

## Politics of 'Ethnic Enclaves' and Dilemmas of Travel-Tourism: Experiential Readings from Mizoram

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### Abstract

Chakraborty attempts an analysis of the emergence of Mizo state and land and people with unique characteristics as offering the rich potential for promoting tourism. The resource rich state has potential for income generation and alternative mode of development taking into consideration the indigenous history of hospitality and welcome accorded to people.

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**Keywords:** Colonial, Experiment, Zo/Mizo, Politics, Ethnicity

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### Introduction

Mizoram lies sandwiched between Bangladesh and Myanmar in the southernmost tip of North Eastern India. Popularly known as the 'land of the Blue Mountains' and the 'Green Emerald', Post-Peace Accord Mizoram has time and again been described as an 'island of peace', in the insurgency ridden North-East. Beyond the stereotyped description of the land and its people, Mizoram remains a geo-political puzzle for the rest of the mainland Indians.<sup>1</sup> The hills and gorges criss-crossed by gushing rivers and sparkling waterfalls remain picturesque post-cards embedded in the memory of people who have a chance meeting with the region. The Government of India and likewise the State Governments across India have been attempting to boost Travel-Tourism under the banner of 'Incredible India' - 'North-East Unexplored' - *Atitthi Deva Bhava*. The paper attempts at tracing the dilemmas of implementing the same in the North-Eastern state of Mizoram against the backdrop of politics of 'Ethnic-Enclaves' and provide an experiential reading for comparative purpose.

1 The category of Indians who are familiar with the state of Mizoram can be broadly categorized into 3 distinct groups: (a) those who directly served in the Indian Army or Administrative circles; (b) those whose relatives had served in the Indian Army or Administrative circles in the northeast; (c) those who were working as migrant labourers with the BRTF, BSF etc which includes a significant population of Santhal tribes from Jharkhand/Bihar belt. (Cf. Sanjay Barbora, 'Rethinking India's Counter-Insurgency campaign in the North-East', in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2006, September 2-8, 3805-3812) He refers to these officials and sepoys of the Indian forces as suffering from the 'Garrison Mentality', I agree with Barbora's arguments.

### **A Bird's Eye View on Colonial and Post-Colonial Administration**

The formal annexation of the region by the British in the Post-Anglo-Burman War period led to the introduction and implementation of alien administration and exclusivist policies in the form of 'Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas' from 1935 onwards. The British strategy to deal with the aborigines in India and also elsewhere has been that of providing 'Exclusive Discriminatory/Protective Regime'. The British in introducing these policies were not driven by a philanthropic sentiments or 'goodwill' as many British and pro-British writers presume. Rather these protective enclaves were the outcome of the stiff resistance posed by the aborigines to safeguard their homeland and their rights and traditional practices from being swallowed by the 'Alien British rule'. The struggle between the aborigines and the British was a struggle for the preservation of the 'self' and maintaining the voice of the marginalized community. The Santhal Rebellions, the tribal clashes during the Battle of Yandaboo, the Mizo and the Naga uprising and border disputes with these 'naked men' pose as illustrations for this. As early as 1874, the British Indian government passed the 'Scheduled Districts Act' followed by the Government of India Act 1919 which empowered the Governor General in the Council to declare any territory to be 'Backward tract', where laws passed by the British Indian government could not apply. The Government of India Act 1935 further elaborated on the Act of 1919 by introducing the 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded Areas', which excluded these areas from the operation of laws applicable to the rest of British India. Another explanation for the introduction of the exclusivist strategies has been summed up by Baruah (2004), as 'Commercial interests, coupled with a keen eye on geo-political balance of power led the British to draw lines between hills and plains, to put barrier between Bhutan and Assam and to treat Myanmar as a strategic frontier- British India's buffer against French-Indo-China and China'.

The 'Line System' was formulated to allow for limited colonization of lands by settlers. Areas that were dominated by indigenous groups were marked off as 'Out of bounds' for settlement. The colonial Administration introduced the 'Line System' primarily to protect their commercial interest and suit their security concerns in the region and not only with the philanthropic mission of 'saving the innocent tribes from 'Hindu Brahmanical Sanskritic' and 'Islamic' Cultures of mainland India'. The need for the Line System was doubled by the fact that it was necessary to tame the 'wild tribes of the frontiers' and bring them to the fold of the Gospel turning them from 'Head-hunters' to 'Soul-hunters'. Thus to make them give up arms and wars was a necessary corollary for the colonial masters to arm themselves even more and have the sole right to weapons in the region as if the British alone would be 'calling the shots'. Post-Colonial administration in the North-East inherited this structure. Though at the outset it seems to be a strategy aimed at fencing off areas, it also contained the initial kernel of plural legal regimes of land use, property, ownership, and control over resources. Coupled with this was the great dilemma of democracy which cuts both

