



Intra-Party Conflict and Decay of Ideology in Mizo Union

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Abstract

After the reign of the British in Lushai Hills at the end of the 19th century, all kinds of political activities were banned in the hills. After a plan was instigated by the British to leave India during the 1940s, the future status of Lushai Hills which was in 'excluded area' under the Government of India Act of 1935 became uncertain. As stated in Government of India Act of 1935, Section 311(1), the North-Eastern region of India (erstwhile undivided Assam) and the home of Baluchistan hilly people (Tribal Areas) was defined as "areas along the frontiers of India or in Baluchistan which are not part of British India or of Burma or any Indian State or of any foreign state". As a result, political confusion was scattered among the educated Mizo youth as to whether Lushai Hills will be under Indian Union or still be under the jurisdiction of the British government following their departure from Lushai Hills as well as India. There was confusion about whether they can decide their future political status. During this time of despair, Mizo Union (MU) was formed to preserve Mizo culture, tradition, and ethnic identity and overall, it's established for the interest of the people. The party was led mainly by the educated youths who also tried to settle the unstable political position of the Lushai hills. This paper attempts to trace how the MU party underwent several factions and debacles while making several decisions. It critically examines the ideological clash between the leaders that led to the factions and intra-party conflict. It discusses the reasons for various conflicts which led to the formation of new regional and national parties in Mizoram. The paper also analyses the reasons for its ideological decay.

Keywords: Hill State, Intra-Party Conflict, Lushai Hills, Mizoram, Political Party.

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Introduction

The Mizo Commoner People Union was formed on 9th April 1946 as the first political party in Lushai Hills (the present Mizoram). Later on, the name of the party was changed to Mizo Union (MU). Since its formation, the party gained the support of the Mizo people as they believed that it has the power to challenge the Mizo chiefs and guide the people towards the path of democracy. Even though the party gained mass support and progressed rapidly, it faced several dissident activities within the party. These factions within the MU party led to the emergence of several regional and national political parties in Mizoram. Most of these conflicts were caused by ideological differences among the leaders and arguments over positions in the party, which continued till the party merged with the Indian National Congress in 1974.

Ideological Clash

Soon after the Mizo Union was formed, dissatisfaction rose amongst the party members as they considered the first newly appointed leaders not educated enough to lead the party which inculcated the desire for electing educated persons as leaders of the party. On 25th September 1946 the first MU General Assembly was held in which new leaders were elected - Lalhema as President, R. Vanlawma as General Secretary and Lalbuaia as Treasurer. On 5th November 1946 MU councilor and block leaders meeting was held in which Ch. Saprawnga moved a no-confidence motion against the President and General Secretary, intending to replace them with more educated leaders like Khawtinkhuma, the first post-graduate from Lushai Hills, and H. Vanthuama, the former leader in '*Hill Student Union*' in Shillong (Vanthuama, 2001: 23-24). He requested re-election which violated the rules and regulations of the party as elections were to be held only at the General Assembly (MU Constitution, 1946: 12). However, an election was held and the President and General Secretary were replaced which caused a further rift within the party members and a faction known as the MU Right Wing led by Lalbiakthanga, Vanlawma and Pachhunga began to function from within the party.

The main propaganda of MU Right Wing was to attain independence from British India, but it did not gain much support from the party members. Yet, people in rural areas held the view that even if they attain Independence, they would still be under the rule of the chiefs, which resulted in the disapproval of their propaganda among the people (Vanlawma, 1989: 164,178). Factional fights within the MU were considered to be caused by two reasons. Firstly, even though some of the MU leaders stood for the remaining of Lushai Hills under the Indian Union, certain members of the party supported Independence from British India. The said ideological clash between the MU leaders came to be known openly in the MU public meeting at Thakthing locality. Secondly, there was secluded segregation between the illiterate group and the literate group of leaders in the party.

