

Mediating Peace
The Role of Insider-Partials in
Conflict Resolution in Mizoram

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In the discourse on 'peace dividend', Mizoram has earned several distinctions to its credit. It is a State where the once dreaded insurgents, through the democratic process, are now lawmakers. A State where peace triumphed over violence, Mizoram has become a role model for conflict resolution not only for the other disturbed States in India's Northeast, but for other parts of the world as well. Further, Mizoram is a case study where mediation and negotiation emerged primarily from within the society in conflict.

This paper attempts, first, to explain briefly conflict and conflict resolution at a general level, before proceeding to scan ground realities in Mizoram. While discussing conflict resolution, it focuses on the role of mediators and different types of mediators, especially *insider-partial* mediators. In the next stage, it will look into the context of the conflict, i.e., the autonomy movement, its causes and objectives. In the third stage, the insurgent activity of the Mizo National Front (MNF) is discussed as a conflict process. In the fourth stage, the paper scrutinizes the

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peace initiatives by way of mediation and negotiation culminating in the signing of the Mizo peace accord. Finally, it attempts to explain how Mizoram can be a role model for other autonomy movements in the Northeast.

I

Conflict is inalienably a part of the human condition and promises good or ill, depending on how it is understood and handled. Lewis Coser defines conflict as a “struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralise, injure, or eliminate their rivals.”¹ Generally speaking, conflict refers to a condition in which one identifiable group of human beings (whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious, socio economic, political or other) is engaged in conscious opposition to another identifiable group because the latter is pursuing incompatible goals.

In conflict between political actors of any kind, three crucial questions are involved.² First, can both sides survive the conflict? Second, will it pass away, or will it keep recurring again and again? Third, can it be managed and kept within bounds or will it escape all controls and become itself the master of the fate of those involved in it? Any theory of conflict tries to answer these questions from its standpoint.³ Conflict theory investigates the process by which groups develop their strategies and decide upon the character of conflict. It also takes into account the motivation and perceptions of individual leaders and decision makers. Also, conflict theory deals with the situational context or environmental setting which generates conflict among warring factions.

A conflict, by nature, may be fundamental or accidental. It is fundamental if it is rooted in the basic structure of the issue and is likely to emerge repeatedly unless the difficult task of a permanent solution is achieved. On the other hand, a conflict is accidental if it occurs fortuitously or due to passing circumstances

¹ Lewis A. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict*, New York: Free Press, 1956, p. 3.

² Karl W. Deutsch, *The Analysis of International Relations*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1988, p. 136.

³ *Ibid.*

that are transitory in nature. The resolution of accidental conflict is relatively easy.

Conflict may, according to some theorists, have a positive social function.⁴ It may be the only means by which an exploited or deprived group can assert its rights. It is believed that violence or the threat of violence may be essential to create stability and maintain peace, although the goal can also be achieved through non-violent means. Hence, a conflict can be violent or non-violent, fundamental or accidental, manageable or unmanageable.

There are various methods of resolution/management of conflict. Every party to a conflict seeks a resolution that best protects its interests. As the second priority in order, where resolution is not possible, an attempt is made to manage the conflict. A conflict can be settled/managed by legal, organisational or institutional means such as judicial settlement, arbitration, mediation, reconciliation, bargaining and negotiation, peacekeeping and peace making. These strategies of conflict settlement/management are non-violent in nature. Violent strategies are generally war, sabotage and disruption of socio-economic-political infrastructure, killings of the targeted group or individuals, and other insurgent activities. But, violent resolution of conflict ends up, more often than not, with the victory of one group and the defeat of its opponent(s). In most cases, however, conflict resolution takes the form of problem-solving by the process of mutual satisfaction of social needs, viz., identity, recognition, participation and control, redistributive justice, security, etc. This constitutes a 'win-win' resolution of conflict.

For any conflict resolution process, non-violent means are the most viable and desirable option. Such means not only conform to the norms of civilized behaviour for individuals, groups and nations, they also fulfil the basic requirements of democratic standards. Democracy demands the generation of conflict for the manifestation of different expectations and aspirations of people

⁴ Mostly, Marxists hold this view. In Marxism, conflict is an essential element in the dialectical process, which takes a contending thesis and anti-thesis into synthesis. In the social sphere also, they believe, conflict helps achieving material development.

and at the same time its resolution through peaceful means.⁵ As a part of non-violent conflict resolution, the role of negotiation and mediation is of utmost importance.

