



# From Grouping To Permanence: Education, Social Mobility, And Settlement Transformation In Mizoram

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**Abstract:** The grouping of villages in Mizoram during the insurgency period remains one of the most significant and transformative developments in the social history of the region. Introduced by the Indian state as a counterinsurgency strategy after the outbreak of the Mizo National Front (MNF) movement in 1966, grouping involved the forced relocation of dispersed rural populations into centralized settlements. The primary objective of this policy was to isolate insurgents from civilian support networks and to bring rural populations under closer military and administrative surveillance. The paper examines how grouped settlements gradually evolved into centres of educational expansion, infrastructural concentration, and bureaucratic accessibility. Schools, churches, dispensaries, roads, post offices, and administrative institutions became concentrated within grouped villages, creating new opportunities that were previously unavailable in many dispersed hill settlements. Over time, these grouped centres emerged not merely as temporary sites of displacement but as socially and economically advantageous spaces that reshaped aspirations, livelihoods, and settlement patterns.

Drawing upon oral narratives collected from respondents in Lungdai, Khawzawl, Ruallung, Hnahthial, and Kawrtethawveng, the study demonstrates how education became one of the most important long-term consequences of grouping. The legacy of grouping continues to shape contemporary patterns of settlement, education, mobility, and institutional development in Mizoram. By examining the intersection between displacement and educational transformation, this paper contributes to broader debates on forced relocation, modernization, state formation, and social change in Northeast India.

**Keywords:** Grouping of villages, Mizoram, education, social mobility, displacement, militarization.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The grouping of villages in Mizoram during the insurgency period represented one of the most profound transformations in the political, social, and cultural history of the region. Beginning after the outbreak of insurgency in 1966, the Indian state initiated a policy of regrouping dispersed rural settlements into centralized villages as part of a broader counterinsurgency strategy. The primary objective of grouping was to separate civilians from insurgent networks by bringing populations under closer military and administrative surveillance. Villagers living in scattered hill settlements were relocated into compact grouped centres where movement, agricultural activity, and everyday social life could be more effectively monitored and regulated. The policy fundamentally altered the structure of Mizo society. Entire villages were uprooted, homes were abandoned or burned, and traditional patterns of settlement were disrupted. Communities that had previously depended upon jhum cultivation and localized kinship networks suddenly found themselves living within densely populated settlements under military supervision. Curfews, restricted movement, permit systems, and surveillance became part of everyday life. The grouping process therefore represented not only a military strategy but also a major social

reorganization imposed upon rural populations. Despite the violence and coercion associated with grouping, the policy also unintentionally produced long-term institutional transformations. As populations became concentrated within grouped centres, schools, churches, dispensaries, roads, post offices, and administrative offices were increasingly established within these settlements. Over time, grouped villages evolved into centres of education, governance, and infrastructural development. Educational institutions became particularly significant because they transformed patterns of literacy, aspiration, and social mobility within Mizo society.

This paper argues that education became one of the most important unintended consequences of grouping. The concentration of schools and institutional facilities within grouped settlements gradually reshaped social aspirations and transformed the basis of authority and prestige. Literacy and educational qualifications increasingly became pathways toward salaried employment, bureaucratic interaction, and upward mobility. Younger generations adapted to these opportunities more rapidly than older generations, many of whom remained emotionally attached to ancestral villages and agrarian life.

The paper therefore examines two central questions:

1. How did grouping transform educational mobility within Mizo society?
  2. Why did many villagers continue to remain in grouped centres after the grouping period ended?
- By addressing these questions, the study contributes to broader discussions on displacement, modernization, institutional transformation, and social mobility in Northeast India. Rather than viewing grouping solely as a mechanism of militarization and suffering, the paper demonstrates how forced relocation also unintentionally accelerated educational expansion and institutional centralization within Mizo society.

### **Origin of the Grouping of Villages in Mizoram**

The grouping of villages in Mizoram emerged within the broader political context of the Mizo insurgency and the tensions that followed the Mautam famine of 1959. The famine, caused by cyclical bamboo flowering that led to widespread rat infestation and crop destruction, created severe economic hardship throughout the region. Many Mizos perceived the response of the Indian government as inadequate and neglectful, leading to growing dissatisfaction and political unrest. The Mizo National Famine Front, initially formed to coordinate relief efforts during the famine, gradually evolved into the Mizo National Front (MNF), which later demanded independence from India. In 1966, the MNF launched an armed uprising against the Indian state. In response, the government introduced a series of counterinsurgency measures aimed at weakening insurgent support networks.