After L.L. Peters was appointed as the Superintendent of Luhsai Hills, he took the initiative of convening the MU General Assembly on 26th September 1947 to settle the disputes in the party. In this assembly, representatives from the two groups were allowed to address their stand and a decision was taken for the re-election of new leaders. The inner-

party conflict was settled in this assembly while those who had lost interest in the MU joined the newly formed political party, United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO) (Lalbuai, 2002: 65).

The ideology of the MU party remains undefined in its constitution but it is apparent that its main objective was the preservation and upliftment of Mizo culture and tradition. Most of the policies and programs for the implementation of objectives of the party were decided and authorized by the party leaders. Certain ideas contributed by members that challenged the ideology of some of the party leaders were not just abruptly discarded, but the contributors were also excluded from the party subsequently. This was one of the undisclosed grounds for re-elections of the office bearers in November 1946 which resulted in the factional fight within the party. Some of the MU leaders advocated that Lushai Hills should remain under the Indian Union after the British departs from India. According to former MU Vice-president Rev. Zairema, the party received financial assistance from the Assam Congress party prior to the arrival of the constituent assembly advisory sub-committee. The constituent assembly advisory sub-committee visited Aizawl in April, 1946 to discuss the future status of Mizo people under the Indian Union, which further corroborates their intention (Zairema, 2009: 267).

Likewise, the Dawrpui area MU unit rejected the request of Lalmawia, a former Burma civil affairs officer to join the party. His rejection was because he favors the amalgamation of Lushai Hills with the Burma government, which was strongly opposed by the MU leaders. According to H. Vanthuama, the former general secretary of MU, this provoked Lalmawia and his colleague to form UMFO, the second political party in Lushai Hills (Vanthuam, 2001: 82). When MNF initiated the independence movement in 1966, they condemned the MU party as the chief cause of Mizoram's enclosure to the Indian Union and aggravated violence among its members.

Reshuffling of Chief Executive Member (CEM) Split the Mizo Union

The first Lushai Hills District Council government was formed by MU. It was inaugurated on 26th April 1952. Ch. Saprawnga was elected both as a Member of District Council (MDC) from Circle xiv and Assam MLA from Aijal East constituency, and the Assam Congress ministry appointed him for the post of Assam Parliamentary secretary. As such is the case, Mr. Lalsawia was elected to take his place as the first CEM. In the meanwhile, in the MU general assembly, held on 1st March 1952 a proposition to merge with the Assam Congress Parliamentary Party in the Assam Legislative Assembly was passed (Thanhlira, 2012: 118).

Lushai Hills District Council was changed into Mizo District Council effective from 1st September 1954 as per the Lushai Hills District (change of name) Act, 1954, enacted by the Indian parliament. Soon after, another conflict occurred within the District Council government. Certain members of the MU party expressed their desire to change the CEM, Ch. Saprawnga in place of Lalsawia. Lalsawia submitted his resignation on 24th August 1954. An election for the CEM post was held on 7th September 1954 and Ch. Saprawnga was

elected (Lalbuai, 2002: 101). Surprisingly enough, Ch. Saprawnga appointed Lalsawia as Executive Member (EM). However, the EM was soon after forced to resign from his post as his relationship with the new CEM worsened, and this ultimately led to the seizing of his portfolio and his expulsion from the MU party for his refutation (Lalsawia, 1996: 129).

This incident caused a debacle within the party and MU general assembly was held on 24th September, 1956 to settle the dispute (Saprawnga, 1990: 123). Lalsawia and his acquaintances who were dissatisfied with the reshuffling of CEM posts left MU and formed MU Right Wing (Lalsawia, 1996: 129). The main cause of this conflict can be attributed to three factors: i) Ch. Saprawnga's deep dissatisfaction towards Lalsawia's personality and his poor leadership quality increased the tension between them (Saprawnga, 1990: 121). ii) According to R. Vanlawma, one of the founders of MU, Ch. Saprawnga was discontent with the Assam Congress ministry and shifted his interest towards the CEM post instead. To quench his thirst, he manipulated several party leaders and Lalsawia had to pay the price (Vanlawma, 1989: 237). iii) Lalsawia claimed that some of the party leaders conspired against him, and made him resign from the CEM post forcefully. Moreover, he believed that the unfair action of the Executive will anyway lead to the collapse of the District Council government (Lalsawia, 1996:109). Even, the MU President at that time, R. Thanhlira also expressed his disapproval with the reshuffling of posts and submitted his resignation as the party president.