In any conflict environment, third party involvement brightens the prospect of its resolution by bringing the conflicting parties to the negotiation table. As warring factions adopt intransigent postures, thereby taking their enmity up to new heights, it is the mediator who acts like a bridge in order to contain, reduce and finally resolve the conflict. The mediator helps in softening and cooling down the conflict environment before attempting to resolve it.

Mediation is commonly defined as a narrow formal activity in which an impartial, neutral third party facilitates direct negotiation.⁶ The general model⁷ of mediation conceptualisation states that the mediator's effectiveness is rooted in externality (coming from outside the conflict situation) and neutrality (having no connection or commitment to either side of the conflict). This is commonly known as the *outsider-neutral* model. As the mediator comes from outside the conflict situation and as he does not have any bias towards any particular group, parties to the conflict repose their faith in him. He does not have any interest in the issues of conflict. Soon after the resolution of conflict, he leaves the situation. *Outsider-neutrals* always maintain a distance from the disputants.

Mediator-neutrality protects the legitimacy and authority that are created primarily through the professional role, position and function of the intermediary – a Weberian variety of rational-legal authority. The most appropriate example of the *outsider-neutral* model in international politics is the Norwegian mediation in the conflict in Sri Lanka. In India, the role of Zoramthanga, the present Chief Minister of Mizoram, in the Naga conflict is another example of this model. In brief, the third party is not

⁵ According to input-output analysis, the demands and expectations are generated in the intra- and extra-societal environment, fed into the political system which in turn processing them give out in the form of policies and decisions. In any open society, the Government's role is to accommodate various divergent interests to the best satisfaction of all concerned.

⁶ Paul Wehr and John Paul Lederach, "Mediating Conflict in Central America", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 28, no. 1, 1991, p. 86.

⁷ Ibid.

connected to either disputant, is not biased toward either side, has no investment in any outcome and does not expect any special reward from either side. The main motive behind mediation is the restoration of peace through conflict resolution.

Although *outsider-neutral* mediation is the most accepted model of third party intervention, another model is proposed, which is more relevant to a traditional society where norms, values and beliefs play a dominant role: the *insider-partial* model of mediation.⁸ The events preceding the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement (popularly known as Mizo Peace Accord)⁹ in Mizoram fit into this model.

The effectiveness of the *insider-partial* mediator depends neither on externality nor on neutrality, but on quite opposite attributes – internality and partiality. He is the mediator from within the conflict environment. His acceptability to the parties in conflict is rooted, not in distance from the conflict or objectivity regarding the issues, but rather in connectedness and trusted relationships with the conflictants. The trust comes partly from the fact that the mediators do not leave the post-negotiation scenario. They are part of it and must live with the consequences of their work. They must continue to relate to the conflict parties who have trusted their commitment to a just and durable settlement. Such a mediator generally emerges out of more traditional cultural settings where primary, face-to-face relations continue to characterise political, economic and social exchange.

⁸ Insider-partial mediation is mediation that is done by a person who is already involved in the conflict (thus, someone who is an “insider”), and, at least to some extent, is aligned with one side or the other (hence, someone who is “partial”). This type of person differs from the traditional mediator in the dominant North American mode of mediation, which calls for a neutral, impartial mediator. However, many societies in two-thirds of the world feel more comfortable with insiders as mediators, as they know the situation better, are more easily trusted, and will stick around to make sure any settlement is implemented, unlike outsider neutrals, who usually leave to go home or go on to their next case. Thus outsiders may not be as invested in the success of the mediation as an insider might be, nor are they present to help resolve any difficulties that develop in the implementation as often as insiders are. See “Insider-Partial Mediation”, www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/treatment/ipmedtn.htm.

⁹ The Mizo Peace Accord was signed between Mizo National Front (MNF) and the Government of India on June 30, 1986.

In Mizoram, the MNF leadership did not emphasise neutrality for arriving at a political settlement. Rather, they looked towards trust and confidence in the negotiators. In this model, the authority to mediate is vested in the third party through a personal relationship with the disputants and through respectability, rather than through secondary characteristics of an external intervener. Weber categorises this complex of factors as 'traditional authority'.¹⁰

Trust-based mediation assumes accumulated and at times intimate knowledge shared by both the mediator and disputants. They have a certain degree of personal relationship and closeness with each other. They are connected in many ways, not just through a limited service performed in the context of a conflict. *Insider-partials* are not related with the parties to the conflict merely through a specific intervention. Their trust relationship permits them to resolve the conflict together with the adversaries.

