

# Autonomous District Council: An Institution of Governance for Tribals as Per Constitutional Provision

LoisyLalmuanpuii

*PhD Scholar*

*Department of Political Science  
Mizoram University, Khatla, Aizawl*

Prof. Jangkhongam Doungel

*Department of Political Science*

*Mizoram University & Senior Fulbright Research Fellow*

*Department of Political Science  
University of Cincinnati, Ohio State, USA.*

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*India being a multicultural state endows with different communities with a diverse customs and traditions. The tribals of the then undivided Assam were given a special provisions called the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India where the tribals enjoy autonomy in governing and administering themselves based on their traditions and customs. The provisions of Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India laid down a miniature government within the tribals areas. It has three organs - executive, legislative and judiciary like that of the state and the central. The political institutions administer within the tribal areas have a tremendous impact within the tribals. The institutions work for the protection, preservation, welfare and development of the tribals. This paper attempts to analyze the structure of Lai Autonomous District Council and its impact towards the tribal people of the area in the art of governance and development.*

**Keywords** *(Sixth Schedule, Autonomous District Council, Autonomy, development, Governance.)*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

According to Fukuyama governance is define as government's ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services, regardless of whether that government is democratic or not.<sup>i</sup> Governance means the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented or not. It is an active concept and encompasses fast changing political, social and economic milieu. In a democratic framework an administration is considered to be citizen friendly, transparent, citizen caring, responsive and respecting human rights at large.<sup>ii</sup> In governance citizens are rightly concerned with a government's responsiveness to their needs and protection of their rights.

India since its pre independent era emphasize on democratic form of government. The Cabinet Mission sent by the British Parliament under Sir Stafford Cripps had made a public statement on 16<sup>th</sup> March, 1946 which also suggested for the formation of an Advisory Committee, to study upon the rights of minorities and tribal's of excluded area. Accordingly, an Advisory on Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded area was set up Vallabhai Patel as Chairman on 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1947 by the Constituent Assembly. The main task of the Committee was to work out a modus operandi in the constitutional arrangement for tribal's of excluded and partially excluded area and to enable them to safeguard their ethnic identity and culture in a democratic way. Subsequently, on 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1947 the Advisory Committee set up three sub-committees which are given as below:<sup>iii</sup>

1. North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Area Sub-Committee
2. North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan Tribal and Excluded Area Sub-Committee
3. Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas in provinces other than Assam.

Gopinath Bordoloi was Chairman of the North East frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Area Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee was also popularly known as Bordoloi Committee after the name of its Chairman, the then Chief Minister of Assam, Gopinath Bordoloi. Bordoloi committee extensively toured the

Lushai Hills, North Cachar Hills, Mikir Hills and Naga Hills but could not visit Garo Hills and Jowai Sub-Division of Khasi Hills due to bad weather and communication problem.<sup>iv</sup> The Bordoloi Committee tactfully analysed and compiled the facts which were collected and submitted its report to Vallabhai Patel, Chairman, Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights on 28<sup>th</sup> July, 1947.<sup>v</sup> The report dealt with various aspects relating to administration of the tribal areas such as thoughts on development, special features of these areas, land, forest, jhumming, court, finance, control of immigration, service etc. After certain amendments were made, the Sixth Schedule finally emerged and was incorporated in Articles 244 (2) and 275 (1) of the constitution of India. The constituent Assembly also accepted the suggestion of Bordoloi Committee and Excluded and partially excluded Area (other than Assam) committee. As a result, tribal inhabited areas under Fifth Schedule are known as "Scheduled Area" and tribal inhabited areas under Sixth Schedule are known as "Tribal Area"<sup>vi</sup>

The provisions of Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India envisage that the tribal would administer themselves according to their customary laws and traditions. It is a compact mechanism where tribals were given autonomy to govern themselves for the preservation and protection of their identity. It is a grass root administration for tribals giving them protection to retain their identity according to their own genius, politically, economically and socially through their elected representatives and nominated members.