ways: on the one hand, it acts as a great unifier among the group concerned, acting as a cementing force and instills confidence among marginal social groups of their ability to determine their own 'selves' and break from the majoritarian encapsulation; and on the other, it divides that group from the 'larger other' and threatens the larger nation (India) in the making. Modernism/Modernity<sup>2</sup> and the sentiments of nationalism i.e. territorial loyalty seek to substitute primordial loyalties of clan, tribes, castes, race, community and language but in practice end up churning these primordial sentiments even deeper as evident from the Indian experience. The North-East in general has been experiencing this need for re-drawing the boundaries in the North Eastern territorial zones and spaces i.e. re-marking the geo-politics based on the logic of traditional game land that the people had lost due to the British and other external forces. With the introduction of these exclusivist-isolationist strategies the probable age-old cultural-religious contacts of the Plains and the *Kuki-Chin-Lushai-Zo/Mizo tribes*<sup>3</sup> of the region came to an end.

The Post-Colonial administration of the region carried forward the colonial legacy under the new name of Sixth-Schedule. The continuation of the exclusivist policies for instance, the 'Inner Line Permit'<sup>4</sup> and the Autonomous Districts, outwardly justified the need to protect the backward region and its people from being usurped by the wave of Sanskritization and mainstreaming. However, in actual this colonial hangover<sup>5</sup> led

2 There is a lack of unanimity on the issues of the concept and term 'Modernity'. In most cases it is identified with anything that is contemporary. The tendency to equate modernity with technology and other contemporary artifacts is faulty. Modernity has to be equated and reflected through attitudes (towards 'Self' and 'Others'). For detailed readings see, Dipankar Gupta, *Mistaken Modernity India Between Worlds*, New Delhi, Harper Collins, the India Today Group, 2000.

3 The 'Kuki-Chin-Lushai-Zo/Mizo tribes' is a blanket term used to refer to the people living in and around the region of the present state of Mizoram in India; and the neighbouring areas including the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh and the Chin Hills in Myanmar. They have common oral traditions describing common origin, common heritage etc. with certain degrees of interpolations and changes. (Cf. Barbora, *op. cit.* 2006).

4 The Inner line regulations of 1873 empowered the lieutenant Governor of Assam to establish an Inner Line according to which no British subject could cross or go beyond a certain frontier that was drawn along the foothills of the north-eastern and south-western border of the Bhrmaputra valley. The areas beyond the inner line were inhabited by the hill tribes where the Government did not want to apply complicated civil rules. The Inner Lines awarded the hills tribes a special status. Most notably the Inner Line Regulation did not define the actual boundary of the British possession nor did it indicate the territorial frontiers. Its sole purpose was to prohibit the plains people from entering into the hills without the permission of the Government. The Inner lines were drawn simply with a view to protect the hill tribes from any sort of interference from the plains area and to provide a simpler administration for the hill people. The Inner Line Regulation, 1873 had empowered the Lieutenant Governor of Assam to establish inner line to distinguish the areas between the 'Inner Line' and the 'outer line'. The Inner Line Regulation, 1873 prescribed that "the local government by notification in Calcutta Gazette may prohibit all British subjects, or any class of British subjects, or any person, sending in or passing through, such districts, from going beyond such line without pass under the hand and seal of the executive officer" who "may authorize to grant such pass and the local government from time to time cancel very such prohibition" (Sahas Chatterjee, 1990, p. 6)

5 We used the word 'hangover' to make our point that the 'Isolationist model' had its overwhelming influence on the policies adopted by the Government of India which at that time frame was synonymous with the personality and leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru was much enamored by Elwin's model and sought to trace the official policy of the government in Verrier Elwin's book *A Philosophy for NEFA* (1960), which about the Isolationist bent of the policies adopted for the region during that timeframe in Indian politics. Xaxa argues that 'it is rather intriguing that national policy has to be sought in a book rather than an official government document' (Xaxa, 2005). However, it would be wrong to say that the Isolationist policies alone influenced the attitude of the

to the mushrooming of politics of 'Ethnic Enclaves'. The direct repercussions of the 'Nehru-Erwin model' of 'exclusivist-isolationist' administration of tribal region in the North-East were felt on Travel-Tourism.

