

MIZO UNION: ITS ACTIVITIES IN THE EARLY POLITICS OF MIZORAM

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ABSTRACT:

Political consciousness and awakening among the Mizos started after the Second World War. Their movements against the Chiefs and the Government finally led to the formation of a political party in Mizoram, known as Mizo Common People Union which latter on was changed to Mizo Union Party commonly known as Mizo Union. The lead in the formation of this Party was taken up by R.Vanlawma who became the first Secretary of the Party. After its formation, the Mizo Union was gaining quick popularity among the people. In this paper, the early activities of the Union will be discussed which latter led to the up gradation of the Mizo Hills District into Union Territory on 21st January, 1972.

Key words: Mizo, Union, Election, Chiefs, Hills.

INTRODUCTION

There was no political activity in the Mizo territory up to the end of the Second World War. But after the War, many of the Mizo people were politically conscious and awakened due to their political enslavement in the hands of the Superintendent and the chiefs. As independence of India was approaching and the British administration was showing signs of handing over political powers of the territory to the Mizo chiefs, the masses rose against the British policy of handing over of political powers. Their movements against the chiefs and the Government finally led to the formation of a political party in Mizoram. Taking a lead, R.Vanlawma organised the Mizo in good number and formed a political party named the Mizo Common People Union Party on 9th April, 1946 to voice the people's aspirations and various demands.

Before the formation of the Mizo Union, there was voluntary association, the Young Lushai Association (YLA). R.Vanlawma approached the YLA to convert itself into a political association. However, the YLA did not

agree to the request. Therefore, R.Vanlawma decided to bring into existence a new political party-the Mizo Common People Union. An ad hoc committee was formed with R.Vanlawma as the Convener-Secretary of the Union, Lalbuaia and Hrangiaia as members. They convened a meeting of all the members which approved the formation of the Mizo Common People Union. Later on the name of the party was changed to Mizo Commoner's Union. In order to induct increasing number and to draw the true support of the elite section of the society including the chiefs, R.Vanlawma requested the chiefs to join the Union. However, the chiefs argued that as the Association was called the Mizo Commoners Union, they had no place there. So, in order to enable the chiefs to enter the Union, the word Commoners was dropped and finally the party was called the Mizo Union. The Union had its first Conference held on 25th May, 1946 and elected Mr. Pachhungs as President, Lalhema as Vice-President, R.Vanlawma as the General Secretary, Lalbuaia as Assistant Secretary, Lalhmingthanga as the Finance Secretary and Thanga as the Treasurer.

POLITICAL MOVEMENT AND ACTIVITIES OF THE MIZO UNION:

After its formation, the Mizo Union Party was gaining quick popularity among the people. They had done many valuable works for Mizoram. Some of the activities of the Party are as follow:

I. Election:

They contested and won the elections held in 1952, 1957, 1962 and 1972. In the first general election to the Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council held on 4th January, 1952 for 18 elected seats, M.U won 15 seats, U.M.F.O. won a solitary seat and 2 seats were won by Pawi-Lakher Tribal Union (PLTU) in the Pawi-Lakher Region. In this election, both M.U. and U.M.F.O. filled candidates in all the 18 constituencies and was a straight fight between the two parties. There were also 6 nominated members. The M.U. formed the government in the District Council with Lalsawia as the Chief Executive Member and Dr.Rosiama as the Chairman. In the 1952 Legislative Assembly election of Assam (5th January), the Lushai Hills being part of Silchar Parliamentary constituency had three seats in the Assam legislative Assembly and all the three seats are won by M.U. candidates. In the second general election of the Mizo District Council held on 25th January, 1957 out of the 22 elected members, the M.U.won 11 seats, U.M.F.O. won 8 seats, the Pawi-Lakher Tribal Union (P.L.T.U.) won 2 seats and the Indian National Congress won a solitary seat.(number of elected members increased from 18 to 22 whereas nominated members decreased from 6 to 2). M.U. formed the government in the District Council with Ch.Saprawnga as the Chief Executive Member and V.L.Tluanga as the Chairman. However, M.U. managed to win only one M.L.A seat and the U.M.F.O. won 2 seats. A.Thanglura (M.U.) and Lalmawia (Zalen), the two MLAs from the District were made as Parliamentary Secretary.

