

**A CRITICAL STUDY ON CHRISTIAN MISSION WITH  
SEPCIAL REFERENCE TO PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF  
MIZORAM**

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Philosophy**

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## SYNOPSIS

This thesis is an attempt to construct a relevant Mizo theology of mission in the Mizo Christian context in Mizoram. The author has drawn theological hermeneutics from the interaction of the Gospel and Mizo traditional religious and cultural elements such as the concept of God-human-world with the aim of reinterpreting them to reconstruct a Mizo Theology of Mission. Methodologically, the author mainly used the postcolonial approach and synthetic approach to explore the interaction of the Christian mission brought by the western missionaries and the Mizo traditional religion and cultural practices.

Firstly, relevant Mizo religion and cultural elements, which will be utilized, are introduced with a brief interpretation. Secondly, the study explores how, as a result of the Colonial rule and the Mission enterprise, the life of the Mizo society was changed in both constructive and destructive ways. In one way it liberated the Mizos from unjust social and cultural structures in various ways. On the other hand, they started to develop the idea that all that is associated with Mizo traditional religion and culture as pagan, profane and secular and not fit for newly Mizo Christians. Thirdly, the author outlines the way in which the accommodation of Mizo culture has been taking place through the revival movement, to re-establish a lost identity. For instance, the rediscovery of the value of Mizo poetical words in Mizo Christianity is a radical paradigm shift because it is a complete change to the view of Mizo poetical words, which had been totally rejected as anti-Christian elements and marginalised as godless. These poetical words are being retrieved and used to compose Mizo indigenous hymns for praising God. In reinterpreting and reclaiming the traditional

elements, the Gospel and Mizo culture have enriched each other. Fourthly, the study shows that the impact of western theology has been so great that it has captured the whole theological norms of the Mizo mission. Theologically speaking, dialogue between Christianity and other religions is seen as unchristian and is totally rejected. As a result, the strategies of the Mizo mission are threefold, namely converting, saving souls and church planting. Since the western evangelical exclusive theology which the Mizos inherited from the missionaries can no longer cope with the present context with all its problems. The time has come to develop a relevant Mizo theology of mission which will address the present reality by taking seriously the social, economic and political problems for the transformation of the society. Finally, it is shown that to construct a relevant Mizo theology of Mission, the Mizo Christians must critically analyse their past religious and cultural traditions with the purpose of rediscovering and discerning the revelation of God. This will re-root the Gospel and contribute to 'a theology of mission from below' which addresses contemporary realities and fosters participation in '*Missio Dei*', in building the reign of God here and now.

It is hoped that this study will contribute a new and relevant theology of mission to Mizo Christianity in Mizoram.

Total words: 79896

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*‘Hold on to the instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life. Then you go on your own way in safety, and your foot will not stumble’ Proverbs 4:13; 3:23.*

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AAM	Arthington Aborigines Mission
AIC	African Initiated Church
ATC	Aizawl Theological College
BMS	Baptist Missionary Society
CWM	Council for World Mission
ISPCK	Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
MPC	Mizoram Presbyterian Church
PCUSA	Presbyterian Church of United States of America
SAIACS	South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies
SCM	Student Christian Movement
SMB	Synod Mission Board
SPB	Synod Publication Board
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
TRI	Tribal Research Institute
UTC	United Theological College
WCC	World Council of Churches
YMA	Young Mizo Association
ZBC	Zoram Baptist Church

## GLOSSARY

<i>Ai</i>	A religious ceremony on the hunter's behalf to enable the spirits of a dead person and animals killed to accompany him towards <i>pialral</i> .
<i>Bawi</i>	A slave, a bondman, a vassal.
<i>Beirual</i>	A special united effort to win converts.
<i>Chai</i>	The name of a dance in which young men and young women form a circle round a man who serves out rice beer, and others who play a drum and beat the horn of a gayal.
<i>Chapchar kut</i>	The name of the Mizo spring festival held between the cuttings and the burning of the jhums.
<i>Chhinlung</i>	The name of the mythical rock from beneath which the progenitors of the present Mizo races are said to have come out.
<i>Fanodawi</i>	A communal sacrifice to god at the time of cultivating.
<i>Harhna</i>	A revival, an awakening.
<i>Hla</i>	A song or poem.
<i>Hlimna</i>	Joy or happiness.
<i>Inthawi</i>	Performing sacrifice.
<i>Kawngpui siam</i>	A religious community sacrifice asking god to bless the village.
<i>Kelmei</i>	A tuft of goat's hair.
<i>Khua</i>	A village.
<i>Khuang</i>	A drum.
<i>Khuangchawi</i>	The name of the public feast given by chiefs and other well-to-do Mizos.
<i>Khuanu</i>	A poetic name for God.
<i>Khuavang</i>	The name of the guardian spirit.
<i>Kut</i>	Festival
<i>Lal</i>	A chief



<i>Lam</i>	To dance, to drill, and to spin.
<i>Lengkhawm/ Zaikhawm/ Mual inkhawm</i>	Gathering together for singing fellowship.
<i>Lusei</i>	<i>Lusei</i> is one of the names of the tribes in Mizo community from which the English word ‘Lushai’ is derived.
<i>Mihring</i>	Human being.
<i>Mithi khua</i>	Dead man’s village.
<i>Mizo</i>	Literally means highlander.
<i>Pathian</i>	God or a Supreme Being.
<i>Pialral</i>	The Mizo paradise.
<i>Puithiam</i>	A priest.
<i>Ramhuai</i>	An evil spirit.
<i>Ramhuai bia</i>	Propitiating evil spirits.
<i>Rui</i>	Intoxicated, to be drunk.
<i>Sakhua</i>	An object of worship, a god of the spirit who presides over the house or household.
<i>Saphun</i>	To adopt a new religion, a proselyte or a convert.
<i>Thangchhuah</i>	The title given to a man who has distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase or by giving a certain number of public feasts. The wife of such a man also shares his title.
<i>Tlawmngaihna</i>	To be self sacrificing, unselfish, self-denying, persevering.
<i>Zawlbuk</i>	The large house in a Mizo village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night.
<i>Zawlnei</i>	A prophet.
<i>Zirtirtu</i>	A teacher.
<i>Zosap</i>	A white missionary.
<i>Zu</i>	Rice beer.



## MAP OF MIZORAM

### Mizoram



Mizoram is one of the states of India. It shares a boundary with Myanmar in the southeast and Bangladesh in the west. More than 98 percent of Mizoram is hilly and mountainous. Mizoram has a pleasant moderate climate ranging between 20 to 31 degree Celsius.

➤ Area	:	21087 Sq. Kms.
➤ No. of Districts	:	8
➤ Population	:	891,058 (2001)
➤ Christianity	:	87%
➤ Literacy	:	88.49%

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## INTRODUCTION

### RESEARCH RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY

#### 1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The primary purpose of this study is to construct a relevant Theology of Mission out of the interaction between the Gospel and culture in a Mizo context. The existing theology in Mizoram is the traditional exclusive theology inherited from the Western missionaries during the Colonial times which cannot cope any more with the present context with all its problems. Moreover, the spread of British administration, the conversion of the Mizos to the Christian faith and the rapid social change brought by Colonialism and modernization has run through all the fabric of the Mizo life. While admitting that change is a need of the society and irreversible process, this change has also brought many problems. For Mizo theologian Lalsawma, the problems are so serious that it shakes the foundation of the Mizo society and it alienates Mizos from their culture.<sup>1</sup> To address these problems and to cope with the present context, it is imperative for Mizo Christians to construct a relevant theology to meet the challenges of the present realities. However, as the existing theological paradigm is an exclusive one which rejects the Mizo religio-cultural values and at the same time not opens to dialogue or change. Therefore, a shift to contextual paradigm might be a radical shift in the Mizo context. To engage in this work, this study will critically analyse the interaction between the Christianity brought by the Western missionaries and the traditional Mizo religion and culture for the past one hundred years. Mizo traditional religious, social and cultural elements such as the concept of the Supreme Being,

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<sup>1</sup> Lalsawma, 'The shaking of foundation in Mizo Society' in Rosiamliana Tochhawng, ed., *Ground Works for Tribal Theology in the Mizo Context* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 64.

human and the world view, *chapchar kut*<sup>2</sup> (a Mizo traditional festival) and the Mizo philosophy of *tlawmngaihna*<sup>3</sup> (altruism) will be taken for theological hermeneutics.

## **2. THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

Firstly, even after celebrating the centenary of the Mizo Christianity, the interaction of the Gospel and culture has continued to be the subject of debate among the Mizo Christians. In fact, Christian theology has not been interpreted in terms of Mizo religio-culture and thought forms which has led to identity crisis and displacement and inadequate theology that is not open to change. Why did the Mizos have to abandon their traditional religious, social and cultural practices when they converted to Christianity?

Secondly, it was believed that the revival movements first started in 1906 and continued occasionally in subsequent years were the backbone of Mizo Christianity because they provides the Mizos with a setting for regaining and maintaining their identity and selfhood against the prevailing process of westernisation. To what extent did traditional cultural values and practices influence the revivalists? How far was the revival movement in Mizoram responsible for reformulating or reinterpreting the Mizo cultural elements to form indigenous Mizo Christianity?

Thirdly, with the inspiration of the missionaries and the revival movement in Mizoram, Mizo Christians have been engaged in mission and evangelism work in India. However, the resurgence of other religions (e.g. Hinduism) is perhaps the most

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<sup>2</sup> *Chapchar kut* was a thanksgiving festival celebrated by the Mizos in the month of March with feasts and dances. Theological significance of *chapchar kut* will be given in chapter five.

<sup>3</sup> *Tlawmngaihna* was an excellent custom in the social life of the Mizos by which one was duty bound to help others. Theological significances and impacts of *tlawmngaihna* can be seen in chapter five.

significant feature of the contemporary religious context in India today which we did not see in Colonial times. In such a context, the traditional colonial paradigm adopted by the Presbyterian Church in her mission and evangelism work is seen by others as having an intolerant and arrogant attitude. For example, the Mizo missionaries' activities among the poor people under the pretext of rendering social service are seen as suspicious and are sometimes forbidden. How should the Presbyterian Church confront this newly discovered world, a world inviting confidence rather than distrust?

Lastly, we observe today that new ways of understanding the gospel have emerged. Mizo Christians have started a search towards self-identity and begun to look at what they have inherited as the gospel message and Christian culture. The Mizo Christians have an awareness of the need to reinterpret the gospel anew in their own culture and express it using idioms and concepts that make sense to their people. In this context what will be the response of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram if they want the gospel to take root deep into their culture and become effective?

### **3. METHODOLOGY:**

In response to the research questions, the author will adopt a methodology which will be the main interpreting tool to construct a Mizo theology of mission. Theological methodology is here understood as a working principle used by theologians in the articulation of theology with a view to achieving a theological vision of the community of faith. Usually the choice of the methodology depends on the theological vision of a particular theologian and the situation in which theology is to be constructed. In response to the complex situation where identity crisis,

displacement and social injustice become the theological agenda, the concern is to integrate both social transformation and inculturation of the Christian gospel. It is these concerns which compel the author to employ two particular theological approaches. The first one is postcolonial approach because of its comprehensive critique of both colonial and neo-colonial practices and uncovering of hidden agendas and meanings. It also provides alternative readings which is not only binary, but also from the perspective of resistance and dissent, retrieval of heritage, etc. Secondly, we have a synthetic model which is concern with the development of a new and relevant theology from the synthesis of gospel and culture to compliment the postcolonial discourse.

### **3.1. Postcolonial Approach:**

The term 'Postcolonialism' refers broadly to the ways in which race, ethnicity, culture and human identity itself are represented in the modern era, after many colonized countries gained their independence. Post-colonial as originally used by historians after the Second World War designating the post-independence period. However, from the late 1970's the term came to mean not only a simple periodisation after the western countries dominated militarily, but also a methodological revisionism that enables a wholesale critique of western structures of knowledge and power since the enlightenment.<sup>4</sup> Edward Said's critique of western representations of the Eastern culture in his book 'Orientalism'<sup>5</sup> is a seminal text for postcolonial studies. Said has coined the term, 'Orientalism', describing the binary between the Orient and the Occident. This binary, also referred to as the East/West binary, is a key in postcolonial theory. This led to what came to be called colonialist discourse theory in

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<sup>4</sup> Wong Wai Ching, 'Postcolonialism' in Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharajah, eds., *The SCM Dictionary of the Third World Theologies* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 169-170.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979).



the work of critics such as Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who introduced terms such as ‘subaltern’ and ‘essentialism’.<sup>6</sup> Postcolonial theory deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies.<sup>7</sup> It is essential for theological reflection that one understands it as a critical tool addressing primarily imperialism’s general and continuing ideological roles in peoples and cultures of the Third World countries. It is not simply concerned with salvaging past worlds, but learning how the world can move beyond this period together, towards a place of mutual respect. As suggested by R.S. Sugirtharajah, the term generates at least three meanings.<sup>8</sup>

First, in a historical sense, it encapsulates the social, political and cultural conditions of the current world order, bringing to the fore the cultural, political and economic facts of colonialism, and aiding recognition of the ambiguities of decolonization and the ongoing neocolonization.

Secondly, as a discursive practice, postcolonial criticism has initiated arresting analyses of texts and societies. It provides openings for oppositional readings, uncovers suppressed voices and more pertinently, has as its foremost concern victims and their plight. It has not only interrogated colonial domination but has also offered viable critical alternatives.

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<sup>6</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ranjit Guha, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3-34. See also Joanne P. Sharp, *Geographies of Postcolonialism* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008), 109-130.

<sup>7</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), 186.

<sup>8</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 4.

Thirdly, the term implies the political and ideological stance of an interpreter who is engaged in anti-colonial and anti-globalizing theory and praxis. Applied to theological studies, it seeks to uncover colonial designs in theological development, and endeavours to re-read theology from such postcolonial concerns as identity, hybridity and diaspora.

Hybridity commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization. Hybridity has most recently been associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha, whose analysis of colonizer/colonized relations stresses their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. Bhabha contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the 'third space of enunciation'.<sup>9</sup> Thus the new Mizo converts who used to sing only translated hymns, composed new songs with a tune which was neither exactly the western tune nor Mizo traditional tune; a hybrid new tune has emerged which really satisfies the Mizo Christians. Diaspora, the term once used to describe Greek and Jewish dispersion, has now been widened to include other, parallel experiences, based on the transnational migrations which have been a major consequence of the colonial project. In postcolonial terms, diaspora signifies the formation of identities based on diversity and difference and is not necessarily seen in terms of reconnecting with a reverential notion of homeland. It challenges the territorially confined notion of national culture through the fact of wide-ranging movements of people. Therefore, in constructing a vital and coherent theology diversity and difference should not be minimized; rather it has to be held together as a

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<sup>9</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 37.

mosaic to enrich Christian theology.<sup>10</sup> As the society we live in is changing, a relevant theology cannot be static. It is not possible to think of one theology for all ages and places. It must be opened to critical evaluation and if necessary, to reconstruction to meet the need of the context.

Postcolonial theory has various readings, the author intends to apply heritagist, resistant and dissident readings which are in line with the proposed investigation.

### **Heritagist reading:**

Heritagist approach is an attempt to find conceptual analogies in the Mizo concept of culture, such as customs, religious and oral traditions which still exist from the past and which have a historical importance and taking them in theological hermeneutics for reinterpretations. It is an attempt to retrieve cultural memory from amnesia caused by colonialism and missionaries.<sup>11</sup> Non-textual traditions such as the understanding of god, world and stories which are part of the heritage of the Mizos will also be reemployed and placed alongside biblical materials for the purpose of taking them into hermeneutical implications.<sup>12</sup> In addition postcolonial hermeneutics will be seen as a corrective to cultural amnesia and will offer a form of resistance to cultural impositions and silencing. The author will engage in the reinterpretation of the Mizo religious concept and world view, stories, and legends as a remembered history of the Mizo people in order to play corrective and supplementary roles to the inadequate definitions and interpretations of the western missionaries and the Mizos as well. The purpose of adopting the postcolonial approach is to identify the biblical ideas in Mizo

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<sup>10</sup> S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Gospel and Culture: An on Going Discussion within the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC, 1994), 35.

<sup>11</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 55. Hereafter cited as 'Sugirtharajah, Postcolonial Criticism'.

<sup>12</sup> Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism*, 60.

tradition, thought patterns and forms as a way of explaining the basic elements of Christian Gospel rather than depending on the readymade western texts and writings. It will connect the past Mizo thought-form and culture with the aims of reconfiguring the new Mizo identity as a Mizo and as a Christian.

### **Resistant reading:**

Resistant reading does not repudiate western rule, but made profitable use of a paradigm provided by the colonizer. In the colonial context, the Bible became a convenient cultural weapon for both the colonizer and the colonized. While the missionaries saw it as a tool for civilizing and rescuing the degenerate heathen, some at least, of the colonized employed it as a weapon of reprisal. For example, a young Mizo chief named Khawvelthanga, who studied at the mission school became a believer, used the Bible against the practice of slavery in Mizo society. He argued that slavery went against the teaching of Jesus Christ and the Bible. He claimed that people were set free from all bondage by the blood of Christ, and therefore should not end up as slaves and private property of their fellow human beings. In this way the colonized renegotiated the message of the Bible, and created a discourse of resistant reading.

### **Dissident reading:**

Dissident reading is a form of oppositional discursive practice undertaken by some colonialists. Although located within and co-opted by the colonial system, what the discourse of dissent did was to subvert it from within. It did this by indicating the awful things that colonialism had done or was capable of doing to those who were under its control. Prompted by both pangs of guilt and humanitarian motives, the

intention of dissident discourse was to ameliorate colonialism and temper its predatory intensions. As a discursive practice, it could never hope to dismantle the whole edifice of imperialism, but in its own innocuous way it caused unsettlement, dislocation, and placed a question mark over territorial and cultural expansion.<sup>13</sup> The issue of the slavery system in Mizoram posed by a Welsh missionary, Peter Fraser was a relevant one in which the Bible played a vital role. His subversive challenges or dissident approach could not change the edifice of the colonial administration at first, but later liberated the Mizo slaves.

### **3.2. Contextual Theology:**

While postcolonial critique is useful in rediscovering traditional cultural practices for theology, it is not free from criticism due to its critical tendency towards Christianity and western culture. In constructing theology there is a danger of the gospel being domesticated and made captive to one particular culture. Rediscovery of traditional values does not mean ‘culturalism’ in which culture is romanticized and venerated above the Bible. In this context, contextual synthetic approach will compliment the postcolonial theory by re-rooting cultural expressions with mutual interaction and positive contribution towards the wellbeing of the Mizo people. This is necessary because the purpose of constructing a contextual theology is to help the community of faith in a particular socio-cultural context to understand Christian faith.

Contextual theology, without ignoring the importance of scriptures and tradition, considers culture, socio-economic and political issues and the struggle of the people for their liberation as important sources of theology. Stephen B. Bevans specifically

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 44.

defines it as a way of doing theology in which one takes into account of the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the Christian people; the culture in which one is theologizing; and social change in that culture, whether brought about by western technological processes or the grassroots struggle for equality, justice and liberation.<sup>14</sup>

K.C. Abraham an Indian theologian describes contextual theology as faith articulation emerging from the experiences of the marginalised that are committed to altering their struggle of injustice and bondage.<sup>15</sup> K. Thanzauva, a Mizo theologian defines it as a systematic and coherent articulation of how a community of faith confesses Christ in a particular context.<sup>16</sup> Contextualization is therefore, a process of interaction between the hidden gospel rediscovered in Mizo culture and the gospel preached to the Mizos by missionaries. Since, the gospel is present in every culture in an imperfect form, re-discovery of the hidden gospel from one's own culture is necessary to interact with the gospel received from outside, only then the Christian gospel be contextualized.

There are several models of contextual theology propounded by Stephen B. Bevans<sup>17</sup> such as transplantation, fulfilment, translation, dialogical, synthetic and praxis which are all helpful for distinguishing various approaches. For instance, models like fulfilment, translation and praxis have been used by the western missionaries and Mizo church leaders. Zairema, a Mizo church leader, who has been greatly involved in Bible translation, advocated the use of dynamic equivalence. In this study a synthetic model will be used because this model is concern with the development of a new and relevant theology from a synthesis of gospel and culture in a particular

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, Revised and Expanded, 2002), 1. Hereafter cited as 'Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology'.

<sup>15</sup> K.C. Abraham, 'Forward' in K. Thanzauva, *Transforming Theology: A Theological Basis for Social Transformation* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2002), x.

<sup>16</sup> K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community: Tribal Theology in the Making* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997), 57. Hereafter cited as K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*.

<sup>17</sup> Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 30-110.

context to preserve the cultural identity of the people and to confess Christ in the way they understand him.

### **Synthetic Approach:**

Synthetic approach primarily assumes that culture is good and valuable, and that within this culture God is working and revealing divine truth. Although Christ is present in all cultures, unless the culture interacts with the truth revealed in Jesus Christ, it is inadequate. It means the interaction makes the hidden presence of Christ in culture more meaningful. In other words, without the interaction with the gospel, cultural values are inadequate, incomplete and imperfect. According to Jose M. de Mesa, a Filipino theologian, theology is born from the respectful interaction between Judaeo-Christian tradition and the local culture.<sup>18</sup> The source of theology is the fusion or interaction of the Judaeo-Christian tradition which came to the Mizos via western culture with the recipient culture. A synthetic model searches for a new theology resulting from the synthesis of the two or the fusion of two horizons. It is an honest and painful interaction as it seeks to disclose the inadequacies and fallacies of Christianity and other religions. As a result, a new form of Christianity or theology emerges which is what a synthetic model is searching for.

The primary reason for choosing postcolonial-synthetic approaches is to respond to the demands of the Mizo context. When the Mizos received Christianity from the western missionaries, there was an interaction between the gospel and Mizo culture. Therefore, it is proper to adopt these approaches to look at this interaction. The author will first look at mutual enrichment and seek to discover a new theology born out of

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<sup>18</sup> Jose M. de Mesa, 'Doing Theology as Inculturation in the Asian context' in James A. Sherer & Stephen B. Bevans, eds., *New Directions in Mission and Evangelism 3, Faith and Culture* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 120.

the interaction between the gospel and Mizo culture. Secondly, there is a mutual transformation by rejecting dehumanizing aspects such as head-hunting and adopting liberative aspects such as the practice of community singing and dancing and Mizo *tlawmngaihna*. Thirdly, it will also take the form of mutual reinterpretation, which means reinterpreting culture in the light of the gospel and the gospel in the light of culture. In this case, our criteria will be first of all truthfulness to the gospel, not in terms of literal interpretation; secondly, faithfulness to the Mizo religio-culture and finally, motivation for the transformation of the Mizo society.

#### **4. SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH:**

This study covers a period from 1894 to 2008 and it is confined to the Mizo Christian community living in Mizoram and in particular to the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram. Since the Presbyterian Church is the oldest and largest church in Mizoram presently comprising 59% of the Mizo Christians,<sup>19</sup> the author has sometime project the above groups as representing the whole Mizo Christian community in this study. This study deals with the religio-cultural context within which the changes took place in Mizoram. In order to understand how the Mizo people reacted to these changes, and how they developed a new cultural synthesis, it is also necessary to study the pre-British history and culture of the people. This research will also contribute some theological insights to other Mizo ethnic groups living in Myanmar (Burma) and Bangladesh and neighbouring states of Manipur, Assam and Tripura. This study may also be of help, it is hoped, to other tribal communities in Northeast India who have the same religious and cultural background and experienced the same Colonial rule and the western Christianity.

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix II.



## **5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:**

Firstly, this research is significant for theological colleges which are the centres of theological education in Mizoram. This study retrieves Mizo religious and cultural elements for theological hermeneutics to interpret and criticize with the purpose of bringing out a relevant Mizo contextual theology. In addition, this research will be significant for new generation who will engage in theological studies because it provides a new framework which proposes a theological paradigm shift from traditional colonial paradigm to 'theology from below' in the Mizo context.

Secondly, this study is significant for the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram and the Mizo community as a whole. In the Mizo context, tension between the Gospel and Mizo traditional culture is still problematic and debates are going on as to the extent to which the Mizo Christian should abandon or retain their traditions, customs and culture. This research gives new insights and confidence to the Mizo Christians to decide which cultural aspects to abandon and which will be retained for worship and for theological construction.

Finally, this study is significant for theological development because this research is one of the few studies undertaken which gives a new way to look at Mizo Christianity in the light of interaction between the Gospel and traditional Mizo culture. It gives detailed study about revival movements in Mizoram, how the revival movement saved the Mizos from complete British assimilation and provides the people with a setting for regaining and maintaining their identity and selfhood by reinterpreting Mizo socio-cultural values.