Trust is the necessary criterion for all types of mediation. But with *insider-partials*, it is the *primary* condition for selection. They need to be recognised as trustworthy by all sides. Unlike the *outsider-neutral* who is chosen for his aloofness from the parties to the conflict, the *insider-partial* is selected precisely for positive connections, trust and respectability. This trust and confidence ensures sincerity, openness and transparency and is a channel through which negotiation is initiated and pursued.

II

The context of the autonomy movement and peace process in Mizoram can be discussed against this backdrop of conflict and conflict resolution. The autonomy movement in Mizoram can be traced back to the pre-independence period and has two distinct dimensions. One is the movement for abolition of chieftainship, with the objective of acquiring democratic self-government, which was internal in nature; and the other is to attain complete independence and achieve a 'Greater Mizoram', that was external

¹⁰ In case of Mizoram, although outside mediators attempted to resolve the conflict it did not get support from the rebel leadership due to a lack of trust in them.

in character.¹¹ From administration as an 'Excluded Area' to the attainment of Statehood was a long road for the Mizo people in their struggle for assertion of national identity.¹² As a consequence of these processes, the Mizos have been successful in the abolition of chieftainship (traditional *Lal* system) and its replacing by the Village Council system. But the goal of the establishment of sovereign independent state of 'Greater Mizoram' has been partially realized by securing Statehood of a special category along with a certain degree of autonomy. This can be interpreted as a 'win-win' situation in the conflict resolution process.

It is not difficult to discover the causes of the decades of turmoil that engulfed Mizoram. Exploitation by chiefs, poverty, economic imbalance and the lack of civic amenities fuelled insurgency in Mizoram. Poor communication, the lack of contact between the Government and people, a regional economic imbalance, Government apathy to the problems of the common people, and a long history of neglect wounded the sentiments of the Mizos. Internal corruption, nepotism, favouritism and non-participation in the processes of development alienated the people from the ruling elite. Further, differences in culture, language, religion, habits, etc., accentuated these grievances among the Mizos.

It is true that there was no adequate initiative on the part of the Union Government to bring the Mizos into the mainstream of Indian life. But it is also equally true that a handful of local leaders, while taking advantage of the adverse situation, exploited mass sentiments. To an extent, foreign instigation also encouraged the secessionists to precipitate their autonomy demand. The immediate cause that worsened the situation and promoted an armed insurgency was the great famine of Mizoram in late nineteen fifties.¹³ The natural calamity aggravated the people's sufferings, adversely affecting their lives. And the

¹¹ Romesh Buragohain, "Autonomy Movements in Mizoram: A Study in Historical Perspective" in R.N. Prasad, ed., *Autonomy Movements in Mizoram*, Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1994, p. 62.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ R.N. Prasad and A.K. Agarwal, *Political and Economic Development of Mizoram*, Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1991, p. 7.

secessionists, in order to further their agenda, blamed the suffering of the people on the inept management of the crises by the Assam Government and the casual attitude of the Union Government. Individually and collectively, these factors led to three decades of conflict and turmoil in Mizoram, where every aspect of life was affected.

III

Before independence, the constitutional position of the Lushai Hills district under the Government of India Act, 1935, was that the area (later the State of Mizoram) was to be administered as an Excluded Area, over which the State Government of Assam had no jurisdiction.¹⁴ There was no representative from the district to the State Legislature and the district was administered by the special powers of the Governor under the Act. As per provisions of the 1935 Act, the British rulers did not want to give local Government or political autonomy to the Mizos to manage their local affairs.¹⁵ No political activity of any kind was permitted in the district. There was no official political agency, which could voice the people's aspirations and grievances. In effect, the British Superintendent and the Mizo Chiefs continued to rule as virtual dictators. Although a few conscious Mizos were aware of the oppressive rule of the Chiefs, no organised protest was possible due to the blank support provided by the District Superintendent to the Chiefs. The feeling of resentment against the Chiefs' autocratic rule gained momentum even before Independence. When the British transfer of power to the Indians was being discussed, some enlightened Mizos did not want the British to hand over power to the local Chiefs. This resentment, in an organised form, took the shape of a political party – the first in the Lushai Hills – called the Mizo Union, which was formed on April 9, 1946, with the objective of achieving a democratic system of administration for

¹⁴ R. N. Prasad, "Mizo Autonomy Movement – Formation of Autonomous District Council and Regional Council: Issues and Problems of Their Operation", in Prasad, *Autonomy Movements in Mizoram*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the Mizos and fighting the vested interests of the local Chiefs.¹⁶ The party wanted autonomy in all matters affecting custom, law, ethnic identity, culture, land and the dialects of the Mizo people.