Reshuffling of the CEM, which led to the birth of MU Right Wing apparently, impaired the performance of MU in the second District Council (DC) election. In the first DC election, the MU party secured 15 seats out of 18 elected seats; whereas, in the second DC election out of 20 elected seats, MU secured only 10 seats. The MU Right Wing contested in this election and scattered the vote bank of the MU party. This was benefitted by the UMFO as they secured 8 seats in the second DC election. But, on 1st October, 1957 MU Right Wing and UMFO dissolved their parties and formed EITU Mizoram Branch.

Hill States Movement led to the Formation of Congress Party in Mizo District

During the second District Council government led by MU in Mizo District, there were plans for the implementation of Assamese as the official language in the state of Assam. Moreover, several hill leaders who were dissatisfied with the administration and the policy of the Assam government toward the hill people held a meeting in Aizawl on 30th May- 1st June 1957 and formed the Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU) (Chaltuahkhuma, 2001: 209). The main propaganda of this newly formed group was to unite all the hilly political parties in the state of Assam to achieve a separate hill state. On 2nd October 1957 UMFO and MU Right Wing leaders dissolved their party and formed the EITU Mizoram branch in Mizo District. However, on the same day, MU conducted an assembly and proposed that they should continue to support the Hill State movement and not to join EITU (Vanlawma, 1989: 247).

Within the MU party, certain groups supported Hill State policy while another group aimed for Mizo State policy. On 10th March 1959, MU general assembly was conducted in which votes were taken for implementation between the two said policies; however, they

could not form a proper conclusion on which policy to execute even though Hill State policy had more supporters (Dokhuma, 1999: 68). Most of the authors of Mizoram political literature mentioned that All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) leaders were present at this assembly and A. Thanglura, T. Cajee (Khasi District Council CEM) and George Hamilton attend this event from Shillong. However, APHLC was established only on 6-7th July, 1960 at Goodwood Bungalow, Shillong where A. Thanglura was appointed as the chairman (Thanglura, 1999: 155). Therefore, it can be considered that A. Thanglura and his colleague did not attend the MU general assembly which took place in March, as representatives of APHLC but rather in their own endeavor to support the hill state movement.

Under these circumstances, Assamese Language Bill, 1960 was passed on 10th October 1960. The action of the Assam Chief Minister (CM) B.P. Chaliha was criticized by many and lost the trust of the hill people. The MU party not only opposed the Bill but also condemned the way the Assam government handled Mautam Famine in 1959. As a result, it was withdrawn from Assam Congress Legislature Party. As means of opposing the said Bill, APHLC even organized 'Protest Day' on 14th October 1960 at Shillong, Tura, Aizawl and Haflong (Saprawnga, 1990: 130). In addition, APHLC leaders met Prime Minister Nehru and Home Minister Pandit Pant on 24-25th November 1960 in Delhi to discuss the hill state movement. A. Thanglura and Ch. Saprawnga were present as the representatives of the MU in this meeting, where Nehru introduced them to the Scottish Pattern of administration which was in agreement within the state of Assam, however, the APHLC held a meeting in June 1961 and rejected the proposal (Thanglura, 1999: 159-160).

