁸ The MPC led by Brig. T. Sailo won the election overwhelmingly, capturing 23 out of 30 seats. MCC secured three seats and MJP won one seat. The remaining two seats were captured by Independent candidates.⁶⁹ However, due to internal crisis within the MPC, eight MPC MLAs withdrew their support of the party. Opposition MLAs supported the dissident MPC MLAs and the MPC government was dissolved through No Confidence Motion in the State Legislative Assembly.⁷⁰

The Third Union Territory Legislative Assembly Election (1979)

The Third Union Territory Legislative Assembly election was held on 24th and 27th April, 1979. The election was contested by six political parties, namely, the Mizoram People's Conference (MPC), Mizo Janata Party (MJP), The Indian National Congress (INC), Mizo Democratic Front (MDF), Mizo Union and the Mizoram People's Conference 'B' (MPC 'B'), a breakaway group of MPC party.⁷¹ The MPC won the election by securing 18 out of 30 seats. MJP won two seats and MPC 'B' captured four seats, while INC secured five seats. The remaining one seat was won by Sneha Kumar, an Independent candidate.⁷² The main reason of the MPC winning the second and third State Legislative Assembly election was mainly due to the role played by the underground MNF government. MNF tried its

⁶⁸Ibid.pp.120-121

⁶⁹ Vanlalhraia. (2004).*op.cit*.pp.29-39

⁷⁰V.H. Khuma (1999).*op.cit*.p.123

⁷¹Vanlalhraia. (2004).*op.cit*.pp.40-51

⁷² Ibid

best to bring the MPC to political power.⁷³ This proved to be the winning factor for the MPC in these two elections because Mizo people were very fearful of the underground MNF.

The Fourth Union Territory Legislative Assembly Election (1984)

The Fourth Union Territory Legislative Assembly election was held on 25th April, 1984. The election was contested by six parties, namely, Indian National Congress (INC), Mizoram People's Conference (MPC), Mizo Convention (MC), Mizo Democratic Front (MDF), Mizo Peace Forum (MPF) and Mizo Union.⁷⁴ The INC led by Lalthanhawla won the election by securing 20 out of 30 seats, while MPC captured eight seats. MC won one seat and the remaining seat went to R. Lalawia, an Independent candidate.⁷⁵ One of the main reasons of the INC winning the election by a large margin was its election manifesto of bringing peace and normalcy in the state again. Lalthanhawla had promised the people that he would try his best to bring the underground MNF and the Indian Government to negotiate and settle their differences through peace and diplomatic means.⁷⁶ Hence, the Legislative Assembly election, 1984 was very important in the political history of Mizoram. The Congress government succeeded in initiating the peace talks between MNF and the Indian government which ultimately brought an end to the insurgency that had been going on for over 20 years, with the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement or the Peace Accord on 30th June, 1986.

⁷³V.H. Khuma (1999).*op.cit.*p.121

⁷⁴ Vanlalhraia. (2004).*op.cit.* pp.52-62

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶V.H. Khuma (1999).*op.cit.*p.135

The First State Legislative Assembly Election (1987)

In 1987, Mizoram was upgraded to the status of a full-fledged state of the Indian Union. This was possible with the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement, popularly known as the Peace Accord on 30th June, 1986, between MNF and the Government of India. As a result of the Agreement, an interim government was formed which was headed by Pu Laldenga of the MNF. The tenure of the interim government was limited to six months only, and elections had to be held in any case before the expiry of six months. Consequently, preparations for the first State Legislative Assembly elections were started. In fact, the first State Legislative Assembly election was held on 16th February, 1987.⁷⁷

In the election campaign of the first State Legislative Assembly elections, 1987, the MNF gave top priority to economic development of Mizoram concentrating on agricultural sector.⁷⁸ Other main manifestos of the party for the election include emphasizing on cleaning up the administration, wiping out corruption and towards social reformation. However, the growing discontent of some MLAs within the MNF party led to the dissolution of the ministry in 1988.

The Second State Legislative Assembly Election (1989)

The Mizo National Front (MNF) government failed to last its full tenure of five years due to the dissolution of the ministry and the promulgation of President's Rule for the second time in Mizoram from 7th September, 1988. After

⁷⁷Vanlalhrauaia. (2004).*op.cit*.pp.63-74

⁷⁸Chitta Ranjan Nag (1999).*op.cit*.p.106

President's Rule was called off, fresh elections to the State Legislative Assembly was held on 21st January, 1989.⁷⁹ In the election, there were 162 candidates. The Congress (I) led by Pu Lalthanhawla won the election by securing 23 seats, MNF captured 14 seats and while MNF (D) won two seats, the remaining one went the Mizoram People's Conference (MPC) Party.⁸⁰

The second state Legislative Assembly election witnessed the growth of clan-based political parties in elections. The Hmar People's Convention and the Chakma Jatiya Parishad have appeared on the political horizon of Mizoram and started projecting their demands in various forms.⁸¹ This marked the entry of identity or clan-based politics as a major political factor in Mizoram politics. The election of 1989 saw the first successful coalition politics in Mizoram. The election was won by a coalition of Congress (I) and MNF (D), a faction of the MNF, formed as a result of a split in the MNF party in 1988. The two parties formed a pre-poll alliance to contest the election.

The Third State Legislative Assembly Election (1993):

The state Legislative Assembly election in 1989 ushered in a new phase in the political history of Mizoram when it resulted in the formation of the first coalition ministry in the state which was formed by an alliance formed by Congress (I) and MNF (D) prior to the election. The trend continued in the third state Legislative Assembly elections held in 1993. The election was won by the

⁷⁹Vanlalhraia (2004).*op.cit.*pp.75-88

⁸⁰Ibid.,pp.75-88

⁸¹S.N. Singh. (1994).*op.cit.*p.175

alliance formed between the Mizo Janata Dal (MJD) led by Brig.T. Sailo and Congress (I), by securing 25 seats out of 40 seats. Congress (I) managed to secure 17 seat while eight seats were captured by MJD. The MNF won 14 seats while the Mizo Democratic Front (MDF) secured one seat.⁸² The emergence of coalition politics in Mizoram in the post-statehood period may be attributed to various factors.

In the 1990s, many educated Mizo tried to assert their presence in the political scene. During the time, political leaders were fully aware that the Mizo people had become conscious about the manifestos and principles of most of the leading political parties and their actual performances in reality. Hence, the political parties and politicians fully know that people no longer kept their faith and trust upon underperforming politicians and political parties. Thus, a new development had started with the coming in of coalition politics. The reason was that the Mizo public has now become highly conscious politically, and that their contributions to politics through their electoral behaviors could not be taken for granted. This has been realized by the political parties who are looking to claim political power. This trend has continued and became an integral part of the electoral politics of the state till date.

⁸²Vanlalhrauaia. (2004).*op.cit*.pp.90-100

The Fourth State Legislative Assembly Election (1998):

The fourth State Legislative Assembly elections were held on 25th November, 1998.⁸³ The election was fought by different political parties forming pre-poll alliances like in the previous elections in 1993. The coalition politics of the state proved to be fruitful and became a decisive factor in the electoral politics of Mizoram. In this election, the alliance of the Mizo National Front (MNF) and the Mizoram People's Conference (MPC) recorded a landslide victory over their nearest rival, the Indian National Congress (INC) who managed to capture only six out of the 40 available seats. The MPC secured 12 seats while the MNF captured 21 seats. The remaining one seat was won by H. Rammawi, an Independent candidate.⁸⁴ Thus, securing 33 seats altogether, MNF-MPC coalition government was formed.

The emergence of coalition politics in Mizoram since the second State Legislative Assembly election in 1989 also witnessed and experienced inter-party and intra-party conflicts in the state. Coalitions were formed, usually not on the basis of shared ideology, principles or policies and programmes, but with the sole intention of having a share of the governmental power.

⁸³Vanlalhraia. (2004).*op.cit*.pp.101-114

⁸⁴Ibid.,pp.90-100

The Fifth State Legislative Assembly Election (2003)

The State Legislative Assembly election was held on 20th November, 2003.⁸⁵ The election witnessed the emergence of the MNF as the sole political party to govern the state by capturing 21 out of the 40 seats. The Indian National Congress (INC) secured 12 seats; the Mizoram People's Conference Party (MPC) won three seats while two seats go to the Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP). The Mara Democratic Front (MDC) captured one seat and the remaining seat was secured by Lalsangzuala, an Independent candidate.⁸⁶ The election also brought an end to the dominance of coalition politics in the state for the time being. The MNF ministry was marred by various scandals and scams towards the end of their term such as *Aii Puk* scandal involving the then Chief Minister Zoramthanga, Health Care Schemes scandal involving the then Health Minister R. Tlanghmingthanga etc. Besides, their flagship program, the Mizoram *Intodelh* Project (MIP), a program intended to boost economic development failed to fulfill election promises which seemed to have contributed to the major debacle suffered by the party in the State Legislative Assembly election in 2008.

Moreover, with each passing election, the influence and contributions of civil society organizations in the state, the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and the church in particular, has been ever increasing. The status and influence of these civil society organizations has been further strengthened and widened with

⁸⁵Ibid.,p.116

⁸⁶Vanlalhrauaia. (2004).*op.cit*.pp.116-118

the establishment of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF), a church sponsored organization established with the objectives of bringing lasting political, administrative and electoral reforms in the State in 2006. This issue is discussed and analyzed in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

FORMATION OF THE MIZORAM PEOPLE FORUM

Christianity has been the foremost factor for the socio-political and economic modernization and development in the hill areas of the North-Eastern region of India including Mizoram. In fact, the social values in the Mizo society were founded upon Christian doctrines and principles. The churches in Mizoram greatly influenced the general conception about social and political values of the citizens as a whole. Hence, the voice of the church still occupied a great sense of honor and respect among the people in every aspect of their daily lives. In short, in Mizoram, the church has played a vital role in shaping the socio-cultural lives of the people,⁸⁷ as well as their political inclinations.

The third chapter will analyze the role played by the civil society in general and the church in particular in the electoral politics of the state. The first section of the chapter mainly traces the development and the increasing role played by the civil society organizations, particularly the church in the electoral politics of the state. The second part of the chapter discusses the electoral reforms initiated by the non-governmental organizations and the formation of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF). The last part of the chapter analyzes the organizational structure of the MPF and gave a concluding remark of the chapter.

⁸⁷Hluna, J.V. (1985). *Church and Political upheaval in Mizoram*. Aizawl: Mizo History Association. p.42

Role of the civil society organizations in the electoral politics of the state

Various civil society organizations, particularly the Young Mizo Association (YMA), Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) and the church played vital roles in the electoral politics of the state. Among them, the role played by the church in the politics of the state in general, and the electoral politics in particular is noteworthy. In fact, the valiant and brave efforts of the church leaders during the period of insurgency to bring peace, stability and harmony in the state were commendable. The church initiated the negotiations between Government of India and the MNF which immensely helped in signing the 'Memorandum of Settlement', also known Mizo Peace Accord in 1986.

The church and other civil society organizations did not involve in the political activities of the state including electoral politics till 1950s. In the first District Council elections in 1952, the civil society organizations, particularly the YMA and the church did not involve in the electoral politics of the state. There are two main reasons. Firstly, it was the first General election conducted in the District. Both the politicians and the citizens alike do not have much experience and knowledge about the trend and nature of electoral politics. Besides, electoral malpractices, which has been the main issue and concern for civil society organizations these days were not much witnessed and experienced in the first District Council elections. So, the church and the YMA might have felt that there was no need for their involvement in bringing about electoral reform or moral

ethics in the conduct of elections. Secondly, during the District Council elections in 1952, the election manifesto of the Mizo Union, which was mainly the abolition of Chieftainship was warmly welcomed and greatly supported by the common people. Hence, there was a rift between the Chief's Council and the Mizo Union. So, the church might have felt that the issue was too political for them to be involved in, or they might have feared the retaliation from both the parties if they voiced their opinions or standpoint in favor of either side.⁸⁸ This view is shared by Mr. C. Rothanga, who stated that, "There was no involvement of the church by way of press releases, statements or any other means in our locality and as far as my knowledge goes, and I think that was also the case even in the whole District. The church just kept quiet. They might have been afraid of the Mizo Union, because it was the lone party at that time which received an almost total support from the public. Some of their party members dared to stone even the Chief's house and destroy their tea gardens in some villages. In our village also, such incident was bound to happen, but we protected our chief and pleaded to those defaulters since our chief was a kind-hearted man."⁸⁹ The church did not involve or raise their voices as an organization. However, there are some church members who voiced their concerns about the Mizo Union's propaganda and objectives as a

⁸⁸An interview with Mr. C. Rothanga by the scholar on 3rd June, 2013 at his residence. He is a resident of Dinthar Veng, Serchhip. During the first District Council elections in 1952, Mr. Rothanga was residing at Chhipphir village.

⁸⁹Ibid.

kind of ‘submission to idol worshippers’,⁹⁰ an indirect reference to the Indian Government.

The most notable contributions and involvement of the civil society organizations, particularly the church was seen during the 1960s when armed conflict started due to the insurgency movement initiated and spearheaded by the Laldenga-led Mizo National Front (MNF) party in 1966. In fact, it was during the insurgency period that the church started actively involved in the politics of the state with the objective of bringing peace and normalcy in the District.

The engagement and involvement of the church in the state politics was started in the year 1966 with the formation of the Lunglei Citizens’ Committee and the Aizawl Citizens’ Committee. With the formal launching of the Mizo insurgent movement by the MNF on the night of 28th February, 1966, intense fighting began between the Indian armed forces and the MNF insurgents. Most of the residents of Aizawl, like in other places, left their homes and fled to nearby forests and villages. Hence, law and order totally failed; security forces and some other miscreants ransacked the abandoned houses in the way they liked, and the situation remained the same until about 15th March, 1966. It was during this chaos and commotion that the Aizawl Citizens’ Committee came into existence on 12th March, 1966. This Committee was the handiwork of the church. The Synod Standing Committee took the initiative to form the Committee. Especially, Rev.

⁹⁰Ibid.

Lalngurauva, Mr. Sainghinga and Rev. Alwyn Robert, the then Moderator of the Mizoram Presbyterian Synod individually played significant roles.⁹¹ Rev. Lalngurauva also served as one of the member of the Peace Committee set up by the joint churches of Mizoram in the later part of the insurgency period.