One of the most significant measures was the grouping of villages. Under this policy, dispersed settlements were forcibly relocated into larger centralized villages situated near roads and administrative centres. Villagers were often required to abandon ancestral homes, agricultural lands, and jhum fields. In many cases, villages were burned to prevent people from returning. The grouped villages operated under conditions of militarization and surveillance. Curfews restricted movement, permits were required for travel, and military patrols became common features of everyday life. Agricultural activities were heavily regulated because villagers could only travel to their fields during specified hours. These restrictions disrupted traditional economic systems and created widespread insecurity. However, grouping also unintentionally facilitated infrastructural concentration. Because populations were centralized, the government increasingly established schools, dispensaries, roads, churches, and administrative offices within grouped settlements. Over time, these grouped villages evolved into important centres of institutional life. What initially began as temporary sites of displacement gradually became permanent settlements with expanding educational and administrative significance.

### **Review of Literature**

Existing scholarship on the grouping of villages in Mizoram has primarily focused on militarization, insurgency, surveillance, and state violence. Scholars examining Northeast India have frequently interpreted grouping as a mechanism of territorial control designed to weaken insurgent movements by disrupting civilian support systems. While these studies provide important insights into the political dimensions of grouping, less attention has been given to its long-term sociological consequences, particularly in relation to education, institutional transformation, and social mobility.

(Bourdieu, 1986) concept of cultural capital provides an important framework for understanding educational mobility within grouped villages. Bourdieu argues that education functions as a form of symbolic capital that enables individuals to acquire legitimacy, prestige, and institutional authority. In grouped settlements, literacy and educational qualifications gradually became more important than

traditional forms of authority rooted in agriculture and customary leadership. Individuals capable of reading, writing permits, or interacting with bureaucratic institutions acquired new forms of influence within village society.

(Foucault, 1977) analysis of disciplinary institutions is also highly relevant. Schools, churches, military camps, and administrative offices became institutions through which discipline and surveillance entered everyday life. Grouped villages therefore functioned not only as military spaces but also as spaces where governance operated through institutional regulation and normalization.

(Weber, 1978) bureaucratic rationalization helps explain the expansion of literacy-based administration within grouped settlements. Weber argues that modernization increasingly depends upon bureaucratic systems requiring literacy, technical competence, and formal administration. The grouped villages reflected this transition as education became increasingly necessary for interacting with state institutions and accessing employment opportunities.

(Das, 2007) work on violence and everyday life is useful in understanding how ordinary institutions continued functioning amidst fear and militarization. Schools and churches operated within environments shaped by curfews, surveillance, and insecurity, illustrating how violence became embedded within everyday social existence rather than remaining separate from it.

(Cernea, 1997) Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction model further explains the consequences of forced displacement. Cernea identifies risks such as landlessness, food insecurity, marginalization, and social disarticulation as common outcomes of relocation. These conditions were clearly experienced by many grouped villagers who lost access to agricultural lands and traditional livelihoods.

(Mannheim, 1952) theory of generations helps explain differing responses to grouping between older and younger villagers. Older generations often remained emotionally attached to ancestral villages and agrarian life, while younger generations adapted more rapidly to educational opportunities and institutional life within grouped centres.

(Lefebvre, 1991) concept of the production of space also contributes significantly to this analysis. Grouped villages were politically produced spaces designed for surveillance and administrative control. Yet over time, these same spaces were socially reproduced as centres of education, mobility, and institutional opportunity.

## **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative methodology based primarily on oral history interviews and thematic sociological analysis. The research was conducted among respondents from grouped villages such as Lungdai, Khawzawl, Ruallung, Hnahthial, Thenzawl and Kawrtethawveng. Elderly villagers, former Village Council members, teachers, church workers, and individuals who directly experienced grouping were interviewed in order to understand both the historical and sociological dimensions of settlement transformation. Focus Group Discussion was employed to collect narratives concerning displacement, education, mobility, institutional development, and everyday life within grouped settlements. Oral history methodology was particularly important because many aspects of grouping remain absent from official records and state documentation. Personal narratives therefore provide valuable insight into lived experiences, emotions, memories, and interpretations of social change.

The study draws upon (Portelli, 1991) approach to oral history, which emphasizes that oral narratives reveal not only factual events but also meanings and social interpretations. Respondents' memories were therefore analysed sociologically rather than treated solely as objective historical records.