### **Experiment in Travel Tourism: *Atitthi Deva Bhava* in Zo/Mizo Hills**

The State Government and the Government of India has been attempting at projecting the region as a viable tourist destination and make the dole dependent states of the region economically self-sustainable. The concerted efforts of the state governments can be seen if one scans through the official websites of state governments in the region projecting themselves as the exotic tourist destination and each state pitting itself against the other as the final virgin destination. The governmental website of Mizoram <http://mizotourism.nic.in> projects itself as 'a kaleidoscopic 'pleasure trove' for the discerning visitor with its wide array of festivals and dances, handicrafts, flora and fauna, breathtaking natural beauty and temperate climate'. The official trend of travel tourism in Mizoram has ranged from projecting the region in terms of 'Eco-tourism' to 'wildlife tourism' to 'adventure tourism' to 'exotic tribal tourism' etc. For instance the case of the 'Anthurium Festival'<sup>6</sup> 'Festival amidst Nature' covers all the above mentioned trends of travel tourism in Mizoram. The official website claims that 'the 'Anthurium Festival' held at Reiek Tourist Resort in June is the best time of the year to visit and enjoy the beauties of Mizoram. At the same time the 'Anthurium festival' doubles as an 'Exotic tribal tourism' and provides a peek into 'tribal life', the Mizo Typical Village, Modern Village and *Khuangchera Puk* (Cave) etc.

Mizoram being restricted area domestic tourists need an Inner Line Permit (ILP) to visit Mizoram. The application is to be made out in a prescribed application and presented in person with two passport size photographs to any of the Liaison Officers posted in Mizoram Houses in selected cities and towns. However, tourists arriving by flight may obtain permit at Lengpui Airport, Aizawl. As for foreign tourists, a group of 4 or more persons, Restricted Area Permit (RAP) can be obtained from the

Government of India. Especially when keeping in consideration the trends that had developed during that time regarding the nature of the government policy towards the region and the resultant birth of different 'Schools of thought' each of which were as strong as the other and each as convincing as the other. The emergence of the two schools namely the 'Isolationist' led by Elwin and the 'Assimilationist' led by Ghurye and the prolonged 'thesis-antithesis' between the two resulted in the emergence of the hybrid 'Integrationist' (Elwin and Ghurye) model. (Acharyya, 1984; Sangkima, 1995 - 2004)

6 Mizoram is the largest anthurium producer in India. To promote anthurium flower among Mizo farmers as well as to attract tourists, the state horticulture and tourism departments have initiated a colourful Anthurium Festival a few years back. The festival will also serve as an exhibition for various local products - fruits, vegetables, handloom and handicrafts...Indian metros such as Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi. Dubai is the biggest destination of Mizoram's anthurium, and the exporters are eyeing New Zealand and Australia...At present, more than 70 varieties of anthurium are cultivated and more than 400 growers are engaged in it, said the Horticulture director, adding that under the technology mission programme more areas are being covered to be able to meet the global market's demand. The export of anthurium is being undertaken by Bangalore-based Zopar Export Limited.

Government of Mizoram through Liaison Officers posted at New Delhi, Kolkata and Guwahati. For less than 4 persons, RAP has to be obtained from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India website - [http://mizotourism.nic.in/Entry\\_formalities.htm](http://mizotourism.nic.in/Entry_formalities.htm).

### **Experience in Travel Tourism: 'Self' versus 'Outsiders' in Zo/Mizo Hills**

The notion of *Others* just like that of *foreigners* as perceived by the Zos is apparently confusing and very broad. The category of the 'Others' can be broadly sub-divided into *permanent other* and *temporal other* and thus in general includes the *Vais*, the *Pois* (Burmese, *Burma Mi*) and at times incorporates the *Gorkhas* who have attained the status of 'Denizens'. The category also includes at times the internal tribes or ethnic communities/minorities who maintain cultural, linguistic distinctiveness or exclusiveness whether or not they believe in 'the mythical origin of the Zo tribes' i.e. Chhinlung Theory. Thus the *Mara* (*Lakher*), the *Lai* (*Pawi*), the *Hmar*, the *Chakma*, the *Reang* etc. also form the nebulous category of the 'Others' in Mizoram.