Even government employees like Dr. Lalnghakliana and Mr. Bawnthanga Poonte, the then Block Development Officer of Aizawl were also members of the Committee during the initial period.⁹² However, they were later replaced as they were barred by the Government Conduct Rules. The Committee then set up various cells or sub-committees such as Public Relief Committee and Public Grievance Cell, and they disposed human and animal corpses lying scattered across the streets of Aizawl. They gathered and buried 13 human corpses.⁹³ Besides, the Committee also appealed to the churches of Mizoram to contribute donations and charity for relief efforts for the displaced civilians. They also submit memorandums and complaints to the army Brigade and Battalion officers about army personnel committing illegal actions. At Lunglei, the Lunglei Citizens' Committee was formed on 8th March, 1966 on the initiative of some of the Baptist Church leaders.⁹⁴ Hence, the church took active part towards the rehabilitation and maintenance of social and political order within the District for the first time through the Citizen's Committee.

⁹¹Zamawia, R. (2007), *Zofate Zinkawngah Zalenna mei a mit tur a ni lo (The Spirit of freedom Should not wither in our Journey)*. Aizawl :R.Zamawia.op.cit.p.351

⁹²Ibid.,p.353

⁹³Ibid.,p.354

⁹⁴Ibid.

In the meantime, insurgency in the Mizo Hills intensified and the counter-insurgency measures stepped up in Mizoram. As a result, the Standing Committee of the Presbyterian Synod held a meeting on 14th March, 1966, in which it was decided to form a 'Christian Peace Committee' with members drawn from both the Presbyterian and Baptist churches.⁹⁵ The Committee thereafter, supervised all relief efforts for the welfare of the Mizo people. Members of the Committee were Rev. Lalngurauva and Rev. Zairema from the Presbyterian Church and Rev. H.S. Luaia from the Baptist Church of Mizoram.⁹⁶ The Committee also initiated a number of peace missions during the insurgency period between the Indian Government and the MNF to find diplomatic solutions of the political problems that had triggered the insurgency in the Mizo Hills.

The church involved actively to maintain law and order, formal administration and normalcy within the District during the political turmoil. However, the first visible engagement of the church or the civil society in the electoral process of the state was in the year 1972, when election was held for the first time in the newly formed Union Territory of Mizoram.⁹⁷ In the election, the church leaders issued a statement, appealing and urging the politicians, candidates

⁹⁵Patnaik, Jagadish K. (2008). *Mizoram: Dimensions and Perspectives-Society, Economy and Polity*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.p.27

⁹⁶Nunthara, C. (1996). *Mizoram: Society and Polity*. Delhi: Indus Publishing Company.p.208

⁹⁷Ngente, Dr. Lalbiakmawia. "*Church and Election in Mizoram: The role of the Mizoram People Forum*". Retrieved from mizorampeopleforum.org/ official website of MPF. Dr.Lalbiakmawia Ngente is also a former Secretary of the MPF.

and the members of the church for a clean, free and fair election.⁹⁸ Since then, issuing election messages prior to elections had become a regular affair of the church in their efforts to ensure free and fair elections till today. The importance of the voice of the church and their appeals was further strengthened when another strong and influential civil society organization, the YMA joined the movement by issuing an appeal in 1987. In the subsequent elections, they have involved themselves and took more and more pro-active role in the voters' education and electoral participation.⁹⁹ As a result, the first State-level Co-ordination Committee on Election was formed in 1993.

Formation of the Mizo People Forum (MPF)

Elections in India have become more critical with the gradual disappearance of one party dominance, both at the Centre as well as at the states. The fourth General elections held in 1967 were one of the most important events in Indian politics in the post-Independence period. The election ended the era of Congress Party's domineering rule at the Centre and in most of the states. At the same time, another era of weakened Congress Government at the Centre and coalition governments in six States- Kerala, West Bengal, Punjab, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar had began.¹⁰⁰ Today, it has become very difficult for a single political party to hold on to power independently and consistently for long periods

⁹⁸Mr. C. Rothanga (Interview). *op.cit*

⁹⁹Dr. Lalbiakmawia Ngente. *op.cit*

¹⁰⁰Gupta, D.C. (2004). *Indian Government and Politics*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd. pp.492-493

of time. Thus, political parties tend to strive towards negotiation and agreement as hard as ever with their political counterparts i.e. other political parties, thereby forming coalition to capture power. In their quest for power, political parties and politicians often indulged in malpractices and illegal means such as money and muscle power, booth capturing, threats, kidnappings, false promises, etc to win elections and retain powers in the state and Central Government. Although the Indian Constitution provided for the establishment of an independent Election Commission (Article 324) to ensure free and fair elections, it is virtually impossible for the Commission alone to deal with each and every issue and concern regarding electoral malpractices in a large country like India. As a result, till today, corruption and other political misconducts still characterized Indian politics as well as electoral politics. This is becoming a great stumbling block towards the realization of good governance through free and fair elections in India.

The unhealthy trends of elections like the use of money and muscle power in elections were slowly and gradually witnessed in Mizoram since 1970s. As a result, the church decided to interfere in the electoral politics so that it can bring some positive change in the elections of the state. Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod thus issued statements in the form of requests and appeals to the public on the eve of every election to ensure free and fair elections in Mizoram since the first Mizoram Union Territory elections in 1972. Moreover, Mizoram Presbyterian Church also organized seminars and political education campaigns

through one of its wings-the Synod Social Front, at various places across Mizoram.¹⁰¹

The Mizoram Presbyterian Church in particular and the various churches in Mizoram in general, confined their involvement in electoral process in the form of prayers, requests and appeals till 2003. However, the State Legislative Assembly elections of 2003 changed their attitudes and perceptions regarding their participation and involvement in the electoral process. The state witnessed various untoward incidents such as buying and selling of votes, threats, fake kidnappings and the alleged involvement of some underground organizations etc in the State Legislative Assembly elections, 2003. The Mizoram Synod, therefore, decided to study the issues in details and make more meaningful plan for political reform through its resolution No. Synod 2004 General 11. The matter was again forwarded to the Synod Executive Committee (SEC), who in turn entrusted the matter to the Synod Social Front Committee.¹⁰² The Synod Social Front prepared questionnaires to study the views and opinions of the general public regarding the elections. They collected 3480 questionnaires (*Annexure I*) from 84 pastorate circles. The study revealed that elections in Mizoram were not held in a free and fair manner.¹⁰³ The Synod Social Front also carried out extensive studies on other matters related with elections in Mizoram. They wanted to solve the problems.

¹⁰¹Lalremruata, Joseph C. “*Aspect of Mizoram People Forum (in brief).*” Unpublished paper.

¹⁰² Lalbiakmawia, Rev. Dr. R., “*Church and Politics in Mizoram: The Genesis of the Mizoram People Forum*”. Retrieved from mizorampeopleforum.org/ official Website of MPF.

¹⁰³Joseph C. Lalremruata. *op.cit.* In the booklet ‘*Political education*’ published by the Synod Social Front, the number of questionnaires received was written as 2000.

Ultimately, the church decided to introduce electoral reforms in Mizoram. It can be noted that before the 2003 General election, the churches and most of the prominent NGOs of the state worked tirelessly together for a free and fair election. They had political education campaign in almost all local congregations in the rural and urban areas. It was found that all these campaigns did not bear much fruits as expected. They realized that free and fair election seemed like a distant dream.¹⁰⁴

As a result, the Synod General Assembly, 2004, adopted the agenda of political reform, particularly electoral reforms in Mizoram. The Synod Executive Committee (SEC) then set up a Working Committee and selected five individuals from the members of the Presbyterian Church, namely, Rev. Dr. R. Lalbiakmawia as convener, Rev. Chanchinmawia (L), Rev. Thangdela, *Upa* K. Malsawma and *Upa* Chhawnvunga. They were entrusted to conduct a careful and in-depth study about the issue and submit a proposal in the matter.¹⁰⁵ After the Committee carefully studied the questionnaires prepared by the Synod Social Front and consulted the leaders of different churches, NGOs, political parties, Former Legislative Assembly Members (FLAM) and prominent citizens of Mizoram in various consultative meetings over a period of 18 months, they submitted their report to the Synod Executive Committee (SEC). The Committee proposed to work together, i.e. the church and various NGOs in a common platform, by

¹⁰⁴Rev. Dr. R. Lalbiakmawia. *op.cit.*

¹⁰⁵Dr. Lalbiakmawia Ngente. *op.cit*

creating a new organization wherein all churches and NGOs would be constituent members.¹⁰⁶ The Synod Executive Committee then accepted their proposal and entrusted the same members to act as the Drafting Committee and put their proposal into practice. The Committee, therefore, on behalf of the Mizoram Presbyterian Synod again took up the task of negotiating with the major churches and NGOs in Mizoram. The Committee invited all the churches to join hands and constitute a common platform where they would work together to bring about a peaceful, free and fair election in Mizoram. After series of joint meetings with the leaders and representatives of various churches and NGOs, an agreement was being reached to constitute a common platform as proposed by the Synod Working and Drafting Committee. Finally, at their fifth meeting, the leaders of the major NGOs and churches in Mizoram unanimously agreed to form an organization known as the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) on 21st June, 2006.

Objectives of the MPF

The Mizoram People Forum (MPF) is a non-governmental and non-political organization. It was legally established under the law of the land. It is registered under Societies Registration Act, 2006.¹⁰⁷

According to the Preamble of the Constitution of the MPF, anyone having political party affiliations is not included within the organization. It is an organization which is established not for the purpose of candidature in elections or

¹⁰⁶Rev. Dr. R. Lalbiakmawia. *op.cit*

¹⁰⁷Booklet “*Works and activities of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) for reforming Mizoram politics*” Published by MPF.p.1

taking part in active politics, nor is an organization for attacking or retaliating against the government.¹⁰⁸ The MPF is established with the sole purpose of attaining good governance; maintain peace and harmony, to achieve sustainable socio-economic growth and development and to preserve freedom in the state.

The main aims and objectives of the MPF are as follows:¹⁰⁹

- i) The first and foremost aim of the organization is to clean up the electoral process of the state. It strives to have a clean, free and fair election, where the legitimate citizen and voters may exercise their franchise without fear or favor. In short, to work towards establishing democratic government through free and fair elections.
- ii) Secondly, the aim of the MPF is to work towards establishing good governance in the state. This includes co-operation and co-ordination with the government as well as the people in bringing a developmental process which is participatory in planning and in implementation, and to make the people aware of their duties and responsibilities. In other words, to guide and advise the government on developmental issues, as well as to educate the people on the governance issues and to be responsible citizens.

¹⁰⁸“MPF Constitution-Preamble.” Retrieved from mizorampeopleforum.org/ official website of MPF.

¹⁰⁹Works and activities of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) for reforming Mizoram politics. *op.cit.*p.5 An interview with *Upa* Lalramthanga, General Secretary of the MPF by the Scholar on 10.6.2013. *Upa* Lalramthanga is also the longest serving member among the MPF Office Bearers. He has been holding the post of the MPF General Secretary since the establishment of the organization in 2006 till 2013. Since his term for the post of General Secretary is over, *Upa* Lalramthanga has now stepped down as General Secretary of the MPF. He is replaced by *Upa* F. Lalremthanga.

- iii) Thirdly, the MPF wanted to remove corruption and malpractices in the electoral system in the state.
- iv) To put in place a transparent, accountable and responsible government.
- v) To conduct social audits for social reforms.
- vi) To counter any form of violence, use of arms and terrorism.

In short, the main focus, objectives and purpose of the MPF could be summarized under four main points. Firstly, the MPF sought to bring electoral reforms in the state by ensuring peaceful, free and fair elections. Secondly, the organization is also concerned with the development of political and civic consciousness of the Mizo people. In other words, the MPF attempted to improve and develop the political awareness and consciousness of the general public so that they could develop a sensible political perception and outlook. Thirdly, the MPF also sought to ensure good governance—to take initiatives for having an effective, efficient and just government in the state. Lastly, the MPF wanted to make the people aware of their duties and responsibilities in making such goals to become reality.¹¹⁰

This has also been reiterated in the Mission Statement of the organization which stated that the Mizoram People Forum has been established by the united efforts of the church, NGOs and some ambitious and conscious individuals so as

¹¹⁰Works and activities of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) for reforming Mizoram politics. *op.cit.*p.5

to put into practice the realization of good governance, peace and harmony, progressive, just and sustainable socio-economic development and freedom of the people.¹¹¹ The MPF hoped to achieve all the above by changing the value system and perception of the people through electoral reforms.

Composition of the MPF

MPF has eleven Constituent members and six Associate members.¹¹² The Constituent members are also the founding members of the MPF. They are as follows:

- i) Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod
- ii) Catholic Church, Mizoram
- iii) Wesleyan Methodist Church
- iv) Evangelical Church of Maraland, Saiha
- v) Evangelical Free Church of India
- vi) Lairam Isua Krista Kohhran (Lairam Jesus Christ Church)
- vii) Young Mizo Association
- viii) *Mizoram Upa Pawl* (Elder's Association)
- ix) *Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl* (Women's Association)

¹¹¹Ibid.,p.1

¹¹²Works and activities of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) for reforming Mizoram politics. *op.cit.*p.1

- x) M.T.P Headquarters, Saiha (Mara Youth Association)
- xi) Young Lai Association Headquarters, Lawngtlai.

The following organizations are the Associate members of the MPF:

- i) Mizoram Young Chakma Association, Chawngte
- ii) Mizoram Chakma Student Union
- iii) Mizoram Chakma Mahila Samiti
- iv) Mizoram Buddhist Association
- v) B.R.K Headquarters, Chawngte (Buddhist Association)
- vi) M.CH.P Headquarters, Saiha (Mara Women's Association)

The above membership of the MPF showed the absence of the Salvation Army, the Seventh Day Adventist, United Pentecostal Church-Mizoram, United Pentecostal Church-North East India and the Baptist Church of Mizoram, whom are all church organizations in Mizoram. Among them, the Baptist Church of Mizoram has the second largest church members in Mizoram with a total membership of 1, 51,587 members.¹¹³ The Salvation Army has also been one of the most established church organizations in the state. All of them opted to remain out of the MPF and its activities since the establishment of the MPF, and that remains the same till date.