## 6. PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH:

A major problem of this study is the alienation of the gospel. Despite Christianity in Mizoram being more than one century old, the gospel remains alien to Mizo Christians. Theologically this alienation is the result of uncritical rejection of culture and uncritical contextualization in the past history of the Mizo church. Paul G. Hiebert points out that this kind of alienation or foreignness of Christianity is a real hindrance to communicating the gospel.<sup>20</sup> K. Thanzauva, a Mizo theologian describes the inadequacy of the Mizo theology in contemporary Christianity like this, ‘The problem now is that what had happened in the interaction of the tribal culture and Christianity in the past one hundred years is not theologically expressed. The theology and dogma remain alien to the culture’.<sup>21</sup> All of this could be partly due to the rejection of Mizo religio-cultural elements by the Mizos causing ‘self-alienation’ and theological inadequacies. To quote Thanzauva again:

A more serious problem is that, as we neither developed theology from what had happened nor taught the churches, they have drifted away farther and farther from their roots; theologically they are now in the capacity of western theology. The theological task now is rediscovery and reconception of liberating traditions of the tribal culture.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, ‘Cultural Differences and the Communication of the Gospel’ in Ralph D. Winter & Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2004), 381-382.

<sup>21</sup> K. Thanzauva, ‘Theologizing in the North Eastern Context: Methodological Issues’ in J. Puthenpurakal, ed., *Impact of Christianity in Northeast India* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute Publications, 1996), 101-102.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

With regard to limitation of the research, it should be mentioned that, as the Mizos did not have written language in the pre-Christian era, most of the writings available are recollections of oral traditions, myths, legends and stories. Consequently, most of the available documents are written in the Mizo language and translation to English is needed to present their content and relevant meaning. While the author has sought to produce accurate translations, there may be alternative translations. This leads to some limitations in investigation and deeper study in this research.

At this stage the contextual synthetic model which gives emphasis to the interaction of gospel and culture is used for theological construction which is very relevant for the present context. But like other communities, the Mizo community also encounters different ideologies and new cultures emerging from modern science and technologies. Increasingly they have been dissatisfied with the present missiological approach adopted by the Presbyterian Church which condemned other religions and eventually disrupted the harmony of the community. At a later stage, we may need to apply a dialogical model which is concern with mutual co-existence through tolerance and building new relationships with neighbours of other faiths<sup>23</sup> for the construction of Mizo theology of mission.

## **7. LITERATURE SURVEY:**

The study of the history of the churches in Mizoram is not a new project as some scholars have applied themselves to it and have done valuable work. J.M. Lloyd, the

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<sup>23</sup> S.J. Samartha, 'Dialogue in a Religiously Pluralistic Society' in Israel Selvanayagam, ed., *The Multi-Faith Context of India: Resources and Challenges for Christians* (Bangalore: The Board of Theological Text Books Programme of South Asia, 1994), 6.

long serving missionary in Mizoram in his book, *On Every High Hill*,<sup>24</sup> (1957) makes an effort to relate Christianity to traditional culture. However, he reflects the mission's paternalistic view of certain cultural values as anti-Christian. Hence while acknowledging the conversion and deeper spiritual life of many Mizos as being the result of the revival movement, he sees the rise of '*Puma zai*' (traditional song), which in a modified form ultimately made its way into the revival, as 'a sudden resurgence of heathenism'. It is very clear that Lloyd devalued the social and cultural values of Mizo society and wrote the history of mission from European imperialistic, colonial and political perspectives. His work needs to be re-examined from postcolonial perspectives.

The most substantial book on the history of the church in Mizoram is the work of Saiaithanga, a Mizo pastor and prominent church leader, '*Mizo Kohhran Chanchin*'<sup>25</sup> first published in 1969. This book is still the most widely read mainly because of his systematic arrangement, distinct and precise expression and comprehensive coverage of different traditions. As one of the early pastors, he had an opportunity to work closely with the western missionaries as a theological teacher and a pastor. He was a representative of the church authorities who reflected the mission's ecclesiology in their approach to the revival movement in Mizo church. Saiaithanga did not recognize some elements of the revival particularly the traditional songs and drums, which are important factors for the development of Mizo Christianity. Instead, he characterized the revival movement as the cause of division, anarchy and the economic impoverishment of the church. Consequently, a clear dichotomy of the revival

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<sup>24</sup> J. M. Lloyd, *On Every High Hill* (Liverpool: Foreign Mission Office, 1957), 55. Hereafter cited as 'Lloyd, Every High Hill'.

<sup>25</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Kohhran Chanchin* [History of the Mizo Church] (Aizawl: Regional Theological Literature Committee, 1969). Hereafter cited as 'Saiaithanga, Mizo Kohhran Chanchin'.

movement and the church can be identified in his work. His perspective is identical to that of J.M. Lloyd, who undoubtedly had considerable personal influence upon him.

C.L. Hminga's *The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram* (1987) provides some relevant theological issues such as the transformation of the Mizo concept of God, faith and the establishment of the church and its growth and witness from the church growth perspective. F. Hrangkhuma's research entitled '*Mizoram Transformational Change* (1989) vividly describes the changes and transformation that have taken place in Mizoram since the coming of Christianity in Mizoram. Relevant theological issues such as concepts of God, Christ, salvation and ecclesiology can be found in this research. Lalrinawmi Ralte's *Crab Theology* (1993) clearly presents a view of Mizo women as it developed out of Mizo traditional and culture. Religio-cultural issues particularly the feminist view of God are seen as relevant and valid in constructing Mizo contextual theology. Mangkhosat Kipgen, a church historian published his research under the title *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (1995) which gives a historical perspective of the Mizo traditional culture and Mizo Christianity.

K. Thanzauva's research published under the title *Theology of Community* (1997) contributes a theological reflection on the traditions, experiences and concepts of the tribal Christians in Northeast India. The most significant elements of his research are the Godhead, ecclesiology and humanity. Lalsangkima Pachuau's research entitled, *Ethnic Identity and Mizo Christianity* (2002) concentrates on ethnic identity and Christianity in Northeast India. It deals with the interaction between the Mizo church and traditional culture and the role of the revival movement in the formation of the

Mizo Christian identity. Vanlalchhuanawma's research published as *Christianity and Subaltern Culture* (2005) clearly describes the Mizo traditional religion and cultural practices before Christianity and changes in the Mizo society. These are relevant to the present research because it deals with contextualization.

## **8. OUTLINE OF THE STUDY:**

This study has five chapters with introduction and conclusion. The first two chapters deal with the history of the Mizos before the coming of Colonialism and Christianity followed by the change brought by the British administration and Christian mission in Mizo life. The third chapter examines the revival movements in Mizoram, the interaction between Christianity and Mizo socio-cultural practices and the way in which revival movements are responsible for bringing indigenous Mizo Christianity. The fourth chapter assesses the development of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram and her missionary endeavour through postcolonial critique. The last chapter brings out the propose Mizo theology of mission and ends with suggestion for further research.

**Introduction** gives the purpose of the study, the research questions which the author tackles followed by the methodology which the author intends to apply in this study, scope and significance of the research. It also provides the problems and limitations of this study and the outlines of each chapter and the conclusion.

Chapter One, '**Pre-Colonial Mizo Religion and Culture**' presents the origin of the Mizos, where they came from, their traditional religious and cultural practices such as

their concept of god, human, world, salvation and life after death. The author aims to construct a postcolonial theological approach to the Mizo primal religion.

**‘The Advent of Colonialism and Christian Mission’** is Chapter Two which deals with the coming of the British rule in Mizoram and the change that has affected the social and religious life of the Mizo society in both positive and negative ways. This was followed by the Christian missionaries who converted the Mizos to Christianity within a few decades. This transformation from traditional life to Christianity has severely affected the Mizo life and as a result many of their cultural and religious practices have been lost or abandoned. The author intends to retrieve the lost cultural elements for theological interpretation in the present day Mizo context.

Chapter Three **‘Revival Movements: Cultural Response to Westernization’** looks at the coming of the revival movement in Mizoram and how it helps the Mizos in their response to Christianity and Colonial power. It explores the extent to which the revival movement is responsible for recovering the lost or abandoned cultural elements for the reformulation or reconstruction of the Mizo Christianity. Integrating the Mizo cultural elements such as traditional drums, dancing and new indigenous Mizo Christian hymns will be seen from the postcolonial perspective.

Chapter Four, **‘An analysis of the mission of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram’** first traces the history of the Presbyterian Church and other denominations. It also highlights the paradigm shifts in the history of Christian mission. It outlines how mission work started within the Presbyterian Church, what were the aims and objectives of doing mission among the people. It also shows

factors that motivated the Mizos for this task and how they met the financial needs for this purpose. It will also analyse the mission of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram from the perspective of a postcolonial approach.

Chapter Five is **Towards a Mizo Theology of Mission**. The main purpose of this section is to reformulate or recreate a new and relevant theology of mission for the Mizo Christians. Since our perception of God is determined by our understanding of cosmology, the concern of this chapter is to rediscover the Mizo cosmology and particularly their concept of God-human-world relationship as one of the transformational motifs to be theologically constructed or rediscovered. Moreover, since the issue of land is so fundamental in Mizo life, the relationship of the people and their land is discussed under ecological theology. The relationship between men and women is also examined in order to rectify and transform the Mizo communitarian society to make it more liveable and effective. An attempt is also made to rediscover the traditional festival of *chapchar kut* and ethical principle of Mizo community called '*tlawmngaihna*' for the construction of relevant Mizo theology of mission.

**'Conclusion'** comprises the contributions this study has made for the Presbyterian Church and to Mizo Christianity as a whole. This includes re-reading of the Mizo religious and cultural practices with the purpose of finding contextual and hermeneutical reinterpretation of the Mizo theology of mission. It ends with a brief evaluation of each chapter and suggestions for further research.



## **Chapter One**

### **PRE-COLONIAL MIZO RELIGION AND CULTURE**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

In order to understand Christianity and the Church in Mizoram it is essential to know who and what the Mizos were at the beginning of the twentieth century. In this chapter the author will make an attempt to analyse the identity of the Mizos and their pre-colonial Mizo religious institution which had been presented by the western missionaries as no religion in the light of postcolonial theological perspectives. The aim is to rediscover a relevant hermeneutics for interpretations in the present day context and for the construction of postcolonial Mizo theology of mission. The author will first introduce the background of the Mizo history and their traditional religion and the Mizo world view; secondly, the concept of Supreme Being and active spirits; thirdly, the traditional understanding of salvation; and fourthly, the concept of the life-after and immortality of the spirit will be criticized. Finally, different approaches in the postcolonial period will be analysed with the intention of retrieving the concept of God for postcolonial theological interpretations. It is certain that Mizo religion was far from perfect although there were some good elements, and these need to be judged in the light of the Gospel.

#### **2. THE MIZOS:**

The word '*Mizo*' literally means 'Highlander' (*mi* for 'people' and *zo* for 'highland'), an apt term to describe the short, stocky, muscular people who, with great physical

vigour, easily climb the steep hills.<sup>26</sup> It is a generic term applying to all the Mizos living in Mizoram. Mizos have been known as *Lushai*, *Lushei* or *Lusei* but this is unfortunately a misnomer. The Mizos have been Mizos since time immemorial. But the entire Colonial officialdom and the missionary records and reports before Indian independence and up to the 1960s, represented the Mizos as *Lushais*. The most prominent ruling clan at the time of the Colonial regime was *Lusei*, which was incorrectly referred to as *Lushai*. It was the time when the *Lusei* rulers had extended their influence over the whole of the present Mizoram. Their prominence, perhaps, led the British elites to misrepresent the whole nation as *Lushai*. As various names were adopted by the British for political or anthropological purposes, they contributed to a division among the people who accepted such classifications at face value. This trend not only distorted the homogeneous identity of the Mizos but also affected the people in their response to social-cultural change.

### **2.1. *Lusei* or Mizo Language:**

The Mizos had no lingua franca at the time of the British arrival. As the *Lusei* proselytes naturally adopted the *Lusei* dialect, it was probably assumed that the *Lusei* dialect was common to all the Mizo clans. On this pretext the Mizo alphabet, created by the first two missionaries was based on *Lusei* dialect. The foundational Mizo literature so happened to be *Lusei* literature. With the further development of that literature and political awareness, the literary language came to be mistakenly known as Mizo. The simple logic of this misinterpretation is that since the Mizo language is the *Lusei* language, the Mizos are the *Luseis*. Therefore, the author will use the term Mizo rather than *Lusei* throughout this study.

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<sup>26</sup> J.V. Hluna, *Education and Missionaries in Mizoram* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1992), 2. Hereafter cited as 'Hluna, Education and Missionaries'.

## 2.2. The Mizos belong to the Mongoloid stock:

It is not necessary to be highly educated to tell that the Mizos belong to the Mongoloid stock. Their physical features, mental disposition, social behaviour and customs sufficiently bear the stamp of the Mongoloid racial origin. Even the early foreign writers identified the appearance of the Mizos with the Mongoloid people groups: 'all the *Lushei* clans resemble each other and the Mongolian type of countenance prevails'.<sup>27</sup> This racial affinity of the Mizo clans is certainly an important factor of identity. This theory of the Mizos belonging to the Mongoloid stock has perhaps, received the widest acceptance amongst the Mizos. Lalbiak Thanga, a Mizo historian and writer said that the fact of Mizos belonging to a Mongoloid stock is not disputed.<sup>28</sup> This may perhaps be a reassertion or acknowledgement of the theory of former prominent writers such as Langkhaia, V.L. Siamia and K. Zawla.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.3. Settlement in Mizoram:

It is believed that the Mizos entered present Mizoram at three different times and accordingly they were known by three names. Those who came first were called 'Old *Kuki*' and probably occupied the land no later than 15<sup>th</sup> century since they are mentioned in the account of the Tipperah Raja, Chachag, who ruled at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and A. C. Soppit brings the date to the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>30</sup> The second group 'New *Kuki*' are the *changsen*, *thado* and some others. The third group, the *Lushais* came to their present location between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries

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<sup>27</sup> J. Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1912; reprint, Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1975), 1. Hereafter cited as 'Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans*'.

<sup>28</sup> Lalbiak Thanga, *The Mizos: A Study in Racial Personality* (Gauhati: United Publishers, 1978), 3. Hereafter cited as 'Lalbiak Thanga, *Mizos*'.

<sup>29</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin* [Mizo History] Aizawl: Hmingliani, 1938; reprint, Aizawl, LTL Publications, 2002; V.L. Siamia, *Mizo History*, Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press, 1991; K. Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute leh An Thlahte Chanchin* [History of Mizo Ancestors and Their Descendants] Aizawl: Hmar Arsi Press, 1974. Hereafter cited as 'Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute*'.

<sup>30</sup> A. C. Soppit, *A Short Account of the Lushai-Kuki Tribes on the North-East Frontier with an Outline Grammar of the Hrangkhawl-Lushai Language* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1976), 7.

by driving out the second group the 'New *Kuki*' and other tribes.<sup>31</sup> On their arrival at the present Mizoram, they fought and defeated the earlier clans under the leadership of the *Sailo* clan and this made the *Sailo* chiefs virtually the rulers over the Mizo people.

#### **2.4. Village Administration:**

The Mizo villages are built along the ridges of the mountains on the top of the hills where the air is fresh. These sites were originally chosen primarily considering the strategy of defensibility against surprise raids of enemies. This of course has a disadvantage because water supply was a perennial problem, and it had to be fetched from springs below in bamboo tubes. Houses are usually built in two parallel rows along the ridge, with a road in between. The chief's house and the *zawlbuk* were constructed at the centre of the village.

Before British rule commenced in Mizoram, each village was an independent unit under its chief, who was assisted by his council of elders and the priests. Decisions were usually made by the consensus of this council which met in the chief's house. The opinion of the strongest warriors of the village exerted considerable influence on the decisions made by the chief and his council. Though the chieftainship in Mizoram was abolished by British India in 1955, the old village council provided the basis for local democratic organisation.

A strongly patriarchal hierarchy has been found in Mizo society. Men always occupied high and respected positions not only in the family, but also in the social life

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<sup>31</sup> 'History of Mizoram' [article online]; available from <http://www.mizoram.nic.in/about/history.htm>; Internet; accessed; 11 August, 2008.

as a whole. They were solely responsible for their family affairs. Even the right to inheritance was reserved for paternal descent. Women were oppressed and had no rights either in the family or in society. In body, mind and spirit, women belonged from birth till death to their fathers, brothers or husbands. Women had no voice in the family administration and even if they raised their voices; their words were never accepted simply because they were the words of the women. The burden of women in the primitive Mizo society knew no bounds and they simply had to surrender themselves to this as their lot.<sup>32</sup>

## **2.5. The practice of head hunting:**

Until the British occupation in 1890 the Mizos were known to the outside world as daring head-hunters, whose periodic raids were a source of terror to their comparatively peaceful neighbours in the low hills and plains of Eastern Bengal and Assam. The Encyclopaedia Britannica says about the Mizos (Lushais):

The main occupation of the people is hunting and warfare. From the earliest times the Lushais have been notorious for their sanguinary raids into British territory, which are said to be instigated by their desire to obtain human heads for use at their funeral ceremonies.<sup>33</sup>

The Mizos carried out head-hunting for various reasons. First, it was done not for the sake of the head, but for the sanctity of the head as the seat of the soul. Secondly, much warfare took place as a result of the ever-increasing cycle of revenge for

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<sup>32</sup> R. L. Hnuni, 'Women in the context of the Bible and Mizoram' in K. Thanzauva, ed., *Towards A Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective* (Jorhat: Mizo Theological Conference, 1989), 82. Hereafter cited as 'Hnuni, Women in Mizoram'.

<sup>33</sup> 'Lushai Hills' (article online); available from [http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/LUP\\_MAL](http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/LUP_MAL); Internet; accessed; 23 October, 2007.

previous killing. The more important motives for headhunting according to A. G. McCall, Superintendent of the Lushai Hills were to propitiate the evil spirits, to attain paradise (*Pialral*) after death, to prove prowess over enemies and to gain the respect of a prospective bride.<sup>34</sup> A man who killed non-Mizos was given higher regard than one who had not, therefore, when a man killed a person he had to bring home the head to show that he was speaking the truth.<sup>35</sup> If this was correct a great deal of their apparent cruelties to the innocent tea planters could be explained and understood. The much repeated and accepted dictum of Swami Vivekananda that all religions lead to God if practised in all earnestness could then hardly be applied to Mizo religion.<sup>36</sup> This is a generalization that thoughtful people should consider carefully.

The Mizo religion then would appear to consist chiefly of ceremonies and sacrifices that had nothing to do with moral conduct or behaviour. The evil spirits made no moral demands and no sickness was due to immoral living. The slaughter of human beings and cruelty to animals were considered as a crime displeasing to the Supreme Being. Enemies had to be killed but retribution would come in one form or another. What was feared most was this impersonal retribution rather than direct punishment from the Supreme Being. The impersonal retribution could be realised through the curtailment of longevity, childlessness or misfortunes to their children. There were certain things unlawful to be done otherwise different misfortunes could come upon the doers. For example, it was not right to build a house obstructing the public path. It was perhaps this impersonal retribution that underlies the injunction.

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<sup>34</sup> A. G. McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, (London: Luzac & Co., 1949; reprint, Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 38. Hereafter cited as 'McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*'.

<sup>35</sup> Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans*, 59.

<sup>36</sup> Zairema, 'The Mizos and their Religions' in K. Thanzauva, ed., *Towards A Tribal Theology: The Mizo Perspective* (Jorhat: Mizo Theological Conference, 1989), 31-44. Hereafter cited as 'Zairema, Mizos and their Religions'.

Mizo traditional religion was a religion without scriptures but practised traditionally. If so, how could the Mizos practice this religion more than 300 years? Whom did they worship and what was the object of worship? What were the purposes and elements of worship? All these theological questions arose out of this study and it is not easy to give exact answers immediately. An attempt will be made to give possible answers under the topic of Mizo traditional religious worldview.

### **3. MIZO TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW:**

Religious world view is used here to mean the Mizo concept of God and spirits in connection with human beings, the world and the nature. This world view is culturally structured and consists of assumptions and perception of realities and their responses to it.<sup>37</sup> All the primal worldviews are based on assumptions which they believe to be true, but these assumptions must be scrutinized in the light of modern critique and analysed using a postcolonial theological perspective. Mizo traditional religious world view is given below for analysis of the Mizo understanding of God, human and the world.

#### **Supreme Being**

*Pathian* or God who was worshipped and sacrifices were offered to Him.

#### **Celestial beings**

*Pu Vana* (Father Heaven), *Vanhrika* (Heavenly being), *Vanchung Nula* (Damsel of the heaven) are active and have contact with human beings.

#### **Benevolent spirits**

*Khuavang, kuanu, khal, lasi*, etc.

#### **malevolent spirits**

*Ramhuai, phung, khawhring*, etc.

#### **Human beings**

God-human, human-animals, soul or the spirit of a person or animated objects.

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<sup>37</sup> Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (New York: Orbis Book, 1996), 52. Hereafter cited as 'Kraft, Anthropology'.

In the Mizo world view heaven was above and the earth was below. They believed that the abode of the Supreme Being and all other celestial beings was heaven, though they frequently visit human beings and lived with them. Thus human beings who lived on earth saw their existence in the midst of malignant spirits and so they offered sacrifices to placate these spirits.

### **3.1. Benevolent spirits:**

***Pathian:*** The Mizos believed in the existence of *Pathian* or the High God, who is distinctive above all else. *Pathian* probably means ‘holy father’; holy in the sense of pure and unmixed. *Pathian* was a remote being dwelling exclusively in heaven. While *sakhua* and other spirits were closely involved in human affairs, *Pathian* was more or less an onlooker from heaven. It was to him human beings prayed when they were placed in extremely difficult situations. They used to say, ‘*Pathian* above is looking down on us’ or ‘our *Pathian* is good’ meaning that he would ultimately help them. When all else failed, it was to him they turned for help. Mizos highly respected *Pathian* as a good spirit, who never harm nor demand anything from human beings. Sacrifice was made to *Pathian* on the days of *sechhun* and *khuangchawi*.<sup>38</sup> There was no doubt that *Pathian* was the director of human destiny. It was he who ordained who was to marry whom. Such couples are known as ‘*Pathian samsuih*’ those whose hairs are joined together by *Pathian*.

### ***Khuanu:***

Mizos believed that *khuanu*, ‘mother of nature’ to be the wife of *Pathian* and thus the spirit was treated as a goddess. Again in the Mizo terminology, ‘nu’ refers to feminine

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<sup>38</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua* [Mizo Religion] (Aizawl: Maranatha Printing Press, 1984; reprint, Aizawl: R. Lalmalsawma, 1994), 2. Hereafter cited as ‘Saiaithanga, Mizo Sakhua’.



character and 'pa' signifies masculine form. The word '*khuanu*' is used only in poetry and therefore can be considered as the poetical name of *Pathian*. It was also believed that *khuanu* was sometimes identical to and sometimes distinct from *Pathian*. She was believed to be the goddess who always blessed humankind as a mother does.<sup>39</sup> *Khuanu* was never thought to be feminine. This concept might be the recent opinion of some sociologists like Chitta Ranjan Nag, who was dependant on the writing of Mizo historian, V.L. Siam, who developed this concept in agreement with feminist theology. It is not however, the original Mizo religious concept.

### ***Khuavang:***

*Khuavang* are the good spirits who never harm human beings but rather help in their difficulties. Although their abode was not definitely stated, they were supposed to be in the high places and mountains. *Khuavang* are believed to be inferior to *Pathian* and they are concerned with the affairs of human beings. They are believed to be the creators of all humanity and the spirit of kindness and greatness was attributed to them. In a marriage ceremony, the chant uttered by the priest was addressed to the *khuavang* asking for long life for the newly married couples, many children and that they remain together till old age.<sup>40</sup> H.L. Malsawma, a Mizo sociologist has depicted *khuavang* in a more Christianized one as follows, '*Khuavang* is the famous spirit of kindness and magnanimity who could bring comfort to humanity on earth. *Khuavang* is the keeper and dispenser of the blessing for those who ask for it. *Khuavang* is the

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<sup>39</sup> V.L. Siam, *Mizo History*, 10.

