



Free and Fair Elections: Role of Mizoram People Forum (MPF)

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ABSTRACT: This research paper is about the Mizoram People Forum (MPF), a church-backed civil society established on 21st June 2006, to facilitate the holding of free and fair elections and to bring about reforms in electoral politics. The various activities and role performed by the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) is highlighted in this paper.

KEYWORDS: Free and fair elections, Mizoram People Forum, elections malpractices, election expenditures.

I. INTRODUCTION

In a contemporary political system, democracy or otherwise, elections are the most significant aspects for they remain the first and foremost touchstone based on which the parameters of representation and legitimacy of a system are to be judged. Elections though complicated, provide a link between the society and the polity and between the traditional social systems and evolving political structures. Therefore, the elections must be analyzed within the context of the complete political and social systems.

[1] Elections are the most important and integral part of politics in a democratic system of governance. While politics is the art and practice of dealing with political power, election is a process of legitimization of such power. Democracy can indeed function only on the faith that elections are free and fair and not rigged and manipulated, that they are effective instruments of ascertaining popular will both in reality and in form, and are not mere rituals calculated to generate an illusion of difference to mass opinion. It cannot survive without free and fair elections. The first three general elections (1952-1962) were free and fair, but, the standard of elections seemed to decline in negative ways from the fourth general elections in India. The distortion of the electioneering process appeared for the first time in the fifth general elections in 1971. After

some candidates and political parties started to appear in the elections so as to win them at all costs, the Indian electoral system suffered from various shortcomings. Several unfair practices have now become a tradition in election politics in many states of India. In fact, several loopholes in the election system are the breeder of the so-called political corruption in India.

[2] The Constitution of India also attached also attaches great importance to elections by making an independent powerful body known as the Election Commission of India (ECI) in Article 324 to conduct free and fair election at Parliamentary and State Assembly elections as well as the election of President and Vice President of India. Even at the State level elections like Municipal Council, Autonomous District Council, panchayat and Village Council, an autonomous body known as State Election Commission (SEC) is functioning in different States. In India, the major defects in elections are money power, muscle power, criminalization of politics, poll violence, booth capturing, communalism, casteism that have become a features in Indian elections.

II. Formation of Mizoram People Forum

[3] The 2003 Mizoram State Legislative Assembly election witnessed unusual activities where indirect involvement of armed groups, rampant use of money, huge election expenditure Suangpuilawn fake kidnap case in Suangpuilawn Constituency. The issue was seriously deliberated in the Presbyterian Church of India (PCI) Mizoram Synod Assembly of 2004 and it entrusted the Synod Executive Committee to seriously pursue the matter. The Synod Executive Committee deeply deliberated upon the matter and it further proceeded by consulting other Church associations, civil societies, Former Legislator Association of Mizoram (FLAM) and prominent citizens. The Synod Executive Committee adopted modalities for effective



implementation of the matter and meeting of different church associations, and civil societies was convened on 5th July, 2005 which resolved to initiate necessary steps for implementation of electoral reform for cleansing Mizoram elections. After the resolution of the Joint meeting was discussed in meeting of each church association and civil societies, another Joint meeting was convened on 1st September 2005 which resolved to establish a non-political social reform body for spearheading the new social movement.

[4] Accordingly, a Working Committee was appointed to prepare the rules and regulations of the forum. After acceptance of the rules and regulations prepared by the Working Committee, the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) has been formally established on 21st June 2006. The goals and objectives of the MPF are:

- To work towards establishing a democratic government through free and fair elections.
- To reform the electoral process and do away with the corrupt and malpractices in the electoral system of the State.
- To put in place a transparent, accountable and responsible government.
- To educate people on government issue and make them to be responsible citizen.
- To guide and advise the government on development issues.
- To conduct social audits for social reforms.
- To counter any form of violence, use of arms, and terrorism.

[5] The organizational structure of the MPF has been set-up in the following stratum, such as the Central Forum headquarters at Aizawl, District

III. Role of MPF in Elections

[7] The first activity of the MPF after its establishment was the MPF convened all Party meeting and invited major political parties of Mizoram on September 25, 2006. A consensus was arrived by those who attend the meeting, the need to reduce the election expenditure incurred during electoral campaigns, mainly for organising public meetings, feast, posters, banner etc which became a big burden for candidates. As such, Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on April 30, 2008 between MPF and Political parties which became the main principle and the basis of the activities of the MPF and election guidelines in various elections held in Mizoram. The election guideline of the MPF is prepared keeping in mind the election Model Code of Conduct issued by the election

Forums at district level, Constituency Forum at constituency level and Local Forum at Local levels. The headquarter is administered by 12 Office Bearers (OB), 18 Governing Board Members and 5 Advisors. District Forums are formed in all Districts except in Aizawl and Lunglei Districts because Aizawl can be mobilized and organized by the Central Forum, however in the case of Lunglei, the largest Church organization of the district, namely, Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) is not a constituent member of MPF since its establishment. The District Forum also has Office Bearers and Executive Committee Members. Constituency Forum is supposed to be established in every MLA constituency in times of MLA election to enforce the guidelines of MPF but it cannot be established in all MLA constituencies.