After Independence, the demand for regional autonomy and better status grew stronger in the Lushai Hills. The Interim Government, in order to ascertain the grievances and affairs of the tribal people, appointed a sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly, known as the North East Frontier Tribal and Excluded Areas Committee, under the Chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi, the then Chief Minister of Assam.¹⁷ Recommendations of the Bordoloi Committee were incorporated into Article 244 (2) and the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution whereby Autonomous District Council status was given to the Lushai Hills.¹⁸ Thus, in the first phase of their struggle, the Mizos succeeded in achieving autonomy in the socio-political and economic spheres. After the Constitution was brought into force, the immediate constitution of District Council was not possible. The Mizo Hills District Council and the Pawi, Lakher and Chakma Regional Council were constituted in 1952 and 1953 respectively.¹⁹

Soon after, the *mautam*²⁰ famine gripped Mizo society and the people faced their worst ever crisis. Even the Assam Government did not pay adequate attention to the crisis. As a result, a non-political organisation called the Mizo Cultural Society (MCS) was formed in 1959 to assist the starving people. The MCS, a social service organisation, received accolades for its

¹⁶ Originally, the name of this party was "Mizo Common People's Union". Later, it was renamed as "Mizo Union". See, R.N. Prasad, *Government and Politics in Mizoram (1947-1986)*, Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1987, p. 76.

¹⁷ On January 25, 1947, the Constituent Assembly of India appointed an Advisory Committee on Minorities, Tribal Areas, etc. under the chairmanship of Sardar Vallabhai Patel. This Committee appointed a Sub-Committee headed by Gopinath Bordoloi for North-East Tribal Areas and Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas. See C. G. Verghese and R. L. Thanzawna, *A History of Mizos*, Vol. II, Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1997, p. 2.

¹⁸ See *The Constitution of India*. Article 244 (2) stipulates, "The provisions of the Sixth Schedule shall apply to the administration of the tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram".

¹⁹ Verghese and Thanzawna, *A History of the Mizos*, p. 3.

²⁰ *Mautam*, a Mizo word, means the death of the bamboo. The famine, attributed to the flowering of a type of bamboo, occurred in the Mizo Hills District in 1959.

positive role in the crisis. When it became very popular among the Mizos, Pu Laldenga and other leaders of the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF)²¹ decided to convert this organisation into a political party. As a result, the Mizo National Front came into existence on October 22, 1961, with the declared objectives of complete political independence for greater Mizoram, improving the socio-economic condition of the Mizos, and promoting/safeguarding Christianity.²² A long-term strategy was drawn up to launch a violent movement to achieve these goals, and to acquire dependable support from some foreign countries.²³ In the electoral battle, the MNF gradually consolidated its position, but could not capture power alone,²⁴ and eventually resorted to violent means in order to achieve its goals.

The MNF high command, during an Executive Committee meeting in Aizawl in July 1965, set up its underground government and termed it the 'Mizoram Sawrkar' with a legislature, executive and judiciary, to project an effective demand for independence.²⁵ Its armed wing, the Mizoram National Army (MNA), was created to take the fight to the streets. It recruited young men from colleges, schools, farms and also ex-servicemen, on a voluntary basis. The MNF-led insurgency finally broke out on February 28, 1966, with acts of lawlessness, violence, killings etc. The MNF declared independence on March 1, 1966, and this was followed by an Army mobilisation. On March 2, 1966, the whole district was

²¹ The MNFF was formed in 1961 by Laldenga in response to the perceived indifference of the Assam Government to the prevailing famine. The Union government was projected as showing a casual approach to this serious crisis.

²² Verghese and Thanzawna, *A History of the Mizos*, p. 14.

²³ Mostly Pakistan and Bangladesh extended periodic support to the MNF insurgents. MNF was sending its volunteers to East Pakistan periodically for armed training. Even its leaders visited East Pakistan frequently to secure external support. Besides, these underground rebels had informal link with Chinese leaders. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁴ In the 1962 District Council election, MNF leaders contested, but failed to win and unseat the Mizo Union party. In the 1963 bye-election to the Assam Assembly, the MNF gave a good fight to the Mizo Union candidates by winning two of three seats. But in the District Administration, the Mizo Union retained complete control. For details, see Prasad and Agarwal, *Political and Economic Development of Mizoram*, p. 8.