<sup>40</sup> N.E. Parry, *A Monograph of Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* (Shillong: Assam Government Press, 1928; reprint, Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 31. Hereafter cited as 'N.E. Parry, Lushai Customs and Ceremonies'.

father of nature. He gives blessings, and his name is invoked for blessings, comfort and peace every time food is taken in the same way as grace is said before meal'.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Pu Vana:***

Literally speaking, the Mizo expression of '*Pu Vana*' stands for 'grand father sky'. V.L. Siama, a Mizo historian is of the opinion that *Pu Vana* was the grand father of the *Pathian* family, probably the father of *Pathian*. He was believed to be the god of nature with power, thunder and lightning.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Vanchungnula:***

It was believed that *Vanchungnula* was the damsel in the family of *Pathian* and was the goddess of rain and water. It was said that she was the daughter of *Pathian*. She pours out water whenever human beings need water.<sup>43</sup>

### **3.2. *Sakhua* spirit:**

The word '*sakhua*' is a combination of two words, '*sa*' and '*khua*'. '*Sa*' means the creator and progenitor of tribe or clan or race; and '*khua*' means protector who dispenses wellbeing to human beings.<sup>44</sup> *Sakhua* was the family or clan god. In this sense, the Mizo traditional religion was inseparably connected with his clans and families. Since *sakhua* spirit was the being who created, built up, protected and cared for the family, it was crucial to offer sacrifice to *sakhua* spirit. Negligence of sacrifice certainly caused *sakhua* to be angry and it was necessary to please the spirit otherwise

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<sup>41</sup> H.L. Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizos* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2002), 138. Hereafter cited as 'Malsawma, Sociology of the Mizos'.

<sup>42</sup> V.L.Siama, *Mizo History*, 10. See also Chitta Ranjan Nag, *Mizo Society in Transition* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1993), 47. Hereafter cited as 'C.R. Nag, Mizo Society in Transition'.

<sup>43</sup> Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans*, 109.

<sup>44</sup> James Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* [Mizo Traditional Ways of Life] (Aizawl: J.D. Press, 1992), 42. Hereafter cited as 'Dokhuma, Hmanlai Mizo'.

the *sakhua* would withdraw protection from the family and the family would be vulnerable to the attack of evil spirits. Frequent illnesses in the family were thought to be a sign or an indication that *sakhua* had been neglected. When the sacrifice was made only the very nearest relatives of the clan might share in the feast that followed. Any Mizo male had traditionally adopted his family religion. Women were considered to have no *sakhua* of their own; it was the *sakhua* of her parents or husband which was responsible for her continued welfare and existence. Children took after the *sakhua* of their fathers. If a man wished to embrace the *sakhua* of another clan, he might do so after performing a certain ceremony and after this he had to sever all connections with his relatives or clan members. Such a man is known as '*saphun*' which means implanted into the new *sakhua* and clan.<sup>45</sup> No Mizo would embrace the *sakhua* of another family or clan unless he was sure that the new *sakhua* would be powerful enough to protect him from the evil spirits.<sup>46</sup>

### **3.3. *Khaltu* or guardian spirit:**

Another important spirit to whom sacrifice was made at one stage or other in life was *khaltu* spirit, who can be described as a guardian angel of an individual. *Khaltu* was not as exalted as *sakhua* but was intimately connected with the life and welfare of individuals. Every living creature was also supposed to have '*thla*' (soul) and as long as the soul remain in the body the person was a living being. If a person underwent a frightening experience, such as being mauled by wild animals or being captured by an enemy, the soul was similarly frightened and to restore proper and normal relations with the *khaltu*, a sacrifice must be made. Until this was done, the soul would not be

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<sup>45</sup> Zairema 'The Mizos and Their Religion', 35.

<sup>46</sup> 'Custom of Lushai Society' [article online]; available from <http://www.webindia123.com/Mizoram/People/Lushai20/religion.htm>; Internet; accessed; 9 January, 2006.

free from fright and the body restored to normal living. When the experience was really terrifying, a sacrifice of a goat was made; the tail was cut off and worn round the neck with a string. To break off this string was very serious for the Mizos, perhaps as serious as breaking the sacred tread for Hindus.

### **3.4. Malevolent spirits:**

Apart from good spirits as discussed above, the Mizos strongly believed in the existence of numerous malignant evil spirits who were believed to cause human misery, suffering and misfortunes. Numerous spirits were mentioned in accordance with their abodes. For instance, if a certain spirit is believed to be possessed by a tree, it is called 'tree spirit' meaning the malignant spirit of a tree. Some of the evil spirits can be found below:

#### ***Ramhuai:***

*Ramhuai* means 'the malignant spirit of the forest or jungle' and they existed everywhere in the forest, but were believed to be in certain places such as a spring, banyan tree, cliff and water. They often haunted people and appeared in various disguises.

#### ***Hmuithla:***

This was an evil spirit which is equivalent to a ghost in English. It was believed that they were wandering about usually at night causing mischief such as disturbing people, animals and chicken in their sleep. *Hmuithla* was also said to be a fore-runner of death who would hover round the house where death was approaching and who could sometimes make strange, unusual noises.

***Phung:***

*Phung* was a group of evil spirits of dark complexion and gigantic appearance which caused people to suffer from insanity and epilepsy. The Mizos called epilepsy as *phungzawl* that means ‘possessed by *phung*’. Convulsion or spasm in children was also believed to be caused by the displeasure of *phung*.

***Khawhring:***

Mizos believed that *khawhring* spirits were in close touch with evil eyes on people’s food and drink, and thus conceived *khawhring* as ‘evil eyes’. As these spirits bewitched food and drink, the Mizos therefore offered a portion of food to evil spirits before eating and drinking. If someone was believed to be possessed by *khawhring*, killing that person was almost legal.<sup>47</sup> The Mizos believed that *khawhring* spirit is contagious and hereditary, and takes the form of passing from the hostess to another person, who speaks with the voice of the original hostess. Mostly women were found to be possessed by these spirits. If someone was suspected to be such, they were usually burnt alive or drowned for it was believed that contagious malignant spirits could be extinguished only in these ways.

**3.5. Human being:**

Mizos believed in the existence of the body and soul. The soul must be inside the body that enables a person to be a complete being. The Mizos believed that the soul of the human being was superior to those of animals. If the soul of a person was out of the body, there would be a physical ailment of some kind. Each human soul was

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<sup>47</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua*, 7-8; See also T.C. Hodson, ‘Lushai’ in James Hasting ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics Vol. VIII* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1915), 198.

believed to have a different guardian and guiding spirit called '*khaltu*' who took total charge of all his or her well being. This concept of *khaltu* is almost identical to the Jewish concept of a guardian angel and *khaltu* could be thought to be the apostle of '*sakhua*' (religion).<sup>48</sup> At death, the soul would leave behind the body and go to '*mithi khua*' (the village of the death) or '*pialral*' (heaven). The status of the soul after death was very much determined by the actions in this world. The status and destiny of the soul in this world was much better than *mithi khua*. Some folktales of the Mizos tell that the soul of the dead after living a painful and depressing life for a certain period in *mithi khua* would escape in the form of dew that would evaporate and vanish away forever.<sup>49</sup>

#### **4. THE ROLE OF PRIEST IN WORSHIP:**

*Sakhaw biak* or *sabiak* (religious worship) was family or clan worship of the spirit of a clan. It is a kind of family worship of the good spirits like *Pathian* and others. This was obligatory for every Mizo.<sup>50</sup> In the Mizo religious worship the priests played very important roles, the functions and roles of the priest can be described as follows:

##### **Sadawt:**

*Sadawt* was the title of the priest of the clan. *Sadawt* was usually elected and appointed by the chief and his elders to take the religious responsibilities for all communal religious sacrifices and worship. The primary duty was to perform all the sacrificial rites in their particular ways, prepare the sacrificial animals, and all the

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<sup>48</sup> Zairema, 'Kristian nih hmaa Mizo Sakhua' [Pre-Christian Mizo Religion] in H. Vanlalauva, *Mizo Miziaa Pathian Thu* [Theology in Mizo Thought] (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1988), 36. Hereafter cited as 'Zairema, Mizo Religion'.

<sup>49</sup> R.L. Thanmawia, *Mizo Poetry* (Aizawl: Din Din Heaven, 1998), 18-19.

<sup>50</sup> Lalitluangliana Khiangte, *Mizo Drama: Origin, Development and Themes* (Delhi: COSMO Publications, 1993), 190.

rituals for the worship. Worship to the clan deity could be performed only under his guidance. The *sadawt* was an important official in the community and he was the one on whom the chief always relied.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Thlahpawi:***

*Thlahpawi* was the helper or assistant of the *sadawt*, but when the *sadawt* was absent or unable to perform religious sacrifices due to sickness, the *thlahpawi* usually took his place.

### ***Bawlpw:***

The primary function of the *bawlpw* was to perform sacrificial offering to evil spirits that was intended to heal the sick through propitiation and exorcism. For the Mizos, illness and evil spirits were connected because evil spirits were known as causing sickness among the human beings. In this regard everyone who suffered from illness consulted *bawlpw*. Thus *bawlpw* played a role of ambassador by acting as a go-between evil spirits and human beings with his power of intervention.<sup>52</sup> *Bawlpw* was common to all clans whereas *sadawt* belonged to a particular clan. Since the Mizos had no permanent place for sacrifice, they prepared an altar at the time of religious ceremonies with the guidance of the priest.

### ***Zawlnei:***

According to K. Zawla, there were two kinds of prophets in the pre-Christian Mizo society. One was a real prophet and the other was an imitating prophet. There were a

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<sup>51</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua*, 11.

<sup>52</sup> T. Vanlaltlani, *The Experience of Pathian (High God) and Other Deities in Mizo Religion and Its Influence on Mizo Christians* (Bangalore: Unpublished MTh Thesis, United Theological College, 1990), 32.

number of prophets in Mizoram and these prophets visited villages and those who were sick and in difficulties approached and consulted them. Traditionally they were never considered as healers, but as the ones who could prescribe the right sacrifices to offer through the priest.<sup>53</sup> The *zawlnei* have their own terminology and all the words uttered were mostly in poetical words. There was one assistant or helper who interpreted the word of the *zawlnei* to people. This prophetic office had prepared for the coming of Christianity to Mizoram for it was reported that one, Darphawka from south Mizoram prophesied the coming of the British and the Christian mission over 50 years before their advent in Mizoram.<sup>54</sup>

## 5. THE CONCEPT OF LIFE AFTER DEATH:

The Mizos had a strong traditional belief in the existence of life after death. Immediately after the death the spirit left the human body and went to *tungchaw*, a bed-post which has a hole to keep small articles) and after that it climbed up to the beam of the house, from there to the back door and finally deserted the house. The soul of the dead was supposed to wander around in the village for about three months before leaving this world for an eternal place. His/her usual place at the family meal was kept vacant and some food was set aside for the departed soul. The soul was then taken to 'Rih' lake in Chin Hills (Myanmar) about three kilometres from Mizoram. From there the soul proceeded to 'Hringlang' hill from where he could see his village. He turned so frequently in viewing his village that he could not make progress on his journey. He was then made to wear the 'hawilo' flower and drink water called 'lungloh tui'. He then lost all his longing for home and desire to go back and his

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<sup>53</sup> Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute*, 102.

<sup>54</sup> Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos: Changes and Challenges* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 2005), 120. Hereafter cited as 'Lalrinawma, Mizo Ethos'.



longing for family was also erased. He then swiftly proceeded to his eternal destination.

The early Mizo society believed in the existence of two different abodes for the dead people. One was called '*mithi khua*' (village of the dead) and the other place was called '*pialral*' (paradise).

### ***Mithi khua:***

According to V.L. Siamia, a prominent Mizo historian, Mizos believed that the earth is eight layers thick and the *mithi khua* is in the last layer.<sup>55</sup> It was a dull shadowy place where everything was on a much lower scale than in the present world. Life in the *mithi khua* was miserable compared to this world. It was also believed that the souls of the criminals and those who were anti-social would go to the *mithi khua* and lived there eternally. They had no chance to escape from that place to another place. *Mithi khua* was meant for those who did not performed *thangchhuah*.

### ***Pialral:***

The other place of abode for the departed soul was *pialral* (paradise). According to traditional belief, there were only a few people who were entitled to enter *pialral*. Those who performed *thangchhuah* sacrifice, the new born child who died in infancy and the virgin. Those spirits would go to *pialral* where there was no more work to be done. They would stay there forever enjoying all the good things and everything was provided there free of cost or works. There would be no more pain, misery and suffering and they attained eternal bliss.

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<sup>55</sup> V.L. Siamia, *Mizo History*, 8. See also C.G. Varghese & R.L. Thanzawna, *A History of the Mizos, Vol. I* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1997), 326-327. Hereafter cited as 'Varghese and Thanzawna, History of the Mizos'.

Theologically, Mizo religion therefore, was a religion for the rich people only because for the majority of the poor people there was no way of performing the series of the costly feasts or *thangchhuah* sacrifices. Therefore, in the Mizo traditional religion only the rich and well-to do were entitled to enjoy the bliss of *pialral* and the poor were destined to be at *mithi khua*.

## **6. MEANS OF SALVATION IN MIZO PRIMAL RELIGION:**

The Mizos believed in the existence of soul and life after death and the main objective of the primal religion was to enter into *Pialral* (paradise) after this worldly life. The only means to enter into *pialral* was to obtain the title called '*thangchhuah*' which means 'extraordinary distinguished'. There are two ways to obtain *thangchhuah*- one was to perform a series of sacrificial public feasts (*in lama thangchhuah*) and the other was by killing prescribed wild animals (*ram lama thangchhuah*). The main purposes of *thangchhuah* are that the performer might be fed with rice in *pialral* without any work to do. Secondly, that they might escape the pellet<sup>56</sup> of *Pawla* on their way to *pialral* and lastly, that they might earn honour and respect in the society as long as they live.

### **6.1. *In lama thangchhuah* (Series of sacrificial feasts):**

According to Mizo primal religion, there were about six stages to perform in order to obtain the coveted title called '*thangchhuah*' which means 'extraordinary distinguished'. People who had performed these series of sacrificial feasts were distinguished from ordinary people and were treated with more consideration than the

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<sup>56</sup> Pellet is a small hard ball made from any substance like iron, wax, clay, etc.

other people. A man had to perform the following series of feasts in order to be entitled to the *thangchhuah* position.

1. Establishing religion (*Sakung*)
2. *Chawng* sacrifice
3. Mithun sacrifice (*Sedawichhun*)
4. Honouring ancestors (*Mithirawplam*)
5. *Khuangchawi* sacrifice
6. Second *khuangchawi* with mithun sacrifice
7. Completion of all religious rites (*Zawhzaw-zo*)<sup>57</sup>

In all these religious customs and ceremonies, drinking rice-beer was part of the ceremonies and most of the traditional dances and singings were performed. J. Shakespear clearly describes that all these feasts were performed with the idea of pleasing God.<sup>58</sup> It was not therefore, in their view, drinking bouts nor mere feasts, but deeply religious to please God.

**a) *Sakung* (Establishing religion):**

The Mizos are deeply religious because none of the family existed without establishing religious sacrifice. The most important sacrifice any Mizo new family had to perform was '*sakung*' or worship of the family or clan god. A castrated pig always had to be kept by every family for this purpose. *Sakung* sacrifice was performed by the *sadawt* priest and only members of the family could be present at the ceremony. The *sadawt* having pronounced blessings to all the household members

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<sup>57</sup> N.E. Parry, *Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, 94.

<sup>58</sup> Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans*, 69.

would kill the pig. The meat was cooked inside the house. When everything was ready the *sadawt*, standing in front of the sacrificial post, recited the incantation before offering the meat set aside for sacrifice to god. A day of rest would then be observed.

Theologically the main purpose of the *sakung* was to establish one's family religion with the aims of getting protection from the *sakhua* spirit who was the strong protector. All kinds of sicknesses and illnesses were ascribed to the work of the evil spirits and the main protection that they expected were perhaps from the torments of the evil spirits.

**b) *Chawng* sacrifice:**

The *chawng* sacrifice was not only a religious and public sacrificial ceremony, but ensured the good health of the performers. Two boars and a sow were killed, a boar was for the sacrifice to god and the meat of the sow was for children. *Sadawt* was the master of sacrifice and *thlahpawi* (assistant) also has a role to play. The sacrifice took four days. After the *chawng* feast has been completed the performer has to continue *dawinochhui* sacrifice which included the following – *chung*, *vansen*, *hnuaite*, *hnuaipui*. But this need not however be done at once it could be any time within two or three years.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Bimal J. Dev & Dilip Kumar Lahiri, *Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1983), 103.

The striking theological point for our present research is that the *chawng* sacrifice was a sacrifice to god. According to Lalhmuaka, this sacrifice could be comparable to a kind of praising God in Mizo Christianity today.<sup>60</sup>

**c) *Sedawichhun*:**

*Sedawichhun* ceremony lasted for four days, the first day was *inchhe siam ni*, the second day was *zupui ni*, the third day *ruaipui ni* and the last day was the *chawng* sacrifice. One male young mithun or gayal (domesticated animal), one boar and three small pigs were necessary. Religiously interpreted ‘*khua*’ was worshipped by performing a mithun sacrifice and ‘*sa*’ was worshipped by performing a boar sacrifice. The Mizo family had to set aside the first biggest male mithun for this sacrifice and it was no longer lawful to sell or do anything with that mithun except for sacrifice.

The most striking point for our present study is worship of ‘*sa*’ and ‘*khua*’, which can be regarded as the Supreme Being. After *sedawichhun* sacrifice minor religious rites with its paraphernalia such as *hnuaite*, *hnuaipui* and others were again performed with all their incantations. The whole process of sacrificial ceremonies signified the worship of traditional god.

**d) *Mithirawplam* (Honouring ancestors):**

This sacrifice lasted for four days. The first, second and the fourth day were similar to the previous sacrifice mentioned above. The most striking day was the third day where *mithirawplam* was performed. The preparation and procedures were almost

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<sup>60</sup> Lalhmuaka, *Zoram Thim Ata Engah* [Zoram: From Darkness to Light] (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1988), 74. Hereafter cited as ‘Lalhmuaka, Zoram’.

identical with the previous ceremonies except for the *mithirawplam* ceremony. Therefore the author will describe only the significant part of it.<sup>61</sup>

*Mithirawplam* was an important step towards and part of a big *khuangchawi* festival in honour of one's ancestors and deceased near relatives in which their effigies were carried in a group and seated on the platform specially made for them. In the middle of the effigies one '*thlahpa*' (ancestor) was made taller and bigger than the other effigies. *Thlahpa* was the central figure in this ceremony representing the original ancestor of the clan. At the inauguration, the performer gave all the effigies rice-beer on the platform and started crying out loudly, calling their names. Then the platform was carried to the centre of the village, beating with the gong. The whole villagers were watching with great respect and awe. After that the mithun was again killed and continued the feasts.

A modern Mizo socialologist H.L. Malsawma and Indian sociologist Ranjan Nag do not hesitate to see *mithirawplam* in terms of ancestor worship. H.L Malsawma says that ancestor worship which is a very ancient religious practice was practised also by the ancient Mizos.<sup>62</sup>

The author's view and argument is that the primary purpose of *mithirawplam* was the worship of god, who created their ancestors and also honoured their ancestors in their worship of god. Furthermore in *mithirawplam*, not only the effigies of the deceased ancestors were made, but also the images of infants and children were included. Therefore, it could not be ancestor worship. In support of this view, Charles H.

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<sup>61</sup> N.E. Parry, *Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, 104-106.

<sup>62</sup> H.L. Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizos*, 144-145; C.R. Nag, *Mizo Society in Transition*, 48.

Kraft's critique maintains that the term [ancestor worship] is the product of western worldview limitations, rather than an accurate designation of such customs. More appropriate would be a term such as 'ancestor reverence' or 'ancestor veneration' or even 'ancestor cult'.<sup>63</sup>

**e) *Khuangchawi*:**

*Khuangchawi* sacrificial feast was the final means to earn the coveted title 'thangchhuah'. In the Mizo traditional religion, *sakung*, *dawino chhui*, *sedawi* and *mithirawplam* were all prerequisite and preparatory steps in ascending order to the *khuangchawi* feast. None of the steps were to be skipped for *khuangchawi* feast was meritoriously honoured because it was essential for the attainment of a special title *thangchhuah*, which customarily meant performing and fulfilling all the religious rites and domestic feasts. *Khuangchawi* ceremony lasted for four days and the preparations of feasts and its paraphernalia were exactly the same as previous feasts. The most important point for our study is the worship of *sa* and *khua* for which the performer should kill at least three grown up mithuns, two boars and two young pigs. He should also kill a cow mithun for children.<sup>64</sup> According to Liangkhaia, a Mizo historian and the prominent leader of the church stated that '*khua*' was worshipped through sacrificing two bull mithuns and '*sa*' was worshipped by killing a hog. A mithun was killed for the public feast.<sup>65</sup>

The third day was the most colourful day. In the evening the performer, his wife and children were placed together in a specially designed frame box called '*khuanghlang*'

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<sup>63</sup> Kraft, *Anthropology*, 204-205.

<sup>64</sup> Sangkima, *Mizo: Society and Social Change* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1992), 57.

<sup>65</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin* [Mizo History] (Aizawl: Hmingliana & Sons, 1948; reprint Aizawl: LTL Publications, 2002), 49.

and carried around the street of the village. As they moved along, the couple threw cotton, hens, brass pots, clothes and sometimes they included guns and gongs. People scrambled for these gifts. This sacrifice was performed to propitiate good spirit called '*khuanu*', who was thought to look after the destiny and welfare of the people. One of the most outstanding and colourful features of the feast was *khualam*, a welcoming dance performed usually by men.

After all the religious rites and sacrificial feasts were over, the performer became '*thangchhuahpa*'. He was dubbed as *zawhzawzo* meaning 'one who had completed everything'. *Pialral* was now virtually his place of abode when he died. He was now entitled to open windows as wide as he pleased; to build house with veranda and to wear a specially designed cloth in red and black stripes called '*thangchhuah puan*'.

## **6.2. Ram lama Thangchhuah (Killing prescribed wild animals):**

Hunting animals had theological significance in the Mizo traditional religion for it provided the way to obtain the prestigious title of '*thangchhuah*'. In order to get this title a person had to kill animals such as elephant, bear, wild bison, stag, barking deer, wild boar and human (after clan feuds and internecine wars were forbidden, the killing of human being especially enemies was exempted). Besides these, king cobra (viper),<sup>66</sup> eagle and flying lemur were to be killed. One may have killed over a hundred animals but unless he killed all the aforementioned creatures, he could not earn the *thangchhuah* title. After killing each prescribed animal, a ceremony called '*ai*' had to be performed this required the killing of a domestic animal.<sup>67</sup> If he did not perform this ceremony, the spirit of the tiger might haunt him or he could not have

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<sup>66</sup> Lloyd, *Every High Hill*, 14.

<sup>67</sup> C.L. Hminga, *Life and Witness of the Churches of Mizoram* (Lunglei: Baptist Church of Mizoram, 1987), 36. Hereafter cited as 'Hminga, Life and Witness'.



any influence or power over the spirit of the tiger. The *thangchhuah* person possessed the spirits of all the animals in order to take him safely to *pialral* (paradise).

From this it is clear that the Mizo expectation of *pialral* was not too high. This may be due to the poverty and scarcity of food in the hill tracts that forced the Mizos to work all day long to get enough food for the entire family. Therefore their poor daily lives formed their expectation of *pialral*, where food is available without any labours; this understanding made *pialral* as the place of bliss or paradise to the Mizo people.

In his concluding remarks about the Mizo Religion, Saiaithanga writes, 'Mizo religion begins and ends with the fulfilment of the prescribed religious rites without touching any morality. Fulfilments were the primary concerns and even immoralities such as telling lies or stealing were neglected for these immoralities could not negate the performers of the feast of meritorious sacrifice to the entrance of *pialral*. The futuristic expectations were neither based on righteousness nor justice, but on the prestige to outdo others only.'<sup>68</sup>

## **7. COMMUNITY WORSHIP:**

In the primitive Mizo society the sense of community was so strong that they gave priority to their community in their thinking and actions rather than to their individual needs. Ultimately the Mizo identified himself or herself with the community and the village community became their own identity. When a Mizo met a stranger, he would ask the name of his/her village instead of asking his/her name. In reply the person would tell the name of the village. Communitarian life was very strong in the Mizo

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<sup>68</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua*, 42.

society and as a result there were numbers of community worship practices in the Mizo traditional religion which will now be discussed.

### **7.1. *Kawngpui Siam*:**

*Kawngpui siam* was a public religious sacrifice which was performed every year as an obligation. This was a religious community sacrifice asking god to bless the whole village with animals and human (enemies) heads.<sup>69</sup> According to Malsawma, one or two days before the festival, the village priest, the chief and the leading persons of the village performed this ceremony together to invoke the blessing of *Pathian* for a hunting party which was supposed to go on a hunt and provide meat for the feast as well as for their families.<sup>70</sup> This was done to ensure that in the New Year the villagers would be lucky in hunting, trapping animals, capturing slaves, winning in wars and taking heads of enemies and also that the crop would grow well.

