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## MIZORAM WINE & ALCOHOL REGULATION: A STUDY ON ITS IMPACT ON MIZO SOCIETY AND REVENUE

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### ABSTRACT

*Government changes and the policy towards the regulation of wine and alcohol also undergo a change in Mizoram. Prior to the British annexation of India, Mizo people had a unique style of living before the influence of English Christian missionaries in 1894. One characteristic that set the community apart was the belief that alcohol, or rice beer, was an essential component of life and was offered at nearly all significant events, including weddings, the year's harvest, festivals, successful hunting, and other social gatherings. With the impact of Christianity, most of the culture was transformed, including the way of dressing, eating, and consuming liquor. Making rice wine was considered anti-Christian behaviour and unholy. Many protests were made to prohibit the sale of liquor in Mizoram, which was supported by the most influential pressure groups like YMA and the churches. The Mizoram Liquor (Total Prohibition) Act, 1995, was a pass that came into force in 1997 and made the state a totally dry state. With the emergence of the Congress ministry, the Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition & Control) Act, 2014, was implemented in 2015. This act makes provision for selling and manufacturing of liquor in the state, but when the Mizo National Front won the election in 2018, the Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition) Act, 2019 replaced the previous act of 2014, and Mizoram became a dry state again. The 2019 Act allows the sale of grape wines that are manufactured and harvested purely in Mizoram with a low alcohol content, ranging from 10% to 14%. The sale of grape wine contributes a decent amount of government revenue to the state. In the present scenario, the state of Mizoram needs a*

*systematic procedure for the sale of liquor with a more stringent punishment for the drunkards who have done activities against the limits of the act. Keeping in mind the contribution to government revenue made by the regulation of sales of liquor, the lawmaker needs to amend the law for orderly execution.*

**Keywords:** *Christianity, Dry State, Grape Wine, Liquor, Revenue.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Mizo are a close-knit society with its own unique culture, a society with indigenous religious practices and superstitious beliefs. In the earlier society of Mizo's, it was assumed that all the sicknesses were the mischievous work of the demons, whose exact nature they could not define. So, in order to cure the sickness, they had to make sacrifices to the demon<sup>1</sup>. Before the Christianization by the British Missionaries, they had a tradition of serving rice wine on important occasions, and each family had their own style of making it. In the primitive Mizo lifestyle, zu (rice wine) played a very important role in society. Mizo used zu (rice wine) for sacrifice, marriage, birth, death, festivals, celebrations of successful hunting and harvesting, and other important ceremonies of the society. In 1894, two English missionaries, J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge, landed in Lushai Hills (the present Mizoram) and began their missionary works by imparting education, formulating the alphabet, and preaching Christianity to the people. Slowly, the Mizo were wholly converted to Christianity and thereby had faith in Jesus. The first two young men, named Khuma and Khara, became the first fully converted Christians among the Mizos on July 25, 1899. The first congregational worship started in Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, while the first church was started in Lunglei District.

Today, the work of the Christian missionaries changes the Mizo society, and now Mizoram has the highest percentage of Christians among all the states in India and ranks second in literacy rate, but at the same time, the culture undergoes an enormous change. Though many of the customs and traditions are adhered to by the people, much has undergone change in society, like the making and consumption of "zu" in the family and the society at large, which was among the abandonments of the tradition of the people. Today, manufacturing and consuming "zu" has become a prohibited practice in society and is totally prohibited by the government through the enactment of laws. The prohibition of Zu in Mizo society was no doubt the result of British colonialism and the efforts of the missionaries, but some historians believed that it was not the missionaries that actually prohibited Zu; rather, it was the early Mizo Christians that prohibited

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<sup>1</sup> T. Lalremruata, *Impact of Colonialism on the Traditional Beliefs and Practices of the Mizo*, 5(1) MIZORAM UNIV. J. HUMAN. & SOC. SCI. (2019)

the drinking of Zu<sup>2</sup>. It was not only Christianity that influenced the people not to consume "Zu," even large NGO like MHIP, YMA, etc. were against it and suggested its prohibition to the government. Zu, which was one of the most integral parts of Mizo society, became a prohibited practice. Apart from "zu," missionaries changed the belief of the Mizo, which was based on superstition and blind faith in Christianity, and the fear of evil spirits and demons was replaced by inner peace and faith in Jesus Christ.