The APHLC held a meeting on 29-30th June 1961 at Tura (Garo Hills) proposed all the MLAs in the hilly regions of Assam to submit their resignation to pressurize the Indian government to attain a hill state. The MLAs from Mizo Hill District Lalmawia (EITU) and Ch. Chhunga (MU) submitted their resignation but A. Thanglura was unwilling to resign from his post. At the MU councilors' conference in Aizawl on July 1961 Ch. Saprawnga said: "As per the APHLC Tura conference's resolution, A. Thanglura should submit his resignation as MLA or resign from the party". The Vice-President of the MU party A. Thanglura retorted saying, "If my resignation from Assam MLA will have a positive impact in the fight for hill state, it will be more meaningful if all the MDCs resigned from their post.....I shall think about APHLC Tura conference resolution". However, A. Thanglura (MU) refused to resign and as a result, he left the MU party and consequently formed the Congress party (Mizo District Congress Committee) on 10th August 1961 (Thanglura, 1999: 181).

The establishment of the Congress party in Mizoram was mainly a result of the personal political interest of A. Thanglura and does not have any ideological attachment to the Indian National Congress (INC). The resignation of MLAs as per the APHLC Tura Conference resolution did not have a huge impact on the fight for the Hill State movement. It only led to fractions in the MU party and the formation of the national political party in Mizoram. Due to the invasion of China in India, APHLC held on 30th October 1962 at

Guwahati suggested that any activity in protest to the Indian government for Hill State could worsen the situation, so they decided to cease Hill State movement for the time being (Chaube, 2016: 132-133). From then on, MU decided to terminate all relations with APHLC and its Hill State policy.

Mizo Union State Policy caused Strife within the Party

A MU special assembly was held on 10th July 1963 demanding a separate State for the Mizo. At this Assembly, more votes were cast in favor of a separate state for the Mizo as opposed to Hill State policy (Vanlawma, 1989: 128). It was also proposed that if the Indian government did not meet their demand for statehood before the end of 1964, direct actions will be taken. On 31st August 1963, MU submitted a memorandum to the Government of India demanding statehood which was signed by Ch. Chhunga, Lalbuaia, and C. Pahlira.

In December 1964 the MU councilors had a meeting and decided to withhold taking direct action. However, some MU leaders opposed the decision of this meeting, and they pressurized District Council CEM Ch. Saprawnga who was in favor of withholding direct action to submit his resignation. In April 1965 H. K. Bawichhuaka was appointed as his replacement for the post of CEM (Saprawnga, 1990: 135-136). One assumption regarding the reason for ceasing direct action was that the Mizo National Front (MNF) leaders did not want any disturbance which can degrade their independence movement and threatened the MU leaders who supported Mizo State policy. The second and third memorandum to demand statehood was submitted to the Government of India on 10th July 1965 and on 30th October 1965 respectively.

The MU ceased its State policy due to the Mizoram Independence movement led by MNF and continued the policy in 1971. The decision of the Government of India to confer Mizo District into Union Territory (UT) causes differences of opinion within the members of the party. In the MU general assembly held on 1st October 1971 members were asked to choose either UT or state through voting. Surprisingly, more members choose UT. The supporters of MU State policy were dissatisfied with the result and later formed the Mizo National Union (MNU) party led by H.K. Bawichhuaka, C. Pahlira, and R. Dosanga. In the meantime, just before the 1972 UT of Mizoram Legislative Assembly election, the MNU and the Mizo Integration party (MIP) merged and formed the Mizo Labour party (MLP) (Dokhuma, 1999: 129).

During the time, more members of the MU supported the status of UT for the Mizo Hill. There are several factors for it. Firstly, the pioneer leaders of the MU party such as Ch. Chhunga and Ch. Saprawnga did not believe that MNF will win the fight for Mizoram Independence. So, they left the fight for Mizoram state in the hands of the MNF so that they would be left with a little decency as they come overground (Dokhuma, 1999: 128). Secondly, the MU party prefers getting independence from Assam state and attaining the status of UT as soon as possible rather than delaying it and going through the lengthy process of fighting for statehood. Thirdly, the MU felt that it was more preferable to be under the

direct supervision of the Government of India rather than being under the poor and unjust Assam state government.