A place was cleared on the road side or just outside the village and ash-sand was strewn on it. Two posts were erected on each side of this place and a cane was hung up between them across the road. The *sadawt* then sacrificed the pig and chanted all the names of the animals except tiger. After the sacrificial meat was cooked, they would offer certain parts of meat to the spirit and the rest would be eaten by the participants at the sacrificial place. No leftovers were allowed. The road surface between the two posts would be evenly dusted with ash in order to get the foot print of any animals crossing that place at night. They all left the sacrificial place by evening. On the night this ceremony was performed no strangers were allowed to enter the village and if any strangers came, they were asked to go on elsewhere.

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<sup>69</sup> Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute*, 121.

<sup>70</sup> H. L. Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizos*, 126.

Absentees were liable to be fined ‘*salam*’. The chief and his party would sing and drink rice-beer for the whole night.<sup>71</sup>

Early next morning, some young men would go to the place where ash was put to see the foot print of animals and carefully scrutinize the place. If they happened to find an animal foot print, they would interpret it as a good sign for success in hunting. On the other hand, if human or tiger foot prints<sup>72</sup> were found, these would be interpreted as a harbinger of accidental death and they would have to perform the same sacrificial ceremony again.

## **7.2. *Fano dawi*:**

*Fano dawi* was an annual sacrifice to god at the time of cultivating with the purpose of asking god to protect and bless crops so that they would have a luxuriant crop. This was performed at the gate of the road leading to the jhum. Since it was a communal sacrifice, any paraphernalia would be brought and performed by the *sadawt* priest. After the incantation, sacrificial animals would be killed and feasting would take place at the house of the village chief. A day was observed as a rest day, even pounding of the rice was not allowed. By observing this they hoped to harvest good crops and to have plants and vegetables which flourished.<sup>73</sup> The first generation

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<sup>71</sup> Selet Thanga, *Pi Pu Len Lai* [Days of the Ancestors] (Aizawl: Zoram Press, 1975), 65.

<sup>72</sup> For the explanation of the confusion on the issue of the footprint of an animal and a tiger, Lalsawma, senior church leader and prominent writer has said that from the time of our ancestors, Mizos never considered tiger as animal because it brought only tragedy and death to humankind. (Lalsawma, *Interviewed*, Durtlang: 23 August, 2009). C.Rokhuma, senior citizen and well known writer also emphasized that traditionally Mizos never included tiger in the family of animals. (C.Rokhuma, *Interviewed*, Mission Venghlang, Aizawl: 12 August, 2009). In support of this view, K. Hawla Sailo, *Mizo Ngaihlan Dek Che Tham* [That Moved the Mizo Thought], Kolkata: Author, 2001), 161. Moreover, Lalrinawmi Ralte has also mentioned that the most feared and greatest enemy of the villagers was the tiger. (Lalrinawmi Ralte, *Upa Chalhna: Mizo Nun leh Kohhran* [Elder Chalhna: Mizo Life and Church], Aizawl: Shalom Publications, 2009), 47.

<sup>73</sup> Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo*, 33-34.

Christians did not participate in this sacrificial ceremony and did not even observe the day as a rest day and thus problems started between the Mizo Christians and the non-Christians.<sup>74</sup>

The Mizo traditional religion when examined from the heritagist reading can be seen to have some elements which can be taken as theological hermeneutics such as the concept of *pleasing god*. From the beginning to the end of all religious sacrificial ceremonies a number of sacrifices were made to please god. Participation of the whole community was evident in all these religious feasts. Children, youths and adults received their own share in the ceremonies. **Equality** played an important part in all the feasts uniting and integrating the whole village community except in the *sakung* ceremony. In all other religious rites all clans participated equally and this gave a sense of equality and brotherhood. The **rights of children and women** were respected and they had their own share to enjoy without any guilt and shame. On the day of *khuangchawi*, the first priority was given to the wife of *thangchhuahpa*, this indicated that women were not looked down even though Mizo society was generally patriarchal. **Sharing** by giving these feasts demonstrated the morality of the performers, who had been benevolent to the poor and the needy. Sharing food and wealth for everybody without guilt and shame were the morality of the *thangchhuah*.

However, the western missionaries failed to see all these good elements in the Mizo primal religion like pleasing god, equality, and sharing and community participation in all the religious feasts. They blindly disapproved and negated these as pagan religion with drinking bouts and animistic practices.

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<sup>74</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua*, 27.

## **8. DEBATE IN THE POSTCOLONIAL PERIOD:**

I have stated that the Mizo primal religion was, according to the view of the western missionaries, crude and animistic. In other words from the 19th century missionary paradigm, any tribal or primal religion was regarded as animism. In the colonial period and in fear of the missionaries who were powerful and authoritative in the administration of the church the native people preferred to be silent. In this postcolonial period, the local churches including the Mizo church came forward and started retrieving their primal religion in order to make theological reflections in their context. Consequently, the ongoing debate among the Mizo theologians began as to whether the Mizo primal religion was animism or not.

### **8.1. Critique on Traditional Mission approach:**

This approach sees the Mizo primal religion as ‘animism or evil spirit worship’. In fact, this can be called a colonial missiological approach because it takes the traditional mission paradigm which sees the validity of Christianity at the expense of any other religions. All the western missionaries like J.H. Lorrain and H.W. Savigde,<sup>75</sup> J.M. Lloyd, Lewis E. Mendus and the Mizo pastor Saiaithanga<sup>76</sup> held this theological view in interpreting the Mizo religion. The Mizo primal religion was a mixture of worship of the Supreme Being and making sacrifices to evil spirits in order to placate their hostilities. The animistic approach reduces the worship of God and maximises the worship of evil spirits as the main religion. The traditional mission model emphasizes the transcendence of God and minimizes immanence of God. This theologically biased image of the Mizo god was imbalanced and made room for

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<sup>75</sup> F.W. Savigde, ‘Religious without Scripture, the Religion of the Hill men’ in *Missionary Herald*, Vol. 87, No. 7 July (London: BMS, 1907), 205-206.

<sup>76</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua*, 1.

wrong interpretations. For example, J.H. Lorrain, the pioneer missionary to Mizoram compiled a Dictionary of the Lushai Language, in which he defines the highest Mizo religious performance *khuangchawi* as ‘the name of the public feast given by chiefs and well-to-do Lushais’.<sup>77</sup> This definition nullifies the religious significance of the Mizo religion because in *khuangchawi*, there was a sacrifice to god and it was the climax of the Mizo traditional religion.<sup>78</sup> Lorrain left undefined all these religious aspects of the Mizo primal religion.

### **8.1.1. Historicization of Christian Faith:**

The missionaries understood that they had come to build the kingdom that was not of this world. Therefore, to introduce Christianity they historicized the Christian faith at the expense of rejecting the local religion. R.S. Sugirtharajah rightly delineates the historicization of the colonial interpreters,

This heightened notion of historicity for Christian faith enabled colonial interpreters to portray non-biblical religions as the pagan ‘other’ of Christianity, needing deliverance. The sacred texts of other religions were treated as ‘mythological absurdities and amatory trifles.

The Mizo did not have sacred text or texts, but they had their traditional religious worships and practices. David Kyles, after describing Mizo religion as animism, portrays the Mizos as having no religion at all. As he put it,

That is to say, they have no religion at all. They do not worship any gods, or goddesses, but are keenly aware of the unseen spirit world

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<sup>77</sup> J.H. Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1940; reprint Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1982), 266. Hereafter cited as ‘J.H. Lorrain, Dictionary’.

<sup>78</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, 49. See also N.E. Parry, *Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, 100,107.

of which they are terribly afraid every moment of their lives. The apostle describes their condition exactly when he says, ‘for as much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage’ (Heb. 2:15).<sup>79</sup>

This is a biased statement on the Mizo primal religion because the Mizos did worship God (Pathian), but unfortunately that worship was seen as drinking bouts for drinking rice-beer was part and parcel of the primal religious ceremony.<sup>80</sup>

### **8.1.2. Approaches to Animism:**

Colonial officers like J. Shakespear, A.G. McCall,<sup>81</sup> and missionaries like F.W. Savidge, J.H. Lorrain, David Kyles, J. Merion Lloyd and others describe the Mizo religion as crude animism. In one sense it is partially right to maintain this view because the primitive Mizos offered sacrifices to the evil spirits in order to appease and propitiate the evil spirits. But these sacrifices did not represent the Mizo religion as a whole. Moreover, these sacrifices to evil spirits were not, firstly, obligatory for the Mizos; and secondly, worshipping evil spirits was to divert and dissuade evil spirit from tormenting men and women. Still further, these evil spirits were regarded as the prime enemies of human beings.<sup>82</sup> It was really unlikely that the Mizos worshipped

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<sup>79</sup> David Kyles, *Lorrain of the Lushais: Romance and Realism on the North-East Frontier of India* (London: The Carey Press, 1944), 6.

<sup>80</sup> Lloyd, *Every High Hill*, 58.

<sup>81</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 197.

<sup>82</sup> C. Rosiama, ‘Mizo Sakhua’ [Mizo Religion] in B. Lalthangliana, ed., *Hranghluite Sulhnu* [Footprints of the Heroes] (Aizawl: RTM Press, 1996), 79. Hereafter cited as ‘C. Rosiama, Mizo Sakhua’.

their enemies, rather sacrifice to evil spirits indicated that they deceived their enemies. Therefore, the author will develop three approaches to the so called Mizo animism in order to substantiate a postcolonial theological perspective:

**(a) Dissuading approach:**

This approach sees that animism or worship of evil spirit was to dissuade evil spirits from tormenting human beings with illness and various sicknesses. The evil spirits were thought lower than the human beings and the spirits were treated as if they were badly-behaved children who expected be coaxed. Therefore, it was not worshipping rather it was like dissuading or coaxing the malignant spirits.<sup>83</sup> J. Merion Lloyd makes it clear and states,

‘Lushai sacrifices were intended rather to divert or dissuade evil spirits from tormenting men and women. An altar was made afresh every time it was required. The odd thing is that when sacrifices were made everything was in miniature. Evil spirits were believed to be small (rather like gnomes and pixies). An altar was therefore, small- only a few inches high.’<sup>84</sup>

Therefore, dissuading here means to persuade evil spirits not to harm or torment human beings. It is; therefore, wrong to identify dissuading with worship in the Mizo traditional religion.

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<sup>83</sup> J. Merion Lloyd, *History of the Churches in Mizoram* (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1991), 51. Hereafter cited as ‘Lloyd, History of the Churches’.

<sup>84</sup> Lloyd, *Every High Hill*, 19-20.



**(b) Deceiving approach:**

In the deceiving approach the Mizo did not worship evil spirits through their sacrificial offerings. In fact deceiving is neither worshipping nor submission to the spirits. Deceivable beings are lower than human beings in knowledge.<sup>85</sup> In the Mizo concept, the evil spirits were never thought to be superior to human beings; rather they were inferior and could be out-witted and deceived. J.M. Lloyd delineates the concept of deceiving in this way,

‘Hens were killed and the beaks, the entrails and the claws sacrificed on the altar. The evil spirit assumed that they were being given the hens complete. Whenever a man was ill a clay model of a woman was made for the evil spirits. Again when a woman was ill it was a model of a man that was offered. There were other occasions when evil spirits were deceived. If such a spirit was believed to be trying to take away a new born baby it was promptly deposited in a neighbour’s house. The parents would go along to the house pretending it was not their baby but asking rather, ‘Have you got a little slave baby that you don’t want?’ Ugly names were also given to children so that the evil spirits would think them undesirable and would not want to steal them!’<sup>86</sup>

Viewed in the light of this approach, it can be advocated that the Mizo did not worship evil spirits as God but rather deceived them in order to have a wholesome healthy life from their capricious and malignant effects on human beings.

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<sup>85</sup> Lalnghinglova, *Zoram Nghahchhan* [Foundation of Zoram] (Aizawl: Saikungi, 2000), 121. Hereafter cited as ‘Lalnghinglova, Zoram Nghahchhan’.

<sup>86</sup> Lloyd, *Every High Hill*, 20.

**(c) Adversary approach:**

This approach sees that the Mizo conceptualization of evil spirits as adversaries or enemies who create in their minds constant fear in the world, who never do any good to human beings. No adoration was shown and the meat offering to evil spirits were the worst part which cannot be eaten by human beings. It was not based on love. Chapman and Clark write,

‘As was described earlier, the people lived in constant fear of evil spirits, and the religion was mainly an attempt to ward off the malice of the spirits by spells, taboos and sacrifices. They sacrificed animals, but usually offered to the spirits the less edible portions. As *Chani nu* (Chani’s mother) once commented, what we gave to the spirits was only what we ourselves did not want. Our old religion was not worth much, was it?’<sup>87</sup>

In the light of this approach, the evil spirits are the main source of injustice, injury and all kinds of suffering in the world. A destructive rather than a constructive attitude towards human beings cannot necessarily lead to worship. How can the Mizos worship these adversary spirits? It is therefore, not right to identify the Mizo traditional religion as animism.

**9. POSTCOLONIAL APPROACHES TO MIZO PRIMAL RELIGION:**

As has been discussed in the previous section, Mizo primal religion was described as animism. It is therefore, necessary to see the validity of the term in postcolonial subaltern approaches. When we say postcolonial approaches, the author may includes–

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<sup>87</sup> Chapman E & M. Clark, *Mizo Miracle* (Madras: Christian Literature Service, 1969), 90. Hereafter cited as ‘Chapman & Clark, Mizo Miracle’.

a theistic approach, an unknown god approach, an inclusive approach, a fulfilment approach and a henotheistic approach. The Mizo religious customs from *sakung* to *khuangchawi* and community worship will be assessed in the light of these five approaches with the theological hermeneutics in a postcolonial perspective. However, the author does not claim that the Mizo traditional religion was a completed one without Christianity; rather it had elements to take as theological hermeneutics for reinterpretations in the light of the gospel.

### **9.1. Theistic approach:**

This approach advocates that the Mizo traditional religion was theistic; they worshipped the Supreme Being whom they called '*Pathian*' and never worshipped evil spirits. It is therefore not right to identify the Mizo religion as animism. Nevertheless, no one paid any attention to these subaltern voices at the time of the colonial regime because they dared not challenge the missionaries. It was Liangkhaia, the first generation Mizo theologian and church leader, who defended this theological position in connection with the Mizo primal religion. As Liangkhaia puts it, 'in its truest sense the Mizo does not worship evil spirits, but faithfully seeks God.'<sup>88</sup> K. Zawla, a teacher and lay leader in the Mizo church was also the exponent of this theological position and he writes,

'The Mizo religion is not a sacrifice to evil spirits; rather it is a worship and submission of the family to Pathian(God), who is the creator, guardian and dispenser of blessing to human beings. It is not obligatory to do this religious worship every year, although there are certain times to do so.'<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, 49-50.

<sup>89</sup> Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute*, 78.

A critical survey of the Mizo religious practices and ceremonies from the beginning (*sakung*) to the end (*khuangchawi*) and community worship shows that there was worship of *Pathian* (God). *Sa* (creator) and *khua* (protector) are corporately worshipped by sacrificing pig and mithun or gayal (domesticated animal). Therefore, it is a valid fact that the Mizos worshipped *Pathian* (God). However, it was not a perfect understanding but a vague understanding, which was far from perfect in the light of the gospel.

The colonial mission did not recognize that the concept of a Supreme Being had already been in existence among the Mizos and did not incorporate it into theological hermeneutics. Edwin Rowlands, the missionary to the Mizo people, who had deeply studied and participated in the Mizo religious and social functions, accepted that the Mizo people offered sacrifices to God. As he writes in the report in 1899,

During the first tour, we witnessed one of the Lushai feasts, in which as they say, they worship their God. They generally sacrifice to demons, of which they are in great fear; but two or three times a year they worship their God. Two of these feasts are held; one after the clearing of the land for sowing, and the other after the 'harvest home'. This was a slight degradation of religion not to be forgotten; for two or three days the large village was 'given to drunkenness'; old women and old men would mutter in drunken accents, that they were worshipping God.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> K. Thanzauva, comp., *Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales on Mizoram 1894-1957* (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1997), 7. Hereafter cited as 'K. Thanzauva, Reports'.

This fact may be the proof of the worship of God by the Mizos. In the light of postcolonial criticism, this theistic approach retrieves and rediscovers what had been lost in the Mizo traditional religion and it highlights hermeneutical issues for reinterpretation. As a matter of fact, the writings of the western colonial officers and missionaries are challenged and corrected, and a close connection between a Supreme Being (God) and human beings in the Mizo primal religion is reclaimed despite its deficiencies. However, it does not deny the existence of many kinds of sacrifices to evil spirits. It recognizes such practices but does not accept them as worship.

### **9. 2. Unknown God approach:**

This approach holds the view that Mizo primal religion was ‘worship of the unknown God’, the supreme being whom they did not know. This view is similar to the theological stance of St. Paul at Athens (Acts 17:16ff). While the Mizos were living between the *Run* and *Tiau* rivers in Chin Hills, Myanmar, they sought to worship the god of their parents in times of stress and difficulties. They did not know the name of god of their parents and J. Shakespear describes the incantations of the Mizo priests in their worship sacrifice as follows:

Ah- Arise from the village. Aw-w

And accept our sacrifice

Ah- Arise from the open space in the village, Aw

And accept our sacrifice.

Ah- arise from your dwelling place, Aw

Ah- Arise from the gathering mists. Aw

Ah- arise from below the hill. Aw

Ah- Arise from the village. Aw

Ah- Arise from the floor. Aw

Ah- Arise from the earth. Aw

Accept our sacrifice.

Bless Luta's spirit (the householder's name),

Bless us with sons, bless us with daughters,

Bless us while in bed, bless us round the hearth.

Bless us while the sun shines,

Bless us while the moon shines.

May those above bless us, may those below us bless us.

Guard us from our enemies, guard us from death.

Favour us with flesh,

Favour us with the produce of the jungle.

Bless us in killing man, bless us in shooting animals

Guard us in the presence of men; guard us in the presence of animals.

Bless us in our old age,

Bless us when our heads are bowed down.

Those whom our grandmothers worshipped guard us,

Those whom our grandfathers worshipped guard us.

Bless us in spite of the faults in this worship...<sup>91</sup>

From the above incantations in the Mizo primal worship, it seems that the Mizos are searching for god whom they did not know and addressing him in a theistic manner as *Pathian* or *Khuanu*. Lianzika, a former Mizo religious priest (*sadawt*) of Mualpheng

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<sup>91</sup> Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans*, 71-72.

village agrees with this theological position.<sup>92</sup> Therefore, this idea of an unknown god is not a new development in the Mizo religion but already existed as a hidden idea during the colonial missionary period, but comes out as a new development in the postcolonial period. In support of this, Saiaithanga also mentioned that the primitive Mizos, who did not know what to call god used the following incantation,

‘The Being whom grandma worshipped, accept our sacrifice;

The Being whom grandpa worshipped, accept our sacrifice.’<sup>93</sup>

The incantation clearly indicates that although they worshipped the Being, they did not know who the Being was. And in support of this, Kam lian Buai, a theologian from Burma gave evidence from the conversion of the Mizos in the Chin Hills, Burma. Early Christians from Mizoram visited the Mizos living in Chin Hills and preached by using the unknown god approach. The Lushais were men of their own blood, speaking the same language. Therefore, it was easy for the Lushai Christians to tell their Hualngo brothers ‘what therefore you worship as unknown, this we proclaim to you’ (Acts 17:23).<sup>94</sup>

The validity of the unknown approach is evidence from the conversion of the Mizos in Chin Hills without the help of western missionaries. What the Mizos worshipped in their traditional religion was identified with the Christian God. Before the western missionaries came to the Chin Hills, The Mizos had already been converted to Christianity by their brothers and sisters from Mizoram. From a postcolonial perspective, this approach takes Mizo religion out of the folds of colonial

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<sup>92</sup> C. Laitanga, *Mizo Sakhua* [Mizo Religion] (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1983), 11.

<sup>93</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua*, 13.

<sup>94</sup> Kam Lian Buai, *Christianity in the Hualngo Country* (Yongon-Insein: Unpublished BRE thesis, Myanmar Institute of Theology, 1995), 86.

missiological interpretations called animism. It successfully retrieves the religious element in Mizo religion and brings out theological hermeneutics, paving the way to relate the biblical concept of the unknown God of Paul found in Acts 17:23.

### **9.3. Inclusive approach:**

This approach sees the Mizo traditional religion in terms of the theology of anonymous Christianity of Karl Rahner. God has long been revealing himself to the Mizo people because our ancestors for many years worshipped God through their primal religion. In other words, the traditional Mizo religion was not animism, the Mizo traditional unknown god was made perfect in Christ, and the Mizos were anonymous Christians.<sup>95</sup>

C. Rosiama, a Mizo pastor and theologian strongly advocated this theological stance. He goes beyond the traditional missionary interpretations advocating the validity of the Mizo primal religion in the light of Acts 17:26, 27 and Romans 16:26. He used Acts 17:16 and 17 to justify how the Mizos had been searching for God and to show the presence of God among the primitive Mizo people from time immemorial to the present day as preparation for Christianity. In addition, the Mizo prophetic announcement of the coming of the British and Christian mission was justified in the light of Romans 16: 26 as a valid revelation of God among the Mizos. He also states that the Mizo concept of *pialral*, expectation of life beyond in Mizo tradition was identical to the Christian concept of heaven. Moreover, the moral and ethical teachings in the Mizo tradition like murder, theft and self-sacrifice were advocated

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<sup>95</sup> C. Rosiama, *Mizo Sakhua*, 96.



with certain validity as the pre-existent Christian ethics and virtues. After pointing out all these elements he makes a theological statement as follows:

Comparing all these similarities, God had already revealed himself among the Mizos, and the Mizo traditional religion was what we now know as Christianity. In primitive times, God was vaguely conceived and the Mizos did some animistic practices like worshipping stones and trees. But when they realized that Christianity was supposed to be their religion, Mizos firmly stuck to it and never wavered.<sup>96</sup>

This inclusive approach however brought certain theological developments with positive and negative results. It has been on the one hand, strengthening and advocating the validity of God's revelation through different cultures of the world. On the other hand, to identify the Mizo primal religion with Christianity would not be acceptable in the strict sense of Christianity. Critical theological questions may be addressed to this approach for verification. The author has some reservation in accepting C. Rosiama's exposition of the Mizo primal religion for if all primal religion must be categorized as a vague understanding of Christian religion this may lead to subjective relativism that cannot be practiced in real life.

#### **9.4. Fulfilment approach:**

Fulfilment approach sees that Christianity fulfils what is missing in the Mizo primal religion. Long before the western missionaries came to Mizoram, the Mizos had the

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 95-96.

concept of God, celestial beings and life after death and similar moral and ethical teachings. All these accorded with Christian teaching. What the missionaries brought to the Mizo people was Jesus Christ and Christianity. In support to this argument, J.V. Hluna, a Mizo historian says:

‘Critically scrutinizing the then existing concept of God, *Pu Vana*, *van pathian*, *khuanu* and the concept of life after death and the moral laws such as ‘committing murder, adultery and stealing’ are against the transcendental reality in Mizo primal religion approves that before we are Christianized we have already accepted the moral teachings of Christianity. What Christianity has added to the Mizo traditional religion are Jesus Christ and Christianity itself.’<sup>97</sup>

Again he continues to say that the primary reason for accepting Christianity by all the Mizos lies in the common aspects of moral and ethical norms in Mizo religion and Christianity. However, the fear of evil spirits prevented us from living out those moral teachings in practical daily lives. Christianity brought Jesus Christ who overpowers the evil spirits and we accepted the gospel tidings of Jesus Christ which liberated us from evil spirits.<sup>98</sup>

The Fulfilment approach is rather similar to the inclusive approach, but it does not claim the possibility of anonymous Christianity. Rather it sees Jesus Christ and Christianity fulfilling the inadequacies and weaknesses of Mizo traditional religion.

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<sup>97</sup> Lalnghinglova, *Zoram Nghahchhan*, 7.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

### 9.5. Henotheistic approach:

By the henotheistic approach, the author means the worship of a single god while recognizing the existence of several gods but regards one particular god as the deity of the family or tribe; makes him the centre of worship; and in its relation with him neglects for practical purposes the existence of others.<sup>99</sup> In fact, the henotheistic approach stands mid-way between polytheism and monotheism. Monotheism is the belief in the existence of one god, and monolatry restricts worship to a single god while recognizing the existence of several gods but regarding one particular god as deity of the family or tribe. The practice of the Mizo traditional religion was dualistic worship maintaining the worship of *Pathian* (high God) and sacrifices to evil spirits. It is therefore, henotheistic conceptually, believing in the existence both of one theistic god and other gods like the faith of the Hebrew people when God said, 'worship no gods but me' (Exodus 20: 3). Among the Mizo theologians, Z.T. Sangkhuma, a pastor and writer is of this theological stance. He believed that Mizo religion was neither monotheism nor polytheism, nor animism; rather it was henotheism or monolatry which restricted the worship to one god while recognizing the existence of other gods as well.<sup>100</sup>

In this sense, the Mizo primal religion could be reinterpreted as henotheism or monolatry which would be more appropriate and more fit the Mizo religious and cultural practices more closely. In Mizo traditional religion *Pathian* (God) was worshipped and sacrifices were offered to evil spirits for healing from different kinds of sickness and illness. Therefore, the author believes that Mizo primal religion

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<sup>99</sup> F.L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, third edition, 1997), 750.

