

Historical Development of the Department of Cooperation in India with Special Reference to the State of Mizoram

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Abstract

The dawn of cooperative movement in different countries took two broad forms. In countries like England, members of cooperatives themselves took initiatives in organising cooperative societies with more or less autonomy in their business and other activities. While countries like India and most of the third world nations witnessed cooperative movement under the initiative and guidance of the government through specific legislation or statutory recognition. This paper deals with the Department of Cooperation tracing its origin in India, coming to the state of Mizoram, featuring it as a Hills District under the state of Assam, then as Union Territory of Mizoram and statehood up to present day situation.

Keywords: Cooperation, Cooperative, Registrar, Personnel, Movement.

Introduction

Most governments in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America have recognised that cooperative institutions are pillars of progress. In many cases, the Constitution of the country concerned mentions the recognition of cooperation. In practice, this may range from merely recognising and therefore, protecting them according to the law of the country to give them educational, technical, and even financial assistance. The strongest expression of support by the government to the cooperative is the establishment of an independent ministry or department of cooperation [1].

In India, the existence of the Department of Cooperation may be traced back to June, 1871 when the Department of Revenue, Agriculture and Commerce was set up by the Government of British-India to deal with all matters affecting the practical improvement and development of the agricultural resources in the country, including cooperation. Prior to 1871, the work pertaining to agriculture was the responsibility of the Home Department. The subject concerning cooperation had been transferred to different departments under the government of both the pre and post-independent India. In 1881, the Famine Commission recommended creation of a separate Department of Agriculture and accordingly, the Department of Revenue and Agriculture was reconstituted as a separate department.

In the year 1923, in the interest of economy and efficiency, the portfolios of Education, Health, Revenue and Agriculture were combined to form the Department of Education, Health and Lands. In 1945, the said Department of Education, Health and Land was trifurcated into three separate departments such as Departments of Agriculture, Education and Health. The Department of Agriculture was re-designated as Ministry of Agriculture in August, 1947.

Even under the government of independent India, reorganisation and constitution of ministries and departments took place from time to time. In January 1951, the Ministry of Agriculture was combined with the Ministry of Food to form the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. In October, 1956, this ministry was split into two ministries but they were again combined in April 1957, as the Department of Agriculture and Food under the Ministry of Agriculture [2]. In December 1958, the subject of cooperation was transferred from the Department of Agriculture to form a separate Department of Cooperation for the first time under the Ministry of Community Development. In January 1966, the Ministry of Community Development and Cooperation was merged with the Ministry of Food and Agriculture to form the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Community Development and Cooperation.

The following functions regarding cooperation were added to the Ministry such as Agricultural indebtedness and credit; Cooperation in agricultural sector; Matters relating to National Cooperative Organisations; National Cooperative Development Corporation; Incorporation, regulation and winding up of cooperative societies with objects not confined to one state; and Training of personnel of cooperative departments and cooperative institutions (including education of members, office bearers and non-officials). In the year 1971, the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Community Development and Cooperation was renamed as Ministry of Agriculture with the following four departments under its hands like - Department of Agriculture, Department of Food, Department of Community Development and the Department of Cooperation. Again, in the year 1973, the subject of Consumer Cooperatives was added to the Department of Cooperation in the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperation. On July 6, 2021, an independent Ministry of Cooperation was officially created by the Government of India with the purpose to give focused attention to the cooperative sector with the vision of ‘Sahakar se Samridhi’ (Prosperity through Cooperation) [3]. This marked a significant administrative restructuring, as it was carved out from the Ministry of Agriculture.