¹¹³Baptist Church of Mizoram Statistical Handbook 2011-2012,p.4

The absence of some of the major church organizations has rendered a sense of incompleteness towards the organization and achievement of the MPF to a great extent. Particularly, the absence of the Baptist Church of Mizoram (whose members are concentrated in the southern area of Mizoram) has greatly affected the scope and influence of the MPF in most of the towns and villages of southern Mizoram, where they occupied the majority of the church members. Rev. H. Sangchema, President-Elect of the MPF stated that in the 2008 election, there was not much difference between the northern areas of Mizoram with the southern part, particularly at Lunglei where the MPF is not formed. However, he said that, “There would be a difference between areas with and without the vigilance of the MPF. There are some rumors on the eve of the election about distribution of money at some places within the Lunglei locality. Apart from that, it has been more or less the same with the northern Mizoram where the MPF is strong- there are no public meetings or other public gatherings, feasts, etc.”¹¹⁴ This is due to the fact that people respect the requests and appeals made by the church not to indulge in unfair means and other illegal acts that would prove nuisance to the society prior to every election in Mizoram. Mr. K. Dingliana, an eminent politician residing in Lunglei, who had contested the State Legislative Assembly election twice from Tlabung Constituency in 1993 and from Buarpui Constituency in 1998 as an MNF candidate, is however of the opinion that election has not been more

¹¹⁴A telephonic conversation by the scholar with Rev. H. Sangchema, President-Elect, Baptist Church of Mizoram on 3.7.2013.

free or fair solely as a result of the MPF. In fact, he held that open violation of the Election Code of Conduct has become less, but violation of the rules in secrecy is on the rise, and further said that open violation is more in the southern part while secret violation is common in the north.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, the conditions as well as the perceptions of the common people and the politicians alike regarding the MPF tend to differ between those from the northern and southern parts of Mizoram.

MPF has already initiated to persuade the major church organizations which are not enrolled as their members so that the MPF could be the true representative of all the churches in Mizoram. On 7th July, 2011, the MPF Governing Board had sent letters to all the churches who are not members of the MPF, requesting them to review their decisions regarding their non-participation in the MPF. There was no reply from the Salvation Army, United Pentecostal Church (North East) and the Baptist Church of Mizoram. The United Pentecostal Church (Mizoram), however responded by a letter stating that since the main concern and principle of the church is the preaching of the gospel, they considered that since this is a task which involves a great workload, they don't have the time to be involved in other activities. They further stated that they fully trusted the MPF in this regard and will fully support them in prayer in their future activities.¹¹⁶ The Seventh Day Adventist Church also replied in a letter mentioning that the church adopted a global common working policy and that they are one of the

¹¹⁵Mr. K. Dingliana responded to the queries via written statement which the scholar received on 15.7.13.

¹¹⁶Mizoram People Forum 5th Annual General Meeting held on 28.9.11 Minute. p.44

members. Moreover, since the Mission Statement of the church forbids them to involve in activities other than the church activities, they are not able to enroll themselves under the MPF. They also stated that they are full of praise for the free and fair elections as a result of the efforts of the MPF.¹¹⁷

Speaking on the issue, Rev. H. Sangchema (President-Elect of the Baptist Church of Mizoram) expressed his opinion regarding their non-participation that, “The Baptist Church of Mizoram gave full moral support to the MPF. However, in the initial stages and even today, the church is still weighing whether its participation in the MPF can go along smoothly with the working principles of the church. Besides, participation in the MPF requires financial contribution. This has again been a concern for the church whether it is true or not for the church to disburse funds to an organization whose activities are not completely ecclesiastical or religious in nature. So, the Baptist Church of Mizoram feels that for the time being, the initiative of the church regarding political education, which it undertook through sermons, appeals and statements, etc, is still enough, while at the same time, it still followed the MPF and its activities closely.”¹¹⁸

The Salvation Army also stated that although they fully support the MPF and its activities, they are still pursuing a ‘wait and watch’ approach to take a decision of joining the MPF. At the same time, they also pointed out that unlike some of the

¹¹⁷Ibid.,pp.44-45

¹¹⁸ Rev. H. Sangchema (Interview). *op.cit*

other church organizations, the working policies and principles of the MPF are in line with and not against the church's doctrines and principles.¹¹⁹

Structure of the MPF

The organizational structure of the MPF is a decentralized one. There is a grass root level structure called the 'MPF Local Forum', which is the most vital unit of the organization.¹²⁰ These Local Forums are the one who are expected to deliver the goods and transform electoral processes in Mizoram. In other words, they constitute the core unit of the organization. The MPF has been organized and structured in the form as mentioned below:¹²¹

i) General Body:

The General Body is constituted by all members of the MPF. The meeting of the General Body is held at least once a year. It is the highest policy making body and the supreme authority of the organization. All the decisions and resolutions are made by the General Body.

ii) Central Forum:

The Central Forum, also known as the 'Governing Board' is the highest executing body under the General Body. All the decisions and resolutions made by

¹¹⁹An interview with Major Saitluanga, Commanding Officer of the Salvation Army, Serchhip by the scholar on 15.7.2013.

¹²⁰Works and activities of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) for reforming Mizoram politics. *op.cit.* p.2

¹²¹Ibid.

the General Body are carried out by the Central Forum. It also co-ordinates and look after the functioning of the District Forum.

iii) Board Executive Committee:

The Board Executive Committee looks after the day to day affairs and functioning of the organization, and pursues all the tasks and resolutions of the General Body Meeting and the Central Forum.

iv) District Forum:

District Forum is established in all the Administrative/Revenue District within Mizoram. Its function is to co-ordinate and look after the MPF Local Forum within its jurisdiction. MPF now have seven District Forums in all.¹²²

v) Constituency Forum:

Constituency Forum is proposed to be set up at the time of the State Assembly elections, or when the specific need arises. The Constituency Forum will be formed as per Assembly Constituency, covering the same area under the Assembly Constituency. This Forum will co-ordinate and look after the MPF Local Forum within its jurisdiction, especially at the time of the State Assembly elections.

¹²²Works and activities of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) for reforming Mizoram politics. *op.cit.*p.5. MPF is not formed at District and Constituency level in Lunglei District due to the decision of the Baptist Church of Mizoram not to enroll itself as member of the MPF. At local level, MPF Local Forum is formed at Thingsai and Haulawng Village within Lunglei District. They are, however, not very influential.

vi) Local Forum:

MPF Local Forum is established in all the Village Council areas within the state. MPF Local Forum is the backbone and strength of the organization. The majority of the task and activities to fulfill the aims and objectives of the organization are being carried out at this level. There are over 500 village/local level forums in the cities, towns and villages in the state.¹²³

Income and Expenditure of the MPF

The main source of income of the MPF is the contributions from the Constituent members of the organization. The following table shows the annual budget estimate of the MPF for the financial year 2013-2014:¹²⁴

Budget Estimate for 2012-2013 and 2013-2014

	‘A’ Capital Receipt	2012-2013 (in Rs)	2013-2014 (in Rs)
1.	Presbyterian Church Synod	500,000/-	600,000/-
2.	Catholic Church	10,000/-	15,000/-
3.	Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran	10,000/-	10,000/-
4.	Evangelical Church of Maraland	10,000/-	10,000/-
5.	Evangelical Free Church of India	5,000/-	5,000/-
6.	Wesleyan Methodist Church	5,000/-	5,000/-
7.	Central YMA	40,000/-	50,000/-

¹²³Works and activities of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) for reforming Mizoram politics. *op.cit.p.5*

¹²⁴Mizoram People Forum 6th Annual General Meeting held on 4.10.12 Minute. p.37

8.	Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl Hqrs	15,000/-	20,000/-
9.	Mizoram Upa Pawl Headquarters	15,000/-	20,000/-
10.	Central Young Lai Association, Lawngtlai	5,000/-	5,000/-
11	Mara Youth Association, Hqrs, Saiha	5,000/-	5,000/-
12	Other Sources	18,000/-	5,000/-
	Total	638,000/-	750,000/-

	'B' Estimated Expenditure	2012-2013 (in Rs)	2013-2014 (in Rs)
1.	Salary		
	Chief Functionary	90,000/-	90,000/-
	Other Allowances	54,000/-	54,000/-
	Total	144,000/-	144,000/-
2.	Other Expenditures		
1.	Stationary	40,000/-	40,000/-
2.	Committee/Meeting	20,000/-	25,000/-
3.	Telephone & Internet Bill	10,000/-	25,000/-
4.	Newspapers	6,000/-	6,000/-
5.	House Rent	18,000/-	18,000/-
6.	Office Equipment	10,000/-	10,000/-
7.	MPF Website	25,000/-	25,000/-
	Total	129,000/-	134,000/-

3.	Travelling Expenses		
1.	Travelling Expense	160,000/-	230,000/-
2.	Hospitality	55,000/-	55,000/-
	Total	215,000/-	285,000/-
4.	Publication & Printing		
	Publication & Printing	80,000/-	87,000/-
5.	Publicity & Awareness		
	Publicity & Awareness	60,000/-	80,000/-
6.	Contingency		
	Contingency	10,000/-	20,000/-
	Total	150,000/-	187,000/-
	Grand Total	638,000/-	750,000/-

The credit for the establishment of the MPF will have to go to the Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod, and particularly to the Synod Social Front. It was the Presbyterian Church, who felt that given the situation and incidents happening in the 2003 elections, the next General election due to be held in 2008 might be much worse than the previous election. They felt that the state might witness more untoward incidents and even bloodshed in the 2008 election if they fail to check and address the issue. Besides, the church also opined that such problems and unwanted incidents could not be dealt with by initiatives taken by a single church, in other words, the Presbyterian Church alone.¹²⁵ Hence, the efforts and formulations to constitute a common platform, which would include the major

¹²⁵An interview with *Upa Lalramthanga*, Former General Secretary of the MPF by the scholar at the MPF Headquarter Office at Tuikhuahtlang, Aizawl on 6.6.2013.

churches and NGOs in Mizoram was initiated by the Synod Social Front on behalf of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod who ultimately formed the MPF in 2006. The organization has been registered under the Mizoram Societies Registration Act, 2005 (Act No. 13 of 2005), under Registration No MSR - 61 of 21.8.2007.¹²⁶

The MPF is only seven years old but it has emerged as one of the most active and financially sound organization in the state. It is because of the contributions and donations that it received from its member organizations and individuals. Till date, there may be some discrepancies and shortcomings in its organization and structure and mode of operation. But the success that the organization has achieved for itself and for the people in realizing its goals and objectives could never be undermined. However, it seemed that if all the major organizations that have not agreed to be part of the organization are brought under it, the extent of the activities as well as the achievements of the MPF would be far greater as well as inclusive. This could prove to be crucial and decisive, particularly in the Baptist dominated southern parts of Mizoram where MPF Forums are not established. If the MPF had been strong and active in the southern parts of Mizoram, like they did in the northern parts of the state, the influence of the MPF as well as the very nature of elections of the state as a whole, would no

¹²⁶First MPF Annual General Meeting (4th October, 2007) Minute.p.4

doubt give us a different picture. The activities of the MPF or the role of the MPF in the electoral process of the state are discussed and examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

ROLE OF THE MIZORAM PEOPLE FORUM IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS OF MIZORAM

Mizoram People Forum (MPF) has played an active role in the electoral politics of the state since its establishment in 2006. In fact, in every election including the State Legislative Assembly elections of 2008 and thereafter, MPF played the role of a political watchdog, keeping sharp and careful vigilance over the electioneering process of the state. With the support of the community and moral respect of the politicians and political parties, the status and position of the MPF in the electoral politics of the state as a whole has become more and more firm, popular and assertive.

The fourth chapter will study and analyze the role played by the MPF in the electioneering process of the state. The chapter will also examine the various activities that the MPF had taken up during the past elections. It will also discuss an overview of the future plan and preparations of the MPF. In other words, the chapter will mainly study the various activities of the MPF in the election campaigns, public meetings related with elections, political seminars, election debates, etc.

Working Principles

After its establishment, the MPF initiated an All-Party meeting, inviting the major political parties in Mizoram on 25th September, 2006. In the meeting, leaders of the political parties suggested and gave advice to the leaders of the MPF regarding the plans and principles of the MPF particularly about electoral reforms and good governance in the state.¹²⁷ In the meeting, party leaders expressed their views about the election expenditures. They stated that election expenditures have become considerably high these days. The expenditures incurred during election campaigns, mainly for organizing public meetings, feasts, posters, banners, house to house campaigns etc has become a great burden for the candidates of all political parties. So, if this trend continues in the electoral process, by the time the people face the next election, it would be very difficult for some candidates to campaign for elections with such high election expenditures. Therefore, the political parties stated that the MPF must stop such events and occurrences like buying of votes, public feasts, house to house campaigns, providing transportation for voters, hiring singers and other entertainers, excessive use of flags, posters and banners etc, which amount to high expenditures during elections.¹²⁸

The suggestions and advices of the political parties and party leaders were taken up seriously by the MPF. The leaders of the MPF also discussed and analyzed all the suggestions. Later on, based on the suggestions and views of the

¹²⁷Upa Lalramthanga. (2006). *MPF Hmalakna Report (A booklet in Mizo)*,p.1. It contains the report of various activities of the MPF.

¹²⁸Ibid.,p.1

political leaders, an agreement was reached and signed ‘*Thawhhona Thuthlung,*’ (Memorandum of Understanding) between MPF and the major political parties. The Memorandum of Understanding became the principle and basis of the MPF activities, as well as Election Guidelines in every election of the state till today. The leaders of the MPF and leaders of the political parties held another joint meeting and finally completed the final draft of the Election Guidelines on 30th April, 2008. All the political parties based in Mizoram are expected to follow the Election Guidelines as far as possible; while the MPF will take all possible steps to see its implementation.¹²⁹

The Election Guidelines of the MPF are as follows:¹³⁰ (*Annexure II*)

1. Election expenditure:

- i) No party or candidate shall indulge in huge and wasteful election expenditures. Election expenditures should be kept to the minimum.
- ii) Activities which are ‘corrupt practices’ and offences under the election law can crop up during the house to house campaign. Therefore, all such activities must be avoided. Procession may also be dispensed with.
- iii) Influencing of voters through money or other incentives must be avoided.

¹²⁹“*Political Party te leh MPF Thawhhona Thuthlung*” (*A leaflet in Mizo*). It contains the Election Guidelines published by the MPF.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*

- iv) Community feasts, picnic, poster and flag wars escalate the election expenditure unnecessarily. Therefore, they may be avoided.
- v) General public, organizations and individuals are requested not to ask or expect any favor from the candidates. Similarly, candidates and political parties are also requested to refrain from announcing any financial grants or promises thereof.
- vi) Setting up of Campaign/Election Office may be avoided.

