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From Chiefs To Councils: Negotiating Tradition And Modernity In Village Governance

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Abstract: This academic discourse examines the progressive evolution of village governance in Mizoram, focusing its analysis on the transition from hereditary chieftainship to democratically established Village Councils. Established within the legislative context provided by the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act of 1953, this evolution replaced the centralized authority of chieftains with participatory mechanisms that represented grassroots democratic principles. The research elucidates how the dissolution of chieftainship signified not merely a political restructuring but also engendered a significant sociological transition, effectively dismantling established hierarchies, redistributing power, and empowering the general populace of villagers. Since that time, Village Councils have assumed a crucial role in reconfiguring leadership paradigms, promoting inclusivity through electoral participation, and ingraining democratic values within the fabric of community existence. By scrutinizing this pivotal transformation, the article accentuates the capacity of indigenous tribal institutions to adapt to contemporary governance norms while concurrently safeguarding cultural identity.

Keywords- Village Councils, Chieftainship Abolition, Grassroots Democracy, Mizoram Governance, Tribal Institutions, Sociopolitical Transformation

1. Introduction

Tribals were known for their distinct political institution and the tribal people dwelling in the hill state of Mizoram also had their own traditional political system. Each village in Mizoram had its own self-governing indigenous institution for local or village governance. These institutions functioned independently of one another under the authoritarian hereditary Chiefs who commanded great local power. Traditional institutions have a big influence on the political and administrative systems of Mizoram. The institution of chieftainship and the council of elders (Upas) were vital during the formative years of Mizo society.

Traditional Mizo society was characterised by simplicity and homogeneity and functioning under the chief of each village. There was not much division of labour and the hierarchical division of the social layer in the society. The Mizo chiefs were the proprietors of the land, traditional legal authorities, and administrative heads. The combination of modern functions of the legislature, executive, and judiciary was vested in the chiefs. Allotment of plots for cultivation, the trial of cases, collection of taxes, protection of village territory from outsiders, and village administrations were the principal functions of the chief. The strict duty of protecting the village territory from the encroachment of outsiders rested on the young male members.

It was after the abolition of chieftainship and after the enactment of the village council that a more complex form of division of labour and the hierarchical division of society emerged in villages.

2. Village Administration During the Colonial Period

When Mizoram was placed under British control in 1890, it did not result in significant alterations to the governance of the Chiefs. The village administration, led by the Chief, operated under the overarching oversight of the Superintendent of the Sub-Division Officer (S.D.O). The Chiefs maintained all internal and local government in their respective villages with minimal involvement from the Superintendent or Sub-Division Officer, unless a specific issue was brought to their attention (Zahluna, 2008, p. 261). This was due to the British implementing a regime of internal village governance through local leaders, the Chiefs. The objective was to minimize interference between the Chiefs and their constituents while emphasizing the Chiefs' duties for maintaining order in their villages (Sir Robert Reid, 1978, p.60).

To establish harmonious relations with the tribes, the British India administration implemented the "Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation I of 1873." This regulation established a conceptual boundary known as the "Inner Line," which served as a unilateral demarcation with the frontier tribes. The government's strategy aimed to exert political influence only, avoiding direct interference or administrative control over the border tribes; therefore, it prohibited all British citizens from crossing the boundary without authorization (Ray, 1982, p.43). In Mizoram, according to the Notification by the Government of India, Foreign Department, No. 2299 P., dated August 20, 1875, and modified under G.O. No.1246 dated June 19, 1878, the Inner Line was implemented along its Cachar boundary in 1875 (Mackenzie, 1979, p.397) and remained in effect following the official annexation in 1895 and India's independence in 1947 (Lalsangkima Pachuau, 2012, p.67). Mizoram, formerly referred to as the Lushai Hills, lacked a formal administrative structure until 1891. In 1891, the land became divided into two administrative subdivisions: North Lushai Hills under the Government of Assam and South Lushai Hills under the Government of Bengal. The Chin-Lushai Conference, conducted in Calcutta in 1898, resulted in the consolidation of the two Lushai Hills into a single entity known as the Lushai Hills, which was later placed under the administrative jurisdiction of Assam effective from April 1, 1898 (Singh, 1994, p. 113).