²⁵ For details, see Verghese and Thanzawna, *A History of the Mizos*, p. 33 and Prasad, *Government and Politics in Mizoram*, p.171.

declared a disturbed area. The Union Government, sensing more trouble, announced a developmental package for the district.²⁶ However, the MNF remained adamant in its demand of cessation from the Indian Union. Under pressure, the Union Government acceded to some of the demands of the Mizos and, as a compromise, elevated the Mizo Hills District to the status of a Union Territory on January 21, 1972. This arrangement not only gave relative autonomy to the Mizos, but also gave them a pride of place under the Indian Constitution.

Cracks gradually appeared within the rank and file of the MNF.²⁷ Certain moderates and intellectuals, who were disillusioned with the goal of political independence, realised the futility of an armed struggle and wanted to come over-ground. Meanwhile, the Union Government, as a counter-insurgency measure, adopted a multi-prong strategy to deal with the situation. Apart from dealing very firmly with the insurgents, the administration launched a major publicity campaign. Extensive propaganda materials were circulated to explain to the people the hollowness of the claims and arguments put forward by the MNF. Also, a campaign was mounted to project ground realities, describing the inhuman activities of the MNF and the positive role played by the security forces, with an objective to put an end to the stories of the so-called excesses and atrocities committed by the latter. As a part of the counter-insurgency strategy, some social welfare measures were undertaken to wean away people from the influence of the secessionists and bring peace and prosperity to the region.

As a consequence, periodic surrenders of underground moderates continued, thereby breaking the morale of the

²⁶ For details of these developments, see above-mentioned books.

²⁷ The inner circle of the MNF was divided into two ideological groups – one group who were hardliners and mostly ex-servicemen, wanted to continue their fight for independence, while the other, consisting of the younger and educated lot, wanted to have peace negotiations with the Government of India and accept Statehood within the Indian Union. Vice President Lalnunmawia, Lalkhawliana (brother-in-law of Rev. Zairema), Lalhmingthanga, Thangkima and Zamawia belong to the latter group. Among insurgents, some had the feeling that while they are leading a miserable and difficult life in the jungle, their leaders were enjoying a comfortable life in foreign countries. This schism continued till the end of the insurgency movement.

hardliners. In the first phase, around 60 MNF insurgents surrendered responding to the amnesty offer of the Union Territory Government. In 1973, MNF vice president Pu Lianzuala, who was also chairman of the National Emergency Council (NEC), surrendered along with other MNF and MNA office bearers. Besides, the wives of four MNF leaders also surrendered in the same year. In September and November 1975, a mass surrender of Mizo National Army (MNA) personnel, with their arms, took place before Lt. Governor S. K. Chhiber. Following this, a group of 54 MNA insurgents, led by Damkhosei, surrendered to the Government of Manipur on September 10, 1975. Another mass surrender took place in Aizawl on July 1, 1976. A group of 62 MNF and MNA insurgents led by self-styled Brigadier General John Sawmvela, Chief Justice of the MNF, laid down their arms before Lt. Governor Chhiber. Similarly, periodic surrenders continued till the signing of the peace accord. A majority of the moderates realised the futility of violence and wanted to lead a normal life in Mizoram instead of hiding in the difficult hill terrains of foreign countries. However, undaunted hardliners continued with their violent activities in a more rigorous way.

IV

In the meantime, successive Governments and non-governmental agencies in Mizoram worked hard to bring the Union Government and MNF leaders to the negotiation table. The first effort to broker peace came from the Church. Rev. Zairema took the initiative in 1968 in order to broker a peaceful settlement of the Mizo problem.²⁸ A 'Peace Mission' was formed by the Presbyterian and Baptist Church Committees to persuade MNF leaders to give up violence and to persuade the Union Government to accommodate important demands within the framework of the Indian Constitution. This mission, however, failed due to the uncompromising attitude of the MNF leadership, with Laldenga insisting that the MNF had to "declare

²⁸ Subir Bhaumik, *Insurgent Crossfire: North-East India*, Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1996, p. 165.

independence to preserve our very existence” because of the increasing military deployment in the Mizo Hills after 1965.²⁹ In February 1968, Rev. Zairema made another attempt to persuade Laldenga to commence peace negotiations with the Union Government.³⁰ This abortive peace effort continued up to 1969.