### **Origin of the Lai tribe**

The Lai Autonomous District Council occupies a strategic position in Mizoram, in the southernmost corner of the state. It shares a political border with Burma and MADC, the west by CADC, in the north Lunglei Administrative District and in the south by Burma. The Lai Autonomous District Council covers an area of 1,870.75 square kilometres (722.30 sq m) with a population of 1,09,964 (as per Population Census of LADC 2023)<sup>vii</sup>. The entire population belongs to Schedule Tribes. The LADC is the largest in geographical area among the three Autonomous District Councils of Mizoram. It is bounded by Lunglei District in the North, CADC in the West, MADC in the East and Myanmar in the South and North-East, forming two blocks such as Western Block (West of Kaladan River) and the Eastern Block (East of the Kaladan River). It is mountainous region with narrow and deep river valleys, stretching between the rugged ranges, generally ranging from about 3000 to 5000 feet above sea level. It receives heavy rainfall during Monsoon, which amounts to 350 cm (131 inches) as annual rainfall. The summer temperature varies from 20 °C to 30 °C and the winter temperature varies from 8 °C to 18 °C<sup>viii</sup>. Winter is dry and moderate tely cold whereas summer is wet and warm. The highest mountain "Phawngpui or Blue Mountain" and the biggest river 'Chhintuipui or Bawinu or Kaladan" are located in LADC area<sup>x</sup>. The Headquarters of LADC is located at Lawngtlai since inception, Sub-Hqrs at Bualpui 'Ng' and Divisional Headquarters at Diltlang, Bungtlang 'S' Sangau, Vathuampui, Chawngte 'P' and Lungtian.<sup>x</sup>

### **Structure of Lai Autonomous District Council**

The structural organisation of the LADC is broadly categorized into three main organs such as Executive, Legislative and Judiciary. The working of three organs in the form of the Legislative, Executive and Judiciary signify the autonomous powers of the District Council in exercising control over its administered area. It is an interesting feature that each of the three organs is allotted a separate Secretariat/building and each organ in headed by a separate Administrative Head of Department such as Executive Secretary for Executive, Secretary LADC or Legislative Secretary for Legislative and Court President and Recorder for the Judiciary. The post of the Executive Secretary can be compared to the post of Chief Secretary of the State Government or Cabinet Secretary of the Union Government, Legislative Secretary can be compared with the Secretary, Assembly Secretariat of the State Government or Secretary General of Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha of the Union Government. The post of the Court President or Recorder is similar to Chief Justice of the High Court or Supreme Court. The Lai Autonomous District Council perform its functions as per the provision laid down in Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India with 2161 staffs including the Councillors till 2024.<sup>xi</sup>

### **Legislative Department**

As provided in Rule no. 15 of the Mizoram Autonomous District Council (Constitutional and Conduct of Business of the District Councils) Rules, 1974, the post of Secretary, Lai Autonomous District Council was created in 1972.<sup>xii</sup> Accordingly, the appointing authority of the Secretary LADC or Legislative Secretary also lied with the Chairman but not with the Executive Committee as provided in the same Rule. The Rule further says that the Secretary shall not be a member of the District Council. Thus, the Secretary as the Administrative Head shall assist the Chairman and Deputy Chairman in all legislative affairs and dealings of the LADC.<sup>xiii</sup> The Legislative Department is also designed to be independent from the control of the Executive with respect to powers, functions and recruitments. The Legislative Department calls session and makes necessary arrangement for session of the District Council.<sup>xiv</sup> It also receives questions for session from the MDCs, which should be submitted to the Chairman for scrutiny. However, members should submit the question at least 15 days before the session. The Chairman has to see the questions relate to matters which are the concern of the District

Council as provided in the Sixth Schedule. After that, questions, which are approved by the Chairman, would be sent to the concerned Departmental Officers for preparing appropriate answers, which should be clarified by the concerned Executive Member (EM) in the Session. Further, the Legislative Department also sends the bills for approval of the Governor, after being authenticated by the Chairman and also makes arrangements for summoning the session for electing the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and the CEM under the supervision of the concerned Presiding Officer. It also has to record and publish the proceedings of the District Council Sessions. The salaries and allowances of MDCs and pensions of ex-MDCs are also managed and paid by the department.<sup>xv</sup>

The Secretary also prepare a report of each meeting of the LADC and send copies of such reports to the Government of Mizoram through the Secretary, District Council Affairs, The Chief Executive Member, The Deputy Commissioner, Lawngtlai District and all Member of District Council (MDCs) of Lai Autonomous District Council. A copy of such report, when confirmed and signed by the Chairman shall be accepted as the record of the proceedings of the LADC.