The strategy of indirect rule was used to run the new areas that the border tribes lived on separately after they were added. Based on the Government of India Act of 1919, the Governor-General-in-Council designated certain areas, including border tribes' lands, as "Backward Tracts." This meant that the Governor-General had extra power and the Legislatures had no power over those areas (Rao, 1976, p.52). The Lushai Hills were also classified as a backward region by the Governor General-in-Council on January 23, 1921, in accordance with the Government of India Act of 1919 (Doungel, 2003, pp. 52-53). Correspondingly, the Government of India Act of 1935 (Sections 91 and 92) set up the "Excluded Area" and the "Partially Excluded Area" based on the advice of the Indian Statutory Commission, which is also known as the "Simon Commission." It was planned that these places would not be subject to the effects of Provincial and Federal Laws (Nunthara, 1981, p. 182). In those places, neither the Federal Legislature nor the Provincial Legislature could pass a law unless the Governor said so. In the Partially Excluded Areas, people could vote for members of the Legislature, but they could not take part in the government or send representatives to the Legislature. Thus, in 1936, the government declared that the Frontier Tracts, the North Cachar Sub-Division, the Naga Hills District, the Lushai Hills District (Mizoram), and the Garo Hills District were all "Excluded Areas." The Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts and the Mikir Hills Tracts were also "Partially Excluded Areas" (Chaube, 1973, p.22).

The administration had been paying particular attention to the Tribal Areas since before independence. Therefore, the establishment of an Advisory Committee to research the rights of minorities and tribes in excluded areas was also recommended by the Cabinet Mission under Sir Stafford Cripps. Thus, the Constituent Assembly established an Advisory Committee on January 24, 1947, and the Advisory Committee also created a Sub-Committee called the North Eastern Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Area Committee, whose chairman was Gopinath Bordoloi (Doungel, 2008, p. 207).

3. Village Administration in the Post-Colonial Period

When the British government decided to hand over power to the Indian people, the Bordoloi Sub-Committee was supposed to tour the hill regions and conduct a study of the expectations and aspirations of the hill people in the "Excluded Areas" and "Partially Excluded Areas." The Sub-Committee arrived in Aizawl on April 17, 1947, where they held a lengthy conversation with the District Conference representatives and the leaders of the Mizo Union on how the Lushai Hills would be administered after the British left India. The most crucial topics they covered were the following: the establishment of a District Council chosen by the

people; the inclusion of at least three Mizo representatives in the Assam Legislative Assembly; the appointment of a minister to oversee the tribal areas; the District Council's responsibility for primary education; Inner Line Regulation; and the District Council's handling of all civil and criminal cases following tribal customary law (Lalsangliani, 2008, p.282). Additionally, in a memorandum submitted to the Bordoloi Sub-Committee, the Mizo Union made the following demands: (i) the inclusion of Mizo-inhabited areas in neighboring districts in the Lushai Hills District; (ii) the designation of Lushai as Mizos; (iii) the delegation of internal administration to the Mizos; and (iv) liberal financial assistance (Ray, 1993, p.152). There was a great deal of disagreement among the Mizo people regarding the Lushai Hills' destiny. Debates about cultural identity, self-governance, and how to deal with the ongoing consequences of British colonial control were the root causes of these conflicts.

3.1 Recommendations of the Bordoloi Committee

The Bordoloi Sub-Committee acknowledged the concerns of the hill inhabitants over their land and their apprehension of exploitation by economically privileged individuals, particularly financial leaders. The Committee advised that the Autonomous District Council be established by democratic means, endowed with legislative authority over land use and occupation, excluding reserved forests and jhum farming. The District Council ought to possess the authority to legislate regarding land utilization, village forestry, and agriculture. The District Council ought to be tasked with the administration of justice. The Committee additionally recommended the establishment of a Regional Council in the District to safeguard the unique culture and dialect of minor tribes. The Committee was reluctant to grant the Lushai Hills District the designation of "Excluded Area" due to its perceived advancement (Singh, 1994, p. 132). It further proposed that the region's tribes should have unimpeded autonomy in the practice of their customs, inheritance, social structures, and lifestyle (Nag, 1999, p. 35).