Another attempt at the restoration of peace was initiated by the then Chief Minister Pu Ch. Chhunga on November 12, 1974, when leaders of different Churches, social organisations, political parties, the Young Mizo Association (YMA), the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP, or Mizo Students Federation) and the Human Rights Committee of Brig. T. Sailo³¹ met in Aizawl and formed a ‘Mizo Peace Advisory Body’.³² This body resolved to work for peace and security in Mizoram and urged upon both the security forces and the MNF insurgents to abjure violence.

Another effort to negotiate peace took place in early 1973 when Pu Lianzuala, Chairman of the National Emergency Council of MNF, was influenced by Pu Lalnunmawia, Vice President of the MNF, to initiate talks with the representatives of the Government of India, which were held in Masimpur.³³ Although some MNF leaders were willing to accept ‘statehood’ for the time being, the hardliners insisted on their earlier position demanding complete independence. Consequently, this attempt also failed.

In August 1975, Laldenga proceeded to Geneva to meet a senior officer of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India’s external intelligence agency. After detailed discussions, Laldenga sent a letter to the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, offering to come to India to negotiate peace within the framework of the Indian Constitution. This resulted in talks between the two sides in February 1976. Later, after a series of talks and negotiations, a formal agreement was signed between Laldenga and S.L. Khurana, the then Home Secretary to the Government of India, on July 1, 1976. But the accord created discord among the Mizos due

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Brigadier Thengpunga Sailo, the highest ranking Mizo officer in the Indian army, retired in November 1973 and returns to Mizoram where he formed a Human Rights Committee.

³² Verghese and Thanzawna, *A History of the Mizos*, p.139.

³³ Ibid.

to confusion. While common people, along with the Government of Mizoram, welcomed the 'Peace Accord', MNF hardliners were unhappy about it. The Accord, they insisted, was one-sided, as it only contained obligations for the MNF and none for the Government of India. Later, Pu Laldenga also contradicted the provisions of the Accord, telling his supporters that these were not the actual provisions to which he had agreed.

Several peace overtures initiated in 1978 and 1979 had failed to arrive at any consensual settlement. Another round of serious peace talks started in 1980 when a 'Steering Committee' of the legislators of five opposition parties in Mizoram was constituted.³⁴ It submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister in June 1980. Now the main obstacle to peace was the rift between Laldenga and Brig. Sailo over the issue of transfer of power. G. Parthasarathy was nominated by the Union Government as the chief negotiator to sort out differences.³⁵ However, these peace talks also failed to materialise due to differing stands by both the Union Government and the MNF, and the impossible demands put up by Pu Laldenga.

Church leaders again revived their peace efforts at this stage. On their initiative, the four political parties in Mizoram signed a joint appeal on May 31, 1983, requesting both the MNF and the Union Government to resume talks and reach an amicable settlement. Following the failure of negotiations, the MNF leadership decided to resume insurgency and the Government (both the Central as well as State) launched counter-insurgency

³⁴ The "Steering Committee" of the legislators of five opposition parties in Mizoram submitted a memorandum to the then Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi on June 18, 1980, and pleaded for the dissolution of the 33-member Mizoram Assembly in order to create a conducive atmosphere for the resumption of peace talks. A delegation of the "Steering Committee", consisting of Pu Lalsawia (MP, Rajya Sabha), Dr. Rothuama (MP, Lok Sabha), Pu J. H. Rothuama (MLA, Mizoram Assembly), Rev. Sakhawliana (member, PC (B) party) met the Prime Minister and pleaded to dismiss the Brig. T. Sailo ministry as the latter was obstructing the peace process.

³⁵ MNF delegation led by Pu Laldenga (other members were Pu Chawngzuala and Pu Rualchhina) met the Prime Minister and resumed the demand of "Greater Mizoram" along with a few other proposals. The Government of India on its part placed the 15-point counter proposals for discussion. Before Parthasarathy was appointed as negotiator, Laldenga had four rounds of talks with the then Home Minister, Giani Zail Singh, who rejected the demand of "Greater Mizoram".

operations. MNF issued 'Quit Mizoram' and killing notices to *bhais* (non-Mizos) and a directive to assassinate important officials, including the Chief Minister, Brig. Sailo. The MNF squarely blamed Brig. Sailo for the failure of the talks and appealed to its sympathisers to defeat the People's Conference (PC) party in the Assembly Election of 1984. The Congress, with the support of other opposition parties and MNF sympathy, wrested the majority, and Pu Lalthanhawla became the Chief Minister. Chief Minister Pu Lalthanhawla tried to bring Pu Laldenga back to Delhi for peace negotiations and offered to step down in favour of the latter, if that could help resolve the long-standing crisis.