After the recognition of Mizoram as a Union Territory, the Legislative Assembly passed the Mizoram Excise Act, 1973<sup>3</sup>, which was implemented along with the rules on October 10, 1984. Under the Mizoram Excise Act, 1973, and the Mizoram Excise Rules, 1983, a person who manufactures, carries, or sells liquor can be punished with two (2) years of imprisonment and a fine, but there is no punishment for consumption of it. When the state of Mizoram achieved its statehood on February 20, 1987, the need to have stricter control over liquor was felt, and the Mizoram Liquor (Total Prohibition) Act, 1995, was passed and enforced from 1997 to 2015, and the Excise Department became the Nodal Department for the execution of the Act. As a result of this, the Excise and Narcotic Department was enlarged and spread to other districts like Champhai, Kolasib, and Serchhip, in addition to the existing ones in Aizawl, Lunglei, and Saiha District. This act completely outlawed alcohol in the state. After the Congress party won the election, the Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition and Control) Act, 2014 went into effect and allowed any licence holder to sell liquor against their monthly quota (i.e., anyone who turned 21 years old could apply for a license). Later, the Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition) Act, 2019 was passed in the Assembly on March 20, 2019, by the MNF Government. It came into force on May 28, 2019. According to the act, it is illegal to transport these products out of the state. As permitted by Section 2 of the said act, the Mizoram Excise and Narcotics (Wine) Rules, 2008 were enacted to regulate grape wine, mostly to regulate Champhai Grape Grower Association, Hnahlan Grape Grower Association, and later Blu Gem Winery, Sesawng, and RK Winery, Chite, obtain winery licences from the concerned department.

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<sup>2</sup> Lalhriatpuii Fanai & Smitha AG, *Socio-Political History of Alcohol Use In Mizoram: A Rapid Review*, 6(10) J. POSITIVE SCH. PSYCHOLOGY 2705, 2707 (2022)

<sup>3</sup> Mizoram Excise Act, 1973, No. 7, Acts of Mizoram State Legislature, 1974 (India)

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## 2. THE MIZORAM LIQUOR (TOTAL PROHIBITION) ACT, 1995

Firstly, the manufacturer, seller, and transporter are liable to a punishment of 5 years imprisonment and a fine up to Rs. 10000/-; the minimum punishment for the same is 3 months imprisonment with a fine of Rs. 1000/-.

Secondly, for the first time in the history of Mizoram, this act made the person who consumed liquor liable for punishment of imprisonment for 24 hours to 1 month with a maximum fine of Rs. 1000 and a minimum fine of Rs. 500. And if the person consumes in a public place, he will be liable for imprisonment of 7 days and up to 3 months and a fine of Rs. 500 to Rs. 1000.

Thirdly, liquor licences are permissible exclusively for the security forces in all districts, and licences can also be obtained by doctors' prescription for medical purposes.

Fourthly, 57 people are believed to have died from drinking spurious liquor between 1997 and September 15, 2014, according to the Excise and Narcotic Department (END); however, this number is likely far higher. Additionally, under total prohibition, there was a sharp increase in the number of cases of alcohol-related liver disease and mental referrals for alcoholism, according to the END study. While local alcohol vendors made sure that the majority of the money remained in circulation inside the state, opponents of the repeal of prohibition claim that it will cause more money to leave Mizoram.

## 3. THE MIZORAM LIQUOR (PROHIBITION & CONTROL) ACT, 2014

The MLPC Act of 2014<sup>4</sup> replaces the Mizoram Liquor Total Prohibition Act of 1995<sup>5</sup>, which has been in force in the state for the past 17 years. The Congress government began the process of revising the Mizoram Liquor (Total Prohibition) Act, 1995, to enable the sale of a predetermined monthly quota of liquor to permit holders after winning the state elections in 2013. According to the new law, a permit holder (the licence costs Rs 500 annually) is allowed to purchase six 750-

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<sup>4</sup> Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition and Control) Act, 2014, No. 8, Acts of Mizoram State Legislature, 2014 (India)