The Bordoloi Committee proposed the establishment of a District Council in each Hill District to foster and govern the tribal lifestyle in accordance with their inherent characteristics. The recommendations were approved and integrated into Article 244 (2) and included in Part A of the Table attached to paragraph 20 of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India (Zahluna, 2008, p. 262). The Lushai Hills District Council and the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (PLRC) were established on April 25, 1952, and April 23, 1953, respectively, under the Sixth Schedule. The Lushai Hills District (Chiefship Abolition) Act, 1952 was enacted by the Assam Legislative Assembly, effective from January 1, 1953. The Act mandated the abolition of all existing Chiefs in the Lushai Hill District as of April 25, 1952. Nevertheless, the Chiefs were permitted to operate in accordance with the directives issued by the District Council until an alternative was established (The Lushai Hills Chiefship Abolition Act, 1952).

3.2 Development of the District Council in Mizoram

The Bordoloi Committee's report was presented to the Constituent Assembly for deliberation. The recommendations for establishing the District Council and Regional Council in the hill areas of Assam faced opposition because they could foster separatist tendencies among Indians. The concentration of such immense power inside the tribe is likely to result in turmoil, anarchy, and disorder nationwide, while the establishment of such a council would endanger the interests of the entire country (Lalsangliani, 2008, p.283). Venkata Rao (1976, p.184) noted that Dr. Ambedkar advocated for the establishment of the District Council in the Constituent Assembly. He highlighted the distinction between the tribes in Assam and those in other regions of the country, who have undergone Hinduisation and integration into the Hindu society with which they coexisted. The tribes of Assam cultivated distinct cultures, languages or dialects, and religions. Their internal organization, inheritance rules, and marriage customs significantly diverge not just from those of the plains but also from those of their neighboring tribes. Furthermore, the mountainous regions represent the nation's frontier, necessitating robust protection, and the political aspirations of the inhabitants in these areas must be addressed.

Following extensive consideration, the committee presented its report to the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights and Minorities, Sardar Vallabhai Patel, for approval; it was subsequently transmitted to the President of the Constituent Assembly with several revisions. The Constituent Assembly, following extensive debate and deliberation, ultimately ratified the provisions for the District Council and Regional Council, which were incorporated into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The District Council was granted broad legislative authority for the administration of its region as stipulated in paragraph 3 of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The District Council is authorized to oversee commerce and money lending by non-tribals within the district. The colonial authority's Inner Line Regulation was likewise affirmed. A regional autonomy evolved to allow the hill people to preserve their lifestyle, engage in the

nation's political affairs and local governance, and cultivate their development following their traditional heritage (Lalsangliani, 2008, pp.283-284).

Mizoram, formerly known as Lushai Hills, was integrated into the state of Assam in 1947 when the Indian Independence Act was enacted. The Central Government promptly notified the Mizo Union, which consented to the integration of the district into Assam state according to the provisions of the Sixth Schedule. The Assam Government established the Assam Autonomous (Constitution of the District Council) Act in 1951 (Singh, 1994, p. 145). The first General Election of the Lushai Hills District Council happened on January 4, 1952, resulting in a victory for the Mizo Union. The Lushai Hills District Council was launched on April 26, 1952, in Aizawl by Bishnuram Medhi, the Chief Minister of Assam at that time (Lalsawia, 1994, pp. 63-65). The Lushai Hills District was renamed Mizo District under the Lushai Hills District (Change of Name) Act, 1954 (Act XVIII of 1954) enacted by the Indian Parliament. As a result, the Lushai Hills District Council has been referred to as the Mizo District Council since 1954 (Doungel, 2003, pp 6-7). The District Council member was to be elected for a five-year term. The Mizo District administration, encompassing the District Council, was managed by the Tribal Areas Department (TAD) under the Government of Assam, administered by a Tribal Minister (Lalnithanga, 2005, p. 28).