The attempts at 'opening up' Mizoram to the world beyond the 'Siliguri-Coochbehar corridor'<sup>7</sup>, remains an arduous task of facing the skirmishes of ethnic faultlines and dual citizen politics in the region. The post-insurgency state-building process in the Mizoram in general has tilted heavily on the mantras of 'self-governance', 'autonomy', 'self-determination' and 'self-definition'. In keeping with this spirit the whole process of 'Zo state-building' has been aimed at freeing or liberating *physically as well as mentally*, the Mizo/Zo Christian people and their territory from the *dual* prejudice and hegemony functioning synchronously at two levels: the Administrative and Religious. The Post-Colonial 'Zo world' has witnessed the dual operation of *Proselytization* and *Colonialism* and the introduction of marked *structural and functional changes* in the Zo/Mizo society. The loss of indigenous Zo way of life and the fear of being usurped by *alien cultures* compelled the Mizos/Zos to live under the spectre of the 'Pan-Optics' through the watchful eyes of the State, the Church and its agencies. The Youth organizations like the Young Mizo Association (Y.M.A) (Sangkima, 1985); the Khristian Thalai Pawl (K.T.P) and also the *students' organisation* (Baruah, 2002) like the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (M.Z.P) have been functioning as instruments of '*systemic or structural control*'. These agencies in the attempt to build the ideal Zo Christian state project a spectrum of varying attitudes ranging from prohibiting liquor and Drugs, controlling sexual behaviour and checking prostitution, controlling HIV/AIDS to checking permits of

7 The 'Siliguri-Coochbehar corridor', in fact symbolizes the nebulous zone of 'the beginning' as well as 'the end' of this territorial demarcation of the 'North-East' with the 'Mainland India'.

foreigner<sup>8</sup> and calling 'Vai Bandhs'<sup>9</sup> etc. The policies for state-building harps on the logic of 'Otherisation' and naturally perceives the 'outsiders'- migrants especially. to be a threat to the local as a result very often tourists or outsiders are picketed. These strategies employed to project the building of the Ideal Zo Christian state result in the 'reduction of human freedom' (Popper, 1966) in the Zo/Mizo society. Coupled with this phenomenon of picketing the self proclaimed vanguards of the Ideal Zo State often resort to victimising the outsiders by demanding the permit which legalises their entry to the restricted zone. The exorbitant rates charged for transportation and lodging in the absence of standard tariff rates burns deep into the pockets of tourists in Mizoram.<sup>10</sup>

The opposition to 'opening up' of Mizoram to the outside world reflects itself in the form of *bandhs* and protests staged by various agencies against the Guwahati High Court, ruling on a public suit against the Inner-Line Permit (ILP) system, which barred the Mizoram government from arresting or deporting any Indian nationals on the ground that they did not possess the document. The politicisation of ethnic consciousness by the tribal elites and the resultant ethnic skirmishes has led to a concerted effort to propagate their ancient cultural strains by clinging to their traditional roots resulting in bringing to the limelight some of the most vibrant ancient traditions, cultural heritage and colourful customs of the people of Mizoram. The flip-side of this ethnic consciousness has been that of a strong resistance to opening the region to the 'Outsiders'.

Taxis in Mizoram run without meters and cabbies charge anything between ₹ 500 to ₹ 700 for a distance as little as 40 kilometers. For instance the one has to shell out a minimum of ₹ 500 for reaching the Lengpui Airport which is about 30 kilometers from Aizawl city.

## Conclusion

The changes or the reforms at the mainstream hardly filter down to the bottom especially the peripheral cultures.<sup>11</sup> This stands true especially in the context of the

8 The notion of foreigners as perceived by the Mizos is apparently confusing and very broad it includes all 'others'. It is very difficult as to exactly pinpoint who would be labelled as a foreigner by the church and its agencies. The general accepted notion is that it includes the 'Vais', the Chakmas & the Burmese and at times it also includes the 'Zo' tribes from the other side of the borders. Here it must be noted that they make no distinction between Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, and Indians etc. Emphasis added: A.S.C. (Downs, 1971, 1983, pp. 14-15; Thomas, 1993)

9 The latest of these 'Vai Bandhs' were called by the MZP, the Mizo Students' Union and the YMA following the killing of a Mizo youth on 18th July, 2007 by suspected Bangladeshi goons at Dholai in Cachar District, Assam. Quit Mizoram notices were issued to the 'Vais' and a blanket curfew was imposed on the 'Vais' which was lifted only on the 25th of July 2007. The MZP, however, claimed that it had not imposed any curfew, but merely requested non-Mizos to stay indoors for their own safety. It also called a 24 hour bandh at Vairengte the nearest town to Silchar, Cachar or the plains and demanded Rs. 15 lakhs as compensation for the slain youth. (See J.B Lama, *The Statesman*, 'the inside and out of Mizoram's ethnic skirmishes' 30, July, 2007).