2. Free and fair election, and security issue:

- i) Use of force, intimidation and undue influence to the voters to secure their votes must be avoided.
- ii) Securing the support of underground armed groups and use of arms shall be prevented at all cost.
- iii) Take all necessary actions for security and peaceful elections, especially along the border and sensitive areas.

3. Policy implementation and candidature issues:

- i) Only realistic and practicable policies and programmes must be included in the party manifesto.
- ii) Personal and individual life of the candidates should not be used as a poll issue. Election campaign should revolve around the party policy and programme.
- iii) Political parties are expected to put forward those who are upright, God-fearing, clean and honest persons as candidates.

- iii) Chakma Autonomous District Council Elections 5th March, 2008
- iv) Mizoram Legislative Assembly Elections 2nd December, 2008
- v) Village Council Elections 24th February, 2009
- vi) Lok Sabha Elections 16th April, 2009
- vii) Aizawl Municipal Council Elections 3rd November, 2010
- viii) Lai Autonomous District Council Elections 18th November, 2010
- ix) Village Council and Local Council Elections 23rd February, 2012
- x) Mara Autonomous District Council Elections 3rd May, 2012
- xi) Chalfilh Constituency Bye-Election 23rd February, 2013
- xii) Chakma Autonomous District Council Elections 17th April, 2013
- xiii) Mizoram Legislative Assembly Elections 25th November, 2013

Activities of the MPF

The activities of the MPF could be broadly classified into four main parts- Its activities during the elections, its activities after the announcement of elections, its activities on polling day and its activities in the post-poll period.

Activities of the MPF during Elections

The activities of the MPF started six/seven months prior to the Election Day. The activities of the MPF during this period include organizing seminars, consultative meetings and awareness campaigns at various places across the state. Around these six to seven months, MPF started its activities to create public awareness as well as to mobilize the masses to fulfill their objectives for the realization of a peaceful, free and fair election. During this time, MPF mainly

organized seminars in different towns, villages and localities of the state. Prior to each election, MPF organized awareness campaigns and seminars at various places, mostly at District and Constituency levels and sometimes at state and local levels as well. MPF had conducted many seminars and campaigns during the 7th Mizoram Legislative Assembly elections, 2013. They were as follows:¹³²

- i) 18th June, 2013 (Tuesday) - Mara Autonomous District Level Seminar at Saiha.
- ii) 19th June, 2013 (Wednesday) - Lai Autonomous District Level Seminar at Lawngtlai.
- iii) 2^{4th} June-1^{4th} July, 2013 - Campaign within East Tuipui Constituency Area.
- iv) 17th July, 2013 (Wednesday) - Tuivawl Constituency Level Seminar I at Zohmun.
- v) 18th July, 2013 (Thursday) - Tuivawl Constituency Level Seminar II at Darlawn.
- vi) 24th July, 2013 (Wed) - Kolasib District Level Seminar at Kolasib Venglai
- vii) 24th July, 2013 (Wed) - Tawi Constituency Level Seminar at Keifang
- viii) 27th-28th July, 2013 (Sat & Sun) - Saitual Town Level Seminar at Saitual.

¹³²Mizoram People Forum Work Plan for 2013 MLA Election.

- ix) 3rd and 4th August,2013(Sat & Sun) - Lungpho Pastorate Seminar at Lungpho.
- x) 3rd and 4th August, 2013 (Sat & Sun) - Kolasib Hmar Veng Pastorate Seminar at Kolasib Hmar Veng.
- xi) 14th August, 2013(Wed) - Champhai District Level Seminar at Champhai Vengthlang.
- xii) 15th August, 2013 (Thurs) - Tuichang District Level Seminar at Khawzawl Vengthar.
- xiii) 27th August, 2013 (Tues) - Hachhek Constituency Level Seminar at Kawrthah.
- xiv) 28th August, 2013 (Wed) - Mamit District Level Seminar at Mamit.
- xv) 4th September, 2013 (Wed) - Serchhip District Level Seminar at Serchhip.
- xvi) 5th September, 2013 (Thurs) - Tuikum Constituency Level Seminar at Chhingchhip.
- xvii) 18th September, 2013 (Wed) - Lengteng Constituency Level Seminar I at Ngopa.
- xviii) 19th September, 2013 (Thurs) - Lengteng Constituency Level Seminar II at Hliappui.
- xix) 18th September, 2013 (Wed) - Chalfilh Constituency Level Seminar I at Vanbawng.

xx) 19th September, 2013 (Thurs) - Chalfilh Constituency Level Seminar II
at Khawruhlian.

Activities of the MPF from the date of announcement till Election eve

After the date of election is announced by the Election Commission of India (or the State Election Commission), the activities of the MPF intensified. In fact, it is during this period that the MPF became very active in the deliberation of its various programmes and activities. Moreover, it is basically on the eve of elections that the 'Election Guidelines' or the Memorandum of Understanding, between the MPF and the major political parties in the state are implemented. With the commencement of election campaigns by the candidates of different political parties, the MPF also started its activities of closely monitoring the campaign activities of the candidates in various constituencies.¹³³ The MPF regularly issued appeals to political parties and their candidates to follow the provisions of the Election Guidelines. Besides, initiatives were taken up by the Constituency and District MPF Forums in visiting various places where candidates are campaigning and ensure that they followed the Election Guidelines.

It has been mentioned in the Election Guidelines of the MPF that in one or more towns in each Constituency, a Joint Platform should be organized under the supervision of the respective MPF Constituency Forums in consultation with the

¹³³An interview with *Upa* Lalramthanga, Former General Secretary of the MPF by the scholar at the MPF Headquarter Office at Tuikhuahtlang, Aizawl on 6.6.2013.

candidates of the respective political parties.¹³⁴ Hence, Joint platforms are organized at Constituency levels in which all candidates representing political parties are invited to deliver election speeches before the public from a common platform. The Joint Platforms are chaired by leaders of MPF District or Constituency Forums. Such programmes are telecasted or deferred live by local cable television networks and publicized widely by the media so that people can see the candidates and listen to their speeches.

On the eve of polling day, MPF Local Forums, in their respective localities set up duty centers and closely monitor the whole night to prevent any untoward incidents or electoral malpractices such as buying and selling of votes, public gatherings, etc.

One of the most important points in the Election Guidelines is regarding the reduction of expenditures incurred during election campaigns. The MPF wanted to give maximum effort to reduce the high expenditures in the election campaigns. Election campaigns will be allowed to undergo in such a way that nobody must ask or receive money from any candidate or political party. MPF believed that house to house campaigns increased the probability of electoral malpractices such as buying and selling of votes. Moreover, door to door campaign is also very expensive. So, the MPF desired to stop door to door campaigns.

Total prohibition of house to house campaign however, would curtail the opportunity for both the voters and candidates to know each other. As a result,

¹³⁴Memorandum of Understanding between the MPF and the Political Parties. *op.cit.*

MPF agreed to allow house to house campaign during the election but it must be stopped ten days before the polling date. The MPF wanted such campaigns should also be under the supervision of their members.

Moreover, the MPF also wish to stop buying and selling of votes on the eve of the election as well as on polling day. As precautionary measures, the MPF forbid the electorates or any individual, associations and even the church from demanding donations in the form of cash or any materials from political parties or candidates. At the same time, political parties and the candidates are also expected not to distribute any materials like silpauline, jersey, football, mobile handsets, etc during their campaigns. Besides, public rallies, car or bike rallies, organizing public feasts, picnics etc are also denounced by the MPF. MPF also ban hiring professional singers in election meetings. It argued that all of the above are mere waste of public money and often resulted in unwanted incidents. Moreover, most of the time, State Assembly elections fall in the harvesting season. So, there are many incidents in the past where candidates often hired vehicles for transportation of the harvested rice from fields to the house of the individuals. Even stones from quarries, logs, woods and waters are rumored to have been transported at the expense of the candidates. Such incidents began to cease as a result of the active efforts of the MPF.¹³⁵

Another uniqueness of the MPF's Election Guidelines is the regulation of the number and size of flags, banners and posters to be used for campaigning.

¹³⁵Upa Lalramthanga at his speech at the Serchhip District Level MPF Seminar. *op.cit.*

Before the establishment of the MPF, all major political parties used to put up their own party flags, banners, hats, stickers etc which they distributed for free, as well as pasted and planted on walls, roadsides and in most public places. On the eve of any election, the streets would be colored with the flags, posters and stickers of different political parties bearing their respective party symbols. When the MPF started actively involving in the electioneering process of the state, it decided to fix the number of such flags and other items to be used by each candidate and political party during the campaign. The unlimited use of such items has been another major factor for the high expenditure in election campaigns. Hence, the MPF prescribed the number of flags, banners and posters to be used in each locality as follows:¹³⁶

- Village Council/Local Council having up to seven members:
Banner—3 Flags—30 Posters—Up to 20
- Village Council/Local Council having up to five members:
Banner—3 Flags—20 Posters—Up to 15
- Village Council/Local Council having up to three members:
Banner—3 Flags—10 Posters—Up to 10

The MPF also fixed the size of the banners and posters. The banner should not be more than 18ft x 4ft in size and the posters not more than 4ft x 3ft in size.

¹³⁶*Memorandum of Understanding between the MPF and the Political Parties.* This is commonly referred as the Election Guidelines.

Hats with party symbols, badges and stickers are however not to be used as items for campaigning, and it has been decided that if there is anyone who failed to observe and follow the above provisions, the MPF would be compelled to request them to take down their posters in order to maintain the number within the prescribed limit.¹³⁷

Activities of the MPF on polling day

On polling day, MPF Local Forums set up MPF Office near the polling booths or inside the polling area in their respective localities and closely monitor the polling areas throughout the day. MPF members kept a close and careful watch on the activities of the voters and party workers of various political parties in and around the polling areas to prevent any electoral malpractice that could take place. They also provided benches for voters to sit while waiting for their turn to cast their votes. Besides, MPF volunteers also helped the old and disabled persons who came to cast their votes. MPF also took the initiative of reminding and encouraging the local people to cast their votes by making announcements and appeals from public information systems at regular intervals. In other words, MPF volunteers are present the whole day in and around the polling stations, right from the opening of polling booths in the morning until the closure of casting of votes in the evening.

¹³⁷Memorandum of Understanding between the MPF and the Political Parties..*op.cit.*

On polling day, leaders of MPF District Forums also visited polling booths within their Districts and supervised the various activities of the MPF Local Forums. They observed the overall situation on the polling day within their respective districts.

The survey and inspection of polling booths and polling areas by the MPF leaders seemed to have positive impacts in ensuring a peaceful election. For instance, in Lawngtlai, when the MPF leaders inspected and visited different polling booths on polling day during the 2010 Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) elections, one local politician told the MPF leaders that around 3PM in the evening, it used to be the peak hour for buying and selling of votes in previous elections. With the MPF keeping a close watch, such incidents are not witnessed anymore.¹³⁸ *Upa Lalramthanga*, the former General Secretary of the MPF also said, “In the 2008 election, the various comments we received from different political parties has been that there were no public feasts, house to house campaigns, alcohol related brawls and abuses on polling day, selling and buying of votes around polling booths, etc.”¹³⁹ He further stated that during the LADC election back in 2010, the President of MPF Lawngtlai District Forum Rev. Zionvarmawia pointed his fingers towards the Circuit House and said to him, “In other elections, ministers and politicians used to sit there, summoning anyone they

¹³⁸ *Upa Lalramthanga (Interview).op.cit.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid*

like and bribing them. But as you can see, nothing of that sort is happening in this election.”¹⁴⁰

The nature of elections and election campaigns in the southern part of Mizoram as compared to the northern part is totally different. Moreover, members of these four church organizations often tend to be favorable targets for some mischievous political party workers. They tried to take advantage of their church’s non-participation and attempts have been made secretly to persuade them to illegal bribery and compromises.

The importance of joining the MPF by these four churches in order to render a comprehensive and inclusive influence has been recognized by the citizens and the MPF alike. Professor J.V. Hluna, Pachhunga University College mentioned that he seriously wanted these four church organizations, the Baptist Church of Mizoram in particular, to join the MPF so that it can strengthen the activities and influence of the MPF.¹⁴¹ Mr. Vanlalruata, the General Secretary of the Central Young Mizo Association also held that if all the major church organizations within the state could join the MPF and its campaigns, it could be possible to form the most formidable conglomeration of civil society organizations in Mizoram.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹An interview with Prof. J.V. Hluna by the scholar on 12.6.2013.

¹⁴²An interview with Mr. Vanlalruata, by the scholar on 7.6.2013. The Central Young Mizo Association (CYMA) is also among the founding member organization of the MPF. It is also one of the Constituent members of the MPF.

The significance of the inclusion of the major NGOs and particularly, the major church organizations in the state in the MPF has been duly recognized by the members of the MPF as well. In fact, the MPF has been sending requests to these non-member church organizations, appealing them to join the MPF.¹⁴³ But as of today, these four major church organizations still opted to remain out of the MPF.

It could therefore be concluded that the failure of participation and enrollment of some major church organizations in the MPF, particularly the BCM which is the second largest church in Mizoram in terms of members, has made the influence of the MPF incomprehensive and incomplete. Until these churches, the BCM in particular, join the MPF, the MPF will not be able to bring lasting and comprehensive electoral reforms in the state. Hence, it is quite necessary for the major churches, particularly the BCM, who are still opting to remain aloof of the MPF to join the organization so that the activities and influence of the MPF would be more comprehensive and efficient.

The situation was different at Lunglei. Lunglei is the second largest town in Mizoram and inhabited predominantly by the members of the Baptist Church of Mizoram ((BCM)). BCM did not enroll themselves as members of the MPF. As a result, the whole picture and situation on polling day was quite different as compared to other parts of the state. Most of the inhabitants, not only of Lunglei,

¹⁴³Mizoram People Forum 15th Annual General Meeting held on 28th September, 2011 Minute.pp.44-45
Upa Lalramthanga, in his speech at Serchhip District Level MPF Seminar. *op.cit.*

but also the people of most of the towns, villages and localities of the southern part of Mizoram, especially within Lunglei District are members of the BCM. Other church denominations have lesser members. So, the MPF could not establish local, district or constituency Forums within the District except at Thingsai and Haulawng Village.