3.3 Abolition of Chieftainship

The dominance of the chiefs was a significant burden on the commoners, as several chiefs had exercised their authority capriciously. The conventional taxation and privileges afforded to traditional chiefs imposed a significant burden on the commoners. Christianity and missionary endeavors conflicted with the interests of old elites, resulting in the emergence of a new privileged class that was entirely dominated by commoners, so challenging the established elites. The British rule progressively weakened traditional authority, leading to a decline in the influence of chiefs. The populace envisioned a new set of regulations grounded in democratic principles. The chiefs' subsequent unwillingness to align with the Mizo Union party fostered a contentious political rivalry, resulting in strained relations between the traditional elites and the emerging privileged class (Lalsangliani, 2008, p.286).

Shortly after its establishment, the District Council commenced enacting legislation on various topics aimed at advancing the development of Mizoram. It enacted multiple laws in a brief timeframe and achieved notable progress in legislative matters. The inaugural session of the District Council convened on June 23, 1952, and concluded on July 10, 1952. Empowered by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, which authorized them to legislate, a majority of the members exhibited a vindictive disposition towards the chiefs and advocated for the abolition of chieftainship in the Lushai Hills. Consequently, the Council passed its initial legislation, the Lushai Hills (Chiefs Abolition) Act, 1952, effective January 1, 1953 (Sangkima, 1992, p.175). The District Council intended to abolish the traditional chiefly structure, revoking chiefs of their official power and terminating their entitlement to collect customary tributes. To prevent disorder during the power transition, chiefs were permitted to retain their positions until a new ruling body was established. This action signifies a transition from hereditary governance into modern administration, wherein inherited entitlements are supplanted by frameworks designed to enhance accountability. The Council aimed to rectify societal imbalances stemming from obsolete hierarchies by diminishing the authority of chiefs, while maintaining stability during a regulated transition phase.

The chiefs were ultimately relegated to mere figureheads within Mizo society. They were no longer seen as absolute rulers by the populace. The District Council possessed the authority to exert comprehensive control over the chiefs. The District Council, in its memorandum dated April 3, 1953, rationalized the elimination of chieftainship, alleging that the chief exercised power arbitrarily and attributing the emergence of the political party in 1946 to their actions (Ibid, p.177). The Government of Assam enacted the Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of Chief's Rights) Act, 1954, which obtained the President of India's assent on 26th June, 1954, and was published in the Assam Gazette on 30th June, 1954. The traditional chiefship was dissolved, and the rights and interests of 259 chiefs in Mizo District and 50 chiefs in the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council were acquired effective 1st April 1955 and 15th April 1956, respectively (Hluna, 1997, p. 13). The Act primarily addresses compensation for the chiefs and the resolution of their land issues. The District Council was further authorized to manage all the chief's land (Khuma, 1999, p. 89), and the Chiefs received compensation amounting to Rs 14 lakhs (Hluna, 1997, p. 13). The oldest institution of Mizo Society was abolished, as the longstanding system of chiefship was terminated and the rights and interests of the Chiefs were assumed by the District Council. This facilitated the establishment of a democratically organized institution at the grassroots level.

4. Emergence of Village Council in Mizoram

With the formation of the District Council, the whole administrative setup of the Lushai Hills was changed, enabling the people to participate in the formation of the Government through adult franchise. Now with the extinction of the Chieftainship, the Village Council elected through franchise was to be formed to substitute the hereditary chiefs, who had all the administrative powers and responsibility for managing the affairs of the villages in the Mizo traditional society (Lalsangliani, 2008, p. 287). The District Council prepared the groundwork for the introduction of modern representative democratic institutions by passing the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act, 1953 (The Lushai Hills Act No V of 1953), which received the assent of the Governor of Assam on 29th November, 1953 and published in the Assam Gazette on 9th December, 1953 (Sangkima, 1992, p. 177). The Act empowered the District Council to form a Village Council in every village within the jurisdiction of the Lushai Hills District Council. Accordingly, the District Council had started taking all necessary steps for the formation of the Village Council. It is also provided that the number of Village Councils would vary from village to village depending upon the number of houses (Lalsangliani, 2008, pp. 287-288). The Village Council was introduced with the belief that people would participate actively in various political processes and establish a genuine political control over them. By doing so, they will have a voice in the all-round development of the village.