<sup>100</sup> Z.T. Sangkhuma, *Culture and Christianity* [Seminar paper] (Champhai: Mizo Cultural Club, 27 October, 1997), 5.

should be categorized as ‘henotheism’ in which the primary allegiance was given to *Pathian* (God) and sacrifices to evil spirits were also offered for healing from sickness and illness.<sup>101</sup>

## **10. THE MIZOS AND THEIR CULTURE:**

In this section the author will deal selectively and briefly with some aspects of Mizo popular culture such as the institution of *zawlbuk*, (Bachelor’s dormitory) the Mizo philosophy of *tlawmngaihna* (self sacrifice), festivals and dances because all these elements played an important part in the Mizo cultural change.

### **10.1. Zawlbuk:<sup>102</sup>**

Lalbiak Thanga, a Mizo retired government officer who did extensive empirical study believes that *zawlbuk*, which literally means ‘a big house built for young men to sleep together and keep a vigil at night against enemies’, was introduced in the Mizo society after they occupied the present Mizoram.<sup>103</sup> Apart from the head-hunting and inter-village feuds, the village life was often endangered by the constant attack of the ferocious wild animals upon their domestic animals and human beings as well. To ensure the security and peace of the village, they were compelled to organize such an institution to immediately respond to the urgent call of the chief and anyone in danger. Though security was its primary concern, the *zawlbuk* was also concerned for the total welfare of the village community, and thus became the training centre of a village. It was an institution from which the young men learned technique of war,

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<sup>101</sup> Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture: The Encounter between Christianity and Zo Culture in Mizoram* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997), 315. Hereafter cited as ‘M. Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture’.

<sup>102</sup> The picture of Zawlbuk is given in Appendix V.

<sup>103</sup> Lalbiak Thanga, *The Mizos*, 1.

fighting, wrestling, singing, sex, traditions, customs, etiquette, religion and all the essential things for their lives in their own context.

N.E. Parry, the then Superintendent of the Lushai Hills from 1924-1928 wrote that in the villages where there were *zawlbuks*, the people were comparatively better disciplined, more industrious and keener hunters than in the villages where there were none.<sup>104</sup> In support of this, S.T. Das rightly expressed:

These are an excellent institutions and a distinctive feature of every tribal village. In these clubs young boys have to serve and obey older boys, besides being associated with agricultural, social and almost all other activities of the village community instilled into the youths, respect for and obedience to elders, a spirit of service to the community.<sup>105</sup>

It is not certain how and why such an important institution has disappeared from the Mizo society. There was no prohibition from the side of the government but the emerging new culture which owed much to the British administration and Christianity may have put the *zawlbuk* to an end. The head hunting and inter-village war ceased, the new education system introduced by missionaries prevented many boys from staying on in the *zawlbuk* and peace and tranquillity dawned in the Mizo society and all these factors may have contributed to the extinction of *zawlbuk*. A.G. McCall, the then Superintendent of Mizoram made a serious effort to revive the institution of *zawlbuk* that was discussed in the Young Lushai Association conference in 1914. In spite of his sincere effort, the institution of the *zawlbuk* died a natural death and could

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<sup>104</sup> N.E. Parry, *Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, 9.

<sup>105</sup> S.T. Das, *The Tribal of North East India* (Delhi: Gain Publishing House, 1976), 51.

not continue to exist in its traditional form, but the spirit of *zawlbuk* was resurrected in the Mizo society in a different form as Mizo ecclesiology.

### **10.2. *Tlawmngaihna*:**

The most significant element of Mizo culture maintained by the *zawlbuk* was, however the comprehensive Mizo philosophy of life called '*tlawmngaihna*'. *Tlawmngaihna* literally means 'self-denial for the cause of community and individuals who were in need'. Since *tlawmngaihna* was regarded as the highest quality of life, everyone tried very hard to get the title '*tlawmngai*', which no one officially granted but was conferred by the conventional judgement of the villagers. The certificate was nothing but a cup of rice-beer called '*tlawmngai No*' offered on the occasion of social drinking as recognition of the contributions and sacrifices one had made for others. A cup of rice-beer did not matter much, but the recognition of one as *tlawmngai* was extremely difficult to attain and was highly regarded in the Mizo society.

*Tlawmngaihna* implies a context of independence and self-sufficiency. The Mizos in the pre-literature era hardly attempted to conceptualise or philosophise the term since they tended to understand all socio-religious values in concrete terms and rarely articulated *tlawmngaihna* as a theory. From this perspective, K. Thanzauva's interpretation of the term as a carnal virtue seems quite authentic.<sup>106</sup> The Mizos normally considered *tlawmngaihna* not as an ideal but as some tangible quality of a person or persons. In fact, any aptitude or activity, religious or carnal, wherein self interest was subordinated to the interest of others collectively or individually was

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<sup>106</sup> K. Thanzauva 'Mizo *tlawmngaihna* and Niskama karma' in *United Theological College Annual Magazine*, 1984-85, Bangalore, UTC, 16-18.

considered to be the expression of *tlawmngaihna*.<sup>107</sup> It was this principle which compelled the Mizos to extend hospitality to unknown strangers or travellers, to provide them food and shelter and with a lunch pack for their continuing journey. McCall's description of the practical exhibition of this life principle displays much of its social implications:

Crops of the sick would be tended by the strong; the chief's lands would be weeded as a mark of support, help would be given to rebuild houses accidentally burn down, warriors would volunteer when their help was needed hunters would strive to be energetic in the chase, and in general the good citizen was he who was foremost in meeting calls that were really necessary for the good of the whole village.<sup>108</sup>

*Tlawmngaihna* so overwhelmingly pervaded the whole life of the Mizo society and of individuals in their private, social and religious enterprises that in certain contexts it became synonymous with the generic term 'Mizo'. Thus when a man or a woman is said to be un-Mizo, it means that he or she is lacking *tlawmngaihna* and there can hardly be any remark more insulting to the people concerned. However, I notice the uniqueness of the Mizo *tlawmngaihna* not in its teaching but in the degree of its impact on the Mizo society. *Tlawmngaihna* is undoubtedly the inner core and dominating life principle of the Mizo people.

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<sup>107</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Revival Movement and the Church in Mizoram 1906-1949* (Bangalore: Unpublished DTh Thesis, Senate of Serampore College, 1998), 57. Hereafter cited as 'Vanlalchhuanawma, Revival Movement'.

<sup>108</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 98.

### **10. 3. Mizo Traditional festivals:**

Historically, the Mizo had three festivals *Chapchar kut*, *Pawl kut* and *Mim kut*. Owing to the limitation of space, only the *chapchar kut*, the most important one among the festivals will be highlighted here.

*Chapchar kut* was held every year in March or April after the *jhum* had been cut and dried. This festival was celebrated to give thanks to God or *Pathian* for his protection from all kinds of injuries and for all the blessing he bestowed on them during their engagement in the forest. It lasted for about a week or more depending upon the villagers who could afford to celebrate. Every family was expected to prepare rice beer to cover the whole festival. Young people were not supposed to drink beer except on this occasion. On the first day of the festival, the chief clan slaughtered the pig and followed by others of the tribe on the following days. The young men and girls participated in various *chai* dances and songs. Traditionally, the Mizos were not allowed to have any quarrels between husbands and wives during this festival. Therefore, *chapchar kut* was the happiest time in the life of the Mizo society. This festival will be reinterpreted in the chapter five.

### **10.4. Mizo Traditional dances and songs:**

Dances not only marked the socio-cultural, but also the religious life of the traditional Mizo society. They were performed only on certain occasions like *khuangchawi*, which was a religious custom and ceremony and festive days like *chapchar kut*. It is also to be noted that beer drinking was traditionally and culturally compulsory in singing and dancing. Dances were always accompanied by lively music using instruments such as drum or gongs. But the Exclusive missionaries prohibited



participation in these functions because they perceived them as pagan practices. This created cultural alienation in the Mizo context.

Before the coming of the British and the Christian missionaries, the Mizos developed various folk songs, out of these the author will pick out the most relevant one ‘*Puma* songs and communal dance’ for our study purpose. *Puma* singing was a type of singing and dancing having a particular tune and a way of singing. One particular point worthy of note was that *Puma* singing moved the public to participate in the dance. The spread of *Puma* singing was so popular and fast spreading that it could really retard the spread of Christianity at that time. The Mizo church branded them as anti-Christian songs associated with demonical power. J.M. Lloyd called it a ‘revival of heathenism’;<sup>109</sup> J.H. Lorrain branded it ‘Satanic opposition’;<sup>110</sup> Liangkhaia, a Mizo pastor said it was ‘revelation of power of darkness’.<sup>111</sup>

Later, alongside *Puma* singing, a certain type of singing and dancing called ‘*Tlanglam zai*’ which means communal singing and dancing became popular in the Mizo society. Actually the *Puma* singing was gradually transformed into *tlanglam zai* in which almost all the Mizo people engaged in dancing. Till 1947, it became the main type of singing and dancing among the non-Christian Mizos. The author will substantiate how these elements gradually indigenized into Mizo Christian hymns and dance in chapter three.

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<sup>109</sup> Lloyd, *Every High Hill*, 54-55.

<sup>110</sup> *The Annual Reports of BMS on Mizoram 1901-1938* (Serkawn: Baptist Church of Mizoram, 1994), 48. Hereafter cited as ‘Reports of BMS’.

<sup>111</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, 196.

## CONCLUSION:

In the Mizo primal religion there was the concept of a Supreme Being (*Pathian*), who was worshipped by the people by performing different social and religious sacrificial ceremonies. However, due to the inclusion of drinking rice-beer in their religious worship, the western missionaries without having proper and critical assessment of the concepts and teachings of Mizo religion, branded the Mizo traditional religion as heathenism. In addition, there were some animistic practices in the Mizo primal religion because they offered sacrifices to evil spirits for healing from illness and sicknesses. The then missionaries failed to understand that in the Mizo primal religious practices, there was '*sakhaw biak or sakung*' which means 'worshipping God' and '*ramhuai biak*' which means 'propitiating evil spirits'. These two religious practices should clearly be differentiated if we try to do theological hermeneutics in the Mizo context.

All the postcolonial approaches mentioned above in one way or another assist and support the postcolonial reading in order to retrieve and liberate the Mizo primal religion out of the folds of the western colonial mission paradigm. Firstly, when the missionaries branded the Mizo primal religion as animism, there was a concrete element of worshipping the Supreme Being in the Mizo traditional religion. Therefore, Mizo traditional religion cannot be categorized as animism even though it was far from perfect and a more appropriate categorization should be 'henotheism'.

Secondly, all postcolonial approaches retrieve the revelation of God to the Mizo people and this confirmed that the Mizo traditional religion was a religion of epiphany, revelation of God to human beings out of Mizo primal religion.

Thirdly, the concept of Supreme Being and celestial god, and the concept of *Khuanu*, *Pu Vana* pave the way to accept the classical Christian doctrine of trinity. Moreover, the concept of *khal* (guardian spirit) also helps the understanding of angels in the Bible and it reveals the close relationship of human beings to supernatural beings.

Fourthly, the concept of life after death and *pialral* expectation enabled the Mizos to accept the concept of heaven in Christianity without much difficulty although the purpose might be slightly different.

With respect to the traditional Mizo culture, the following points are vital: the administration of the chief and council of elders in the village, the function and role played by the institution of *zawlbuk* and how the *tlawmngaihna* shaped the Mizo community life. It is worthwhile to point out that the concept of chieftainship later contributed to the administrative structure of the Mizo church and the philosophy of *tlawmngaihna* contributed to church growth and Christian ethics in Mizo Christianity.

Kosuke Koyama writes, 'Theophany creates changes in human culture.'<sup>112</sup> Therefore, how these elements in the Mizo context had been transformed, modified and used as theological hermeneutics with the theophany brought by the colonial power and the Christian missionaries will be critically examined in the following chapter.

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<sup>112</sup> Kosuke Koyama, 'Participation of culture in the Transfiguration of Humanity: Forms of Ecumenical Theology' in *Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 7, No. 2, October, 1993, 219.

## Chapter Two

### THE ADVENT OF COLONIALISM AND CHRISTIAN MISSION

#### 1. INTRODUCTION:

This chapter will deal with the transformation of the Mizo traditional religion, its culture and political framework due to the advent of the British rule and Christian missionaries in Mizoram. One of the popular concepts of the coming of the British and the missionaries was the divine providence because of the prediction given by the Mizo prophet Darphawka of *Pukpui* village, South Lushai Hills eighty years before their arrival.<sup>113</sup> Historically, the author is convinced that the annexation of the Mizo land to the British Empire was the result of the ferocious and oppressive Mizos, who very often raided the British subjects living in the plain areas neighbouring to their land.<sup>114</sup> As to the Christian mission, the coming of the western missionaries, who dedicated their precious lives for the salvation of the Mizo people deserved due credit for the transforming power of the gospel which they brought and preached to enlighten the Mizo society. The assumption of the author is that since the missionaries were the missionaries of the colonial times, there were constructive as well as destructive social-political and cultural transformations within the context of the Mizo society. These changes and transformations need to be evaluated, modified and reformulated in the light of the postcolonial theological readings such as resistance, dissident and subaltern readings.

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<sup>113</sup> M. Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 189-190. According to Mangkhosat Kipgen, the prophet was Darphawka, a man from *Pukpui* village in South Lushai Hills, who had a dream one night and a voice saying, 'a great light will come from the west and shine upon the Mizo land; follow the light, for the people who bring it will be ruling the race... This light may not shine in my life time, but when it comes, follow it- follow it.' When D.E. Jones, Welsh missionary in Mizoram visited the *Pukpui* village, the two daughters of Darphawka, Lawmi and Khumi became the first Christians because of their father's influence; H.L. Liansailova, *Kum 30 Lai Rawng Ka Bawlina* [A Missionary's Autobiography: Thirty Years of My Ministry 1897-1926] (Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press, 1999), 36.

<sup>114</sup> V.L. Zaithanga, *From Head- Hunting to Soul-Hunting* (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1981), 10. Hereafter cited as 'Zaithanga, Head Hunting'.

On the one hand, the British military officers imposed peace, prohibited various savage and barbarous practices and at the same time preferred to continue the administration of the Mizo chiefs to rule the people and made use of them as contact persons to act on their behalf. On the other hand, the rigid missionaries completely swept aside the existing religious traditions and allied practices and thus changed the traditional Mizo society.<sup>115</sup> As a result, the socio-cultural changes in the Mizo context are two-fold, the British administrators imposed changes and the missionaries convinced the people of the necessity of such transformations even though in certain case the British administrators and the missionaries had different views and sometimes clashed over changing social-cultural structures and institutions. The author on the one hand will focus on the beneficial aspects of the Mizo society due to the introduction of British rule and Christianity; on the other hand as Sugirtharajah suggests that the colonial people also inherited the psychological, intellectual and cultural domination which is the most damaging for the society from the colonial power.<sup>116</sup> The abolition of the slavery system, *zawlbuk* and *chapchar kut* in the Mizo society will be read in a postcolonial perspective to contribute new approaches.

## **2. SOCIO-CULTURAL SITUATION BEFORE THE BRITISH RULE:**

The socio-cultural situation of the Mizo society prior to the British annexation of Mizoram was what anthropologists would call a ‘non-literate culture’ and some would say a ‘primitive culture’ because the people had not developed a form of writing. Since some of the important socio-cultural practices of the Mizos had already been

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<sup>115</sup> E.J. Thomas, *Mizo: Bamboo Hills Murmur Change* (Delhi: Intellectual Publishing House. 1993), 46.

<sup>116</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Postcolonialism: Contesting Interpretations* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 1998), 126.

mentioned in the previous chapter we will not repeat what has been already discussed instead we will go straight to the coming of the British Colonial power.

### **3. THE BRITISH ADMINISTRATION AND CHANGES:**

The introduction of the British rule in Mizoram had great impacts on the life of the Mizo people in both ways – positive and negative. The positive contribution of the British administration to the Mizo people was that it transformed the primitive Mizo society to the modern age and prepared the way for the coming of Christian missionaries in Mizoram. Negatively, as McCall confessed the British administration paralysed the social life of the Mizo society.<sup>117</sup>

A retired Indian civil servant Animesh Ray, basing his argument on the warlike nature of the Mizos concludes that the occupation of Mizoram was ‘a step against the British economic interest’.<sup>118</sup> In addition to this view, R. Vanlawma, a Mizo veteran politician and prominent writer recorded that the Mizo chief, Suakpuilala raided the tea garden along the border of Cachar and also neighbouring Chittagong Hills Tract and Tripura in defence of the land encroached upon by British planters.<sup>119</sup> Zairema’s observation also supports this and he said that with the discoveries of Assam tea, plantations started on the foothills bordering Mizoram. Gradually the forest gave way to planters’ axes. The Mizos were alarmed at the encroachment of lands they considered theirs. To discourage such expansion they led a number of raids into these tea gardens plundering and killing.<sup>120</sup> Zokima, a retired pastor and writer, shares a

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<sup>117</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 196.

<sup>118</sup> Animesh Ray, *Mizoram: Dynamics of Change* (Calcutta: Pearl Publishers, 1982), 16.

<sup>119</sup> R. Vanlawma, *Ka Ram Leh Kei* [Me and My Country] (Aizawl: Zoram Printing Press, 1972) 19. Hereafter cited as ‘Vanlawma, Ka Ram’.

<sup>120</sup> Zairema, *God’s Miracle in Mizoram: A Glimpse of Christian Work among the Head-Hunters* (Aizawl: Synod Press & Bookroom, 1978), 1. Hereafter cited as ‘Zairema, God’s Miracle in Mizoram’.

similar view with Zairema saying that the Mizos could not tolerate the tea planters often encroaching upon their hunting ground.<sup>121</sup> A.G. McCall, the British Administrator of Mizoram summed up the primary reason for the invasion of Mizoram as providing security for the commercial enterprise in the plains. As he puts it,

After all, to provide security for commercial enterprise in the plains, the Lushai people have been called on to pay the price, have been thrown off their balance, their lives and social system invaded and dislocated.<sup>122</sup>

### **3.1. Prohibition of savage and barbaric practices:**

The first aspect of Mizo cultural changes come through impositions and prohibitions. Saiaithanga maintains the view of the coming of the British and the Christian missionaries as 'divine providence' because of the prohibitions of the deadly practices and barbaric practices of the Mizo society.<sup>123</sup> The British administrators tried to provide justice with highly civilized values and orders to curb the savage and barbaric practices and imposed values with respect to human life. Mangkhosat Kipgen categorized prohibitions as stated below:

- (1) *The prohibitions of raids or head hunting.* If this happened the chief had to be executed.<sup>124</sup> The British government did justice in prohibiting this cruel practice of the Mizo people. If a village launched a raid, the chief of that village will be killed.

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<sup>121</sup> Zokima, *Mizo Lal Ber: Kairuma* [Mizo Greatest King: Kairuma] (Aizawl: VLP Press, 1993), 76.

<sup>122</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 65.

<sup>123</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua*, 8

<sup>124</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, 150; Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans*, 64; Chapman & Clark, *Mizo Miracle*, 13,20.

- (2) *Prohibition of elephant hunting.* This prohibition, despite the fact that it was really good for preservations of animals, paralysed the Mizo traditional religion because it affected one of the means of salvation, '*thangchhuah*' in which killing of elephant was one of the requirements.
- (3) *Burying alive of infant together with the dead mother.* There was a belief that the motherless baby could not live more than a year because the spirit came to call the baby after one year. This belief caused the Mizos to have a custom of burying a baby alive if the mother died.<sup>125</sup>
- (4) *The killing of those believed to witchcraft or magicians.*<sup>126</sup> Several tragedies had occurred on account of the belief in witchcraft within the Mizo community.

These savage acts were declared illegal and were made punishable with imprisonment for more serious cases and fines for other minor ones. Other customary practice like eavesdropping by the young friends of a newly married couple on their first night while not made illegal were nevertheless discouraged by the Christian missionaries and school teachers. But the prohibition of elephant hunting and killing of enemies (not murder in the village) severely affected the Mizo religion since these were requirements in '*ram lama thangchhuah*' to earn salvation and a place in *pialral* (heaven). Therefore, the Mizo religion was paralyzed when the British administrators strictly prohibited raiding villages and killing elephants and one of the means of gaining salvation collapsed.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Chapman & Clark, *Mizo Miracle*, 15, 29.

<sup>126</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *Zoram Encyclopedia* (Aizawl: Remkung, 2003), 140-141. According to A.G. McCall, Keitawna was believed to be a magician, Thangvuka killed him and ate a piece of his liver to alleviate or neutralize his magical power. See McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 71-72.

<sup>127</sup> Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans*, 64.



### 3. 2. Social evils:

According to Liangkhaia, the British government gave orders to maintain law and order and to do administrative justice among the Mizo society. The Mizo chiefs were not without blemish for some of them were cruel, corrupted and capricious, and persecuted and oppressed their subjects without any sympathy. These collections of orders seem sometimes to have arisen out of the contextual situations.

- 1) No one is allowed to ill- treat, maltreat and loot others.
- 2) Every village has to clear their respective roads.
- 3) Every chief is a tax-collector in his village.
- 4) All the chiefs must regularly attend the *durbar* meetings.
- 5) It is strictly prohibited to accuse someone as evil eye (*khawhring*).
- 6) The chief is curbed from confiscating and plundering belongings of the villagers.<sup>128</sup>
- 7) It is not legal to gang rape a reputedly loose woman by young men.<sup>129</sup>

Liangkhaia positively commented that due to the implications of these orders the lives of the poor and the oppressed people in the Mizo community were much relieved. The advent of the British in this perspective was liberation for the oppressed people from the injustices done to them by the corrupted chiefs.

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<sup>128</sup> Thanga, *Hman Lai Mizo Awm Dan* [Mizo Traditional Ethos] (Aizawl: Tlangveng Pringting Press, 1992), 192,194-195. Hereafter cited as 'Thanga, Hman Lai Mizo Awm Dan'.

<sup>129</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, 150. This is very notorious custom in the Mizo society. The British government did justice by prohibiting this evil practice because young girls of poor families sometimes suffered this gang rape as they were helpless.

### **3. 3. Decentralization of political power:**

Before the annexation of the Mizo land by the British, the lands belong to their respective chiefs. J. Shakespear, the British administrator introduced the process of decentralization of the political power of the Mizo chiefs and the chiefdom. The policy seemed to be simple, if there are more chiefs, the powerful chiefs will lose their political power and therefore, J. Shakespear then drastically increased the number of chiefs from the existing 60 to 350 chiefs with the aim of decentralizing political power.<sup>130</sup> With the decentralization of political power of the chiefs, the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills became more powerful and the Mizo chiefs had fewer powers.

The Superintendent had final authority in appointing and removing the chiefs, although most of the chiefs were appointed to their former positions. Moreover, lands were apportioned to the chief by the government in accordance with the 'indirect administration'; lands were made over to persons who had no pretence to chieftainship under indigenous conditions. This again helped to lower the whole status of the Mizo traditional chiefs.

### **3. 4. Abolition of traditional rights of the Mizo chiefs:**

Mizo traditional chiefdom was often thought of in terms of the divine right theory.<sup>131</sup> But now the divine right theory had been removed, superseded and supplanted by the British administration. Consequently, the following traditional rights of the Mizo chief were also arbitrarily extinguished to meet the exigencies of the situation:

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<sup>130</sup> Subhas Chatterjee, *Mizo Chiefs and the Chiefdom* (New Delhi: M.D. Publications Pvt. Ltd. 1995), 1.

<sup>131</sup> Subhas Chatterjee, *Mizo Chiefs and the Chiefdom*, 3.