10 Taxis in Mizoram run without meters and cabbies charge anything between ₹ 500 to ₹ 700 for a distance as little as 40 kilometers. For instance the one has to shell out a minimum of ₹ 500 for reaching the Lengpui Airport which is about 30 kilometers from Aizawl city.

11 The core has been identified with the north-central Hindi-Hindu heartland, with an associated core to the

North East where the federal experience tends to convey images of 'dual regimes', 'dual citizenships' through the politics of Sixth Schedule. The 'Northeast' in general and Mizoram in particular provides a unique experience in understanding the trends in everyday politics as a living space dictated<sup>12</sup> by the politics of 'inclusions' and 'exclusions' projected by the *Nexus of Patriarchy*.<sup>13</sup> The resultant consequence has its reverberations on the attempts at promoting travel-tourism in the region and the official policies falls flat on its face. Mizoram thus remains a 'Shangri-La' and its 'opening-up' is postponed to some indefinite future making it largely unknown to the world at large. The colonial hangover in the form of ILP and protected areas thus has its limitations and limits the possibilities of cultural exchanges which would otherwise have contributed towards knowing the 'other' and promotion of pluralist-multicultural perspective and act as a leveller bridging the gap of 'incredible India'. Tourism has great educational significance. Contact between people of different races and nationalities widen one's outlook and broaden knowledge. 'Tourism is the most effective instrument for national integration, harmony and thus leading towards social transformation and upliftment of rural poor. It has already been proved that the return on investment in tourism from the point of view of employment generation is much higher to agriculture and manufacturing sector. Tourism policy and action plan has also pointed out that multidimensional efforts are needed to exploit the tourism potential and managing tourism resources'.<sup>14</sup>

west, south and east of the country which is non-Hindi but Hindu. This then leaves two periphery zones: one to the northwest consisting of the Sikh, Muslim, and Buddhist regions of Punjab, J&K and Upper Himachal and other in the Northeast with its Buddhist, Christian, Muslim and tribal communities and indigenous faiths such as Donyi-Polo among the Adis in Arunachal (Verghese, 1996, p.5). However, for the sake of convenience I would like to counter Verghese's arguments with a simpler and clearer demarcation of 'Core-Periphery' categorization. I would suggest that the core for the North-East would naturally and more conveniently mean / refer to the mainland India, beyond West Bengal (minus the Silliguri corridor) and the Periphery would naturally zero down to North-East and its fringes (including Silliguri corridor, Doars, Darjeeling etc.). (for details see Hmar.net » Inner line permit issue causes furor in northeast.htm, Aizawl, July 27, 2008, Economic Times; Hmar.net » NE students demand enforcement of ILP.htm, Aizawl, July 22, 2008, PII/ Assam Tribune; Hmar.net » Sit-in against move to scrap ILP in Mizoram.htm, Aizawl, July 21, 2008, *The Shillong Times*).

12 I agree with Michel Foucault's notion of a spatialized history which reflects the arena for power contestation, 'A whole history remains to be written of spaces', which would at the same time be the history of powers' (Rabinow, 1987; Soja, 1989, p. 21) which in the case of the Northeast determines the criteria for inclusion and exclusion. Emphasis added, A.S.C.

13 The Zo tribes and their sub clans form the majority and dominate all the socio-politico-eco-cultural arenas of the society. The Church and the State are the instruments through which the majority dictates their terms to the minorities including the women and Vais. I call the coalition of the majority, the church and the state the Nexus of Patriarchy because it represents the functioning of the patriarchy which tries to dominate the others. The nexus of patriarchy dominates and marginalizes women and by the same token marginalizes the "others" men and women inclusive (Lefebvre, 1991).

14 Mizoram, one of the federal states of India located at the extreme northeastern fringes has experienced diverse socio-political upheavals ranging from secession to acceptance of the constitutional mechanism of India to being 'an Island of Peace', within a span of three decades. The whole territory officially came under British rule in 1895. The area was bifurcated into South Lushai Hills under the Superintendent or Assistant Political Officer of Chittagong Division of Bengal Province, and the North Lushai Hills in control of the Political Officer under the Chief Commissioner of the Assam Government. The North Lushai Hills and the South Lushai Hills were amalgamated as one district 'The Lushai Hills District' in 1898, under the charge of one Superintendent under the Chief Commissioner of Assam (Ray, 1982, pp. 12-17, 20-24, Lalrimawia, 1983, Singh, 1994, pp. 113-114, Mathew, 2008, pp. 118-120, Biju, 2007, pp. 110-113, 120).