The Lushai Hills District Council announced that the inaugural meeting of the Village Council for all villages occurred on 16th August, 1954, during which the President and Vice President were elected. The elected President was required to appoint an individual from the villagers to serve as secretary for the term, based on personal qualifications (Zoram Hriattirna, 1954, cited in Lalsangliani, 2008). The Act stipulates that one-third, or the nearest equivalent, of the Village Council members shall be nominated by the executive committee, while the remainder shall be elected by the adult population of the village, in accordance with the regulations established by the District Council under the Act. Following the completion of all formalities, the responsibilities of village-level administration, previously held by the chiefs, were assumed by the Village Councils in Lushai Hills starting in 1954. Consequently, the communities in the Lushai Hills evolved into a village republic, wherein the village head or President was elected by the villagers for a predetermined term. The aspiration for democratically established communities, where individuals would govern themselves, was realized for the first time in the Lushai Hills, marking the inception of grassroots democracy under the District Council (Lalsangliani, 2008, p. 288).

The Village Councils were officially inaugurated with significant celebration from 22nd July to 12th August, 1954, and commenced operations on 16th August, 1954. The establishment of the Village Council resulted in a substantial transformation of the conventional village governance. It introduced a contemporary participatory political process in Mizoram, supplanting conventional political institutions. It provided an entirely new perspective on politics and transformed public perception. It broadened the political perspective of people by encouraging them to transcend their localized communities. The new concept of elections, representation, and majority decisions gradually began to infiltrate these entities. A new leadership cohort with a broader political viewpoint and contemporary outlook has evolved through the Village Council. The leadership of these entities was seeing a gradual transformation, with newly rising figures beginning to assert power inside the institutions. Consequently, the implementation of the Village Council system instigated a comprehensive and profound transformation in the socio-political fabric of Mizoram.

4.1 Composition of Village Council

The Village Council constitutes the most basic administrative level in Mizoram. The Village Council comprises all elected members chosen by the villagers by adult suffrage, together with nominated members, the Secretary, and the Tlangau or Village Crier. The President and Vice-President of the Village Council are elected by the Council members from among the elected representatives, as stipulated in Sub-Section (I) of Section 7 of the Lushai Hills District (Village Council) Act 1953. A Village Council shall consist of one or more villages as determined by the State Government by a notification in the Mizoram Gazette. As to the Village Council (Amendment) Act, 2014, Chapter II, a Village Council shall consist of members determined by the number of households it encompasses, as detailed below:

- (i) For a village not exceeding 200 households, there shall be 3 (three) elected members, of whom 1 (one) shall be a woman.
- (ii) For a village with more than 200 households, but not exceeding 500 households, there shall be 5 (five) members, of whom 1 (one) shall be a woman.
- (iii) For a village with more than 500 households, but not exceeding 1000 households, there shall be 7 (seven) elected members, of whom 2 (two) shall be women.

- (iv) For a village with more than 1000 households and above, there shall be 9 (nine) elected members, of whom 3 (three) shall be women.

The complete membership, as specified in sub-section (2), shall be elected by adult suffrage in line with the Government's Election to Village Councils Rules.

Village Councils in Non-Sixth Schedule regions of Mizoram operate under the Local Administration Department. At its commencement, only 288 Village Councils were established out of 410 villages in the Lushai Hills District. The Pawi-Lakher Regional Council comprised 72 Village Councils from a total of 123 communities (Hrangthanga, 1994, p.3). The most recent record from the Local Administration Department, Government of Mizoram, indicates that there are nine districts in the Non-Sixth Scheduled Areas of Mizoram, with the Village Council population detailed in the following table:

Table: Village Council Population

Sl No	Name of District	No. of Village	No. of Household	Number of Population			No. of Voters
				Male	Female	Total	
1	Aizawl District	67	20078	53352	54204	107556	60607
2	Lunglei District	113	30267	72469	73223	145692	83441
3	Champhai District	62	17670	42926	43942	86868	47431
4	Kolasib District	55	17608	41232	42687	83919	52006
5	Serchhip District	53	14917	37561	39093	76654	41342
6	Mamit District	90	21273	51763	51251	103014	59415
7	Saitual District	44	11173	29451	29756	59207	34858
8	Hnahthial District	31	6204	21980	16062	38042	16088
9	Khawzawl District	37	7477	19012	18884	37896	25788
Total		552	146667	369746	369102	738848	420976