<sup>5</sup> Mizoram Liquor Total Prohibition Act, 1995, No. 10, Acts of Mizoram State Legislature, 1995 (India)

ml bottles of liquor and ten bottles of beer and wine each month. Wine shops were opened under the MLPC Act 2014 on March 16, 2015, for the first time after 28 years, as partial prohibition had been in place since 1987 and the dry law had been in force for 18 years. After obtaining a liquor card from the nodal department, everyone over 21 is permitted to consume and buy alcohol. The first two wine shops opened on March 16, 2015, and are both located in the main market. One is located in the only mall in Mizoram called Millennium Centre, and the other is located at New Market, which are both government properties. There are a total of 16 outlets all over the state, and the END<sup>6</sup> has issued more than 52,000 liquor cards at an annual fee of Rs 500. Three state-owned corporations have been chosen to operate retail outlets.

#### **4. THE MIZORAM LIQUOR (PROHIBITION) ACT, 2019**

Some of the few changes and key points of the MLP Act, 2019 are as follows:<sup>7</sup>

- Firstly, the Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition) Act, 2019 came into existence with effect from May 28th, 2019; total prohibition was enforced; and Mizoram became a "completely dry state" again from the date of its implementation. Under the new act, all liquor and its related activities, such as production, import, sales, consumption, etc., are totally prohibited. According to the state government, the move would cause a loss of Rs 700 million every year to the state exchequer.
- Secondly, the new law states that consuming alcohol might result in a six-month jail sentence or that the court may compel the offender to perform community service for a maximum of five working days. Additionally, purchasing, selling, or possessing alcohol could result in a five-year prison sentence.
- Thirdly, in addition to the above-mentioned penalties, driving while intoxicated or creating annoyance in public areas while intoxicated carries a maximum two-year prison sentence or a minimum two-day community service requirement.

<sup>6</sup> Excise & Narcotics Department

<sup>7</sup> Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition) Act, 2019, No. 8, Acts of Mizoram State Legislature, 2019 (India)

- Fourthly, liquor import, export, sale, purchase, and manufacturing would carry corresponding penalties, with minor quantities carrying a maximum sentence of six months in jail, intermediate quantities carrying a maximum sentence of two years in jail, and commercial quantities carrying a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

## 5. YEAR WISE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE EXCISE DEPARTMENT IN TERMS OF MONEY

The prohibition and non-prohibited periods of state revenue through the excise department, as shown below, show the impact on revenue. As a Christian state, the prohibition of liquor may seem to be very holistic and a sign of commitment in Christian belief, but states like Mizoram, without any permanent and reliable revenue, need to rethink a more systematic way of selling wine or liquor in the state to improve and secure government revenue. There are a few other states that totally prohibit the selling of liquor in India, along with Mizoram, like the state of Gujarat, which is the only Indian state that imposes the death penalty for the manufacture and sale of homemade liquor that result in fatalities. In 2015, the then-chief minister Nitish Kumar outlawed the sale of alcohol throughout the state, turning Bihar into a dry state. The Nagaland Liquor Total Prohibition Act (NLTP), which forbade the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages, turned Nagaland into a dry state in 1989. Lakshadweep is the only Union Territory in India to ban the sale and consumption of alcohol except for the island of Bangaram, which is an inhabited island but has a bar. Alcohol is banned in the rest of Lakshadweep.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
1.Foreign liquor and spirit	Rs.190,28,618/-	Rs.174,01,913/-	Rs.162,93,182/-	Rs.193,22,214/-	Rs. 158,60,777/-
2. Fines & Confiscation	Rs. 33,71,740/-	Rs. 51,70,490/-	Rs. 115,39,837/-	Rs. 110,77,835/-	Rs. 137,13,827/-
3.Other	Rs. 291,000/-	Rs. 3,00,343/-		Rs. 450,730/-	Rs. 1,83,600/-