Mizoram, a north-eastern state of India was formally known as Lushai Hills. The British armed force that was dispatched to this land in 1889 - 1890 was named as the Lushai Hills Expeditionary Force by the British administrators. It is generally accepted that the name ‘Lushai’ had been derived from the word ‘Lusei’ which was the chief clan among many others inhabiting the state [4]. So, the word Lushai seems to be the corrupted spelling of the term Lusei. After the annexation of the Lushai Hills in the year 1890, the Government of British-India decided that the North Lushai Hills would be administered by the Chief Commissioner of Assam and the South Lushai Hills formed a district under the Bengal province. To begin the British administration in the region, the Government appointed Captain H.R. Browne, Personal Assistant to the Chief Commissioner, as the Political Officer in the North Lushai Hills. He arrived at Aizawl (Aijal) in May, 1890. The South Lushai Hills which became a district in 1891 was placed under G.S. Murray as Superintendent. These officers had the powers of Deputy Commissioner and were made heads of all departments including police in their jurisdictions [5]. Realizing the inhabitants of the North and South Lushai Hills were the same tribe and for administrative convenience, the government amalgamated the two districts into one Lushai Hills District with effect from April 1, 1898 and was placed under the Chief Commissioner of Assam [6].

With the passage of time, in the area of cooperative development and in view of the prevailing depressed condition of the movement resulted by the world great depression of the 1930s, the government adopted certain economic and administrative measures in the sphere of cooperative management. The entire province of Assam was divided into three Divisions namely, the Assam Valley Division, the Surma Valley Division and the Hill District (Shillong) Division. Registrar of Cooperative Societies,

Government of Assam headed the department which was separated from the Agriculture Department. Two Assistant Registrars of Cooperative Societies (ARCS) were appointed to assist him. One of the Assistant Registrars of Cooperative Societies was given charge of the Surma Valley and the Hill Division and other was put in-charge of the Assam Valley Division [7]. The Lushai Hills fell under the then Surma valley Division and the Cachar District Assistant Registrar of Cooperative Societies; Government of Assam looked after the Division from Silchar. When the cooperative movement entered in the 1940s, the Lushai Hills was under the charge of an Assistant Cooperative Officer equivalent to Cooperative Audit Officer of today [8]. These Cooperative Offices functioned under the guidance and overall supervision of the Registrar of Cooperative Societies, Government of Assam, Shillong, the then capital of undivided Assam.

After the World War-II and following India's Independence, political awakening took place among the Mizos in the Lushai Hills. This had yielded the most important political development in the Hills after India's Independence. In accordance with the provisions to the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, the Lushai Hills District Council, with executive, legislative and judicial powers on certain matter, was inaugurated by Mr. B.R. Medhi, the then Chief Minister of Assam on April 23, 1952. The name "Lushai Hills District" had also been changed into "Mizo District" with effect from September 1, 1954 by an Act called the Lushai Hills District (change of name) Act, 1954 (18 of 1954) which was assented by the President of India on April 20, 1954 [9]. Mizoram had, thus, remained as one of the administrative districts of Assam till it attained its status as a centrally administered Union Territory on January 21, 1972.

The origin and growth of government departments in Mizoram are largely influenced and characterised by its mother state of Assam. The first cooperative societies in Assam like Rajahauli Village Bank, Jorhat; Jorhat Cooperative Town Bank, Jorhat and Chrigaon Village Bank, Jorhat were registered on October 10, 1904 [10]. In 1951, the Government of Assam established a Cooperative Sub-Divisional Office at Aizawl and posted Shri S.R. Chowdhury as a Sub-Divisional Deputy Cooperative Officer and Shri K.C. Das as Assistant Cooperative Officer. At first, there was no separate cooperative office and these two cooperative officers were initially attached to office of the Deputy Commissioner (Civil) at Aizawl. Due to congestion of office room, the Agriculture Office then provided accommodation with clerical staff to assist in the day to day works. Cooperative movement in the Mizo District was progressing year by year and as such, the Government of Assam, on January 31, 1956 posted Shri P.B. Bhattacharjee, Assistant Registrar, Cooperative Societies to open and man a full-fledged District Cooperative Office at Aizawl [11]. Thus, Sub-Divisional Office was upgraded to a District Cooperative Office and started functioning separately from March 1, 1956. To foster cooperative movement in the area, the government opened Cooperative Sub-Divisional Offices under the Department of Cooperation at Lunglei and Saitual towns in the year 1958 [12]. These offices were headed by Deputy Cooperative Officers in the rank of Cooperative Audit Officer of today. They supervised the registration of cooperative societies and also looked after the registered societies in their own jurisdictions with the help of Field Staff posted under them. At this time, there were three offices of the Deputy Cooperative Officers operating at Aizawl, Lunglei and Saitual towns under the supervision of the Assistant Registrar of Cooperative Societies headquartered at Aizawl who was in charge of the whole Mizo District of Assam.