Thematic analysis was employed to organize narratives under themes such as educational mobility, institutional concentration, changing aspirations, settlement permanence, generational transformation, and bureaucratic integration. The study also compares the experiences of different generations in order to understand how grouping reshaped social aspirations over time.

## **Education and the Transformation of Social Mobility**

Before grouping, most villages in Mizoram functioned within relatively isolated agrarian systems dependent upon jhum cultivation. Educational access remained uneven because of geographical isolation, difficult terrain, and dispersed settlement patterns. Schools were limited in number, and many villages lacked adequate institutional facilities.

Mr. A, a respondent from Lungdai narrated:

***“Za a sawmkua (90) hi chu lo nei mi kan ni ang.”***

***“90 percent were agriculturalist before grouping.”***

This narration demonstrates the dominance of agrarian life before centralized settlements transformed institutional access. Social prestige was primarily associated with agricultural productivity, clan authority, and customary leadership. Economic life revolved around cultivation, and mobility opportunities outside agriculture remained limited. However, grouped settlements gradually became centres of educational expansion. Mr. B, a respondent from Khawzawl narrated:

***“Primary school kha chu a awm sa a, middle school leh high school kha a hnuah khawm lai leh khawm hnu khan a rawn chang tlung chho ta a ni Khawzawl ah chuan.”***

***“Primary school was there but slowly middle and high school began to developed with the grouping in Khawzawl.”***

Another respondent who is from Thenzawl explained:

***“Sawrkar khan hmun pawimawh a tihna chhan chu post office, dispensary leh sikul te kha a lo awm ve vang a ni.”***

***“The Government proclaimed it an important place because of the establishment of post offices, dispensaries, and schools.”***

These narrations reveal how grouped villages increasingly evolved into institutional and administrative centres. Roads and communication networks improved accessibility, while schools enabled literacy and educational advancement. This transformation reflects (Weber, 1978) argument that modernization expands bureaucratic and educational institutions that reorganize social life through rationalized systems of administration. The grouped villages unintentionally created conditions for educational mobility even within environments shaped by militarization and fear. Mr. T from Lungdai narrated:

***“Khawkhawm tir kha chuan sikul kha kan kal thei lo a, curfew leh chhuah phalloh te kha a tam a. Mahse hun a han rei ta a, sikul te pawh kha a chang chuan kal kha kan phal ta a. Khawkhawm hnuah phei kha chuan a chang tlung ve ta zel a ni.”***

***“At the initial stage of the grouping, schools were all closed. However, as time passed, they began to allow schooling in the grouping centres. It began to be more developed after the grouping.”***

This narration reflects the contradictory nature of grouped society where militarization and educational expansion coexisted simultaneously. Schools functioned amidst curfews, surveillance, and insecurity. (Das, 2007) argues that violence becomes absorbed into everyday institutions rather than existing separately from ordinary life. In grouped villages, education continued despite fear and uncertainty. Education increasingly emerged as a new basis of social mobility within grouped settlements. A respondent from Khawzawl narrated:

***“Permit ziah leh chhiar thiam kha an tam vak lo a, a awm chhun te kha chu min hmang tangkai em a, keimah pawh kha khawm lai kha chuan min hmang tangkai em a ni.”***

***“There were not many persons who know how to read and write. Those who know were very useful during the grouping. Even I proved to be very useful.”***

This narration demonstrates how literacy itself became a source of authority and mobility. Individuals capable of reading, writing permits, or communicating with officials acquired influence within grouped society. Literacy enabled interaction with bureaucratic systems and opened pathways toward government employment and institutional authority. Over time, educational qualifications became associated with

modernity, prestige, and upward mobility. Younger generations increasingly pursued schooling as a means of escaping agricultural hardship and accessing salaried employment. Teachers, clerks, church workers, and government employees gradually emerged as respected figures within village society. The concentration of schools within grouped centres also transformed gender roles and family aspirations. Parents increasingly encouraged children to pursue education because literacy was now linked to economic security and social advancement. Education therefore became not merely an institutional activity but a broader cultural aspiration shaping the future direction of Mizo society.

### **Reasons to why some villagers stayed in the grouping centres after the grouping period**

Although grouping formally ended, many villagers chose not to return permanently to their ancestral settlements. One of the most important reasons was the concentration of educational and institutional opportunities within grouped centres. Respondents repeatedly emphasized the presence of schools, roads, dispensaries, churches, markets, and administrative facilities within grouped villages. These institutions provided advantages unavailable in many original settlements. Returning to remote ancestral villages often meant losing access to education, healthcare, transportation, and employment opportunities.