Rev. Lalrosiama, who was the Pastor in charge of Chanmari Pastorate in Lunglei in 2008, reported to the MPF Headquarter at Aizawl that there were reports of electoral malpractices such as buying and selling of votes, distribution of money, etc taking place in various localities. Even on polling day, there had been widespread rumors that buying and selling of votes had been taking place in many polling areas within the district.¹⁴⁴ Rev. H. Sangchema, who was the then Pastoral Co-ordinator of the BCM at the BCM Headquarter Office at Serkawn, Lunglei said, “There are not much public meetings or other public events as such on the eve of elections, although at some places it is there. But, before the night of the polling, there are rumors that some party workers are distributing money and buying votes at some localities within Lunglei. Nevertheless, I heard that even in the northern part of Mizoram, such things are also being happening secretly.”¹⁴⁵ Hence, what became clear is that there has been quite a difference in the overall character of election, especially on polling day in the areas where the MPF has been active and vigilant, and in the areas which are not covered by the MPF. This

¹⁴⁴Upa Lalramthanga(Interview). *op.cit.*

¹⁴⁵A telephonic interview by the scholar with Rev. H. Sangchema on 3.7.2013. Rev. H. Sangchema, also a respected academician, is the present President-Elect of the -Baptist Church of Mizoram. He is due to take the post of the President of BCM in 2014.

has also been reiterated by Rev. H. Sangchema who opined that there could be differences from area to area where the MPF is established and in the areas where the MPF is not formed.¹⁴⁶

Apart from inspection of polling areas and keeping a close and strict vigil on the polling day, another notable activity taken up by the MPF on polling day has been the task of the searching electoral Rolls or the voters' lists by MPF volunteers. This activity was done by local party workers in the previous elections before the establishment of the MPF. With badges bearing the word 'MPF' or 'MPF Duty', the task of scrolling through voters' lists was taken up by the MPF volunteers, which are being often constituted by members of NGOs, mostly members of the Young Mizo Association (YMA), or at times, by members of the Youth Organization of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church. Refreshments for these volunteers are also prepared mainly by the YMA, and often by other NGOs or associations under the church. In the State Legislative Assembly election, 2013, however, the role was assumed by election officials designated by the Election Commission of India.

Some of the activities of the MPF on polling day have been criticized by party leaders. The MPF leaders did not allow political party workers and politicians to loiter around the polling booths for fear of bribery or compromise taking place. This particular activity of the MPF is criticized by politicians and party workers. They believed that such work is the responsibility of the political

¹⁴⁶Ibid

parties, and not those of religious leaders. Besides political parties did not get the opportunity to be in close contact with their supporters because the MPF requested the political parties not to set up party information centers or party offices near polling booths which used to serve as the main source of information for electors on polling day.¹⁴⁷

Post-poll activities of the MPF

The MPF worked continuously even after the elections are over to bring electoral reforms in the state. The activities are however confined to organizing seminars and conduct of consultative programmes at various places, covering different themes mainly on good governance, importance and role of the youths, administrative reforms, and moral reforms, issues on development, planning, etc.

Seminars and Consultations

The MPF has been organizing seminars on political education, conduct trainers' training programmes, a training programme intended mainly for the leaders and members of Local and Constituency Forum members and volunteers. Moreover, various consultation programmes are also conducted on the topics of good governance, administrative reforms, voters' participation and elections, panel discussion to the youths, etc in various towns, villages and localities throughout Mizoram.¹⁴⁸ The MPF considered the youth programmes very important to

¹⁴⁷An interview with Mr. R. Tlanghmingthanga, Former Minister and Vice President of the MNF by the scholar at his residence on 11.6.2013

¹⁴⁸MPF Hmalakna report.*op.cit.*p.3

generate awareness among the general public and to realize the principles and objectives of the organization.

Youth Consultations

Youth Consultation programmes are mainly organized at state level. The participants are students selected from various colleges, teachers, representatives of major NGOs, Youth Organization of various churches as well as representatives from the Youth Front/Association of the major political parties. Besides, special invitees mainly consisting of eminent academicians, research scholars, and representatives from Synod Office, advocates, church elders and press personnel also attended the programmes.¹⁴⁹

Seminar papers on selected topics are presented by academicians and intellectuals, followed by discussion in the consultation programmes. The subject of discussion in the seminars and consultations are good governance and free and fair election, fight against corruption, priority towards sustainable development, administrative reforms, land reforms, reforms in the value system and work culture, etc.¹⁵⁰ The future plan of the MPF to realize their aims and objectives are also discussed. Priority is given to the role of the youths that they could play in bringing such reforms in the electioneering process of the state.

¹⁴⁹*A report on Youth Consultation.* The report was prepared by *Upa Lalramthanga*, Former General Secretary of the MPF.

¹⁵⁰*Suggestions for Consultations on Youth Consultation and Good Governance.* Unpublished paper. The paper contains the suggestions and discussions of the participants in the 'Consultations for Good Governance' organized by the MPF at Aizawl on 27.6.2013.

The MPF also organized a special consultation program on good governance to realize their principles. The main themes of the consultation include:¹⁵¹

- i) The importance of public reverence for a fair and just candidate.
- ii) To work for decentralization of power.
- iii) To establish a government that is comprehensive in development, planning and administration.
- iv) To promote public involvement and participation.
- v) To work out a well planned goal for development through proper planning.
- vi) To start campaign for good governance inside the church.

Apart from such programmes, the MPF also organized a number of consultations on the importance of citizen's participation in the process of development and planning, in making the electoral process free and fair and in the efforts towards establishing a good and accountable government.

These programmes are conducted at State, District, Constituency as well as Local levels of the Forum. Moreover, political education campaigns and seminars are conducted in different churches of different denominations that are members of the MPF. Thus, Consultations, Seminars, Trainers' Training and political education campaigns constitute the most comprehensive activities of the MPF

¹⁵¹Ibid

during post-poll period. Some of the notable programmes conducted by the MPF since its establishment till date may be mentioned as under:¹⁵²

- i) Seminar on Election Model Code of Conduct Dt. 9.5.2007
- ii) Seminar on MPF and its principles at Suangpuilawn
Dt. 16 - 17.6.2007
- iii) Seminar on MPF and its principles at Hliappui
Dt. 23 - 24.6.2007
- iv) Seminar on MPF and its principles at Kanghmun
Dt. 21 - 22.7.2007
- v) Seminar on MPF and its principles at Saitual
Dt. 22 - 23.9.2007
- vi) Seminar on MPF and its principles at Sakawrdai
Dt. 29 - 30.9.2007
- vii) Seminar on MPF and its principles at New Vervek
Dt. 1 - 10.9.2007
- viii) Youth Consultation for Aizawl city Dt. 17.1.2008
- ix) Youth Consultation for the youths of various Churches
Dt.1.5.2008
- x) Consultation on Good Governance Dt. 27.6.2009
- xi) State Level Youth Consultation Dt. 27.8.2009

¹⁵²First MPF Annual General Meeting Minute(2006-2007).pp.1-2.MPF Hmalakna report.op.cit.p.3

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|--------|---|------------------------------|
| xii) | Consultation on Administrative Reform | Dt.2.9.2010 |
| xiii) | District Level Seminar at Champhai | Dt. 3.3.2010 |
| xiv) | District Level Seminar at Serchhip | Dt. 19.3.2010 |
| xv) | District Level Seminar at Kolasib | Dt. 26.3.2010 |
| xvi) | Trainers' Training for Lai Autonomous
District Council | Dt.10. 4.2010 |
| xvii) | District Level Seminar at Mamit | Dt. 29.5.2010 |
| xviii) | Seminar for Aizawl city Local Forum Leaders | Dt. 27.8.2010 |
| xix) | Consultation on Administrative Reforms | Dt. 9.2.2011 |
| xx) | Mara District Level Trainers' Training | Dt.18.6.2011 |
| xxi) | Seminar on Reformation and development of Mizoram
At Lunglei | Dt. 15.9.2012 ¹⁵³ |

The MPF also received invitations as resource persons from different organizations inside and outside the state. As a result, the MPF also regularly sent their representatives as resource persons to various seminars and workshops on election and politics organized by various NGOs as well as Central Government. MPF leaders were invited for consultations on election organized by the Nagaland Baptist Church Council from 25th-26th May 2011 at Kohima, Nagaland, 7th Regional Consultation on Electoral Reforms held at Guwahati on 12th June, 2011, etc.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, MPF leaders also often participated in Talk Shows, interviews

¹⁵³6th MPF Annual General Meeting Minute (2011-2012),p.12

¹⁵⁴Upa Lalramthanga(Interview). *op.cit.*

and other TV programmes on election and politics organized by the press and local cable network operators.

Memorandums

Another activity of the MPF in the post-poll period is the frequent submission of memorandums to government officials, political parties, political leaders and the Governor. The memorandums are submitted in the form of appeals and requests for public interests regarding various issues like elections, governance, maintenance of peace and security etc.¹⁵⁵ Although these memorandums are only issued and submitted in the form of appeals and requests, they are greatly respected and considered it very important by the political parties and the citizens alike. This is mainly because of the agreement or consensus reached between the MPF and the major political parties in forming the Election Guidelines and largely due to the status, popularity and support that the MPF from the general public. Moreover, the MPF also published statements and press releases from time to time, underlining its principles and objectives. The leaders of the MPF requested the people, political leaders and government officials to work towards the realization of good governance in the state. Besides, the MPF also closely monitored the implementation of government programmes such as preparation of job cards for Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), administrative reforms, etc. They often

¹⁵⁵Booklet “*Works and activities of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) for reforming Mizoram politics.*” published by MPF.pp.42-51

expressed their wishes and stand on the issue, and appealed the authorities on certain public-related matters at the state as well as local or village council levels.¹⁵⁶

The MPF has not been very active in its activities during the post-poll period. In other words, MPF does not directly interfere or actively participate and involve in the socio-political affairs of the state. The MPF mainly engaged in keeping a close watch and often issuing notes of advice, requests and appeals in the form of memorandums, statements and press releases in the daily administrative affairs of the state. In short, the MPF mainly played the role of an advisory agency in post-poll period.

Upa Lalramthanga, however, stated that, “The activities of the MPF might have been dissatisfying for some people. But, we don’t stop our activities right after elections. Rather, we continue our efforts in the post-poll period also. Time and again, we have been advising the government in many ways, such as to maintain decorum and etiquette in the Assembly sessions regarding their speeches and actions inside and outside the House, submitting various suggestions to the Chief Minister, and even preparing a booklet on ‘Administrative Reforms’, which we submitted the same to the Congress Ministry 2012-2013, etc. Besides, we have been requesting the government to deal with the problems of the wide prevalence of fake ration cards, as well as fake job cards in MGNREGS But we never reveal

¹⁵⁶Ngente, Dr. Lalbiakmawia. “*Preparation of the Mizoram People Forum for the 2013 General Election.*” Unpublished paper

our dialogues with the government in newspapers or publicize it, because we feel that it is not always necessary and might be inappropriate to reveal such dialogues in public. We just advise them and co-operate with them in making a good government for the people.”¹⁵⁷

Analysis of the MPF activities

The various activities of the MPF in bringing about a peaceful, free and fair election has drawn great praises as well as criticisms from all sections of the people. There has been a general feeling that the MPF is not very influential in the post-poll period. The scope of their activities have been practically confined to realizing the organization’s objectives of securing good governance, administrative reforms or to instigate a sustainable and inclusive process of economic development.

Critics have often pointed out, or rather question the general opinion on the success or achievement of the MPF. Mr. K. Dingliana, a two time contestant of the Mizoram Legislative Assembly elections and an experienced and eminent politician, belonging to the Mizo National Front Party (MNF) from Lunglei, opined that there is no need for the MPF, or the role that it played in bringing about electoral reforms in the state. The reason is that the MPF has been only successful in doing away with electoral malpractices which used to be practiced openly and in public, while they could do nothing about the happenings taking place in secrecy. Besides, even the political parties and the candidates conform

¹⁵⁷Upa Lalramthanga (Interview). *op.cit.*

themselves to the desires and requests of the MPF only out of fear of enraging the public. Mizo normally support the idea and activities of the church and the MPF. Thus, he stated that in the northern areas of the state where the MPF influence is strong, electoral malpractices are practiced secretly, while in the southern part, where the MPF is not being established, it is practiced more openly.¹⁵⁸ Hence, he did not find much importance of the MPF in bringing about lasting electoral reforms.

Mr. James Thanghmingmawia also believed that the existence and activities of the MPF alone would not succeed in bringing about electoral reforms in the state. He stated that, “Incidents like huge public gatherings around public booths, noises and other disturbances created by alcoholics and drunkards, transporting voters from different places within the area with vehicles are now no more as a result of the strict vigilance of the MPF. However, until and unless the attitude of the public towards such malpractices, which is still taking place secretly at various places is reformed, and until our economy has been more stabilized, the existence and operation of the MPF alone would not result in lasting electoral reforms in the state. For instance, manipulation of mobile phones to pass on secret information to party workers is still secretly and frequently taking place in each election, but beyond the vigilance and watchful eyes of the MPF.”¹⁵⁹ Mr. R. Tlanghmingthanga, a former Minister of the Government of Mizoram and the current Vice-President

¹⁵⁸ An interview with Mr. K. Dingliana by the scholar on 17.7.2013.

¹⁵⁹ An interview with Mr. James Thanghmingmawia by the scholar on 6.6.2013

of the Mizo National Front Party held that the involvement and activities of the MPF in the electoral process of the state is not basically reform measures, but an encroachment and curtailment of the obligation and activities of the political parties and their workers. He cited the example of searching the name of the electorates in the electoral rolls by the MPF volunteers near polling booths, which he considered it as the sole responsibility of the party workers and not of church members. He further said that there are many positive developments as a result of the MPF activities, yet the MPF must restraint itself to a certain extent by drawing a clear line between what it should and what it should not do.¹⁶⁰ However, in the State Legislative Assembly elections of 2013, the role of the MPF in searching the name of the electorates has been done by election officials designated by the Election Commission of India.

MPF organized Joint Platforms for political parties and party candidates who contested elections. This activity of the MPF has sparked public debates and controversies. In such platforms, each candidate is given a stipulated time to deliver his/her election speech.

People criticized the nature and conduct of the Joint Platforms. In these Joint Platforms, only candidates from recognized political parties are included, while the independent candidates are not allowed to participate. Besides, with the hope of avoiding harsh political war of words among the candidates in public, the

¹⁶⁰ Mr. R. Tlanghmingthanga (Interview). *op.cit*

MPF prescribed the topic for the debates.¹⁶¹ These restrictions of the MPF have been criticized by some leaders of the community. Mr. James Thanghmingmawia, former President of the Mizo Zirlai Pawl stated that, “Giving selected topics for election speeches have taken away the opportunity of the candidates to talk and discuss freely about their party’s policies and election manifestos. Besides, candidates can deliver a public speech only on the Joint Platforms organized by the MPF. But at the same time, the MPF has not been able to organize Joint Platforms in each and every towns and villages across the state. So, many people, especially from the rural areas do not have the adequate time and opportunity to meet the candidates personally and know them better if the MPF does not organize Joint Platform in their localities, because house to house campaigns have already been restricted.”¹⁶² If any political party desired to organize public meeting apart from the Joint Platforms, the MPF wanted the meeting to be organized under its supervision.