- a) Right to order capital punishment.
- b) Right to seize food stores and property of villagers, who wish to transfer their allegiance.
- c) Proprietary rights over lands, now arbitrarily reserved by the government in the interests of the public living in neighbouring areas in British India.
- d) Right to tax traders doing business within the chiefs' jurisdiction.
- e) Right to freedom of action in relation to making their sons chiefs under their jurisdiction.
- f) Right to help those bawis, who were by custom not open to redemption.
- g) Right of freedom of action in relation to other kinds of bawis, who used to constitute the means whereby the chiefs could cultivate and acquire the ability to sustain their villages in peace and in war.
- h) Right to attach the property of their villagers when they wished or deemed fit, with or without fault on the part of the villagers.<sup>132</sup>

As result of abolition of those rights, the Mizo chiefs became the British tax collectors, agents and subjects who were at their disposal. The chiefs had no prestige and power in their own lands. On the other hand, it was better for the Mizo people in one sense that the government abolished the right of capital punishment. In spite of this, some chiefs ruled their subjects with justice and dignity, while there were some cruel chiefs who abused their rights. For instance, Chief Vanhnuailiana killed one of his innocent Indian poor villagers, who was a captive and settled in his village without

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<sup>132</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 202.

any reason.<sup>133</sup> More people enjoyed liberation when the government abolished the rights of capital punishment of the Mizo chiefs.

### **3. 5. Circle Administration:**

A change of administration usually brings about social, political and cultural changes in society. The British administrator introduced Circle administration and the northern part of Mizoram was divided into 12 circles and southern Mizoram into 6 circles, totalling 18 circles and a circle inspector was appointed to each circle to serve as a channel between the Superintendent, Sub-divisional Officer, the chiefs and the people in general. Under each circle an interpreter was appointed. In addition a village writer called in Mizo ‘*khawchhiar*’ was also appointed in every village to keep necessary records and statistics of the village.

This system of administration ran properly till 1942 and it was extremely oppressive to the people challenging the Mizo chiefs with their authoritative power. Knowing that the colonial master had the power to make and depose the chiefs, a Mizo Circle interpreter ill-treated the chiefs by composing the following song:

If thou art against the British employee like us,

Thou art no longer being a chief,

Just expect to end in smoke.<sup>134</sup>

How bitter it was for the Mizo chiefs. Abusively using the colonial power, they sarcastically and ironically sang a song which was detested by the Mizo people. This

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<sup>133</sup> Thanga, *Hmanlai Mizo Awm Dan*, 174-175, 195.

<sup>134</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *History and Culture of Mizo in India, Burma and Bangladesh* (Aizawl: RTM Press, 2001), 483. Hereafter cited as ‘Lalthangliana, History and Culture’. The song in Mizo is as follows: *Sappui bawngte keini min tai chuan, Lal lai hrui ang in suih lo vang, In run romei kai rawh se.*

clearly brought changes in social stratifications. The Mizo government employees were now becoming the new elites in the Mizo society while they were detested by the chiefs and their families.

### **3. 6. Impressed labour:**

For the proud Mizo society, who had never been under any government oppression, impressed labour was the most detested imposition they had ever experienced. The Mizos would happily complete any voluntary work on the basis of *tlawmngaihna*, but culturally resented any imposition or forced labour. Although it was termed as ‘impressed labour’ in the government record to avoid ensuing later criticisms, in reality it was ‘forced labour’ because it was forced by the colonial officers on the Mizos to do this except for the village chiefs and their officials.<sup>135</sup> Village chiefs were frequently asked to supply labours and if they failed to do so on time, heavy fines and punishment immediately followed. While the Mizo society was suffering oppression and insult from forced labour, the missionaries praised the colonial officers. To quote,

‘The British government deserved great praise for the energy with which they have been opening up better means of communication in the hills of late years. This, as all the government work, is done by the impressed labour. A message is sent to the chiefs saying, ‘we want so many men, for such a work, on such a date’ and the men have to be supplied.’<sup>136</sup>

As stated earlier, the Mizos detested this forced labour but the British administrators, to justify the issue of impressed labour used the propaganda that ‘the Mizos are

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<sup>135</sup> Lalthangliana, *History and Culture*, 483.

<sup>136</sup> Grace R. Lewis, *The Lushai Hills: The Story of the Lushai Pioneer Mission* (London: The Baptist Missionary Society, 1907), 43-44. Hereafter cited as ‘R. Lewis, The Lushai Hills’.

savage, head-hunters and always giving trouble to the British subjects and the British government was forced to annexe their land'. Sangkima quotes Shakespear words as he states,

‘You (Mizos) forced us to occupy your hills, we had no wish to come up here but you would raid our villages, so we had to come, and so now you have got (to) bear as much of the cost of the occupation as possible, you cannot expect us to spend the money of the people of the plains on importing coolies to do the work that you are too lazy to do except under compulsion.’<sup>137</sup>

The unexpected imposition of the Colonial rule in Mizoram shattered the traditional social structure and cultural practices of the Mizo society and greatly embittered the chiefs and the common people alike. But the colonial divide and rule policy had considerable success in Mizoram and paved the way for Christian Missions which followed on the heels of the British conquest to win Mizoram ‘for God and Empire’.<sup>138</sup>

#### **4. THE ADVENT OF THE MISSIONARIES AND CULTURAL CHANGES:**

The socio-cultural changes through the advent of Christianity among the Mizos were presented by Siamkima, a Mizo writer in his article, ‘*Rih* Lake and the Jordan River’. He identified *Rih* Lake with the Mizo traditional religion and culture and the Jordan River with the advent of Christianity.<sup>139</sup> Symbolically it may seem very relevant, but this theological paradigm of western culture was unacceptable for postcolonial

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<sup>137</sup> Sangkima, *Mizo: Society and Social Change*, 78.

<sup>138</sup> Reginald A. Lorrain, *Five Years in the Unknown Jungles: For God and Empire* (London: Lakher Pioneer Mission, 1912; reprint, Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1988), 18.

<sup>139</sup> Siamkima, *Zalenna Ram* [Land of Liberty] (Aizawl: M.C. Lalrinthanga, 2002), 46.

theological reflections because the River Jordan could not represent the advent of Christian missionaries with the western culture.

#### **4. 1. The First Christian missionary in Mizoram.**

The first Christian missionary ever to set foot in Mizoram was William Williams, a Welsh missionary working in the Khasi Hills. He became interested in Mizo after seeing a number of Mizo chiefs in the British jail of Sylhet. He and his friends from different backgrounds arrived in Mizoram in March 20, 1891.<sup>140</sup> They had a wonderful encounter with the Mizos, learned some aspects of Mizo culture, conducted religious meetings and distributed biblical pictures. They left Aizawl, the capital, on April, 17 with a strong determination to start a mission in the Lushai Hills.

Immediately after his return to Khasi Hills, Williams wrote a strong appeal to the Home Board of Welsh Mission to start work in Mizoram. The appeal was taken up in the General Assembly and with the recommendation of the Working committee, the assembly of June, 1892 eventually adopted Lushai Hills (Mizoram) as its field for missionary operations. As a result of the sudden death of William Williams in 1892 and the difficulty of arranging for another missionary as well as financial restraints, the Mission Board could not make immediate arrangement to start mission work in Mizoram. In the meantime the Arthington Aborigines Mission took advantage of the withdrawal of the government's prohibition in 1893, to make their way to Mizoram without knowing the intention of the Welsh Mission Board.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Lalhrualtuanga Ralte, *Interviewed*, (Aizawl: Synod Press, 11 September, 2009).

<sup>141</sup> K. Thanzauva, *Reports*, 1.

#### **4. 2. Arthington Aborigines Mission (AAM):**

The Arthington Aborigines Mission was a private mission of Robert Arthington of Leeds that sends missionaries with the compulsion of ‘the imminent second coming of Christ’. His mission strategy was based on his conviction that ‘there are plenty of men and women who are ready to care for the bodies of men; God has called me to care for the souls of the heathen.’<sup>142</sup> Being influenced by the second coming, preaching to convert the people was the sender’s primary purpose, not literature or translation works. J. Herbert Lorrain and Frederick W. Savidge were sent to the Lushai Hills as missionaries. They arrived at Aizawl, Mizoram on the 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1894 from Silchar. Unlike other white soldiers, they came unarmed carrying their own baggage without any coolies as they found none to carry their baggage. They entered into the residence of Col. G.H. Lock, who was the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills and he helped them to choose a place to build their house.<sup>143</sup> In those days, the Mizo attitude towards the whites was greatly pessimistic and the two new missionaries found no one to help them in building their houses or in any work. The Superintendent then, ordered all the shopkeepers not to sell salt without the consent of the two missionaries. Then, only when the Mizos thought that the two missionaries were powerful to control even shops, they were able to find Mizo people to help them in their work.<sup>144</sup>

In spite of all dangers, the two English men toured the country preaching the gospel and singing hymns. Hearing them in the streets, the people came round to see what was happening. On seeing the two white men singing in the street, their first thought

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<sup>142</sup> A.M. Chirgwin, *Arthington’s Million: The Romance of the Arthington Trust* (London: Livingstone Press, 1920), 11.

<sup>143</sup> Lalhmuaka, *Zoram*, 95,

<sup>144</sup> V. Hawla, *Mizoram Hmar Chan Zosapte Chanchin* [History of Missionaries of Northern Mizoram] (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1980), 17.



was that these two white men must be either drunk or fools because Lushais never sing in the street in broad daylight except when they are drunk. But seeing no sign of drunkenness in them, they took them to be fools who had run away from their kinsmen. All the time the people looked at them as fools and in nearly every village children were heard singing:

I see two fools, I see two fools;

Two real big fools I see;

I see them coming along the hills,

Aia, I e, u aw, aia e.<sup>145</sup>

Their stay in the Lushai Hills was rather short as Mr. Arthington, who supported them, desired their removal to another field because Arthington had a prejudice against institutionalization of missionary work; the primary task is proclamation and as soon as a small Christian fellowship had been gathered in one tribe, the missionaries should press on to regions as yet unreached,<sup>146</sup> even though the two missionaries wanted to stay longer and continue their mission works. Knowing that the Welsh Mission was planning to start their mission work, they begged the Welsh Mission to accept them as evangelists but they were not accepted. Therefore, they pleaded for Welsh missionaries to be sent immediately in order that they might assist them in learning the Mizo language before they left for another place. It is true that even in doing Christian mission; the rich people had the power to control the missionaries. In a postcolonial perspective, the concept of the ruler and the ruled could be seen in the work of Arthington Aborigines Mission.

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<sup>145</sup> Chuautea, 'The two white Fools' in *The Missionary Herald*, (London: March, 1936), 63.

<sup>146</sup> Donna Strom, *Wind through the Bamboo* (Madras: The Diocesan Press, 1991), 30. Hereafter cited as 'Donna Strom, Wind'.

#### **4. 3. The Welsh Calvinistic Mission:**

The request of J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge was answered by the Welsh Calvinistic Mission which sent its first missionary D.E. Jones, who arrived on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1897 with Khasi evangelist Rai Bhajur and his wife. Lorrain and Savidge remained in the Lushai Hills to the close of the year, giving valuable assistance to D.E. Jones. Within four years of ministry (11<sup>th</sup> January, 1894 – 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1897), Lorrain and Savidge had laid the foundation for the transformation of the Mizo people. Firstly, they reduced the Mizo language into writing by using the Roman alphabet. Secondly, the first school was opened on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1894; thirdly, they started translation of Luke, John and the Book of Acts into the Mizo language; fourthly, they had seven Christian songs (translated from English and composed by themselves); and finally, the first Mizo Primer was completed on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1895.<sup>147</sup>

Another Welsh missionary, Edwin Rowlands, came to Mizoram in December, 1898 and proved to be a great help for D.E. Jones. They lived and worked together and complemented each other's deficiencies because of their different characters and talents.<sup>148</sup> The reinforcement of the Welsh Mission in the person of Edwin Rowlands provided a dynamic addition to the missionary efforts. He was known to the Mizos as a great teacher of the Mizo nation, a loyal missionary, a gifted poet and a liberator of Mizo women.<sup>149</sup> A later fellow missionary, J.M. Lloyd generously remarks that it was

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<sup>147</sup> Lalthangliana, *Zoram Encyclopedia*, 491-492.

<sup>148</sup> Lloyd, *Every High Hill*, 31.

<sup>149</sup> C. Vanlallawma, *Tun Kum Za Chhunga Mizo Hnam Puipate 1894-1994* [Fathers of the Mizo Nation of the Century 1894-1994] (Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press, 1993), 34.

Rowlands of all missionaries, who best grasped the genius of the Mizo character from within.<sup>150</sup>

The two missionaries soon gained the trust of the Mizo people who started calling them ‘zosap’ meaning ‘white people who belong to Mizo’. The Lushais were fond of hearing that Jesus Christ had conquered the devil and death. The first two converts Khuma and Khara were baptized by D.E. Jones on December, 1898 along with two Khasi tribesmen.<sup>151</sup>

British officers at that time were supporting the mission works, and although the native people would have liked all the military officers and their sepoys to leave, they wished the missionaries and their shops to remain. In opening schools among the Mizos, J.B. Fuller, Chief Commissioner of Assam, J. Shakespear, Superintendent of the Lushai Hills and Major Loch had played vital practical roles and helped the missionaries. The two Welsh missionaries had the whole of the Lushai Hills as their field of service until the coming of the Baptist Missionary Society, who took over the South Lushai Hills and started mission work in 1903.

#### **4. 4. Baptist Missionary Society (BMS):**

J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge went back to England for furlough and met Robert Arthington. Arthington was not satisfied with their missionary work. Therefore, with the support of their friends the two missionaries went to Abor-Miris people in Sadhya (now Arunachal Pradesh). During this time, the south Lushai Hills was adopted by the

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<sup>150</sup> Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram*, 44.

<sup>151</sup> John Hughes Morris, *The History of Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Foreign Mission, to the end of the year 1904* (Carnavon: The C.M. Book Room, 1910), 231-232. Hereafter cited as ‘J.H. Morris, The History of Welsh Mission’.

Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) as their mission field. The Baptist Mission immediately requested Lorrain and Savidge to return to Mizoram as the missionaries of the BMS on condition that the BMS would send someone to continue their work among the Abor-Miris, to which they agreed. They arrived at Lunglei in March, 13, 1903 more than five years after they had left Aizawl, headquarter of North Lushai Hills. After selecting *Serkawn* village as their mission centre, they spent most of their first two years supervising the building work and visiting the nearby villages from their station.<sup>152</sup>

Lorrain and Savidge did not confine themselves to preaching the gospel alone; they opened schools, hospitals, a printing press and other social projects that brought the missionaries closer to the Mizo people. The arrival of the Baptist Mission marked the emergence of the denominational churches in Mizoram, namely the Presbyterian in the North and Baptist church in the south of Mizoram.

## **5. INTERPRETING SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS:**

Interpreting socio-cultural transformations and changes in the Mizo Christian context brings out fresh and new outlooks. When the missionaries came and converted the Mizos to Christianity, the concept of *saphun* (traditional practice of conversion or proselytization) still remained in the minds of the people. If the early Mizo Christianity is interpreted in the light of this proselytization, then Mizo Christianity can be seen as a change of religion that means from the inferior Mizo religion to the superior religion of Christianity. It can also be understood as a change of clan or race which means conversion from the Mizo traditional family into the more civilized

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<sup>152</sup> Hminga, *Life and Witness*, 55.

missionary's western race or society. Therefore this approach saw the missionaries as the masters of Christianity and those who played advisory roles to sustain the life of the church; whereas the Mizo Christian converts are seen as the subordinated, who cut themselves off from their religion, abandoned their social and cultural traditions and were completely committed to Christianity. If we look at the transformations of the Mizo society from this perspective, it was not only the missionaries but also the Mizo Christians themselves who were responsible for the changes and transformations of the society. These changes and transformations had both positive and negative impacts on the life of the Mizo society which can be discussed as follows:

#### **5. 1. Positive impacts of Changes:**

The positive impacts of these changes give allegiance to the gospel and accommodate the message of the good news into the local cultural context and paving the way for contextualization.

##### **(a) Religious Transformation:**

In adopting Christianity, some existing elements such as the concept of God (*Pathian*), the concept of *pialral* (heaven) can be used as a vehicle for communicating the message of the good news with new meaning. The Mizo traditional world view was transformed by Christianity into a new set of doctrines and beliefs. The traditional assumption of a Supreme Being, *Pathian* was identified with God; the concept of '*thangchhuah*' or the means of salvation which needed several costly sacrifices are superseded by faith in God; *pialral* has been transformed into eternal heaven in the light of the gospel. D.E. Jones preached a gospel based on the Mizo eschatological expectation as follows:

‘Believe on ‘*Pathian*’ Jehovah and worship Him, then you don’t need to sacrifice to demons any more. Even when you die you shall go to ‘*pialral*’.<sup>153</sup>

This preaching connected *Pathian* and *pialral* by faith but without costly sacrifices. This gives new hope for all believers irrespective of their positions, and transformed *pialral* into heaven with greater hope of enjoying eternal bliss. This new found faith and doctrine prepared the Mizo people for psychological and intellectual transformations and to abandon completely anything connected with their old religion, culture and social practices. If we summarize the transformations and changes in the life of the Mizo society in a single sentence, we may say that the head-hunters are transformed into the soul- hunters.

**(b) Social-cultural transformations:**

There are quite a number of transformations in the social-cultural life of the Mizos which can be summarized as follows:

**The appearance of the villages** in the past was controlled by the Mizo traditional religious practices. When they became Christians, these changed as all the elements of sacrifices and their paraphernalia such as small altars, stone platforms, posts on which skulls of all animals killed were hung and sacrificial posts all disappeared and the appearance of the villages was much better and cleaner than before.<sup>154</sup> In addition Christianity united the Mizos and there was a closer relationship and unity of society in the villages.

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<sup>153</sup> Hminga, *Life and Witness*, 62.

<sup>154</sup> H.S. Luaia, ‘The land of head hunters became the land of peace’ in *Missionary Herald* (London: BMS, April, 1960), 58.

**Birth:** In the pre-Christian custom, there was a belief that the motherless baby could not live more than a year because the spirit of the mother came to call the baby after one year. This belief caused the Mizos to have a custom of burying a baby alive if the mother died giving birth. In addition, twins were regarded as dreadful and one was supposed to be the incarnation of an evil spirit and they were left in the forest to die. The gospel changed all these superstitious beliefs.

**Marriage:** Mizo Christians adopted western Christian marriage and its paraphernalia. The Gospel eliminated two notorious customs of pre-Christian marriage- one was throwing mud, water and rotten eggs at the bride's party when they were heading for the bridegroom's house. Secondly, eavesdropping on the first night of the newly-married couple was also stopped. Divorce was interpreted from the Bible and it was not as easy as before to obtain a divorce, while pre-marital sexual relationship were discouraged and did not fit with a Christian ethos. Polygamy was eliminated by Christian teaching.<sup>155</sup>

**Death and burial:** In the pre-Christian culture, dead bodies were usually buried in the compounds and funeral services were done by old people. But this changed so that all the dead bodies were buried in the burial ground outside the villages with Christian funeral services. *Pialral* or *mithi khua* or life after death or eschatological expectation was contextualized into a place called heaven where God reigns.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Hminga, *Life and Witness*, 294.

<sup>156</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Kohhran Chanchin*, 164.

**Morality:** The Mizo moral and ethical principle of *tlawmngaihna* was redefined in the light of the Gospel eliminating its negative impacts. *Zawlbuk* (bachelor house) the foundation of *tlawmngaihna* was abolished, but *tlawmngaihna* survives in the Christian context in a redefined form because *tlawmngaihna*, self sacrifice for others' and 'doing good to others' remains in agreement with the Gospel.

**Traditional festivals:** In the place of Mizo traditional festivals, Christian elements were introduced like baptism, the Lord's Supper, observation of Sunday, celebration of Christmas, New Year and Good Friday.<sup>157</sup>

**(c) Intellectual Transformation:** Although the Mizos were illiterate until the 1890's, they thought of themselves as at the top of the world because of their isolation and lack of knowledge.<sup>158</sup> It was during the colonial rule that the Mizo language was reduced into writing by the missionaries.<sup>159</sup> This gave them education and intellectual development within one generation was remarkable. Now the Mizos are highly educated in both secular and theological fields. Zairema agrees with this and writes, 'Some of the Mizos have received their doctorate degrees with high commendations and contributed some new knowledge to the world at large'.<sup>160</sup>

All these transformations are the results of the gospel in which the Mizos put their faith and works. Positively these religious, social and intellectual transformations can

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<sup>157</sup> F. Hrangkhuma, ed., *Christianity in India: In Search of Liberation and Identity* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 277. F. Hrangkhuma writes that all the non-Christian festivals have completely disappeared. But Mizo traditional festivals are reappearing in the postcolonial era. *Chapchar kut* is celebrated every year in Aizawl, Mizoram. Hereafter cited as 'F. Hrangkhuma, Christianity in India'.

<sup>158</sup> Hminga, *Life and Witness*, 297.

<sup>159</sup> Chitta Ranjan Nag, *Post-Colonial Mizo Politics* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1999), 19.

<sup>160</sup> Zairema, *God's Miracle in Mizoram*, 23-24.



be categorized as total transformations even though some cultural elements were modified and transformed and reinterpreted with totally new meaning and significances. However, there were some good elements which were left or abandoned because of Christianity and these will be discussed as follows.

## **5. 2. Negative impacts of Transformation:**

Postcolonial reading points to those rejecting, abandoning and discouraging one's own traditions at the expense of adopting some elements from another culture. There are some religious traditional and cultural practices which the Mizos abandoned and rejected with the help of the missionaries after they embraced Christianity.

*a) Zu and Kelmei:* The first step the missionaries took was 'doing away with drinking rice-beer and sacrifices to evil spirits'. As a matter of fact, drinking rice-beer (*zu*) was a religious ritual and this was what the missionaries primarily focussed on. J.M. Lloyd clearly described how the missionaries associated *zu* and the *kelmei* charm (a tuft of goat's hair hanging from a string around the neck to ward off evil spirits)<sup>161</sup> with the old religion of the Mizo and fought against the drinking rice-beer and *kelmei* charm. In those days two acts in particular marked the sincerity of the convictions of a man who desired to be baptised. Firstly he gave up drinking *zu*, secondly he surrendered the *kelmei* charm. The former not only meant a pledge of total abstinence, it meant also that a man gave up the practices of Lushai religious rites. Drinking *zu* was a religious act. To desist from drinking therefore meant a clean break with the old faith.<sup>162</sup> To hand over the *kelmei* to the missionaries at that time meant that the owner

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<sup>161</sup> Picture of a Lushai man, wearing around *kelmei* charm is available in the journal of *Missionary Herald*, London: August, 1905, page 391.

<sup>162</sup> Lloyd, *Every High Hill*, 48.

of the *kelmei* has discontinued his belief in the protection of the spirits and that he wished to be a Christian.

Before the coming of the missionaries, drinking rice-beer was not seen as sin, rather it was used as nutritious food. But there were some excessive drinking which caused trouble and problems. The psychological, intellectual and spiritual changes of attitude towards drinking rice-beer resulted in this being viewed as sin. Abstaining from drinking became the proof of good Christian, and anyone drinking was seen as un-Christian. Although drinking *zu* is not encouraged, the new attitudes to drinking rice-beer as sin made the Mizo Christian misunderstand the real teaching of Christianity. For example, if a person stopped drinking, instinctively the Mizo would say, 'he has experienced religious conversion'. Spiritual conversion and stopping drinking were actually confused.

**b) Eating meat offered to idols:** In pre-Christian Mizo society, religion had an integrating force and function and close relatives gathered together and worshipped *sakung*. For that religious performance every house kept a pig for family worship and only the very near relatives could share in the family feast that followed. The Mizo traditional religion in this sense represented blood family ties and the integration of nuclear family. But Christians were advised and forbidden to take part in this and cut themselves off from the family ties. If we analysed the way the missionaries taught 'the more they cut off from Mizo religion, the more they became good Christians.' In one sense, it is religion which exclusively claims that we are right, you are wrong. Consequently Christianity was seen as causing disintegration of family ties. Zairema writes,

‘Being new creations they felt that they should cut themselves off completely from old religious practices. Every Mizo family kept a castrated pig for family worship and only the very nearest relatives may share in the feast that followed. Christians could not take part in this and thus cut themselves off from blood family ties and adopted their fellow Christian as their new family. The annual festivals were also associated with some type of worship and as the Christians refused to take part they were regarded as anti-social elements. Although they tried not to shirk any social duties like contributing their labour in digging graves and helping the sick, but when such duties involved some form of religious practice they withdrew themselves.’<sup>163</sup>

This is clear evidence of affirming the Mizo concept of proselytization to be totally a new creation in their new-found Christian religion. This led to separation; they could not live in the same village with others. The first Christians were then persecuted, beaten when they were having worship services and driven out of the village while heavy rain was pouring down.<sup>164</sup> This led to disintegration within the Mizo society and sometime later the Mizo Christians lived together in one village.

There had been psychological and intellectual changes so that they saw their past as something to be ashamed of and abandoned, but at the same time they found themselves caught in a plight between two traditions which put them in a cultural dilemma. Lal Dena writes,

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<sup>163</sup> Zairema, *God's Miracle in Mizoram*, 10.