A respondent from Lungdai directly associated reverse migration with the “lack of productive lands.” This demonstrates that although some villagers returned because of emotional attachment to ancestral villages, many others remained because grouped centres offered better infrastructural and institutional conditions. A respondent from Lungmuat village which was grouped in Lungdai narrated:

*“Lungdai kan awm hnu kha chuan lehkha zir pawimawh zia kha kan hre ta a, kan khua ai kha chuan Lungdai ah khan cham hlen kha kan duh ta a ni. Hei hi midang ah pawh a ni tho a ni. A let ve lo ho kha chu Lungdai a kan cham na chhan chu zirna kha a ni ber a ni.”*

*“Once we were shifted to Lungdai, we start to understand the importance of education. We want to permanently settle in Lungdai rather than move back to our ancestral village. This is the same with most of the permanent settlers in Lungdai.”*

Grouped settlements also transformed aspirations and lifestyles. Younger generations increasingly associated education with salaried employment, urban mobility, and professional advancement. Government jobs, teaching positions, and clerical work became desirable alternatives to agriculture. (Mannheim, 1952) theory of generational consciousness helps explain why younger villagers adapted more rapidly to grouped society than older generations.

Economic considerations also influenced settlement permanence. Roads and markets within grouped villages improved trade and accessibility. Administrative offices created employment opportunities, while proximity to transportation networks facilitated interaction with towns and urban centres. Over time, grouped villages became integrated into broader regional economies. (Lefebvre, 1991) theory of spatial production helps explain this transformation. The grouped villages were initially created as militarized spaces of control, yet over time they became socially reproduced as normalized centres of opportunity, education, and institutional life. The meaning of grouped space therefore changed historically from coercive settlement to permanent social centre.

### **Conclusion**

The grouping of villages in Mizoram produced far-reaching educational, social, economic, and institutional transformations that extended far beyond the immediate objectives of counterinsurgency. Although grouping originated through militarization, displacement, surveillance, and coercion, it unintentionally accelerated processes of institutional concentration and social modernization within Mizo society. One of the most significant consequences of grouping was the expansion of educational access. The concentration of schools within grouped settlements transformed literacy patterns and created new opportunities for social mobility. Education gradually emerged as a major source of prestige and authority, challenging older forms of status rooted in agriculture, clan hierarchy, and customary leadership. Literacy enabled interaction with bureaucratic institutions, access to salaried employment, and participation in expanding administrative systems. The grouped villages therefore became spaces where violence and modernization coexisted simultaneously. Military surveillance, curfews, and fear shaped everyday life, yet schools, churches, and administrative institutions continued functioning within these same environments. This contradiction reveals the complex nature of grouping as both a mechanism of control and a catalyst for institutional transformation.

The study also demonstrates that grouped settlements gradually evolved into permanent centres of social and economic life. Roads, dispensaries, schools, churches, and markets created infrastructural advantages that many ancestral villages lacked. Younger generations increasingly viewed grouped centres as spaces of opportunity and advancement. As aspirations shifted toward education and salaried employment, returning permanently to remote agrarian settlements became less attractive. Generational differences played an important role in shaping responses to grouping. Older villagers often retained emotional attachment to ancestral lands and traditional agricultural life, while younger generations adapted more readily to institutional and educational opportunities within grouped centres. Over time, these differing aspirations contributed to the permanence of grouped settlements.

The findings of this study suggest that forced displacement can produce unintended forms of social transformation that extend beyond immediate political objectives. In Mizoram, grouping not only disrupted traditional settlement patterns but also accelerated the transition from a dispersed agrarian society toward a more centralized, education-oriented, and bureaucratically integrated social order. The legacy of grouping continues to shape contemporary Mizoram. Many present-day towns and administrative centres originated as grouped settlements during the insurgency period. Educational institutions established during that era contributed significantly to rising literacy and expanding professional opportunities. Patterns of mobility, settlement, and institutional life in contemporary Mizoram therefore cannot be fully understood without examining the historical impact of grouping.

Ultimately, the grouping of villages represents a deeply paradoxical chapter in Mizo history. It was simultaneously a period of suffering, displacement, and militarization, as well as a period that unintentionally laid the foundations for educational expansion, infrastructural development, and new forms of social mobility. Understanding this complexity is essential not only for interpreting the history of Mizoram but also for broader discussions concerning displacement, modernization, state formation, and social transformation in conflict-affected societies.

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