The Executive Committee is headed by the Chief Executive Member (CEM) but the administrative responsibility of the Executive Committee lies with the Executive Secretary, who is appointed by the Chief Executive Member (CEM). However, a person to be appointed as Executive Secretary shall not be a Member of the District Council (MDC). In accordance with the provisions laid down in sub-paragraph 2, paragraph 6 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, certain departments was created in the LADC with the approval of the Governor of Mizoram.<sup>xvi</sup> As such, there are now 26 departments in LADC functioning under the supervision of the Executive<sup>xvii</sup>.

General Administration Department (GAD) is the central most departments in the LADC and is under the direct responsibility of the Executive Secretary. The GAD is the main channel of correspondence and communication between the State government and various departments of the LADC. It also looks after the general administration of all Council departments and handles the control and posting of all the LADC employees of the Council. It is the main distributing centre of all Council functions and responsibilities. The Finance and Accounts Department looks after all the account matters and maintains the District Council Fund under the supervision of the Executive Secretary. It also receives revenue/taxes, collected by the departments of the LADC and deposits these in the District Council Fund<sup>xviii</sup>. The grants-in-aid received by the LADC from the Government and some Central financial assistance is also received and deposited in the District Council fund. The Planning and Development Department controls and looks after the development works of all departments of the LADC and also prepares and estimates the planned budget of the District Council. The main works of the Public Works department are preparation of bills for development works and supervision of works. The Department also collects rent and other charges from Lai House at Aizawl, rest houses at Chawngte, Vathuampui, Bungtlang and Vawmbuk. Public Health Engineering Department functions under the technical supervision of an Assistant Engineer (AE) and is administratively under the control of Local Administration Department.<sup>xix</sup> The main functions of PHED are construction of water tank and RCC water tank, harvesting of rain water, repair of water tank and supply of polythene pipes to the public and to take steps for provision of drinking water facilities to the public.

The Transport Department manages control of and maintains all vehicles, owned by the LADC. It also has to collect road tax as per the provision provided in paragraph 8, sub- paragraph 3(d) of the Sixth Schedule the Constitution of India. Sericulture Department started functioning in LADC since 1987.<sup>xx</sup> Workloads of the department include maintenance of sericulture farm, construction of cocoon cages and development of silkworm rearing and other steps for development of sericulture. The Agriculture & Horticulture Department looks after Agricultural as well as Horticulture Development of the LADC area. It looks after the welfare of the farmers and supplies high yielding seeds to them. It also gives financial assistance to owners with paddy fields and provides fertilizers and agricultural tools to the farmers.<sup>xxi</sup> The Rural Development Department controls and looks after the development works of rural areas such as free distribution of rural housing schemes, maintenance of Inter Village Paths (IVP), construction of community halls, village jeepable roads, wells, public latrines, rest sites etc. The Industry Department looks after the industrial activities and industrial development of the LADC area. It also gives specialized training in different fields such as waving, tailoring, shoe-making. The Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department looks after the animal husbandry activities and takes steps for development of piggery, poultry, cow-breeding and buffalo breeding within the LADC area. It also has a dispensary, which is effectively managed and looked after by a trained Inspector. The department distributes medicines and vaccines free of cost for protection of animals from diseases. The Education Department controls and looks after academic programmes, education policy, syllabus pattern and the academic calendars of all schools up to middle school level within the LADC area. The Social Welfare Department undertakes social welfare responsibilities and activities within the LADC area. It also gives financial assistance to old age, physically handicapped, widows, orphans, orphanage homes, philanthropic organization and gives excellent gifts to exceptional NGO and social workers within the LADC area.