<sup>164</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Kohhran Chanchin*, 28; Lalsawma, *Revivals: The Mizo Ways* (Aizawl: Author, 1994), 39-40. Hereafter cited as ‘Lalsawma, Revivals’.

They acted and even preached that their ancestors were savages, head hunters, so as to make their fellow tribesmen ashamed of their past. In this way they began to uncritically imitate new pro-western values. This is not to say that they were completely cut off from their traditional mores. Rather they were caught in a contradictory situation- the simultaneous adaptation to two contra-posing elements: one traditional and the other western. Such being the case, they were in the continuous process of nationalisation. The concept of nationalisation may be defined as a process of a change in mental attitude that tended to despise one's national traits or traditional ethos in preference to other cultures and then to imitate rather than to create.<sup>165</sup>

The author's view is that all these identity crises within the Mizo society were the result of Mizo traditional understanding of conversion to a superior religion. This led theoretically to identification with the western missionaries but in practice this was impossible. The Mizo Christians were caught in a plight between traditional and western culture. As stated earlier, practically, it was difficult to be a proselyte to the European race and to be cut off from the Mizo traditions and culture and to imitate and adopt western culture. In other words, the result is confusing western culture with Christianity.<sup>166</sup>

**c) Traditional festivals:** Mizo society celebrated three major traditional festivals- *Chapchar kut*, *pawl kut* and *Mim kut* with singing, dancing and feasts every year. In

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<sup>165</sup> Lal Dena, *Christian Missions and Colonialism* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1988), 110. Hereafter cited as 'Lal Dena, Christian Missions and Colonialism'.

<sup>166</sup> H. Vanlalauva, 'Mizo Christian Theology' in *Mizo Miziaa Pathian Thu* [Theology in the Mizo Thought], 28-29. Hereafter cited as 'Vanlalauva, Theology in Mizo Thought'.

*chapchar kut* all kinds of *chai* songs and dances would be performed. But Mizo Christians cut themselves off from all these festivals because they considered that these were pagan.<sup>167</sup>

The missionaries stressed that if the Mizo Christian individuals observed the rules of the church, their souls would be saved. Observance of the rules was a means of salvation. The first meeting of the church was called and decided to observe the following:

- 1) To observe the day of rest.
- 2) Not to eat things sacrificed to demons.
- 3) To practice Christian giving.
- 4) Not to drink *zu* (rice-beer).
- 5) To start a Sunday school in every village where there are converts.
- 6) To give a tenth or more of all their crops to God year by year.<sup>168</sup>

This was very important in the history of the Mizo church as the initial step towards Christianity started to bring cultural changes in the Mizo society. Traditional religion was now completely abandoned. Traditional songs and dances were strongly discouraged. Therefore, all the traditional festivals where singing and dancing were performed had completely disappeared.

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<sup>167</sup> F. Hrangkhuma, *Christianity in India*, 277.

<sup>168</sup> J.H. Lorrain, 'Annual Gatherings of the Lushai Converts' in *Missionary Herald* (London: BMS, April, 1904), 163.

#### **d) Traditional songs and poetical words:**

Mizo may be one of the richest tribes in terms of poetical words. Spoken language and poetical language are completely different and prose is never regarded as a song or a poem or lyric. When the missionaries came, they did not realize that the Mizos had both spoken language and poetical words to compose songs, solos and hymns. They translated or composed hymns or songs in terms of prose and taught the first generations Mizo Christians to sing. But this for the Mizos was not singing a song, it was singing prose. However, the Mizo Christians thought that this was the way that Christian had to sing, wholly distinctive in tunes and compositions. The first generation Mizo Christians had perceived that Christian songs had to be in prose.<sup>169</sup> Any mixture of Mizo poetical words was not tolerated because they had been proselytized to Christianity. The total fault lay not only with the missionaries, but also the Mizo Christians themselves because they had the understanding that all the Mizo poetical words were labelled as being of Satan consequently, they were disposed of and abandoned.<sup>170</sup> Zairema writes,

The church was, however, strict and would discipline any member who even hummed the music (*Puma zai*) unconsciously.<sup>171</sup>

The missionaries insisted that Mizo Christians should compose Christian hymns and songs with the Mizo poetical words, but the Mizos refused because their old religion and culture were thought to be of no use in their new religion. Sangkhuma surprisingly describes how the missionaries had attempted to adopt the Mizo

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<sup>169</sup> Liangkhaia, 'Hla Thu' [Poetical Words] in B. Lalthangliana, ed., *Hranghluite Sulhnu* (Aizawl: RTM Press, 1996), 99. Hereafter cited as 'Liangkhaia, Hla Thu'.

<sup>170</sup> Sangkhuma, *Missionary-te Hnuhma* [Footprints of the Missionaries] (Aizawl: M.C. Lalrinthanga, 1995), 150. Hereafter cited as 'Sangkhuma, Missionary-te Hnuhma'.

<sup>171</sup> Zairema, *God's Miracle in Mizoram*, 18.

traditional tune and how Mizo Christians were antagonistic to adopting it. Sangkhuma write,

‘D.E. Jones, the pioneer missionary, probably traced the tunes and styles of the Mizo traditional songs. He wanted to adopt the Mizo *chai hla* for his newly translated song, ‘When I survey the wondrous Cross’, but the early Mizo Christians rejected the use of traditional tunes.’<sup>172</sup>

In a postcolonial reading, rejecting one’s own traditional tune is a sign of total conversion which abandons the Mizo traditional tune for the translated song of the missionary. Therefore, the Mizo converts who cut themselves off from the Mizo traditions and culture rejected the use of traditional tunes in worship and instead sang translated songs with western tunes and western music.

#### **e) Traditional dances:**

The Mizo traditional dances were interwoven with the primal religion. As described earlier, all the activities done in the Mizo community can be interpreted as having religious significances and cultural elements as well. However, the missionaries saw the Mizo traditional dances as anti-Christian elements rather than seeing them as hermeneutical tools for interpreting the Mizo tradition from a new perspective. In this regard we cannot solely blame the missionaries, but the Mizo converts who cut themselves from their own cultural dances. Ironically, they started criticizing their own cultural dances and other cultural elements as satanic and worldly without realizing how they themselves had been brought up within this very tradition and culture. This created a radical loss of Mizo identity and the Mizos were later pushed

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<sup>172</sup> Sangkhuma, *Missionary-te Hnuhma*, 180.

to find their own identities. Lalrinawmi Ralte, a Mizo feminist theologian created Crab theology to reformulate and reclaim the forgotten and neglected cultural practice like dance in this way:

‘In crab theology we reclaim the neglected women’s power as the source of empowerment. Dance is a cultural expression of power for Mizo women. Discovering that source of empowerment is the reconstruction of theology. It is the theology of hope for all the Mizo people because every Mizo person can relate the experience of Mizoness. It is a theology of transformation because we appreciate our Mizo roots and establish that root as a source of developing our theology of hope. Dance is not only a survival of Mizo culture but points to a new way of experiencing Christianity. Dance makes a connection between Mizo traditional and religious life with the Christian life. In dance, Mizos are truly Christian and truly Mizo at the same time.’<sup>173</sup>

**f) Traditional Drum (*khuang*):**

A Mizo drum is a hollow cylindrical frame of dead wood with cow skins stretched on both ends, which when beaten produce sounds. Mizo drums may be classed into three groups according to the sizes. A small-sized drum will normally measure less than 12 inches in diameter. A medium-sized drum measures approximately 12-16 inches in diameter. A large-sized drum measures anything more than the medium size. The early Mizo Christians did not use the Mizo drum because of its old association with

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<sup>173</sup> Lalrinawmi Ralte, *Crab Theology: A Critique of Patriarchy – Cultural Degradation and Empowerment of Mizo Women* (Cambridge, Mass.: Unpublished thesis for Doctor of Divinity, Episcopal Divinity School, April, 1993), 192-193. Hereafter cited as ‘Lalrinawmi, Crab Theology’. The position of Mizo women may be revealed when we look at the Mizo traditional saying about crab and women. ‘Crab’s meat is not a meat, so women’s word is not a word’.



their traditional religion and cultural entertainments, and the missionaries also did not give encouragement.<sup>174</sup> H. Vanlalauva, a Mizo theologian clearly writes about Christianity at the colonial mission as follows, ‘at the very outset, not only Mizo traditional beliefs were rejected but forbade even the use of drums in the church.’<sup>175</sup> According to Liangkhaia, the early Mizo church leaders rejected the use of drum in the church.<sup>176</sup> There are some truths in this as missionaries played advisory roles. For instance, Chalhna, who was the most prominent elder in the *Mission Veng* church, which was attended by missionaries, expressed the following observations about the restriction of using drum in church. He said that the missionaries did not appreciate using drums in church. ‘We dared not go against the missionaries and their interests automatically became our interest’.<sup>177</sup> Muka, one of the church leaders did not necessarily blame the Mizo church leaders for refusing to use of drums in church because at that time the message was that the Mizo life was pagan, dreadful and fearful. He concluded that it is true that the first church leaders tried their best to stay away from the traditional Mizo life as far as possible.<sup>178</sup>

But the Mizos could not resist forever the use of drums in church. The drum was later adopted because the Mizo cultural instinct asserted itself through the excitement of the revival. Since drum beating had never come into Christian worship in the early days, when it made its entry into the church, it was strictly through the back door, not readily accepted by the church leaders until the powerful force of singing and dancing during the revival made it an essential complement of the upheaval. Now the use of

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<sup>174</sup> Lalsawma, *Revivals*, 78.

<sup>175</sup> Vanlalauva, *Theology in Mizo Thought*, 24.

<sup>176</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, 165.

<sup>177</sup> Lalrinawmi, *Crab Theology*, 203.

<sup>178</sup> Lalrinawmi, *Crab Theology*, 205.

traditional drums has become so popular and widespread that the Mizo church worship service without drums could be compared to a dish of food without salt in it.

When the Presbyterian Church in Mizoram celebrated its centenary in 1994, they made one of the biggest drums in the world with a diameter of 7 feet. The idea of having a drum was truly symbolical in various ways for the Mizo society. It shows resistance to being called pagans and animists with all its negative connotations. The drum has become a part of life in all religious and cultural activities.

## **6. SLAVERY SYSTEM:**

The author wants to look at the controversy over the slavery system because it has a connection with the gospel and culture in the Mizo context. The primary issue of controversy was ‘are *inpuichhung* slaves real slaves or not?’ What does the Lushai word ‘bawi’ mean? Does it mean slave, pauper or other? The two opposing dignitaries were Major Cole, Superintendent of the Lushai Hills on the one side and Peter Fraser, a medical missionary of the Welsh Mission. The missionary Peter Fraser used the Bible to liberate the slaves while Major Cole, the colonial administrator tried to maintain the Mizo culture, especially the slave system. The author will take the dissident and resistant readings or approaches to look at this controversy.

In order to have a clear perspective of the controversy, a review of the historical development of slavery in the Mizo society is necessary. There were two kinds of slaves – the **captive slaves**, those who were taken against their will during the inter-tribal wars; the other slaves were **non-captive slaves** who entered the chief’s house at their own will to be the slaves of the chief. There were three types of the non-captive

slaves- *chemsen* slaves were criminals like murderers who took refuge in the chief house to escape vengeance; the second type are called *tukluh* slaves, those who deserted the losing side in war and joined the victor by promising to become slaves with all their descendants; the last are *inpuichhung* slaves, those who had been driven because of poverty, sickness or distress to take refuge in the chief's house to be slaves.<sup>179</sup> It was as a result of the last type of slavery '*inpuichhung bawi*' that the controversy arose.

### **6. 1. The Colonial view of the Mizo slave system:**

Out of the three types of slavery mentioned above, the British government recognized only *inpuichhung bawi*. The main reason for supporting this system was the administrators like Major Cole saw the Mizo slave system as beneficial both to the slaves and the chiefs. Customarily, the slaves were well treated and in return they had to give all they could to the chiefs and worked for the chiefs. To get freedom the slave's family or the slave had to pay Rs. 40/- or a mithun for ransom. It was at that time a large sum of money that an ordinary family could not afford. This system of slavery was fundamental to the economic sustenance of the chiefs. Therefore, British administrators advocated the Mizo slave system and saw it as benevolent and suited to the Mizo social-cultural context.

Despite their attempt to do justice and keep the Mizo customs alive, the colonial officials did not realize there was actual selling of slaves. J. Shakespear, who carefully observed the slave system among the Mizo people, did not see it as real slavery. He wrote,

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<sup>179</sup> Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute*, 142.

‘The ‘boi’ custom-Among the *Thados* and *Chins* real slavery used to exist, men and women were sold like cattle. Among the Lushais this has never been the case, but there is a class known as ‘boi’ [*bawi* is the right spelling, author] who have been miscalled slaves by those ignorant of their real condition.’<sup>180</sup>

J. Shakespear view was neither totally right nor totally wrong for the fate and destinies of the Mizo slaves were solely conditioned by the chiefs and their masters. All the British officers and the majority of the Mizo chiefs supported this view.

## **6. 2. Missionary view:**

On the other hand, the missionaries recognized that the slavery system in the Mizo society was real slavery, but they preferred to keep quiet. As the proverb goes, ‘Actions speak louder than words’. They did redeem some of the slaves out of their oppressive positions with their own money.<sup>181</sup> Despite their sympathy for the slaves, the early missionaries dared not complain about the Mizo slavery system to the colonial administrators. Peter Fraser came to Mizoram in 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1908 and saw the Mizo slavery system as against the Bible’s teachings (Exod. 20:3-7; Ezk. 3:7-21) and the British Law under the influence of Pax Britannica. He raised the question of why the slavery system still existed in Mizoram which was under the administration of Pax Britannica. He pointed out that the British government prohibited slave trade in 1807 and in 1833 ruled that all slaves should be set free.

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<sup>180</sup> Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans*, 46.

<sup>181</sup> According to Lalhmuaka, Edwin Rowlands ransomed Pawngi, Hlunziki and Challianbuki out of the Zote chief’s slavery with his own money. Lalhmuaka, *Zoram*, 103.

Unfortunately the way he interpreted the Bible is not available but it can be imagined that his hermeneutical circle takes up the Ten Commandments and he seemed to identify the hardened hearts of the Egyptian people with the colonial administrators and the Mizo chiefs. He studied the Mizo slavery system and configured seven points which clearly disclosed the injustice of the Mizo socio-cultural structure which his friend Major Cole defended for the sake of administration. According to Peter Fraser,

‘That the ‘*bawi*’ system is a system under which British subjects in Lushai are deprived of their right to liberty and justice is evident from a perusal of the following statements of slaves, evangelists, chiefs, missionaries and others. Besides, bondage for life other evil features are seen: (1) The inhumane separation of a mother from her child (2) The separation of husband and wife (3) the separation of relatives (4) Intimidation, bodily hurt (5) Temptation to immorality, (6) Opposition to slaves becoming Christian (7) The selling and buying of people.’<sup>182</sup>

He further observed that it was real buying and selling of people under the chieftainship. However, J.M. Lloyd, his colleague stated that there was no actual selling and buying of human beings in the Mizo slavery system.<sup>183</sup> But the fact that there were certain cases of the real buying and selling of slaves was confirmed by the statement of R. Dala, an elder in the church who witnessed that Vanphunga was really selling his slave to Laihang. <sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Peter Fraser, *Slavery on British Territory: Assam and Burma* (Canarvon: W. Gwenlyn Evans & Son, 1913), 5. Hereafter cited as ‘Fraser, Slavery’.

<sup>183</sup> Lloyd, *History of the Churches*, 154.

<sup>184</sup> Fraser, *Slavery*, 61.

### **6. 3. Mizo Christian chiefs freed their slaves:**

Khawvelthanga chief of Maubuang attended the mission school at Aizawl and became a Christian. He saw that the slavery system was incompatible with Christianity. Khawvelthanga, therefore, set free all his slaves that he had inherited from past generations. The non-Christian chiefs felt that it was going to shake their chieftainship and it was against the Mizo custom to release the slave without any ransom money. Major Cole together with Hmara and Tualawma went to investigate Khawvelthanga, and he was interviewed and questioned but found no need to take action.<sup>185</sup> Some Christian chiefs also released their slaves and did this as a public testimony of their allegiance to Christ when they became Christians.<sup>186</sup>

### **7. POSTCOLONIAL READING ON CONTROVERSY AND CHANGES:**

Resistant reading sees that the slavery was a source of structural injustice in the Mizo society and was against the Bible and the British law, although it probably contributed benevolent things to the person concerned. Khawvelthanga wrote to Major Cole, the Superintendent clearly stating that ‘the Mizo *bawi* system was incompatible with Christianity or the teaching of Jesus Christ and the crown of the British Empire King Edward.’<sup>187</sup> He also gave letters to the slaves whom he freed saying, ‘From this time in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the name of our King Edward, I free you from slavery. From this time no one will be able to make you a slave.’<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> J.V. Hluna, *Mizoram Hmar Bial Missionary-te Chanchin* [History of Missionaries in Northern Mizoram] (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 2003), 88. Hereafter cited as ‘Hluna, Mizoram Hmar Missionary’.

<sup>186</sup> Lloyd, *Every High Hill*, 63.

<sup>187</sup> Fraser, *Slavery*, 59.

<sup>188</sup> Fraser, *Slavery*, 8.

Unfortunately, Major Cole who defended the cause of the Mizo chiefs and the customs could not support the meritorious deeds of Khawvelthanga. Therefore, he had to devise a method and recognized its limitations. Although Khawvelthanga totally freed his slaves they would still be slaves in other villages until and unless they paid the ransom fee. When Fraser, who himself ransomed over forty slaves out of his own pocket learnt of the case, he thought it could be solved through a payment of Rs. 40/- for each slaves. He then found Rs.200/- for five families and gave it to Khawvelthanga as ransom money.<sup>189</sup> The motive was to legalize the process as the Mizo customary law demanded the ransom money. Khawvelthanga neither demanded the payment nor asked Fraser to do this. The slaves were then informed that their ransom has been paid, and that they are now free from slavery.

Major Cole was supported by all the colonial officers, staff and the Mizo chiefs while Fraser was supported by few like his partner Watkins Roberts, Khawvelthanga chief of Maubuang village and R. Dala, assistant to Fraser in his medical work. The rest of the missionaries secretly supported Fraser but dared not say anything. Although they did not support outwardly, almost all the Mizos took the side of their beloved missionary doctor.<sup>190</sup>

Meanwhile in 1909, Major Cole wrote an article about the Mizo *bawi* system in the local monthly news called '*Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*' (Newspaper of Mizo and Indian). In the November issue he stated that what they call *bawi* (slavery) in the Lushai Hills is not 'bound' slavery. By paying ransom money they can be free according to their pleasure. They can go wherever they like; for that reason it does not

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<sup>189</sup> Fraser, *Slavery*, 79.

<sup>190</sup> Lalthangliana, *History and Culture*, 494.

appear that they are real slaves. So, because they can do as they desire it is only 'membership of the household'. Henceforth without calling it 'slave price' (*bawiman*) it is to be called 'payment for board of house hold members' (*chhungte chawmman*). So whoever wants to ransom himself if he gives to the chief 'payment for board of house hold members' (*chungte* [sic] *chawmman*) - forty rupees or a gayal, one family will be allowed to ransom themselves.<sup>191</sup>

Here Cole's statement was incompatible with the then existing Mizo customs. It was this modified version and reinterpretation of the Mizo customs with which the Mizo chiefs disagreed. Chief Khawvelthanga's letter to Cole makes the issue clear. On 29<sup>th</sup> November, 1911, Khawvelthanga wrote that the reason he freed his slaves in the name of Jesus Christ and in the name of king was the love of God and the king who does not want the evil way of slavery. But the majority of the Lushai chiefs did not allow their slaves to be free until they received Rs. 40/- from their slaves. This Rs. 40/- was not *chawmman* (payment of board), it is *bawiman* (payment for slave). Khawvelthanga turned the order of Cole against him as Cole had not recognized the payment and modified the Mizo custom by his authority.

King Edward VII died in 1910 and all the Mizo chiefs were ordered to light a fire on the highest hill in their chieftdom as a sign and symbol of commemoration. Khawvelthanga failed to comply with that order and the Superintendent; Major Cole confiscated his double barrel gun. The Mizos thought that the reason behind this was not because of the failure to comply with the order, but rather that he supported Fraser's case in releasing the *bawis*. Major Cole wisely rationalized the case in order

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<sup>191</sup> Fraser, *Slavery*, 21; Lalthangliana, *History and Culture*, 494.



to evade the truth and justified his position historically.<sup>192</sup> On 8<sup>th</sup> November 1910, Major Cole officially restricted the ministry of Fraser and Fraser sent a letter of complaint to the Assam Chief Commissioner Sir Archdale Dharle, who defended the cause of administration for the sake of peace. Fraser was asked to moderate his statements which he flatly rejected and he was then asked to leave the Lushai Hills.<sup>193</sup>

Sometime after Fraser was withdrawn from the Lushai Hills, the slavery controversy was taken up and a settlement affected an order issued on 18<sup>th</sup> of March, 1914 during the time of J. Hezlett, Superintendent of the Lushai Hills. The main points were briefly as follows:

- 1) The use of the word *BAWI* to be discontinued as far as possible due to its association with the wider sense of slavery.
- 2) Claims by chiefs against parties alleged to be *BAWIS* should adopt the same form as in all customary cases among the general public on which the issue was recovery of the customary Rs. 40/- or 1 Mithan chawman or board and lodging costs.
- 3) That in any case of *CHEMSEN BAWIS* and *TUK LUT BAWIS*, types which are in any case fast dying out and which had never been recognised by the Administration, any claims put forward would on decision be limited to the specific amount of the consideration, if any, received.
- 4) The maximum liability of a *BAWI* on seeking freedom be accepted as Rs. 40/- or 1 Mithan for a whole family.

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<sup>192</sup> Lalthangliana, *History and Culture*, 501-502.

<sup>193</sup> Lloyd, *Every High Hill*, 63.

- 5) A *BAWI* might leave his benefactor at will, it being open to the chief then to sue- he having no remedy to demand service, by force, pending the settlement of the freedom price.
- 6) Questions arising out of disputes over *BAWIS* should, as far as possible, be decided on the lines of Lushai custom as applied to ordinary cases of *chawman*.<sup>194</sup>

There was no explicit order of a slavery system in the Mizo Hills, but Fraser, who left due to this controversy, had come back to Lushai Hills to collect his materials, and was applauded as if he had championed the cause of the *Bawis* successfully. Thanga, who sat for the Matriculation examination in Shillong, heard the news of Fraser coming back to Mizoram after he had been withdrawn imagined that Fraser had won the case and composed a song which still popular even today among the Mizos. The song goes like this:

We praise and honour thee o Lord Most High  
Thou art living and Almighty God,  
Friend of the oppressed, slaves, downtrodden and the sinners,  
Lord, Father and God of the orphans and the poor.

If the *bawi* controversy is studied from the postcolonial perspective, the Colonial administrators, with good intentions tried to protect the Mizo custom, tradition and culture for administrative purposes. Fraser criticized the unjust social structure in the light of the Bible and the British Law by pinpointing the slavery system. The

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<sup>194</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 129; Lalhmuaka, *Zoram*, 288; Lalthangliana, *History and Culture*, 500-501.

controversy was ‘are the *mizo bawis* really slaves?’. Secondly, J.H. Lorrain had a totally different view and he said that the word ‘*bawi*’ must be translated as ‘pauper’ or ‘retainer’ and not as ‘slave’.<sup>195</sup> But his classic Dictionary of Lushai Language was published in 1940; he did not change ‘*bawi*’ to ‘pauper’ or ‘retainer’ but still translated the word as ‘slave’.<sup>196</sup> Therefore, it can be concluded that the answer is ‘yes, the *bawis* are slaves’. It is significant to note that J.H. Lorrain might have been traumatized by the administration of that period. However, the transforming power of the Gospel which changes the socio-political structure finally abolished the oppressive structure of the slavery system of the Mizo society. Fraser’s subversive challenges and Khawvelthanga’s resistant approach could not change the edifice of the colonial administration at first, but later practically liberated the Mizo *bawis*, who were bound by tradition in the hands of the chiefs.

## **8. RE-READING THE ABOLITION OF ZAWLBUK:**

The abolition of *zawlbuk* may be re-reading from the postcolonial perspective which maintains those binary notions and interactions of colonial administration and the missionary movements. Four approaches, political, religious, modernization and subaltern will be developed in order to look at the abolition of the traditional *zawlbuk* in the Mizo context.

### **8. 1. Political approach:**

This approach sees that it was the colonial administration that directly or indirectly led to the abolition of *zawlbuk*. N. Chatterji points out that both the advent of the colonial power and the Christian mission were the primary cause of weakening the

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<sup>195</sup> Lalthangliana, *Zoram Encyclopedia*, 34.