Source: <https://lad.mizoram.gov.in/> (Village Council Population 2020, compiled)

The number of villages with Village Councils in Mizoram continues to rise over time. Currently, there are five hundred fifty-two (552) Village Councils in the Non-Sixth Schedule regions, including a total of 146,667 households and 420,976 voters. In addition to the aforementioned number of Village Councils and their members, there exist other Village Councils overseen by the District Council, which possesses the authority to enact its own legislation as granted by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Mizoram comprises three Autonomous District Councils: the Lai Autonomous District Council, the Mara Autonomous District Council, and the Chakma Autonomous District Council.

4.4 Tenure of Membership

Subsequent to the 2014 Amendment of the Village Council Act, the tenure of Village Council membership is established at five (5) years, with all members serving for the duration of the Council's existence; in the event of a new election resulting from the dissolution of a Village Council as per Section 25, the newly elected members shall serve for the remainder of the Council's term. A member elected to replace a casual vacancy shall serve for the remainder of the term of the member whose position has become empty. Suppose a member is absent without permission from three consecutive Village Council meetings. In that case, the Council may declare his seat vacant in a specially convened meeting, after providing him an opportunity for a hearing. The Council will then inform the State Government of its decision.

4.5 Qualification of Village Council Member

As per Chapter II, Section 4 of the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act, 1953, a Village Council member must be a Scheduled Tribe individual, at least twenty-five years old on the qualifying date, a voter in the village of candidacy, not affiliated with any other Village Council, of sound mind as declared by a competent authority, and must not have been convicted of an offence under the Lushai Hills Autonomous District (Administration of Justice) Rules, 1953 or any applicable law in India unless three years have passed

since the conviction, and if imprisoned, since release from incarceration. An individual engaged as a government servant on a regular basis is ineligible to be elected as a member of the Village Councils.

4.6 Terms of Office and Dissolution of Village Council

Section 5 of the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act, 1953 stipulates that the standard duration of the Village Council is three years from the date of its inaugural meeting, unless it is dissolved earlier. As amended in 2014, the Village Council Act extends the duration to five years, stating, “every Village Council, unless dissolved earlier under section 25 of this Act, shall persist for five years from the date designated for its inaugural meeting.” The State Government may, by order, prolong or reduce the duration of a Village Council for a total term not exceeding eighteen months. The election procedure for a Village Council must be concluded prior to the expiration of the Council's term.

The Village Councils (Amendment) Act, 1986, Chapter II, Section 7 (10) provides that the President or Vice-President may be removed by the State Government for failing to maintain majority support, refusing to resign, exhibiting inefficiency or corruption in village administration, or acting detrimentally to the interests of the State. The Village Councils Act 1953, Chapter II, Section 6 (3) guarantees that if a member is absent from 10 consecutive meetings without authorization, the Village Council may hold a special meeting and declare his position vacant after providing him an opportunity for a hearing. In this instance, the Village Council shall notify the State Government; additionally, Chapter V, Section 25 (1) addresses the dissolution of the Village Council. The Act mandates that the State Government may dissolve a Village Council if it deems the Council inefficient, incapable of managing village administration, acting detrimentally to the interests of the State, or for any other justifiable reasons. During the dissolution time, the State Government may select individuals to oversee village administration and serve as a Village Council Court for the remainder of the term.

In the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) (Amendment) Act, 2014, in sub-section (1) of Section 25 of the Principal Act, the following paragraph was added: “Provided that no such dissolution shall take place unless the Village Council has been given a reasonable opportunity to explain as to why it should not be dissolved. If the situation demands, the State Government may, during the enquiry on the complaints, suspend the functioning of the Village Council, during which the administration of such Village Council shall be exercised by a Government official appointed by the State Government”. The Act also provided that if the State Government considers it necessary to do so for the general public, it may issue an order for holding a fresh election of the Village Council at any time before the expiry of the remaining period. The Mizoram State Government exercised this power in 2025 to the Election of the Village Council election and conducted the Village Council Election on 12th February 2025, which was before the expiry of the previous Village Council.