The Decline of Mizo Union

Under the North Eastern Reorganization Act 1972, Mizo District was upgraded to the status of Union Territory and renamed it as 'Mizoram'. The first election to the Legislative Assembly of UT of Mizoram was held on 18th April 1972 and comprised of 30 constituency seats and 3 nominated seats. In the elections, the MU party secured 21 seats, forming the first government of UT of Mizoram under the leadership of Ch. Chhunga as CM. INC secured six seats and independent candidates also won two seats in this election. Sangliana and Lalbuai from MU party were also elected as representative members of Mizoram in Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha respectively. (Lalmachhuana, 2013: 61).

During the time, a proposal to merge with the Congress party was passed at the Mizo Union special assembly held in Theatre Hall on 12th January 1974. The MU executive committee and Mizoram Congress executive committee decided to form the Adhoc committee on 23rd January 1974 and formed government under the Congress party (Hermana, 1999: 8). In other words, the MU which was formed on 9th April 1946 as the first political party in Mizoram dissolved after 27 years from its establishment. However, several members who object this proposal formed MU Right Wing (MU Ziding) on 10th October of the same year under the presidency of C. Pahlira. MU Right Wing proposed the submission of all MU properties and buildings into their hands and subsequently resulted in a court dispute with the Mizoram Congress at Guwahati High Court in which the Congress won the case. Most of the MU Right Wing members joined the People's Conference party which was formed on 17th April, 1975 to compete with the Mizoram Congress leading to the disintegration of MU Right Wing (Nithanga, 2008: 165).

Several assumptions were made for the cause of this merger which included: i) the central government which was formed by the Congress party aimed to have better attachment with the government in UT of Mizoram. ii) The central government led by the Congress party pressurizes the MU leaders into this merger by claiming that it will be beneficial for the future of Mizoram. iii) It was believed to be more favorable for the peace and welfare of Mizoram if the Congress party were to form a government since they were the reigning party in central government. iv) The first mention of this merger was at the meeting of Congress youth president C. Hermana and his colleagues with Ch. Saprawnga in which he responded that he will consult with the MU leaders (Hermana, 1999: 4). This ignited hope in the Mizoram Congress party and immediately made plans for this merger with the All India Congress Committee.

Conclusion

The Mizo Union as the first political party in Mizoram was, unfortunately, disappeared from state politics after it merged with the Congress party in 1974. The party played a significant role in inculcating a spirit of regional sentiment and socio-political consciousness among the masses. It tried to preserve the Mizo ethnic identity. Since its

formation and till its decline, the party faced a lot of challenges. Many of the challenges and obstacles in the party were mainly originated from the party's prominent leaders. It is evident from the above that the root of hurdles within the party was due to ideological differences and arguments over positions among the leaders.

After examining various disputes in the party, it seemed as if Ch. Saprawnga, a prominent party leader was associated with most of the conflicts within the party. It might be inappropriate to assume to reprehend him as the core of issues in the party, but, as he hold a leadership role in the party for quite a long period, he can somehow be held responsible for several intra-party conflicts and factions within the party. Eventually, factions in the MU party have had a positive impact on the politics of the state. For instance, A. Thanglura's refusal to resign from his MLA post for demanding Hill States resulted in his expulsion from the MU party which led to the formation of the Congress party in Mizoram and had a positive influence on the Mizo people. This national party led the way for the people to become more aware in regards to how national level political decisions swayed regional politics. Firmly, it also implanted a bigger picture in the Mizo people towards a broader political consciousness.

Undoubtedly, Mizo people gained a lot of political awareness through the MU party. Meanwhile, the activities and strategy of the party to diminish chieftainship and their actions towards the opposition party (UMFO party) that supported the chief brought animosity in state politics. The first political awareness given by the MU party through their activities was their intolerance towards opposition parties. Since this was the foremost political activity seen in Mizoram shown by the pioneer political party leaders, the preceding parties followed in this footsteps and continued to show intolerances and hostility towards their opposing parties which continued to exist even in the present Mizoram politics. Despite all their shortcomings, the MU party was able to maintain a functional and well-organized District Council government. Even though the first political party of Mizoram has no longer existed, they must be remembered by the younger generation.

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