The Information & Publicity Department controls and looks after information and publicity activities of LADC. It releases advertisements of different departments of LADC and bears all advertisement charges. As per the provision provided in paragraph 6, sub-paragraph 2 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, a Co-operation department was created in LADC in 1995 by the Governor's order of sub-section 2 of Section 3 of Mizoram Co-operative Societies Act, 1991.<sup>xxii</sup> 245 Societies have been registered under the department since its inception. Its main functions are organization, supervision, inspection, audit, liquidation, assistance and development of the co-operative societies within the LADC area. The Environment & Forest Department is entrusted with the management and control of any forests except the reserved forests within the LADC area as provided in paragraph 3, sub-paragraph 1(6) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.<sup>xxiii</sup> The department also takes steps for protection and preservation of wild life, flora and fauna, forest area and forest products within the LADC area. It also takes steps for creation of an environmental friendly atmosphere such as seasonal plantation, afforestation, roadside avenue and large-scale plantation of trees. Soil and Water Conservation Department is headed by District Council Soil Conservation Officer (DCSCO). For preservation as well as conservation of land, the department has to take steps for irrigation channel, repair of retaining wall and distribution of seedlings to the public for plantation. The Sports and Youth Services Department undertakes programmes for promotion and development of sports within the LADC area. It also campaigns for drug awareness, to involve youths in constructive activities and to inculcate the quality of sportsmanship in the mind of the young people. It conducts coaching for different games such as boxing, football, volleyball etc. The Land Revenue Department controls and looks after the land revenue scheme, allots land and passes to land owners within the LADC area as enshrined in paragraph 3, sub paragraph (1) (a) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.<sup>xxiv</sup> Likewise, it also has to assess and collect land revenue and to levy and collect taxes on profession, trades, callings and employment as provided in paragraph 8 of the same schedule. The Art and Culture Development take steps for promotion of arts and crafts within the LADC area and it takes every possible precaution for development of the Arts and Crafts of the Lai ethnic group. It takes steps for development of traditional music, fine arts, cultural meets, research works and cultural dance. It also maintains the library and museum and allocates funds for publication of books.

The Local Administration Department (LAD) looks after the village administration and sanitation as provided in paragraph 3, sub-paragraph 1 (e) and (f) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India and makes necessary regulations for control of markets within the LADC area as provided in paragraph 6, sub-paragraph (1) of the same schedule.<sup>xxv</sup> The Fishery Department is created as per provisions enshrined in paragraph 6, sub-paragraph (1) of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.<sup>xxvi</sup> The department has taken various steps for development of fisheries in the LADC area and it extends help to the people in the form of money and material.

### **Judiciary**

Judiciary is another important organ, which signifies the autonomous nature of the functioning of the District Council. As provided in paragraph 4, sub-paragraph 4 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, the Lai Autonomous District Council (the erstwhile Pawi Autonomous District Council) had enacted the Pawi Autonomous District Council (Administration of Justice) Rules, 1974 with the approval of the then Lieutenant Governor of Mizoram.<sup>xxvii</sup> Accordingly, three-tier courts, namely, Village Council Court, Intermediate Council Court and District Council Court were created for the trial of suits and cases between the parties all of whom belong to Schedule tribes or tribes within the LADC administered areas<sup>xxviii</sup>. However the Courts have no jurisdiction to suits and cases to which provision as sub-paragraph 1 of Paragraph 5 of the Sixth Schedule to Indian Constitution applies. The erstwhile Pawi District Council Court which is now the Lai Autonomous District Court or LADC Court was established on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1972. It is also a notable feature that an appeal against the judgement of the District Council Court can be preferred only in the High Court.

The Village Council of each village functions as a Village Court and there are 95 Village Councils present in the LADC administered area<sup>xxix</sup>. The Village Council Court comprises of the President of the Village Council Court and a minimum of two other members. The quorum to constitute the sitting of a Village Council Court shall not be less than two members and the Jurisdiction of the Court shall extend to the hearing and trial of suits and cases arising within the territorial limit of the village. However, a Village Council Court shall only try suits and cases in which the parties belong to a Schedule tribe or tribe's resident within its jurisdiction.

(a). Cases of a civil and miscellaneous nature falling within the purview or tribal laws and customs.

(b). Criminal cases falling within the purview of tribal laws and Customs and offences of petty nature such as petty theft and pilfering, mischief and trespass of petty nature, simple assault and hurt and affray of whatever kind, drunkenness or disorderly brawling, public nuisance and simple cases of wrongful restraint. The Village Council Court is not competent to try offences in respect of which the punishment of imprisonment is obligatory under the Indian Penal code. Further, a Village Council Court is not competent to pass a sentence of imprisonment in any criminal cases.