This view is also shared by Mr. P.C. Lalansanga, the General Secretary of the Mizo National Youth Front (MNYF). According to him, it took away the opportunity for close and personal interaction between the people and the candidates.¹⁶³ Regarding the issue of exclusion of certain independent candidates and candidates of unrecognized parties in the Joint Platforms, Mr. James further

¹⁶¹Upa Lalramthanga (Interview). *op.cit.* Upa Lalramthanga further stated that the independent candidates were excluded as per the terms of the agreement signed by the MPF with the major political parties.

¹⁶²James Thanghmingmawia (Interview). *op.cit.*

¹⁶³An interview with Mr. P.C. Lalansanga by the scholar at his residence on 11.6.2013.

said that, “Irrespective of whether they are independent or party-based candidates, I think that every candidate who has been recognized by the Election Commission of India should be included in the Joint Platforms. So I blamed the MPF for their partiality in the matter. I also think that what they did is wrong. I feel that it may be an underestimation of the basic principles of democracy.”¹⁶⁴ Professor J.V. Hluna also opined that it would be much better if the Joint Platforms have been more inclusive and comprehensive by including all the legal candidates.¹⁶⁵ Lt. Col. Z.S. Zuala considered it as ‘unfair.’ Mr. Zuala stated that, “The candidates are legally accepted, and therefore should be invited and included. As a democratic state, equality of opportunity should prevail even in that situation.”¹⁶⁶

The influence and extent of participation of the civil society organizations in the political and electoral process of the state has also been criticized by some people. Mr. R. Tlanghmingthanga said that, “It seems that our state and government these days move along the lines and conditions laid out by the civil society organizations.”¹⁶⁷ Some opined that NGOs in the state have become so strong and have gained and occupied the status of an authority. In one of the articles in *Vanglaini*, it was stated that there are three authorities in Mizoram-the Government, the Church and the YMA.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁵Professor J.V. Hluna (Interview). *op.cit.*

¹⁶⁶An interview with Lt. Col. Z.S. Zuala by the scholar on 11.6.2013. Lt. Col. Z.S. Zuala is an MLA as well as Parliamentary Secretary.

¹⁶⁷Mr. R. Tlanghmingthanga (Interview). *op.cit.*

¹⁶⁸Ralte, Zirmawia. “Mizoramin Roreltu pathum a nei? (*Mizoram has three authorities?*).” *Vanglaini* Vol.XXVIII.No.224. 11.9.2013

Some of the issues which are questioned and criticized by some sections of the society are relevant to be thoroughly discussed and analyzed. For example, the issue of whether to allow or not to allow the independent candidates to participate in the Joint Platforms. The MPF does not favor public rallies and campaigns apart from the platforms that they organized and supervised. So, if all party-based candidates used the Joint Platforms as a substitute for their respective party public meetings as per the Election Guidelines of the MPF, there could be a huge difference or gap in campaigning opportunities between the independent candidates who are being excluded from the Joint Platforms, and those of party-based candidates. Mr. R. Tlanghmingthanga also held that, “The MPF, as an organization, might justify its stance regarding their omission of the independent candidates by virtue of being their non-members. In politics, however, I don’t think it is fair to take such decisions. Besides, if such omitted candidates organized their own rallies or public meetings, the MPF might not have the right or authority to object such incidents. Same is the case with the conduct of house to house campaigns, which is not abolished by the Election Commission of India until the last 48 hours before polling.”¹⁶⁹ Others have questioned why the MPF obliged to the demands of the parties not to include independent candidates in Joint Platforms. They are of the opinion that if the MPF desired to ensure free and fair election, they should insist on including the independent candidates even if the

¹⁶⁹R. Tlanghmingthanga (Interview). *op.cit*

political parties do not want to include them in the Joint Platforms.¹⁷⁰ After hearing severe criticisms from various sections of the society, the MPF and political parties decided to include independent candidates in the Joint Platforms from the State Legislative Assembly election of 2013.

Despite many criticisms, the MPF also received lots of support from eminent citizens, scholars, community leaders and even from some politicians. On the issue of Joint Platforms, Dr. L.N. Tuanga who was also a former Senior Adviser of the MPF supported the view of the MPF. Dr. L.N. Tuanga held the view that the decision for excluding independent or party-less candidates is not due to the refusal and ignorance, or a case of underestimation of such candidates by the MPF. In fact, they just proceeded along the guidelines which they had already prepared along with the concerned political parties.¹⁷¹ Moreover, while the restriction on house to house campaigns by the MPF has been criticized by some people, it has also drawn great praise from the candidates themselves on the ground that it greatly reduced their campaign expenditures.¹⁷² Lt. Col. Z.S. Zuala, Parliamentary Secretary in the Congress Government 2008-2013, stated that the restrictions of house to house campaign by the MPF in the 2008 Mizoram Legislative Assembly elections had greatly brought down the overall election

¹⁷⁰Colney, Eddy Zosangliana & Lalmuanpuia Punte. “MPF leh Recognized Political Party Thawhona thuthlung hi ennawn a ngai em? (Do the Election Guidelines of the MPF and Political Parties need a revision?). Vanglaini. Vol.XXVIII.No.56. 3rd & 4th March, 2013.

¹⁷¹An interview with Dr.L.N.Tuanga by the scholar on 12.6.2013.

¹⁷²Upa Lalramthanga (Interview). *op.cit.* The same has been stated again by Upa Lalramthanga himself at the Serchhip District Level Seminar held at Serchhip Kawnpui, Serchhip on 5.9.2013.

expenditures compared to other General elections held prior to 2008.¹⁷³ The achievement of the MPF, particularly in reducing the election expenditures has also been shared and supported by some eminent citizens as well.¹⁷⁴

Mr. Chhawnvunga, a retired Associate Professor and a senior church elder, who was also one of the members of the expert committee, set up by the Mizoram Presbyterian Church for the establishment of the MPF back in 2005, fully attributed the disappearance of various electoral malpractices during elections as a result of the efforts of the MPF.¹⁷⁵ This view is also shared by Lt. Col. Z.S. Zuala, who stated that, “It is necessary and essential that the MPF continued its active involvement in the deliberations of the electoral process in order to remove electoral malpractices and other illegal activities completely, so that Mizoram can witness a free and fair election.”¹⁷⁶

With regards to the MPF’s objective of ensuring a peaceful, free and fair election in Mizoram, Dr. L.N. Tluanga said, “To bring about lasting electoral reforms, or to ensure a peaceful and fair election, I don’t know of any better organization other than the MPF to achieve such goals. The very reason for the

¹⁷³Lt. Col. Z.S. Zuala (Interview). *op.cit*

¹⁷⁴This is based on the opinions of various eminent citizens as stated in the interviews below:

An interview with Mr. C. Vanlalruata, General Secretary of the Young Mizo Association(YMA) by the scholar at the Central YMA Office on 7.6.2013

An interview with Mr. Chhawnvunga, Associate Professor (Retd), Pachhunga University College by the scholar at his residence on 11.6.2013.

Professor J.V. Hluna (Interview). *op.cit*

Dr. L.N. Tluanga (Interview). *op.cit*

An interview with Mr. N.B. Sachhei, Associate Professor, Govt. Serchhip College by the scholar at the College Office on 18.7.2013.

¹⁷⁵Mr. Chhawnvunga (Interview). *op.cit*.

¹⁷⁶Lt. Col. Z.S. Zuala (Interview). *op.cit*.

establishment of the MPF has been to initiate and bring electoral and political reforms.”¹⁷⁷ One of the most respected and senior pastors in Mizoram, Rev. Darchungnunga, also stated that MPF has transformed the electoral process in Mizoram to become a role model for other states to follow in their electioneering process.¹⁷⁸ The most widely circulated daily newspaper in Mizoram, *Vanglaini* also praised the activities of the MPF in elections and stated that the efforts of the MPF in ensuring a free and fair election have greatly reduced electoral malpractices.¹⁷⁹ The achievements and contributions of the MPF have also been duly noticed at National level as well. *The Times of India*, on the eve of the 2008 State Assembly election, stated that, “The MPF, comprising all major denominations of churches, has not only checked the expenditure during elections but even scaled down candidates’ movements in their constituencies. No door-to-door campaign, no rally, no public meeting, no feast, no singers, no tall promises; the MPF’s instructions are loud and clear.”¹⁸⁰ *The Asian Age* Newspaper also highlighted, “The entire electoral battle in the frontier state of Mizoram is revolving round the church so much so that the powerful Presbyterian Church of the state is sponsoring an organization, the Mizoram People Forum (MPF).”¹⁸¹ *The Hindu* also mentioned, “To ensure a free and fair poll, the Mizoram People Forum

¹⁷⁷Dr. L.N. Tluanga (Interview). *op.cit.*

¹⁷⁸Rev. Darchungnunga. “*MPF Zoram hmel tithatu (MPF has changed the political picture of Mizoram)*.” *Vanglaini*. Vol.XXVIII.No.127. 22.5.2013

¹⁷⁹Editorial. “*Inthlan leh MPF (Election and MPF)*.” *Vanglaini*. Vol.XXVIII.No.104. 24.8.2012.

¹⁸⁰Hmar, Sangzuala.”*Mizo polls sans shine: EC, Church Serve Notice Against Extravagant Campaigns.*” *The Times of India*. 14.11.2008.

¹⁸¹Anand, Manoj. “Powerful church plays a crucial role in polls.” *The Asian Age*.21.11.2008.

(MPF), a platform floated by the Mizoram Presbyterian Church and other NGOs, has issued a set of commandments to the political parties, candidates and voters which require them to strictly adhere to the election code of conduct.”¹⁸² Moreover, *The Indian Express* stated, “The Church, through the Mizoram People Forum (MPF), an umbrella of NGOs, has not only issued a code of conduct for parties and candidates to follow this election, but is also monitoring its implementation.”¹⁸³ *The Assam Tribune* reported, “Describing itself a social watchdog, the influential MPF comprising various social organizations and the church had issued a ‘diktat’ to the political parties, to keep electioneering at a low key, which was religiously followed.”¹⁸⁴ The MPF has also received various awards and certificates of appreciations for its efforts and activities in bringing electoral reforms in the state. Zonet, a local cable television network has presented Zonet Award, 2008, along with a cash award of Rs.10, 000/- to the MPF on 22nd January, 2009 for its outstanding performance in the State Legislative Assembly elections held in 2008. The State Election Commission of Mizoram has also presented the MPF certificate on 18th November, 2010 for its outstanding performance and contribution in ensuring the observance of the Model Code of Conduct for General Election to the Aizawl Municipal Council held in November, 2010.

¹⁸²<http://www.hindu.com/2008/11/24/stories/2008112455221300.html>.

¹⁸³Kashyap, Samudra Gupta. “Poll with a difference.” *The Indian Express*. 24.11.2008.

¹⁸⁴“Church-backed body calls the shots in Mizoram elections.” *The Assam Tribune*. 12.12.2008.

One of the activities of the MPF which draw lots of appreciations and praise from all sections of the society, including the politicians has been the helping hand of the local MPF Forum volunteers for the voters on polling day. They made sitting arrangements for the voters in the form of benches while waiting for their turn to cast their votes. This has provided great comfort for the electorates who came to cast their votes but have to wait in queues for hours.

The MPF got the support and cooperation of the general public as well as the candidates, political leaders and political parties. The Election Guidelines laid down by the MPF with the consent of the major political parties do not possess any legal authority, yet, it has been respected, obliged and observed obediently by the concerned political parties or individuals in each election campaigns. The reasons for such respect and reverence that the MPF received is because of the mindset and attitude of the Mizo people who have always developed and maintained the spirit of social bonding and respect for religion and the church as well as the civil society organizations in their daily lives.

Nevertheless, despite many points of dissatisfactions and criticisms leveled against it by some sections of the society, there is no doubt that the MPF do bring about significant changes in the electoral process of the state. The change in the atmosphere of elections, particularly on the polling day, the shift in the nature of election campaigns and more importantly, the prevalence of a greater degree of peaceful and fairer political deliberations, especially during elections, etc could be attributed to the active and comprehensive efforts undertaken by the MPF.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

One of the most important hallmarks of a democratic State and democracy is the prevalence of a free and fair electoral system. In fact, it is the peoples' representatives through elections that rendered a State as democratic State. A State which is ruled by rulers who came to political power, not by virtue of being elected by the people to such positions out of their free will, but through other means such as coups, civil wars etc are condemned by the world. They may assume power or keep the political mantle under their control, but the legitimacy of their authority and power are often unaccepted, questioned or criticized by public and governments worldwide. In other words, control of political power by leaders through an open, free and fair election is the foundation of liberal democracy. At the same time, it also renders legitimacy to their political power and authority. Hence, the existence of an open, free and fair election is the essence and foundation of any democratic political order. In fact, elections and democracy are like two sides of the same coin-they are complementary to each other.

Mizoram has a young history of elections and electoral politics. The first District Council election held in 1952 was the first election in Mizoram in which the Mizo people had the opportunity to actively participate in elections. The politics of Mizoram in general and the electoral politics in particular, has been affected and influenced by many factors. The repressive rule of the Mizo Chiefs

had emerged as a major election manifesto (abolition of Chieftainship) in the early 1950s. In fact, the issue of abolition of Chieftainship became the deciding factor for the District Council elections during 1950s and 1960s. The period of insurgency (1960s to mid 1980s) brought a long period of political turmoil and economic breakdown and hampered the socio-political and economic conditions of the people. Hence, economic development was another important factor that affected the electoral politics of the state during the insurgency period. Moreover, identity politics or ethnic politics or clan-based politics from some communities of the Mizo society such as *Hmar*, *Lai*, *Chakma* and *Mara*, in particular, has often generated issues and concerns in the electoral politics of the state. Besides, the role and influence of the civil society organizations in the state politics could not be undermined, especially after the establishment of the Mizoram People Forum in 2006.