5. Powers and Functions of the Village Council

The Mizo Chiefs from time immemorial had governed their villages with unwritten laws with the advice of the Upa (Council of Elders), which they think is most suitable for the villagers. Later on, these unwritten laws developed into a tradition and culture of the people occupying the Lushai Hills. N.E. Parry, the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills from 1924 to 1928, collected the customs which have been practiced by various chiefs and prepared a book which was published in 1928; the book was greatly utilized by the chiefs and elders in giving judgments to the villagers (Mizo Customary Law 2006). Later on, when the Lushai Hills were placed under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, having its own District Council, N.E. Parry's book, with certain modifications, was developed into a Mizo Customary Law and was published in 1957. The book was legally utilized by the Council Court and Village Council Courts in Mizoram.

The Village Council, since its inception, has had certain functions and responsibilities being substituted of the Village Chiefs who enjoyed enormous power and had taken up the responsibilities of legislating, executing, and protecting the village and the villagers. The Village Council has to see that the villagers have enjoyed enough liberty in every sphere of life. The powers and functions of the Village Council may be broadly divided into two groups, which are the executive and judicial functions.

5.1 Executive Functions

The Executive powers and functions of the Village Council, according to the Lushai Hills District (Village Council) (Amendment) Act, 2014, may be discussed under the following:

(i) Distribution of Jhum land for Shifting Cultivation: The first important executive function of the Village Council is the distribution of Jhum land within its jurisdiction. *Jhuming* of Shifting Cultivation being the most important source of livelihood for the villagers in Mizoram and administering the jhum land always play an important role in the administration of villages. The Lushai

Hills District (*Jhuming*) Regulation, 1954 had empowered the Village Council to distribute jhum land each year to the villagers on the appointed time.

(ii) Enforcement of *Hnatlang* or Collective Labor: The next important function of the Village Council is the enforcement of *Hnatlang*, which means common service for the common good of the villagers which the residents of the villagers are to render whenever the need for it arises in the village.

(iii) The Control of Animal and Taxation of Animal: The third executive power and function of the Village Council is controlling of the animals within their village.

(iv) Allotment of House Sites for the Villagers: The fourth important executive function of the Village Council is the allotment of house sites in the village for the villagers to live in. The Lushai Hills District (House Sites) Act, 1953 had empowered the Village Council to distribute land within its jurisdiction for the construction of houses for homes. However, the Village Council was not authorized to distribute land for the purpose of agriculture, shops, hotels and any other forms of business.

(v) Prevention and Control of the Outbreak of Fire: The fifth important executive function of the Village Council is the Prevention and Control of Fire within its jurisdiction as given in The Mizoram Prevention and Control of Fire in the Village Ram) Rules, 1983. The Village Council was given the responsibility of preventing the outbreak of fire within its jurisdiction.

(vi) Control and Protection of Forest: The sixth important function of the Village Council is the control and protection of safety, supply and Protected Forest Reserve under the Mizo District (Forest) Act, 1995 (Act No. IV of 1955). The Village Council is given the responsibility of protecting these reserved forests and maintain the records of its boundaries.

(vii) Sanitation of the Village: Chapter II of the Lushai Hills District (Village Council) Act, 1953 had clearly indicated that the Village Council is responsible for the sanitation of village.

In addition to the above, the normal functioning of the Village Council covers a variety of items. It has to handle all the developmental programs, with the help of administrative officials, within their respective jurisdictions. The President is to report the harvest of rice of his village to the Government so that the Government will be able to take remedial measures if the harvest is very poor. In any severe incidence takes place in the village, the Village Council is to carry all the duties assigned to it by the Government. Also, it is necessary to consider the welfare of the villagers, in bringing their felt needs to the notice of the Government, such as for the opening of a school, post office, construction of an inter-village path, and construction of roads, approach roads, and footpath to jhum. The Village Council is also expected to take various steps in order to prevent the spread of communicable diseases of epidemics. The President also acts as a communicating link between the villagers and the Government.