The LADC has two Intermediate District Council Court at Lawngtlai and Bualpui (NG) which were started both in 1977<sup>xxx</sup>. The jurisdictions, of the two Intermediate District Council Courts also extend to the hearings and trial of suits and cases including appeals arising respectively within their block. The two Intermediate Courts are presided over by a Judicial Officer. The Intermediate District Council Court has original Jurisdiction in all suits and cases in which both the parties do not fall within the local jurisdiction of the same Village Council Court but within the area under the jurisdiction of the Intermediate District Council Court and in suits and cases referred to it by a Village Council Court.<sup>xxxi</sup> An Intermediate District Council Court is competent to try all suits and cases arising within its jurisdiction within its jurisdiction other than suits and cases referred in sub-paragraph 1, paragraph 5, of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India unless the Court has been authorized by the Governor to exercise such cases for the trial of a particular class or classes with respect to the said paragraph<sup>xxxii</sup>. Moreover, an Intermediate District Council Court does not have jurisdiction in such suits and cases.

The Lai Autonomous District Council Court or LADC Court is the highest court in the LADC administered area and it consists of three Judicial Officers, one whom is appointed as President and Recorder of the Court by the District Council. Judgement of the Court should be delivered on the basis of majority opinion and any member of the District Council shall not be entitled to hold office as Judicial Officers. The LADC Court may transfer a case to the Intermediate District Council Court if it is satisfied that the offence involved in the case is fit to be taken care by the Intermediate Court. It also may call for an examination of the record of any proceeding of an Intermediate District Council Court or a Village Council Court and may enhance, reduce, cancel or modify any sentence or findings passed by such Court or demand the case for retrial if it appeals to the LADC Court. The LADC Court has applied the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898, Code of Civil Procedure 1908 and customary laws for delivering judgements on certain cases<sup>xxxiii</sup>. But, the Pawi – Lakher Region Hnam Dan or Customary laws of the Pawi – Lakher Region, codified by the Pawi- Lakher Regional Council is still the guiding principle so far as customary law is concerned. An appeal against the judgement of the LADC Court can be laid only in the Gauhati High Court and the limit for filling an appeal is ninety days from the date of order or decision.

The Constitution provides autonomous administration for the tribals of North East India. The working of LADC as a mini-government with three organs such as legislation, executive and judiciary is a unique feature of the Sixth Schedule. In fact, the LADC has also received grant-in-aid annually from the State and the Central Governments, and it also earns its own revenue from various sources. It serves as a good employment ground for people of the area. It undertakes developmental works through various departments like Public Health Engineering (PHE) department, Local Administrative Department (LAD), Agriculture department, Planning & Programme Implementation Department and Public Works Department (PWD). Since LADC is situated in the southern belt of Mizoram, unlike the central part of Mizoram development do not reach the people to the extent that the area is backward in many factors especially in economic and education sphere. The existence of LADC and smooth functioning from the very existence proved that the Lais who inhabited the area were more developed in infrastructure, economy and social sphere. The introduction of Laica in 2014 revives the language of the Lais among the young educated people. Another milestone is the introduction of Adult Education where the adults were taught how to read and write. This boost the literacy rate not only in LADC, but in the whole Mizoram.

The LADC as a grass root level democratic institution is essential for the people, because people still have the sense of democratic participation and the zeal for preservation of their ethnic identity. It has contributed to ethnic consciousness and economic development of the people.

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<sup>ii</sup> Dr. Tariq Mehraj,(2020) Concept of Governance : An Introduction. 1.7 Researchgate.net

<sup>iii</sup> Chakraborty, P., Fifth and Sixth Schedules to the constitution of India, Capital Law house:Delhi, 2005, p.5

<sup>iv</sup> Hansaria, B.L., Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India – A study , Jyoti Printers, Gauhati, 1983, pp 9-10

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<sup>vi</sup> Chakraborty, P., Op. Cit. p 8

<sup>vii</sup> <https://ladc.mizoram.gov.in> retrieved on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2024

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid

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- <sup>xvii</sup> PURA Lai Autonomous District Council Golden Jubilee (1972-2022) Souvenir published by The Lai Autonomous District Council, Golden Jubilee Celebration Executive Committee : Lawngtlai, p 23
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- <sup>xix</sup> PURA Lai Autonomous District Council Golden Jubilee (1972-2022) Souvenir Op Cit pp. 42,43
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- <sup>xxiii</sup> Ibid p. A - 18
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid p. A 316
- <sup>xxv</sup> Ibid p.A- 315
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Ibid p. A-319
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