During this period, while insurgency continued unabated, the Government took up several developmental measures in the field of agricultural production, electrification, health, education, etc., so that people would be motivated towards peace and drift away from insurgency. In the meantime, Pu Laldenga requested the Government of India for a cease-fire on 'Gandhi Jayanti' day, although stray incident of violence and collection of illegal donations continued. The peace talks were to start in mid-November 1984 but were delayed due to the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. However, these political developments pushed the peace effort forward, finally leading to the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement on June 30, 1986.

The Memorandum of Settlement incorporated some important issues in its provisions. The MNF agreed to end underground insurgent activities, surrender all arms and weapons to the appropriate authority, come back to normal civil life and eschew violence within a stipulated time frame. It further agreed to delete its objective of "independence and secession of Mizoram from the Union of India" from its constitution to confirm its faith in the Indian Constitution. The Union Government, on its part, agreed to rehabilitate underground MNF cadres with adequate compensation. It also agreed to upgrade the status of Mizoram from the existing Union Territory to a full-fledged State of the Indian Union. Further, the Union Government committed to establish a High Court and a University for the State. The socio-cultural autonomy of the Mizo people was duly recognised by the Union Government.

After the Accord was signed, both the parties took a sincere interest in implementing its provisions. Underground MNF and MNA cadres surrendered their arms before the civil authorities. The MNF amended its party constitution by deleting objectionable provisions. The Union Government lifted the ban on the MNF and introduced the Mizoram Statehood (Constitutional Amendment) Bill in 1986, which later became an Act.³⁶ Thus the Union Territory of Mizoram became the twenty-third State of the Indian Union. As an interim arrangement, a coalition Government was formed in Mizoram with the MNF leader Laldenga as Chief Minister and Congress leader Pu Lalthanhawala as the Deputy Chief Minister. The coalition Government was sworn in on August 21, 1986.³⁷ But, this Government was short-lived, owing to fundamental differences between the two coalition partners. The Congress being a national party and the MNF a regional party, their policies and programmes obviously differed widely. Differences also cropped up over the issue of inclusion in the ministry of members from both the parties, and the allocation of portfolios. While the MNF wanted to keep key portfolios like Home and Finance, Pu Lalthanhawla vehemently objected to this. The public utterances of both the leaders revealed their conflicting positions. However, in spite of all these bickering, peace returned to Mizoram.

As enunciated above, mediation and negotiation could achieve what insurgency and militancy could not do for so long. Now, Mizoram has not only found a pride of place in India's North-east but has also become an example for other strife-torn States in the country. The present Chief Minister Pu Zoramthanga is now the main negotiator for the resolution of the insurgency in other parts of the Northeast, and is the prominent advocate of peace and progress in the region. There is a broad view that, had Mizo Accord been signed a decade before, the pace of

³⁶ Mizoram Statehood (Constitutional Amendment) Bill became the Constitution (Fifty-third Amendment) Act in 1986 and came into force from February 20, 1987.

³⁷ As the Congress party ruled at the centre and at Mizoram when the peace accord was signed, Lalthanhawala agreed to share power with MNF leaders under pressure from his party high command and local organisations. But due to the difference in interest and ideology between them, they could not remain in power for long.

development in the State would have been much faster. It is to be noted that Mizo society as a whole wanted peace desperately, and this sentiment was successfully read by top-ranking MNF leaders. This earnest desire for peace among Mizos carried the peace process forward, finally settling the long-drawn conflict in the State.

It needs to be emphasised, in conclusion, that the peace process in Mizoram demonstrates that, while selecting mediators for peace, it is more relevant to entrust this responsibility to an *insider-partial* mediator. This creates the basis for a more effective and durable resolution of conflict. While not undermining the importance of *outsider-neutral* mediation, it is further emphasised that both these can compliment each other, even as the former has an edge over the latter. At the same time, it should be noted that the urge for peace must come from within the society, and this is what has to be translated into fact by the parties to the conflict. This is an essential feature of any open society.