5.2 Judicial Function

The Judicial Functions of the Village Council as laid down by the Lushai Hills District (Village Council) Act, 1953 may be summarised as follows:

The judicial functions of the Village Council under The Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act, 1953 include the following:

(i). Village Court Role: The Village Council acts as a Village Court to resolve disputes and administer justice within its jurisdiction.

2. Litigation Fees: The Village Council is authorized to realize registration fees for each litigation within its jurisdiction.

3. Punishment for Disorderly Conduct: The Village Council can impose fines (up to Rs. 50) for disorderly conduct during its meetings.

4. Eviction and Fines: The Village Council can enforce eviction orders and impose fines for unauthorized occupation of sub-villages or settlements, as directed by the State Government.

5. Accountability: The Village Council must maintain proper records of proceedings and decisions, which are subject to inspection by the State Government.

6. Compliance with State Orders: The Village Council is responsible for implementing orders and notifications issued by the State Government.

These judicial functions are aimed at maintaining order, resolving disputes, and ensuring compliance with laws and regulations within the village.

6. Reconfiguring Power, Society, and Governance

The evolution of political institutions in Mizoram leading up to the institution of the Village Council is therefore a watershed in governance as well as society and culture of Mizo people. What first was an authoritarian system of hereditary chieftainship becoming a representative one, emphasizing participation in

the democracy at village level as well as political needs and social change. This shift was not immediate or uncontested, but was facilitated by imperial practices of indirect rule, postcolonial constitutional provisions, and domestic demands for a more inclusive system of government.

Disestablishment of Chieftainship represented a major stage in the dismantling of the hierarchical structure that had concentrated authority, land tenure and judicial adjudication in the hands of an elite few. It was not just a question of an administrative "clean slate"; it had profound sociological implications. The Village Council structure is, therefore, a democratization of power in which a leader is legitimized through popular mandate rather than lineage and operates within an enhanced accountability relationship towards his/her community.

In sociological terms, the Village Councils transformed at root traditional patterns of village existence. Instead of the raw power of the chief, who was above the law as well as its source, governing has passed into the hands of politicians who pass laws that facilitate dialogue and negotiation - where once there would have been diktat and personal accountability. It was a kind of transformation for the average civilian, from passive objects to active subjects who interacted with and affected their lives. The newly established institutions also challenged traditional stratification by creating openings for persons of non-elite background to rise up and lead, thus expanding the array of political actors. As this change continued to evolve, the Mizo people developed a new political reality that placed democratic values at the heart of everyday existence.

The importance of Village Councils also resides in their capacity to integrate indigenous traditions with contemporary governance structures. They maintained the communal ethos of Mizo society—where collaboration and collective well-being were held in high regard—while concurrently incorporating democratic practices such as elections, representation, and rule-based governance. This hybrid nature facilitated the community's ability to reconcile continuity with transformation, ensuring that modern institutions did not entirely usurp traditional values but rather augmented them.

A further key sociological issue is women's incorporation into political representation. The compulsory participation of women members in the Village Councils, especially after subsequent amendments, has fundamentally transformed the terrain of democratisation, contested patriarchal habitus and opened up new horizons for gender justice in state decision-making. This has resulted in a slow but significant restructuring of Mizo leadership and representation. Furthermore, Village Councils also brought governance closer to the people and increased social cohesion. They developed as more than just administrative units, serving as spaces for socialization, mediation and organizing. They also gave villagers a voice to discuss issues such as land, justice, and local development further engraining the ideas of community and empowerment.

Conclusion

Finally, the introduction of Village Councils in Mizoram is a political novelty and a sociological landmark. It is a tribute to how well the process of post-tribal society has worked in moving from authoritarian familial traditions to participatory democracy at a local level. More than their official functions, Village councils represent the democratization of village life, the redistribution of authority and a new pattern of social relations based on equality and accountability. They illustrate how traditional indigenous organizations, when revamped under the aegis of the modern democratic system, can be major forces for creating new social orders. Viewed in this context, the Village Councils of Mizoram are more than just administrative agencies—they stand as symbols of community aspiration for autonomy, equity, and democracy that drive Mizo culture from chieftdom to vibrant, community-based democracy.

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