receipt	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1.Foreign liquor and spirit	Rs.4054,18,962/- Rs. 56,18,999/-	Rs. 7156,03,644/-	Rs. 6289,31,799/-	Rs.6879,00,749/- Rs.1, 87,197.00/-	Rs.1561,29,492/- Rs. 2,40,897/-
2. Fines & Confiscation	Rs. 304,61,314/-	Rs. 7,89,464/-	Rs. 2,22,445/-	Rs. 148.43,571/-	Rs. 11,03,976/-
3. Other receipt		Rs. 122,59,513/-	Rs. 208,38,799/-		
	2020	2021			
1.Foreign liquor and spirit	Rs. 92,56,326/- Rs. 2,27,150/-	Rs. 86,03,753 Rs. 8,83,050			
2. Fines & Confiscation	Rs. 9,84,683/-	Rs. 1,64,050			
3. Other receipt					

## 6. SPURIOUS LIQUOR AND LIQUOR RELATED DEATH IN MIZORAM

The actual condition of the impact of liquor can be seen from the data below, as shown by the Excise and Narcotic Department, Mizoram. Spurious liquor has caused a number of deaths in Mizoram, contrary to the history of Mizoram. In the primitive Mizo society, wine is served on many occasions, and spurious liquor is not found.

Year	Number of Death due to consumption of Spurious Liquor	Number of deaths in Mizoram as per Economic



		<b>and Statistic Department Data</b>
2010	NIL	
2011	NIL	5,484
2012	NIL	6,503
2013	2	6,126
2014	9	6,444
2015	9	6,440
2016	23	6,422
2017	57	6,191
2018	6	5,525
2019	NIL	6,606
2020	NIL	6,703
2021	NIL	8,101

## **7. MIZORAM GRAPE WINERY AND ITS PRESENT CONDITION**

Mizoram has a grape-growing district purely for winery and not for table fruits, a variety named Isabella, or, in the other name, Bangalore Blue Variety. The eastern region of Mizoram cultivates and runs a grape winery, and Champhai and Hnahlan Grape Winery Ltd. was established in 2007

to be one of the largest grape wine manufacturers in Mizoram<sup>8</sup>. They have a production unit in Champhai and another in Hnahlan. The famous wine "Zawlaidi," to be translated as "love potion," was launched in 2010, after 13 years of prohibiting grape cultivators from producing wine. The local wine has an alcohol content of just 11%, which does not intoxicate consumers that much. The state produced around 20,800 metric tonnes of grapes in 2012–13, and in 2021, 750 families in the area depend solely on grape growing and winery, while the Indian-made foreign liquor industry in Northeast India is worth Rs 1400 crore, selling 7 million cases annually and registering year-on-year growth of 7 to 8%<sup>9</sup>. The winery is operated under the supervision of the government of Mizoram, and under current regulations, production must be consumed within Mizoram.

One of the important things that cannot be ignored is that the grape growing in the said district was done under the initiatives of the government programme MIP (Mizoram Intodelh pawl) by the MNF ministry, but now the same ministry that led the growing of grapes has a large intention of lifting the law that allows the manufacture and sale of grape wine in the state, which will result in a disaster for the entire region. A very devastating condition is being faced by the destitute grape growers in the region as there is an attempt to amend the law that banned grape wine in that state recently, while 80% of the people of Hnahlan and Champhai village have used grape growing as their means of living by occupying 3000 acres of land. As per the local newspaper Vanglaini, the Champhai Grape Grower Association had a sale value of Rs. 17, 06, 04,323/- during the years 2011 to 2021, and the excise paid by the vendor of the grape wine during the years 2012–2013 to 2015–2016 was Rs. 13, 62,539/-. At present, Mizoram grapes are manufactured under three brand names, with "Zawlaidi" being the first to be manufactured, followed by "Champhai Wine" and "Isabella," which are in high demand in the state.