The role played by the church in the politics of the state in general and in the electoral politics in particular is noteworthy. The most notable contributions and involvement of the church in the politics of the state was during the 1960s, where it served as a peace-broker during the insurgency period. The church however started involving in the electoral process since 1970s. In the first Mizoram Union Territory elections of 1972, the church leaders issued a statement for the first time and appealed the politicians, candidates and the people to ensure

a clean, free and fair election.¹⁸⁵ This was the first visible involvement of the church in the electoral process of the state. Today, the church has become one of the most efficient and influential civil society organizations for bringing electoral and political reforms as well as peaceful, free and fair elections in the state.

Since the first District Council election in 1952 and particularly after the Union Territory election in 1972, electoral malpractices such as use of money and muscle power, buying and selling of votes, picking up voters to polling booths by vehicles, etc had started and became the election trends in Mizoram. The incidents of such electoral malpractices were reported on a much larger scale in the State Legislative Assembly elections in 1993 and 1998 respectively.

The churches in Mizoram in general and the Mizoram Presbyterian Church in particular confined their involvement and participation in the electoral process in the form of prayers, requests and appeals till 2003. The church issued election messages on the eve of elections regularly till 2003. However, the State Legislative Assembly elections, 2003 witnessed more untoward incidents like buying and selling of votes, threats, kidnappings and involvement of underground organizations, etc. Such electoral malpractices compelled the church to involve in the electoral process of the state. The church, particularly the Presbyterian Church felt the need for electoral reforms to ensure a peaceful, free and fair election in Mizoram. Thus, the Presbyterian Church took the initiative to form an

¹⁸⁵Ngente, Dr. Lalbiakmawia. “*Church and Election in Mizoram: The Role of the Mizoram People Forum.*” Retrieved from mizorampeopleforum.org/ official website of MPF.

organization which would make serious efforts to bring electoral and political reforms in the state. The efforts of the Presbyterian Church led to the establishment of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) in 2006. Today, the MPF served as an effective political watch dog in the electioneering and political process of Mizoram.

The Mizoram People Forum (MPF) has been engaging itself in several activities and initiatives with the goal of securing a peaceful, free and fair election since its establishment. It sought to achieve a just and sustainable economic development of the state. Although the success of the MPF in realizing and securing its goals and objectives is still considered by some as unsatisfactory or incomplete, yet, there is no doubt that due to the efforts of the MPF, the very nature and trend of elections has been changed to a great extent. In other words, the credits for removing various electoral malpractices such as money laundering, excessive use of loud speakers, public feasts etc, which were often experienced in the past elections, could be given to the efforts of both the MPF and political parties as well.

The role of the MPF in initiating electoral reforms in general and its efforts in bringing a peaceful, free and fair election in the state has yielded many positive results and development in the overall political and electioneering process of the state.

In the past elections which are conducted prior to the establishment of the MPF, electoral malpractices such as buying and selling of votes, picking up of

voters by political parties, distribution of money, feasts, concerts, drunk electorates gathering around polling booths and party information centers, etc are practiced and seen openly in the public. However, with the active efforts, vigilance and requests of the MPF, such incidents are now not seen on polling day. Besides, with the MPF prohibiting the use of loud speakers and sound systems apart from the setting up of party information centers (election camps) near polling booths, the atmosphere of the polling day has now become much peaceful and calmer after the establishment of the MPF. The restriction of house to house campaigns by the MPF also limited the chances of candidates and party workers to indulge in electoral malpractices, unseen by the public. In short, the efforts of the MPF in ensuring a peaceful, free and fair election, especially on polling day has no doubt greatly reduced the chances and incidents of electoral malpractices taking place in elections.

Another noteworthy achievement of the MPF, which further render the importance of the MPF in ensuring a free and fair election, has been the reduction of expenditures incurred during elections. Before the establishment of the MPF, political parties and candidates spent large sums of money for organizing public rallies and meetings, feasts, concerts, buying and selling of votes, posters, flags, banners, stickers, hats, door to door campaigns, distribution of money and items such as silpauline, jerseys, etc during election campaigns. However, with the following of the MPF Election Guidelines, political parties and party candidates considerably reduced their election expenditures. Both the supporters of the MPF

as well as the critics agreed that election expenditures have been reduced due to the activities of the MPF. In fact, even the politicians and political party leaders admitted that the restriction of house to house campaigns and conduct of Joint Platforms by the MPF has reduced their election expenditures to a great extent. Hence, it is clear that election expenditures have been greatly reduced due to the efforts of the MPF.

The conduct of elections under the vigilance and monitoring of the MPF has been greatly welcomed by all sections of the society, electorates and politicians alike. Although there are people who harshly criticized the MPF and its activities, they even could not deny the positive impacts that have developed in the electoral process of the state due to the efforts and activities of the MPF. Nevertheless, the importance of the MPF in ensuring a peaceful, free and fair election in the state would be further enhanced if all the church organizations and major civil society organizations work together under the banner of MPF. At present, there is no doubt that the success and achievements of the MPF is incomprehensive and incomplete without the non-participation of some major churches in the state. In fact, there is a huge difference in the nature of elections in the northern parts of Mizoram where the MPF is strong and efficient as compared to the southern part where MPF is not formed.

The non-participation of four major church organizations in the state- the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM), the Salvation Army, the United Pentecostal Church (UPC) and the Seventh Day Adventist Church is a serious concern for the

MPF and the people in general. Without these churches, it will be very difficult to achieve the goals and objectives of the MPF because the inhabitants of many villages and localities in Mizoram are members of either one of these churches. As a result, MPF Local Forums could not be formed in villages and localities where most inhabitants are members of these churches. It therefore hindered the scope of comprehensiveness of the MPF and greatly affected the activities of the MPF in the southern part of the state.

At the same time, complete reformation of politics and electoral process of the state could not be realized within a few years. It is rather a gradual process, and there is always a room for improvement. *Upa Lalramthanga*, the former General Secretary of the MPF said, “It is not possible to attain a 100% success in bringing about reforms in the electoral process in one time. In 2013, if we could see a 60% improvement or success as compared to other years, it would be a great achievement. Likewise, we aimed of reaching our goal step by step by improving our activities and subsequently, we will achieve our goals and objectives in the years to come.”¹⁸⁶

The MPF model and method of operation in the electoral process of the state could not be implemented or applied effectively in the electoral process of other states of India. Mizo society is a mono-ethnic society in the sense that majority of the community belong to Mizo sub-ethnic group with the exception of Chakma. In other words, Mizoram is more or less a homogeneous state. The

¹⁸⁶*Upa Lalramthanga*, at his speech at the Serchhip District Level MPF Seminar.

homogeneity factor is the biggest obstacle for other states to successfully implement the MPF model in the electoral process. For instance, after hearing the success stories of the MPF in the 2008 elections, Nagaland had desired to apply and follow the MPF model in its elections. In fact in 2011, the Naga Baptist Church Union (NBCU) had sent delegates to Mizoram to conduct an in-depth study about the MPF. The MPF also sent some resource persons to Nagaland on the request of the Baptist church to conduct consultative seminars about the MPF.¹⁸⁷ Till today, Nagaland however, still failed to implement the MPF model. The fact that the Mizo follow a common religion, with 87% of the population belonging to Christian community,¹⁸⁸ has been one of the foremost factors behind the success of the MPF in Mizoram. Hence, this ‘homogeneity factor’ is one of the main problems for the MPF model to be successfully applied and implemented in other states.¹⁸⁹ In Meghalaya, most of the people are church members of either the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Synod or the Roman Catholic Church and other civil organizations like the Khasi Student’s Union (KSU). These civil organizations served as an active pressure group. So, it might be the most likely state to

¹⁸⁷ An interview with *Upa* Lalramthanga, by the scholar at the MPF Headquarter Office at Tuikhuahtlang, Aizawl on 6.6.2013.

¹⁸⁸ http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Mizoram

¹⁸⁹ An interview with Mr. Chhawnvunga by the scholar at his residence on 11.6.2013.

An interview with Lt. Col. Z.S. Zuala by the scholar on 11.6.2013.

An interview with Mr. Vanlalruata, General Secretary of the Central Young Mizo Association by the scholar on 7.6.2013.

An interview with Prof. J.V. Hluna by the scholar on 12.6.2013..

successfully implement the MPF model, mainly due to its large Christian population and strong civil society organizations.¹⁹⁰

The Election Commission of India appreciated the activities of the MPF in the 2008 State Assembly election. They even submitted recommendations to the Parliament to consider the application of the MPF model in the elections in other states of India.¹⁹¹ However, Mizoram is a state whose inhabitants are bonded by cultural, social, religious, traditional and linguistic homogeneity unlike other states. Other states have been characterized by diversity of religion, language, castes and tribes.

People highly respected and supported the civil society organizations, particularly the church in Mizoram. MPF, being sponsored and established by the church, and whose members include the major NGOs in the state, is bound to receive the respect and support of the general public. Most of the Mizo are members of either one of these organizations. So, they considered it as their duty and obligation to support and co-operate the movement of socio-political and economic reform initiated by the MPF.

The respect and reverence that the civil society organizations, particularly the church received from the Mizo people has been one of the main reasons for the success of the MPF in carrying out its various activities. This is not something which could be easily found or followed in other states of India. *Upa*

¹⁹⁰*Upa Lalramthanga (Interview).op.cit*

¹⁹¹*Ibid*

Lalramthanga, however, is of the opinion that it would be very difficult, but not impossible altogether to implement the MPF model in other states of India.¹⁹²

The MPF has succeeded in conducting elections in a more free and fair manner. Although electoral malpractices are still practiced secretly, incidents such as buying and selling of votes near polling areas, party workers openly encouraging and asking voters to vote for their parties near polling areas, etc, were no more because the MPF monitored very closely in and around the polling areas. The atmosphere and situation on polling day is also quite different after the establishment of the MPF. The State Legislative Assembly elections, 2013 provides the most recent example. Polling stations and the surrounding areas remained calm and peaceful. Political party workers were present near the polling booths in large numbers. In short, the overall atmosphere on polling day has greatly changed and improved due to the efforts and appeals of the MPF.

The activities of the MPF in the post-poll period however, need to be reviewed. If the MPF is going to affect administrative reforms, it must widen the scope of its activities. Organizing seminars, consultative programmes and submitting appeals and requests to the authorities is not enough. MPF must follow and study the activities of the government more closely and try to develop itself as an active and efficient pressure group that could compel the government to consider their demands and requests for public interests. The MPF must take advantage of the respect and support that it received from the people and

¹⁹²Ibid.

politicians, and use them to press the government to consider their appeals and demands for public interest. In short, the MPF must strive to maintain the stature and respect that it received from politicians and political parties during elections even in the post-poll period.

The nature and conduct of Joint Platforms by the MPF is also not satisfactory. At present, Joint Platforms are organized at Constituency levels only. Although the MPF allowed political parties to organize public meetings under their supervision, The MPF failed to conduct public meetings or Joint Election Platforms at different places all across Mizoram. Hence, the opportunity of close and personal interaction between the candidates and the electorates has been greatly limited by the restriction of organizing public meetings by the MPF. So, the number of Joint Platforms needed to be increased and it must also be allowed to be organized at all levels of MPF Forums- local, constituency and district. In such a way, the candidates can choose to participate in the Joint Platforms of their preference at different levels and will also have more opportunities for addressing the electorates during election campaigns. The electorates also got more time and opportunity to interact with the candidates and assess them.

There is no doubt that the MPF still have a long way to go and improve itself to realize its various goals and objectives. It is however, the only civil society organization in Mizoram today which has taken active and serious efforts towards bringing reliable and long lasting electoral and socio-political reforms in the state.

Annexure I

(Questions prepared by the Synod Social Front to understand the pulse of the people regarding the ‘free and fair’ election in Mizoram.)

Questionnaire on Political Education

1. Do the involvement and participation of our church elders in party politics help in making politics free and fair?
a) To a great extent b) To some extent c) No
2. From a Christian viewpoint, does the active involvement of a church leader in politics adversely affect his Christian life and religious activities?
a) To a great extent b) To some extent c) No
3. Does the church have a role and responsibility in bringing about electoral reforms in the state?
a) To a great extent b) To some extent c) No
4. Is there a need for active church-goers to be concerned and conscious about politics?
a) To a great extent b) To some extent c) No
5. Are the election messages published by Synod prior to elections useful and beneficial?
a) To a great extent b) To some extent c) No
6. Do you benefit from the various studies and researches conducted by the leaders of the church on various issues in politics?

a) To a great extent b) To some extent c) No

7. Are you satisfied with the contents of the various messages, statements and articles issued and written by leaders of the church regarding election and politics?

a) To a great extent b) To some extent c) No

8. Will you benefit if issues like economic and development, politics and social life are included among the topics to be studied and discussed on Wednesday night church meetings?

a) To a great extent b) To some extent c) No

9. Do the present level of participation and activity of the church in politics contributed to a positive change in the overall politics of the state?

a) To a great extent b) To some extent c) No

Annexure II

ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN POLITICAL PARTIES AND MIZORAM PEOPLE FORUM

(Memorandum of Understanding)

The joint efforts of the political parties and the Mizoram People Forum in implementing the 'Articles of Agreement' for holding a clean, free and fair election in various elections within Mizoram such as - Mizoram Legislative Assembly General Election 2008, MP Election 2009, Village Council Elections 2009 & 2012, Aizawl Local Council Election 2012, Aizawl Municipal Election 2010 and Autonomous District Council Elections, have been a great success. The conduct of elections in Mizoram has become a role model for other states of the country, which is the result of the united effort of all the people concerned in the electoral process and the people of Mizoram. Mizoram is facing Legislative Assembly General Election in 2013; buoyant by the past achievements and successes, and the desire to uphold the great election model, Political Parties of Mizoram and the Mizoram People Forum have come together and inked this 'Articles of Agreement' which will be in force for the Mizoram Legislative Assembly General Election 2013.

I. General conduct:

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

II. Election expenditure:

- 1) No party or candidate shall indulge in huge and wasteful election expenditures. Election expenditures should be kept to the minimum. MPF functionaries shall not accept money or donations from the political parties and the candidates.
- 2) Activities which are 'corrupt practices' and offences under the election law can crop up during the house to house campaign. Therefore, house to house visits by candidates and their supporters is prohibited during the period of 10 days prior to the election day, to allow the electors period of tranquil to decide their option.