[6] The constituent members of MPF are Mizoram Presbyterian Church, Catholic Church Mizoram, Wesleyan Methodist Church, Evangelical Church of Maraland, Evangelical Free Church of India, Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran (Lairam Jesus Christ Baptist Church), Young Mizo Association (YMA), Mizoram Upa Pawl (Mizoram Elders Association), Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl- MHIP (Mizo Women's Organisation), Mara Thyutlia Py- MTP (Mara Youth Association) with headquarter at Siaha and Young Lai association (YLA) with headquarter at Lawngtlai. There are 6 associate members of MPF. They are Mizoram Young Chakma Association at Chawngte 'C', Mizoram Chakma Student Union, Mizoram Chakma Mahila Samiti, BRK Headquarters (Buddhist Association) at Chawngte and Mara Chano Py (Mara Women Association) at Siaha.

Commission of India (ECI). Over and above that legal, social and moral aspects and sentiments of general public were taken into account in circulating the election guidelines.

[8] The Election guidelines of the MPF are:

Election Expenditure:

1. No party or candidate shall indulge in huge and wasteful election expenditures. Election expenditures should be kept to the minimum, Activities which are corrupt practices and offences under the election law can crop up during the house-to-house campaign, therefore, all such activities must be avoided and public possession should also be not organized in favour of particular candidate or party during



election.

2. Influencing of voters through money or other incentives must be avoided.
3. Community feasts, picnic, poster and flag wars escalate election expenditure unnecessarily. Therefore, they may be avoided.
4. General public, organizations and individuals are requested not to ask or expect any favour from candidates. Similarly, candidates and political parties are also requested to refrain from announcing any financial grants or promotes thereof.

Free and Fair election, and security issue:

1. Use of force, intimidation and undue influence to the voters to secure their votes must be avoided.
2. Securing the support of underground armed groups and use of arms shall be prevented at all cost.
3. Take all necessary actions for security and peaceful elections, especially along the border and sensitive areas.

Policy implementation and candidature issues:

1. Only realistic and practicable policies and programmes must be included in the party manifesto.
2. Personal and individual life of the candidates should not be used as a poll issue. Election campaign should revolve around the party policy and programme.
3. Political parties are expected to put forward those who are upright, God-Fearing, clean and honest persons as candidates.
4. Campaigning through false propaganda, unproven truth and scandalous issues must be avoided.

Joint effort for electioneering:

1. Joint election campaign platform will be organized for candidates under the guidance of

the MPF as and when possible.

2. All public meetings, even those organized by individual party, may be held under the guidance of the MPF.
3. Distribution of party manifesto, policies and programme and any other leaflets may be undertaken by the MPF or in a joint effort with party workers.
4. No tea or eatable items shall be served on polling stations on polling day. Providing electoral numbers or slips will be done by the MPF members or in a joint effort with party workers.

On polling day, the MPF local forums set up MPF office near the polling booths or inside the polling area in their respective localities and strictly monitored the polling areas throughout the polling day. The MPF carefully kept watchful eyes on the activities of political parties, candidates and their campaigners and even party workers so as to prevent electoral malpractices like use of money power, distribution of materials to the voters. The MPF volunteers also helped the old and disable persons who come to exercise their franchise on polling day. Besides, MPF used to seriously appeal to voters to exercise their franchise on polling day through Public Announcement (PA) system. In some areas, the MPF publicly announced the names and candidates or campaigners involved in distribution of money or materials to the voters if there were reliable reports and evidence. The role played by MPF has been very helpful and effective for avoiding many election malpractices which had been freely in practice in the past elections. However, the MPF has no legal authority to punish or take actions on the wrongdoers.

IV. CONCLUSION

The efforts and activities of the MPF for ensuring free and fair elections has been praised and criticized as their has been perception that the MPF is not powerful enough in the past elections since it has no legal authority to punish those who practice unfair means in elections. However, the State of Mizoram has been experiencing a freer and fairer elections after the establishment of the MPF and the active involvement of the MPF in the election process. Though, election malpractices

such as use of money power, corrupt electoral practices cannot be stopped overnight, it will take time to stopped this practices. The MPF has performed well in ensuring freer and fairer elections as various unethical election practices were not done openly, though it may be practice in secrecy.



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