In the third general election to Mizo District Council held on 5th February, 1962 there were 22 elected members and 2 nominated members. U.M.F.O. no longer appear in the electoral history of Mizoram as it had already merged with Eastern India Tribal Union (E.I.T.U.). On the other hand, new regional party, Mizo National Front (M.N.F.) was formed on 28th October, 1961 under the leadership of Laldenga. In the election, M.U. won 16 seats, E.I.T.U. won 2 seats, P.L.T.U. won 2 seats and 2 seats were won by independent candidates. All the M.L.A. seats were won by M.U. M.U. formed the government in the District Council with Ch.Saprawnga as the Chief Executive Member and H.K.Bawichhuaka as the Chairman. However, election to the fourth general election could not be held on time in 1967 due to insurgency spearheaded by M.N.F. When there was some improvement in the law and order situation, the fourth general election of the Mizo District Council was held on 23rd April, 1970. In the election M.U. won 9 seats, Congress 12 seats and there were 2 nominate seats. Thus, for the first time in the political history of Mizo District Council, the Indian National Congress formed government with Zalawma as the Chief Executive Member and F.C.Nghina as the Chairman. However, the Congress government was not stable and short lived governments came up from 1970 – 1972 till the creation of the Union Territory of Mizoram.

After the separation of the Lushai Hills (Mizo District) from Assam and the formation of the Union Territory of Mizoram in 1972 (Indira Gandhi inaugurated Union Territory on 21 January, 1972 at A.R.Lammual), Mizo District Council was abolished. However, the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (PLRC) was trifurcated into three Regional Councils namely Pawi Regional Council, (PRC), Lakher Regional Council (LRC) and Chakma Regional Council (CRC) on 2nd April, 1972, after which the three Regional Councils were subsequently upgraded to the status of full-fledged Autonomous District Councils on 29th April, 1972. The first general election to the Union Territory Legislative Assembly of Mizoram was held on 5th May, 1972 and Mizo Union formed the first Union Territory government of Mizoram by winning 21 seats, Congress 6 seats and independent just 3 seats. All independents and nominated candidates joined hands with the M.U. The Lok Sabha seat was won by Sangliana, M.U. candidate and another M.U. candidate Lalbuai secured the Rajya Sabha seat. Thus, in the first election to the Legislative Assembly of the Union Territory of Mizoram, none but the Mizo Union got clear majority and formed the first Ministry of the Union Territory of Mizoram on May 13, 1972 with Ch.Chhunga as the Chief Minister and Saprawnga became the party President. However, there was new political development in Mizoram politics and the Mizo Union decided to merge with the Congress for not only improving the political and economic future of Mizoram but also to gain favour with the Central Congress I Government. Thus, M.U. merged with the Indian National Congress on 12th January, 1974 and ceased its separate existence as political identity.

II. Abolition of Chieftainship:

Another notable activity of the Party was its pertinacious movement for the abolition of the chief's indigenous administration. In consequence, the Government of Assam abolished Chieftainship by a legislation called "The Lushai Hills (Acquisition of chiefs' Rights) Act, 1954 which came into force on 1st April, 1954 within the jurisdiction of the Lushai Hills District Council and on 15th April, 1954 in the area under the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council of the Lushai Hills District. Thus, the responsibility which was carried by the chiefs was taken over by the District and Regional Councils. Under the provision of the "The Lushai Hills District (village Council) Act, 1953 (Act No. V of 1953), the first Village Council elections were held and completed on 24th July, 1954 in which the Mizo Union captured all the Village Councils. Now, the Village Councils had discharged all the responsibility in governance of the village which was earlier discharged by the Mizo chiefs and Upas. Thus, the Mizo Union as a regional party was instrumental in transferring the indigenous administration of the chiefs to the Village Councils.