The proposed amendment to the Mizoram Liquor Prohibition Rules was discussed by the MLP Rules Drafting Study Committee headed by the Deputy Chief Minister, who got the support of the YMA and churches in the state as they felt that the alcohol content in the grape wine was up

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<sup>8</sup> Alex Lalramdinthara & Dipak Kumar Bose, *Knowledge of Farmers towards Adoption of Grape Cultivation for Wine Making in Champhai District, Mizoram*, 41(9) ASIAN J. OF AGRIC. EXTENSION, ECON. & SOCIOLOGY 647, 649 (2023)

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 650

to 14%, but at the same time, a large number of the general population and the opposition party ZPM were against the proposal. Many argue that grape wine is considered a “food item” as per the Food Safety and Standard Authority of India, and wineries are food processing units as per the FSSAI. At the same time, the Mizoram winery became a little more popular in the neighbouring state, and the Radiant manufacturer in Guwahati purchased a huge amount every year for Rs. 65 per litre. A short while ago, in the project Focus: The North East Acceleration organised by the Japan International Cooperative Agency and IIM Kolkata, the Mizoram winery was one of the selected projects among the 600 projects submitted.

'Shaw Wallace', one of India's leading producers of wine, visited the state's District of Hnahlan region in 2021 with the belief that the grape varieties produced in the area are of the best quality in the country and have the potential to turn the place into the Bordeaux Province of France, known worldwide for its grapes, used for commercial wine manufacturing. So, if the cultivation, storage, and marketing system has been improved by the nodal department, the grape wine of the area can have a future in an international market. The manufacturing of grape wine is one of the futures of the state and can upgrade the economic condition of the people. It can also be the only exportable item for the state in the current situation.

On August 31st, 2022, Mizoram decided to allow the sale of wine made from locally grown grapes in the markets across the state, though it was suddenly prohibited in May 2022 for a certain period. The decision to prohibit the sale of local wine followed large-scale protests after the State Excise and Narcotics Department seized bottles of locally-made grape wine worth Rs. 22 lakhs in May 2022, leading to the death of a woman involved in the wine business. So, the cabinet meeting headed by the Chief Minister of Mizoram permitted the sale of wine made locally from local grapes.

## **8. CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS**

The development and transition of alcohol and its related regulations show that the political policy of the government changes the revenue receipt of the state from time to time. Good and systematic policy in the need of the hour to increase the government revenue receipt from liquor and alcohol-related products. Though the state is among the few Indian states to impose a total

prohibition of liquor, the reason can be anything, like the influence of Christianity and NGO, etc. There is a chance that, instead of imposing a strict prohibition, having a more stringent punishment for drunken driving, drinking in public places, defective manufacture, etc. can make the law workable. It is clear from the data of the Health Department of Mizoram that alcohol-related deaths are not much reduced due to the total prohibition of wine and alcohol within the state.

The systematic approach and orderly sale of liquor in the state can be a cure for the alcoholism that frightens many families. The excise revenue collected during the period of 2015 to 2019 is the highest as it is the period of implementation of the Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition and Control) Act, 2014. Though the pressure from the churches and NGO is a big issue for the ruling political party, the state needs secure and permanent revenue to uplift the revenue of the government<sup>10</sup>. At one point, it is no doubt true that prohibition and control of wine in the state do not prove the dearth of liquor. Many people find ways and means to sell undercurrent without proper guidelines, and at the same time, people who consume still continue to do so.

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It can be presumed that moving backward to the tradition was the need of the state when liquor or wine was simply used moderately and positively in the village. The law and order were regulated smoothly by the king and elders of the society when rice beer was manufactured in most of the house. Mizo is already far away from their tradition and culture in regards to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and costume. The transition took place in such a huge way that, at some point, it is time to trace back and stick with some of the culture through moderate and systematic consumption of wine. The orderly implementation of the law to regulate liquor will bring the mizo closer to the custom; at the same time, it will elevate the revenue of the government. Though certain steps have been taken to lift the manufacture and sale of grape wine in the state, the BCM, one of the largest religious denominations, used the grape wine of Mizoram as their sacrament in the church in 2016, which is one of the sacred church activities of Christians.

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<sup>10</sup> J. MEIRION LLOYD, HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN MIZORAM (Synod Publication Board, 1991)

The other North East states successfully run wine marketing, like Nagaland, which manufactures organic dragon fruit wine with a prize of Rs. 1,100 per bottle; Arunachal Pradesh, which sells a wine made from kiwi; and Meghalaya, where home-made wine is very popular with a licence from the Deputy Commissioner. Why not apply the same system to enhance government revenue? Not only this, but grape wine manufacturing and harvesting generate a number of permanent jobs.

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