- 3) Influencing of voters through money or other incentives and inducements must be avoided. General public, organizations and individuals are requested not to ask or expect any favour from the candidates. Similarly, candidates and Political Parties are also requested to refrain from announcing any financial grants, distribution of inducement articles like silpouline, jersey, football, mobile handset, NLUP etc, or promises thereof.
- 4) Feasting, picnic and procession escalate the election expenditure unnecessarily; they must be avoided.
- 5) Banner, flag and poster unnecessarily escalate the election expenditure; therefore the maximum number of banners, flags and posters is restricted within each locality as follows:
 - VC/LC with a maximum of seven members:
Up to 3 banners, 30 flags and 20 posters.
 - VC/LC with a maximum of five members:
Up to 3 banners, 20 flags and 15 posters.
 - VC/LC with a maximum of three members:
Up to 3 banners, 10 flags and 10 posters.
 - The maximum size of banner shall be 18'x4' and that of the poster shall be 4'x3'.

- Caps, badges and stickers with political party symbols may not be use as the election materials.
- MPF functionaries will request the political parties to remove excessive banners, flags and posters, if any, if the case arises.

III. Free and fair election, and security issues:

- 1) Use of force, intimidation and undue influence to the voters to secure their votes must be avoided.
- 2) Securing the support of underground armed groups and use of arms shall be prevented at all cost.
- 3) Take all necessary actions for security and peaceful election, especially along the border and sensitive areas.

IV Policy implementation:

- 1) Only realistic and do-able policies and programmes must be included in the Party manifesto.
- 2) More than the personal and individual life of the candidates, election campaigning should revolve around the Party policy land programme. Campaigning by use of false propaganda, unproven truth and scandalous issues must be avoided.

V. Candidates:

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

- 1) Stable and upright person.
- 2) Honest and hard working.
- 3) Person with great integrity.
- 4) Free from the influence of alcoholic and other drugs.
- 5) Abstain from fornication
- 6) Having great respect for law of the land.
- 7) Dedicated to the welfare of the society and fellow human beings.
- 8) Committed to one's faith and religion.

VI Joint electioneering effort:

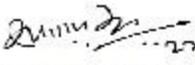
- 1) As and when possible, joint election campaign platform will be organized for various candidates, under the guidance of MPF Constituency Forum. These programmes may be widely publicized in the local TV and media; other than these, joint election campaign platform must be avoided.
- 2) All public meetings, even those organized by individual party, may be held under the guidance of MPF. In the absence of MPF, individual political parties may make suitable arrangement.

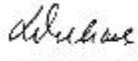
- 3) No tea or eatables shall be served on the Polling day. Giving out of election numbers or slips shall be undertaken by the MPF duty or in a joint effort with the party workers.

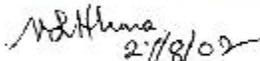
VII. Conclusion:

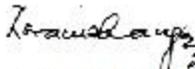
- 1) MPF District Forum, Constituency Forum and Local Forum shall neither make additional agreement nor deviate from this 'Articles of Agreement'.
- 2) If any political parties or candidates default or goes against the spirit of this 'Articles of Agreement' and if there is solid proof or documentary evidence to prove the same, it shall be widely publicise within the MLA Constituency where it has been committed.
- 3) This 'Articles of Agreement' shall be widely publicised and circulated by the Mizoram People Forum and Political Parties.

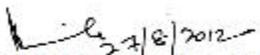
Signed by leaders of the said political parties and MPF:

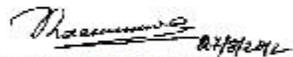

(LAL THANHAWLA)
President, MPCC

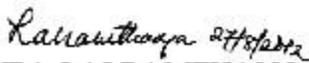

(LALDUHOMA)
President, ZNP Gen. Hqrs.


(LALHLUNA)
President, BJP Mizoram Unit


(ZORAMTHANGA)
President, MNF Gen. Hqrs.


(LALHMANGAIHA SAILO)
President, MPC Gen. Hqrs.


(REV. THANGZAUVA)
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Upa Lalramthanga, General Secretary, Mizoram People Forum

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Abstract

M. Phil Dissertation

ELECTIONS IN MIZORAM: A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF THE MIZORAM PEOPLE FORUM

By

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2013

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Abstract

Elections and democracy are like two wheels of a cycle. If one wheel is removed, the cycle cannot move forward. Democratic rule is inconceivable without elections. A ruler who does away with elections is called a dictator. Moreover, the classical form of direct democracy is not possible in the modern world. Hence, indirect democracy through open, free and fair election is one of the most important means for strengthening and sustaining the principles of democracy. India is the biggest democracy in the world. Hence, with its huge population, election is all the more important for India than other countries in order to maintain and ensure the realization of the basic principles of democracy.

An election is a formal decision-making process by which an electorate chooses an individual to hold public office. It is through elections that offices are filled in the Legislature and sometimes in the Executive of a country, as well as in regional and local governments. The process is also used in many other private and business organizations such as trade unions, sport organizations, civil society organizations etc. Election is not a new phenomenon. Elections were used in ancient Athens and in Rome in the selection of Popes and Holy Roman emperors. The origin of elections in the contemporary world however, lies in the gradual

emergence of representative government in Europe and North America which began in the 17th century.

Electoral system and its dynamics are one of the most important mechanisms for the realization and materialization of the basic principles of democracy. Election constitutes the heart of democracy. The exercise of popular voting, or in other words, election, gives political legitimacy to the people's representatives. This legitimacy is highly essential for the stability of democratic constitutional order. The importance of elections cannot be undermined in any democratic country. In fact, it is one of the most important cornerstones for the successful working of democracy in the world. Elections are taken very seriously in the democratic countries of the world.

A political system could be considered as democratic, if its political leaders are elected through fair, honest and periodic elections. In such elections, candidates freely compete for votes and virtually all the adult population is eligible to vote. Similarly, a system is undemocratic to the extent that no opposition is permitted in elections, or that the opposition is curbed or harassed in what it can do, or that votes are manipulated or miscounted. Hence, an open, free and fair election is the essence of democracy. In fact, it is the most efficient and reliable means for ensuring a representative democracy in the world. The principle of democracy lies in conducting an open, free and fair election, where everyone has an equal opportunity for participation and contestation in the electoral process. Thus, in a democracy, elections provide a proper and systematic channel for

expressing support or opposition that enabled governments and political leaders to work out public policies within the framework of democracy. It could therefore, be said that election is the foundation of democracy.

Methodology

The present study is based on the survey method of social science research. Survey research has special importance in the field of research. It is important for studying opinions, attitudes, viewpoints and social facts, etc. The data for the study are collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data are collected through unstructured interview and observation methods. Interview had been conducted on the leaders of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF), intellectuals and academicians, student leaders, political leaders, leaders of eminent civil society organizations and church leaders. Official documents of the MPF like leaflets, pamphlets, press releases of the MPF, etc are collected and used them as primary sources. Both direct and indirect observation method has been adopted by attending various seminars and consultations organized by the MPF during the State Legislative Assembly elections, 2013 and primary information are collected for the study. Secondary data are collected from government documents, circulars and publications, political party documents, articles from journals, newspapers (both local as well as national), books, doctoral thesis and other research publications which are relevant for the study. Descriptive and content analysis are used for the analysis of collected literatures, clippings from various newspapers, particularly *Vanglaini*, Aizawl Post, The Hindu and The Times of India, apart

from other local newspapers in order to have an insight into the subject of the study.

Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To study the electoral politics in the State of Mizoram in general and the role of the church in particular.
2. To examine the role and function of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) in the electoral politics of Mizoram.

Research Questions

There are two main Research Questions for the study. They are:

1. How important is the role of MPF in the conduct of free and fair elections in Mizoram?
2. In what way is it possible to follow the Mizoram model of election process in other parts of India?

There are five chapters in the dissertation. The first chapter introduces the study. It includes a brief profile of Mizoram, the nature and meaning of elections, history of elections, elections in India in general and in the North-east in particular. The chapter also discusses the methodology, objectives of the study, research questions, review of related literatures etc.

The second chapter examines and analyzes in detail the electoral politics of Mizoram as a whole. The first section traces the origin of political consciousness among the Mizo people as well as political developments in the state. Besides, it also discusses the establishment of civil society organizations in Mizoram. The second section examines the emergence of political parties in Mizoram. The last part of the chapter analyzes the various elections beginning from the first District Council election in 1952 till the establishment of the Mizoram People Forum in 2006.

The third chapter analyzes the role played by the civil society in general and the church in particular in the electoral politics of the state. The first section of the chapter mainly traces the increasing role played by the civil society organizations, particularly the church in the electoral politics of the state. The second part of the chapter discusses the electoral reforms initiated by the non-governmental organizations and the formation of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF). The last part of the chapter discusses the organizational structure of the MPF.

The fourth chapter study and analyzes the role played by the MPF in the electioneering process of the state. The chapter also examines the various activities that the MPF had taken up during the elections. It also discusses an overview of the future plan and preparations of the MPF. In other words, the chapter mainly study the various activities of the MPF in the election campaigns, public meetings related with elections, political seminars, election debates, etc that it had organized

in the past elections and the present as well, particularly in the State Legislative Assembly elections of 2013 and Parliamentary elections of 2014.

The fifth chapter (last chapter) is the summary and conclusion of the study. It summarizes the study and includes all the findings. The major findings of the study are as follows:

The MPF has succeeded in making the elections more free and fair. Although electoral malpractices are still practiced, incidents such as buying and selling of votes near polling areas, party workers openly encouraging and asking voters to vote for their parties near polling areas, etc, are no more visible due to the strict monitoring by the MPF in and around the polling areas. The situation on polling day is also quite different after the establishment of the MPF. The State Legislative Assembly elections, 2013 provides the most recent example. Polling stations and the surrounding areas remained calm and peaceful. In short, the overall atmosphere on polling day has greatly changed and improved due to the efforts and appeals of the MPF.

In the past elections which are conducted prior to the establishment of the MPF, electoral malpractices such as buying and selling of votes, picking up of voters by political parties, distribution of money, feasts, concerts, drunk electorates gathering around polling booths and party information centers, etc are practiced and seen openly in the public. However, with the active efforts, vigilance and requests of the MPF, such incidents are no more experienced on polling day. Besides, with the MPF prohibiting the use of loud speakers apart from the setting

up of party information centers near polling booths, the atmosphere of the polling day has now become much peaceful and calmer after the establishment of the MPF. The restriction of house to house campaigns by the MPF also limited the chances of candidates and party workers to indulge in electoral malpractices. In short, the efforts of the MPF to ensure a peaceful, free and fair election, especially on polling day has no doubt greatly reduced the chances and incidents of electoral malpractices taking place in elections.

Another noteworthy achievement of the MPF has been the reduction of expenditures incurred during elections. Before the establishment of the MPF, political parties and candidates spent large sums of money for organizing public rallies and meetings, feasts, concerts, buying and selling of votes, posters, flags, banners, stickers, hats, door to door campaigns, distribution of money and items such as silpauline, jerseys, etc during election campaigns. However, with the following of the MPF Election Guidelines by the political parties and party candidates, election expenditures have come down considerably.

The electoral process under the vigilance and monitoring of the MPF has been greatly welcomed by all sections of the society, electorates and politicians alike. There are people who are very critical of the MPF and its activities, yet, they even could not deny the positive impacts that have developed in the electoral process of the state due to the efforts and activities of the MPF. Nevertheless, the importance of the MPF in ensuring a peaceful, free and fair election in the state would be further enhanced if all the church organizations and major civil society

organizations work together under the banner of MPF. At present, there is no doubt that the success and achievements of the MPF is incomprehensive and incomplete without the non-participation of some major churches in the state. In fact, there is a huge difference in the nature of elections in the northern parts of Mizoram where the MPF is strong and efficient as compared to the southern part where MPF is not formed.

The MPF model and method of operation in the electoral process of the state could not be implemented or applied effectively in the electoral and political process of other states of India. The homogeneity factor is the biggest obstacle for other states to successfully implement the MPF model in the electoral process. The fact that the Mizo follow a common religion, with 87% of the population belonging to Christian community, has been one of the foremost factors behind the success of the MPF in Mizoram. Hence, this 'homogeneity factor' is one of the main problems for the MPF model to be successfully applied and implemented in other states. Mizoram is a state whose inhabitants are bonded by cultural, social, religious, traditional and linguistic homogeneity unlike other states. Other states have been characterized by diversity of religion, language, castes and tribes.

Another unique factor for the success of the MPF is the status and position that the civil society organizations enjoy in the hearts of the Mizo people. The NGOs and civil society organizations in the state involve themselves in every important issues of the state, be it political, social or likewise. Hence, the respect and reverence that the civil society organizations, particularly the church received

from the Mizo people has been one of the main reasons for the success of the MPF in carrying out its various activities. This is not something which could be easily found or followed in other states of India. People highly respected and supported the civil society organizations, particularly the church in Mizoram. MPF, being sponsored and established by the church, and whose members include the major NGOs in the state, is bound to receive the respect and support of the general public. Most of the Mizo are members of either one of these organizations. So, they considered it as their duty and obligation to support and co-operate the movement of socio-political and economic reform initiated by the MPF.

The activities of the MPF in the post-poll period however, need to be reviewed. If the MPF want to bring administrative reforms, it must widen the scope of its activities. Organizing seminars, consultative programmes and submitting appeals and requests to the authorities is not enough. MPF must follow and study the activities of the government more closely and try to develop itself as an active and efficient pressure group that could compel the government to consider their demands and requests for public interests. The MPF must take advantage of the respect and support that it received from the people and politicians, and use them to press the government to consider their appeals and demands for public interest. In short, the MPF must strive to maintain the stature and respect that it received from politicians and political parties during elections even in the post-poll period.

The nature and conduct of Joint Platforms by the MPF also required a proper and thorough analysis. Although the MPF allowed political parties to organize public meetings under their supervision, The MPF failed to conduct public meetings or Joint Election Platforms at different places all across Mizoram. Hence, the opportunity of close and personal interaction between the candidates and the electorates has been greatly limited by the restriction of organizing public meetings by the MPF. So, the number of Joint Platforms needed to be increased and it must also be allowed to be organized at all levels of MPF Forums- local, constituency and district. In such a way, the candidates can choose to participate in the Joint Platforms of their preference at different levels and will also have more opportunities for addressing the electorates during election campaigns. The electorates also got more time and opportunity to interact with the candidates and assess them.

There is no doubt that the MPF still have a long way to go and improve itself to realize its various goals and objectives. It is however, the only civil society organization in Mizoram today which has taken active and serious efforts towards bringing reliable and long lasting electoral and socio-political reforms in the state.

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Interviews

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