III. Change of the Lushai Hills District to Mizo District:

Another activity of the Mizo Union was its persistence pressure to the government for the change of the Lushai Hills District to Mizo District. As a result of its constant persuasion, that the name of the Lushai Hills District was changed to Mizo District by an Act of Parliament called "The Lushai Hills District (Change of Name) Act, (Act VXIII of 1954) which came into effect from 29th April, 1954. Following the change of name of the District, the racial identity of the people was subsequently changed from 'Lushai' to 'Mizo'.

IV. Opposition to Assam Official Language Bill, 1960:

In spite of having good relation with the Assam government under B.P.Chaliha in 1957, the Mizo Union was not satisfied with the relief measures taken by the Assam government when the Mizo District was strike by severe famine known as Mautam. The government attitude during the famine period extremely disappointed the Mizo Union leaders. The relationship between the Government of Assam and the Mizo Union further deteriorated when the government introduced the Assam Official Language Bill making Assamese as the State Official Language in 1960 which was considered disadvantageous to the hill people. On these two issues, the Mizo Union M.L.As. in the Assam Assembly withdrew support to the Assam Congress legislature party. In protest against the Assam Language Bill of 1960 and for the creation of a separate Hill state, the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) was formed comprising of North Eastern tribal political parties in July 1960 and the Mizo Union extended support to it and even A.Thanglura a Mizo Union leader became its President. However, when the

APHLC decided to boycott the General Election of 1962, A.Thanglura left both the parties and formed the “Hills People’s Convention”. In the election that follows, the original Mizo Union retained 2 seats and the third was won by the dissident A.Thanglura. When the APHLC observed the Demand Day on 24th October, 1962, the two Mizo Union MLAs also resigned from the Assam Legislature along with other AHPLC MLAs.

V. Demanding of statehood leads to Union Territory:

Another activity of the Mizo Union was its protest against Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s formula called the Scottish pattern which was announced on October 5, 1963 for solution to the prevalent political problems in Assam which was accepted by APHLC. The Mizo Union, one of the components of APHLC, withdrew support to the APHLC, stood against and finally boycotted the Commission which was appointed to look into the matter as it demanded a statehood for the Mizo inhabiting areas comprising the present Mizoram, neighbouring states of Manipur, Tripura and Assam. This demand for statehood for Mizoram can also be considered as one of the cause for the failure of Mizo Union in the election of 1970. However, the Congress ministry in 1970 did not last long and the Mizo Union once again formed the government on 20th (18) March, 1971 with the support of Dengthuama led faction of the Congress. Ch.Chhunga became the Chief Executive and the Mizo Union once again revived its move for statehood and passed a resolution to that effect in the District Council. The M.U. submitted a representation to the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 15th December, 1970 reiterating their demand for a separate statehood for the Mizo within the framework of the constitution of India which it had been demanding long. The representation was signed by Ch.Chhunga, Saprawnga and H.K.Bawichhuaka on behalf of the Mizo Union.

As a result of the sustained movements of the Mizo Union and political pressure created from different angles, the government of India while reorganizing the North Eastern Region granted upgradation of the existing Mizo Hills District of Assam into a Union Territory under the provision of the Act called North Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act, 1971 (Act No.81 of 1871) which came into force from January 21, 1972 with the provision of 33 member Mizoram Legislative Assembly (30 elected and 3 nominated) and 2 seats in the Parliament – one for the Lok Saha and the other for the Rajya Sabha. This new Union Territory came to be called The Union Territory of Mizoram. Thus, in short we can say that the demand for separate statehood for the Mizo within the framework of the Indian Constitution which was initiated by M.U. led to the upgradation of the Mizo Hills District into Union Territory on 21st January, 1972. The People have to wait for another 15 years to get statehood which was demanded by M.U. in its early politics after a lot of bloodshed.

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