In the year 1960, there was a cooperative departmental reorganisation in the Government of Assam. As a consequence of this departmental reorganisation, the Cooperative Circle Offices were closed and

instead, headquarters of Civil Sub-Divisions came into existence. Following this reorganisation, the office of the Deputy Cooperative Officer at Saitual was closed while the office at Lunglei was upgraded to the office of the Sub-Divisional Deputy Cooperative Officer. Likewise, the office of the Deputy Cooperative Officer at Aizawl functioned as office of the Sub-Divisional Deputy Cooperative Officer for some time [13]. This Sub-Divisional Deputy Cooperative Office soon after, was merged with the office of the Assistant Registrar of Cooperative Societies, Aizawl.

Finally, the Mizo District Council was elevated to a new centrally administered Union Territory in 1972. This brought about one of the most important events in the development of cooperatives in Mizoram. The position of the Department of Cooperation was elevated and improved to a great extent. Shri. K.B. Gurung, the then Development Commissioner took over the charge of office of the Secretary and Registrar, Department of Cooperation in addition to his normal duties. The post of Registrar of Cooperative Societies was then created in the same year i.e. 1972 [14]. This post, in its initial stages, was occupied by one of the Deputy Secretaries of the Union Territory Government in an ex-officio capacity in addition to his normal works in the Secretariat. This was done during the period starting from December 13, 1972 to November 17, 1976 [15].

The government created a full-fledged post of the Registrar in December, 1976 and appointed a senior officer from amongst the Provincial Civil Service personnel which was changed to the cadre post of Indian Administrative Service since 1987 [16]. In addition to a single District Office, two more District Offices were created and opened in the years 1975 and 1979 at Lunglei and Saiha to look after cooperative societies in Lunglei district and the then Chhimtuipui district respectively. By the turn of 1987, when Mizoram got statehood on February 20, the cooperative movement covered almost all nook and cranny of the state. This development had necessitated the creation of other three more District Offices at Kolasib, Aizawl East and Champhai in the years 1987, 1988 and 1995 respectively. In September, 2007, the Government of Mizoram opened a new District Cooperative Office at Serchhip town for Serchhip District. Later on, Mamit District Cooperative Office was inaugurated on September 18, 2018. So, the state of Mizoram is having eight District Cooperative Offices manned by the Assistant Registrar of Cooperative Societies with supporting Field Staff, Ministerial Staff and IV Grade Staff [17]. As the apex of these offices, there is the Directorate of Cooperation at Babutlang, Aizawl headed by the Registrar of Cooperative Societies. While in the Government Secretariat, the supervisory work is performed by the Commissioner of Cooperation and his subordinate officers like Deputy Secretary, Under Secretary and other Ministerial Staff under the guidance of Minister in-charge of Cooperation.

Conclusion

Cooperation has been recognised by the government as the third sector of economy which plays a crucial role in the socio-economic development of the people. In an imbalanced society like India, it is a unique instrument of the underprivileged and the weak whom it seeks to strengthen by realising their inner strength and initiatives [18]. Acknowledging this, the government created the department of cooperation and developed it as an agency to play a catalytic role, provide guidance and strengthen cooperative movement in the country. So, the success or failure of cooperative movement largely depends on the ability of the department of cooperation to fulfil the functions entrusted to it by the government.

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