<sup>196</sup> J. H. Lorrain, *Dictionary*, 31.

operation and stability of *zawlbuk*.<sup>197</sup> In the pre-colonial period, *zawlbuk* played political roles in defending the community, giving security and peace. After the annexation, clan feuds and village warfare were forbidden by the British government, security, peace, law and order was restored to its maximum level. In other words, the colonial administration had taken over the role of *zawlbuk* in the defence and security of the villages and the importance of *zawlbuk* inevitably declined in the minds of the majority of the Mizo people.<sup>198</sup> J.M. Lloyd also agreed that when the British administration took over the land and restored law and order, *zawlbuk* was no longer necessary.<sup>199</sup>

Although the colonial administration paralysed the institution of *zawlbuk*, the colonial officials wanted to retain the *zawlbuk* institution. On 29<sup>th</sup> of November, 1937, Assistant Superintendent, B.M. Roy sent a letter to A.G. McCall in favour of retaining the traditional *zawlbuk* institution in *Thakthing veng* (Thakthing area) in *Aizawl* for its contributions to the Mizo society. He even complained about the Lushai Christians seeing their tradition and custom in a negative way. This clearly testified that the British administrators were in a position to retain the traditional *zawlbuk*.

## **8. 2. Religious approach:**

This approach favoured the abolition of *zawlbuk* which was supported by the missionaries, the Mizo Christians and the school teachers. J.M. Lloyd believed that the head hunting raids which made the Lushai notorious were planned and perfected

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<sup>197</sup> N. Chatterji, *Zawlbuk as a Social Institution in the Mizo Society* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1975), 23. Hereafter cited as 'N. Chatterji, *Zawlbuk*'.

<sup>198</sup> N. Chatterji, *Zawlbuk*, 23.

<sup>199</sup> Lloyd, *History of the Churches*, 143.

in the *zawlbuk*.<sup>200</sup> A.G. McCall observes that the prime movers in the abolition of the *zawlbuk* were the mission employees. He writes,

‘It was however, the Lushai mission employees who were the prime movers in the matter of abandoning the ZAWLBUK system. The missions were left to view the notion sympathetically or alternatively, to oppose it with vigour. The latter alternative basically conflicts with their principle of encouraging self-expression and Lushai initiative, and must be abhorrent to the personnel of the missions.’<sup>201</sup>

Meanwhile, David Edwards, a Welsh missionary also sent a letter to A.G. McCall in support of the abolition of the *zawlbuk* from the Mizo society. Even though the missionaries made use of the *zawlbuk* in their previous ministry for preaching and learning the Mizo language, but later on, it was seen as a danger to their mission works and supported the abolition of *zawlbuk*.

### **8. 3. Modernization approach:**

In this approach the new elites in the Mizo society such as mission employees including pastors, teachers and other church workers and the government servants saw that the Mizo traditional ways of living were outdated and needed to be modernized and updated and that the *zawlbuk* institution should be abolished. Besides there were some 2000 Lushai Labour Corps, who went to France during the World War I, who had been enlightened and changed in their outlook and they also supported the abolition of *zawlbuk*. These people brought money with them and thus introducing the new economy to the Mizo society. As Kipgen has mentioned in his book the new

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<sup>200</sup> Lloyd, *Every High Hill*, 47.

<sup>201</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 211.

economic system based upon monetary wealth was one of the reasons for the abolition of the *zawlbuk*.<sup>202</sup> It is therefore valid to claim that modernization was one of the reasons for the abolition of *zawlbuk* in the Mizo society.

Another reason for the abolition of the *zawlbuk* may be the introduction of formal education by the government and the Christian mission. J.M. Lloyd also agrees with the introduction of education as the primary reason for abolishing the *zawlbuk*.<sup>203</sup> According to H.L. Malsawma, the *zawlbuk* institution collapsed because of the introduction of the education system by the missionaries. He writes,

‘The institution of *zawlbuk* has disappeared due mainly to modern education and not so much of Christianity. The necessity of having this institution like the preparation for war, *chapchar kut*, emergency of discipline is no more valid. Factors which contributed to the decline and ultimate disappearance of this institution are many and varied. The newly educated Mizo frowned upon all the customs and manners of the past. ‘Down went into oblivion, golden years and traditions of adventure and bravery’. The opening of primary and middle schools in the villages generated a clash between two interests and *zawlbuk* had to give way. Missionaries and Superintendent had attempted once to revive it at *Thakthing veng, Aizawl*, but the native people themselves objected the attempt on many grounds and the proposal had to be abandoned.’<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> M. Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 151.

<sup>203</sup> Lloyd, *History of the Churches*, 278.

<sup>204</sup> Malsawma, *Sociology of the Mizos*, 168.

#### 8. 4. Postcolonial approach:

The Postcolonial subaltern approach sees *zawlbuk* as an institutional structure of injustice and an oppressive tool for the chiefs to exploit their subjects. *Zawlbuk* was the source of power for the chief in every Mizo village. There were conflicts between the chief and the people concerning rights and dues of the chief and it was aggravated at that time. Therefore the abolition of *zawlbuk* meant abolition of power of the chief and structural injustice. When the Superintendent, N.E. Parry ordered the rebuilding of *zawlbuk* in every village, some of the Mizos, under the leadership of Telela of *Kulikawn* resisted the order by turning against the indirect administration. Vanlalchhuanawma delineates the subversive questions of the subaltern Mizos as follows:

Is the Superintendent endowed with the power to compel people to labour without wages? Why does he order us rebuild the *zawlbuk*? Are the Mizos under the British government or *Lals* [chiefs]? Is there any other tribe under the rule of both at one and the same time? Should the Superintendent collect fowl and eggs free from the poor subjects? etc..<sup>205</sup>

Again on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1937, *Thudikziakngama*, (one who is not afraid to write the truth) and who was in favour of radical changes, pointed out the weakness of *zawlbuk* and its oppressive elements. He wrote an anonymous letter relating to the improvement and advancement of the Lushai to Superintendent McCall pointing out only the destructive roles in support of the abolition of *zawlbuk* as follows:

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<sup>205</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Revival Movement*, 332-333. According to Vanlalchhuanawma, the Superintendent branded them 'Kulikawn Rogues' and the leading persons Telela, Thuama, V.Z. Biaka, Saikunga, Chawngnhuaia, Chawngdailova and Zuala were kept in custody on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1926 and released them by the end of December. They were penalized by a fine of Rs.5000/-.

‘*Zawlbuk* has been destructive to the Mizos instead of improving. In fact, it is making the Mizo worse. Children cannot be controlled, taught and disciplined by their respective parents. Children not only learnt notorious fun and jokes, but dirty scathing chats from the uneducated elders. Children also suffered under strict disciplines under the supervision of the elders. *Zawlbuk* naturally demands more compulsory community works while lots of labour had to be devoted to the construction of schools and churches. Men have wasted their time in the *zawlbuk* without helping and assisting their wives at home. *Zawlbuk* therefore, is deteriorating, nothing to do for the advancement and development of the Mizo society.’<sup>206</sup>

Despite its various positive contributions for the betterment of the Mizo society, if reading from the postcolonial perspective which advocates social justice, *zawlbuk* had some negative aspects such as:

- 1) Miscarriage of social justice on the girls. This is a sheer injustice done to the girls by the men folks.
- 2) The daily nocturnal visits of young *zawlbuk* dwellers to their sweethearts enjoying easy uninhibited indulgence in their company as an accepted social more.
- 3) Lack of any restraint on such activities by the parents and socially accepted collective reprisals by the *zawlbuk* as a whole on any parents taking objection to such free mixing, all contributed to the growth of natural hetero-sexual

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<sup>206</sup> The original letter is in Mizo language, and McCall, Superintendent asked Buchhawna to translate into English. I suggest that this letter is prepared by the ‘Kulikawn Rogues’ of that time. McCall response can be seen in his book ‘Lushai Chrysalis’. See McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 211.



relations between man and woman in this tribal society. This could bring about the dreadful '*tlangsawi*'.

- 4) Gossips and clandestine love affairs received unhealthy encouragement as a result of such weighted treatment in favour of men folks.
- 5) Another important weakness of the *zawlbuk* system was that the frequent absence of young men folks from the family and also from the filial ties with the parents.<sup>207</sup>

By abolishing the *zawlbuk* institution, discrimination against women has come to an end. Men folks who wasted their time at *zawlbuk* now spent more time looking after family affairs. Children also got freedom from the compulsory duty of collecting firewood and they had time to go to school and received more care and attention.<sup>208</sup>

On the other hand the abolition of the *zawlbuk* institution in one sense weakened the unity of the village and there was no better substitute. Now the church is interpreted as a substitute for the *zawlbuk* in various ways and utilizes it as a hermeneutic to construct Mizo tribal ecclesiology.

To summarize from the postcolonial perspective, not only the advent of the colonial power, Christian mission and modernization, but also the structural injustice based on chieftainships in connection with *zawlbuk* were the primary reasons for the abolition of *zawlbuk*. As a whole, a cultural institution that is against the gospel must be transformed. Nowadays, *zawlbuk* no longer survives but the spirit of *zawlbuk* known as *tlawmngaihna* still survives in every Mizo village and town. As a result in all the villages and towns, 'Young Mizo Association' a voluntary organisation is formed in

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<sup>207</sup> N. Chatterji, *Zawlbuk*, 21-22.

<sup>208</sup> Sangkima, *Mizo: Society and Social Change*, 132.

order to help people in various ways. It therefore, right to maintain the view that even in the postcolonial era, though no *zawlbuk* institution can be seen, yet the spirit of *zawlbuk* together with *tlawmngaihna* is actively functioning within the Mizo community.<sup>209</sup>

## 9. REFLECTION ON MEDICAL MISSION:

In this section the author wants to present the medical mission which enlightened and completely changed the philosophy of medicines in connection with sacrifices to evil spirits in the Mizo context. The Mizo philosophy and world view before the coming of the British and the Christian mission was that any sickness was ascribed or attributed to the work of malignant evil spirits. John Hughes Morris writes, ‘The average Lushais had more faith in a tuft of goat’s hair or in a number of dog’s teeth strung around his neck, than all the medicines in the world!’<sup>210</sup> So the appeasement of the evil spirits and offering sacrifices were the major means to cure sick people.

When Peter Fraser, the medical missionary doctor first explained that sickness and illnesses were not the work of the evil spirits but germs and other harmful things, the Mizos could not accepted his explanations. Mizo priests, who were the propitiators of the evil spirits, challenged the medical explanation. But during his first year of ministry in Mizoram, Peter Fraser treated about 24,000 patients.<sup>211</sup> When he left Mizoram after five years he had treated more than 50,000 patients.<sup>212</sup> Thousands of lives have been saved and the Mizo philosophy of medicine was gradually changed when they found that a single dosage of quinine was more effective than the series of

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<sup>209</sup> N. Chatterji, *Zawlbuk*, 25.

<sup>210</sup> John Hughes Morris, *In the Step of the Good Physician: The Story of Medical Missions* (Canarvon: The Calvinistic Book Agency, 1938), 57. Hereafter cited as ‘Morris, Medical Missions’.

<sup>211</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Kohhran Chanchin*, 46.

<sup>212</sup> Lalhmuaka, *Zoram*, 161.

sacrifices to the evil spirits.<sup>213</sup> Medical mission not only brought physical healing, but also changed the Mizo world view in terms of psychological, intellectual and spiritual changes. Sacrifices to evil spirits for cure were more expensive than buying medicine. The Mizo society greatly benefited from the medical mission and its education and enlightenment in all spheres of life. In other words, it was the medical mission that changed the minds of the Mizos and enlightened and transformed their attitudes to evil spirits and this played a vital role in a transformation of Mizo culture and religion. Communication of the gospel by means of medicine and prayer proved to be a wise missionary method in a society where people associated sickness with evil spirits and religion.

The Mission hospital (now called Presbyterian Hospital) was started with only one missionary doctor and six beds in 1928. From this humble beginning the hospital progressed slowly but steadily. When the Presbyterian Hospital celebrated its 80 years of service in 2008, there were 23 doctors and 114 nursing staff and 300 beds.<sup>214</sup> The hospital is a secondary level multispeciality, equipped with all the modern equipments including a licenced Blood Bank. The hospital also has three outreach centres outside the hospital campus. Besides the routine outdoor patients and ward facilities, a mobile clinic team regularly visits the interior villages throughout Mizoram delivering health services to those unable to obtain treatment elsewhere. The main objectives of the hospital are: To render quality health care to all at all times without discrimination and to train quality nurses with Christian principles.

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<sup>213</sup> Morris, *Medical Missions*, 57.

<sup>214</sup> 'Present' [article online]; available from [derhkentlang.org/present.html](http://derhkentlang.org/present.html); Internet; accessed; 20 July, 2009.

## **10. POSTCOLONIAL REFLECTION ON EDUCATIONAL MISSION:**

Some contributions of western education can be summarized in three or four categories given below, although the impact of western education is still unfolding. If churches and mission agencies are to reclaim their relevancy, they must explain why missionary education failed to liberate people from ignorance, from hatred and the spiral of exploitation and violence.

### **10. 1. Education was a means for conversion:**

The term conversion has been used with different spectrums of meaning according to the context in which it is used. It can mean conversion of currencies, change of religious affiliation, and experience of inner change among Christians. The main concern in this section is to study religious conversion from the perspective of Mizo Christians, with a view to finding correlation between personal and social change. Let us first briefly look at the matter of religious conversions and the deep theological and sociological questions they raise. According to R.S. Sugirtharajah, religious conversion means a shift from one religion to another, but also more importantly, from one community to another. It is a change of outlook and an orienting of one's life to a different focal point, but it also means leaving one's own cultural heritage and joining a Christian community whose style of worship and church structure follows western cultural patterns.<sup>215</sup> Therefore conversion raises many theological issues such as: Is one religion superior to the other? What aspects of culture and social life should a convert be encouraged to preserve? In what way should he or she be helped to make use of his or her rich tradition to interpret the new faith? Should one leave one's own cultural social tradition entirely in accepting another faith?

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<sup>215</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices from the Margin Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (New York: Orbis/SPCK, New Edition second impression, 1997), 307.

Trusting in the power of the western education and the universality of English literature, missionaries often ignored some of the burning issues of the day and were concerned only about converting and Christianizing the people. For example, the introduction of the Commission III Report of the World Missionary Conference in 1910 confessed that it considered education only as a means, either direct or indirect, to fulfil the great commission in Matthew to make disciples of all nations and to baptize them.<sup>216</sup> This observation was in agreement with a majority of educational missionaries including Alexander Duff, who argues that the Colonial government was a powerful force, sent by God to Christianize India and the government should do all in its power 'for the conversion of a hundred and thirty millions of idolaters'.<sup>217</sup> Jonathan Ingleby, who worked for more than twenty years in education in India, agreed that the main British supporters of the Indian mission saw the conversion of the heathen as the missionary primary task.<sup>218</sup> The long running debate as to whether the men and women who gave themselves entirely to educational work were really missionaries was an indication of this concern. The dispute between the Serampore missionaries and the BMS had partly to do with the Serampore College offering a general education which according to its critics had lost its evangelistic cutting edge. This means that officers of the missionary societies wished to emphasise the task of the missionary as first and foremost converting non-Christians and building up the church. The failure to obtain conversions might have been expected to lead to the

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<sup>216</sup> *Report of Commission III, Education in relation to the Christianisation of National Life*, World Missionary Conference, 1910 (Edinburgh and London: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier), 16.

<sup>217</sup> George Smith, *The Life of Alexander Duff*, 291, quoted in Jacob S. Dharmaraj, *Colonialism and Christian Mission: Postcolonial Reflections* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), 70. Hereafter cited as 'Dharmaraj, Colonialism'.

<sup>218</sup> Jonathan Ingleby, *Missionaries, Education and India: Issues in Protestant Missionary Education in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 368. Hereafter cited as 'Jonathan Ingleby, Missionaries Education'.

closing down of the schools and colleges and the diversion of resources into other enterprises.

The primary object of the missionaries in Mizoram was also to convert the people into Christianity. From their experience, the missionaries learned that mere religious preaching would not bear much fruit nor could it take a deep root in the mind of the Mizos. Unless they had education, these ignorant and primitive people could not understand or appreciate the facts, evidences and doctrines of the scripture. This factor would always stand as an obstacle to win them over to Christianity. It was necessary to start schools to educate the illiterate converts so that they could read the bible, a qualification that was essential for all Christians.

It seems clear from the experience of the Mizo society that conversion provides the people with a new source of power, replacing the traditional source of power. This has had a far reaching consequence in the life of the Mizo people. C.L. Hminga has argued strongly that the Mizo conversion to the Christian faith changed the physical appearance of the village, the social life, the customary practices and belief of the Mizo people.<sup>219</sup> John Hughes Morris referring to the work of Presbyterian Church of Wales in Mizoram said, 'The story of our work in Lushai Hills forever remain an inspiration to the Churches of Wales, and a clear demonstration of the saving and transforming and uplifting power of the gospel of Christ'.<sup>220</sup> Lal Dena correctly notes with regard to Mizoram that 'while conversion was essentially a religious issue, it encompassed the whole aspects of one's or community's life. Therefore, the

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<sup>219</sup> Hminga, *Life and Witness*, 287-307

<sup>220</sup> John, Huhges Morris, *The Story of Our Foreign Mission* (Liverpool: John Hughes Morris, 1930; reprint, Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1990), 88.

missionary view about the process of conversion itself ultimately amounted to a whole theory of social change'.<sup>221</sup>

The conversion of the Mizos has made a significant contribution to the transformation of the society. Today, in a situation where there is no more mass conversion from primal religion to Christianity, in what way is conversion a powerful means of social transformation? In the context of Mizoram, conversion is now experienced as a dynamic and ongoing process of turning from sin to God. The importance and value of the conversion experiences as a foundation for struggle for social transformation should not be underestimated.

**10. 2. The Diffusion Theory:** E. Stanley Jones, a long time missionary in India explained the logic of this theory; influence people who have influence in the society.<sup>222</sup> He argued that winning the educated upper class will automatically lead to penetration into the social world of the lower classes. Therefore the missionaries found justification in concentrating educational activities among the rich and powerful sections in the society. In Mizoram from the beginning, it was only the children and relations of the new rich that utilized the new and novel experience of middle and higher education. This group included the mission workers and the salaried employees of the government. In this way their children and relations enjoyed the advantages which otherwise were not easily available to the ordinary and typical Mizos. This was because their resources were meagre. It was in this way that a kind of oligarchy or intelligentsia emerged which had no place in the indigenous society of the Mizos.

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<sup>221</sup> Lal Dena, *Christian Missions and Colonialism*, 86.

<sup>222</sup> Jonathan Ingleby, *Missionaries Education*, 247.

Soon education and Christianity began to be considered as a passport to salaried jobs and a welcome relief from the wearisome toil of hard work. The mission education brought about the creation of the privileged class. Black-coated occupations became synonymous with progress and Christianity led towards black-coatism.<sup>223</sup> Thus, according to McCall, a privileged class had been produced by the system of education with which the Mizo background had little in common.<sup>224</sup>

One of the reasons for imposing English as the medium of education from the middle school stage in India and also in Mizoram was buried in this change of priority informed by the diffusion theory. It also reflected the political interest in unifying the emotions and ambitions of the colonized people. The English education was introduced as a component of the prevailing political logic of imperialism. In his famous thesis, Thomas Macaulay argued that the English education would promote a cultural revolution and this would make Indians loyal to the crown. Once the revolution was achieved, he wrote, ‘The Indian people will cease to opt for and aim for independence. The native shall not rise against us and thus the energy will be fully and harmlessly employed in acquiring and deffusing European knowledge and in naturalizing European institutions’.<sup>225</sup>

The majority of educational missionaries were enthusiastic about the Macaulay doctrine and for them teaching of the Bible and English language were inseparable. However, language is not just a medium of communication or a symbol of civility but an experience of reality. The language they speak puts them in touch with the basic

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<sup>223</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 250.

<sup>224</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 206.

<sup>225</sup> Jacob Dharmaraj, *Colonialism*, 69.



truths that every religion grapples with.<sup>226</sup> The language also determines the explanation or understanding of the truth and thus directs the social praxis to realize the perceived truth explanations. Furthermore, language is a medium of one's own social reality, the reality of life. Therefore alienation from the social self was the immediate ramification of imposing an alien language English in missionary education. Moreover, depriving people of their mother tongue resulted in their alienation from the truth of life, creating a structural inability in them to search for the fundamentals of their own reality.

### **10. 3. Education as justification for Colonial Rule:**

The other objective of education was to provide the logic which justified colonial administration. One of the moral questions that missionaries sought to answer was 'what right did the Europeans have to occupy, dominate and to manage the people of Asia, Africa and Americas?'<sup>227</sup>

In seeking rational justification for education and occupation, missionaries proposed two possible answers which later assumed the role of an official explanation of the churches and the colonial political leadership. Missionaries argued that colonialism was providential, allowing people to encounter the saving grace of God. The imperial success therefore was integral to God's plan to bless the world. Secondly, occupying other lands and educating their occupants was driven by a moral imperative to

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<sup>226</sup> Aloysius Pieres 'Towards an Asian Theology of Liberation' in Virginia Fabella ed., *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity* (New York: Orbis, 1980), 77.

<sup>227</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Beyond Philosophy: Ethics, History, Marxism and Liberation Theology* (New York: Ronman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 53-81.

modernize primitive economic relations and to civilize the barbarians.<sup>228</sup> Wilberforce was not alone in isolating the people of non-western societies and positioning them at the lowest rung of civilization. William Carey, a BMS missionary in India wrote that all non-western societies are culturally inferior. The antidote to religious ignorance and cultural lowliness is preaching of the gospel and the introduction of superior western culture.<sup>229</sup>

Out of many constructive contributions, there were few imperial elements to be found in the Mizo Primer. The Duhlian Primer published in 1915 had initially aimed at curbing the traditional beliefs, taboos and the possession of the evil spirits, nomadic life and strengthening moral and the social relationship. Moreover, there was an urge to submission to the colonial power. For example:

Do not be nomadic.

Be a good slave.

There is no magic.

Do not resent impressed labour.

It is useless to offer things for the dead person.

It is not good to have a concubine.

Do not despise the servant.

Do not search lice on the street.

All deceased bodies must be buried.<sup>230</sup>[*Trans, mine*]

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<sup>228</sup> William Wilberforce said that Indian natives were barbarous and low in the scale of European civilization. Speech of William Wilberforce, Hansard, 22 June, 1813, First Series, Vol. 26, 164, quoted in Jacob Dharmaraj, *Colonialism*, 33.

<sup>229</sup> William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to use means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (First Published in 1792, reprint, Didcot: Baptist Missionary Society, 1991), 40-41.

<sup>230</sup> Lalthangliana, *History and Culture*, 561.

These short, but powerful lessons changed the minds of the Mizo people. B. Lalthangliana, a Mizo historian writes that the influence of these lessons on thought patterns and the ways it enlightened the minds of the Mizos were so great that it was beyond one's imagination.<sup>231</sup> In fact, their fear of evil spirits and magic was driven away; things offered to the dead were no longer necessary. At the same time there are imperial indoctrinations. For example, 'do not resent forced-labour'. This seemed against God's will and not in accordance with the Bible. In the Mizo history, forced or impressed labour was one of the most disturbing and problematic impositions and even resulted in severe disputes between the Mizo chiefs and the British government.<sup>232</sup>

In addition, the missionary education laid a deep foundation of imperialist ideology which was really effective in the Mizo context. In the Mizo Primer Book which was printed in 1915 and 1929, these two sentences were included:

4. There are five kinds of people in the world: the black, the brown, the yellow the red and the white people.

5. All are but one. Vast majority are the yellow people; the wisest and most powerful are the white people.<sup>233</sup>[Trans, mine]

Again, B. Lalthangliana comments this, 'It is wonderful to put these manifestations of imperialist attitudes in the Mizo text book. These lessons were taught and the Mizo society was indoctrinated in this way for nearly 50 years with the aims of colonizing and brainwashing. The effect was really powerful and influential; it successfully

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<sup>231</sup> Lalthangliana, *History and Culture*, 562.

<sup>232</sup> N. Chatterjee, *Mizo Chiefs*, 116.

<sup>233</sup> Lalthangliana, *History and Culture*, 563.

inculcated the minds of the Mizos with the idea that the white people are the most superior till today'.<sup>234</sup> But in the reprinted edition of the Mizo Primer in 1959 these sentences were no longer included.

Furthermore, to enlighten the minds of the Mizos religiously in terms of superstitions and taboos, the Mizo Primer was designed to educate the people as follows:

*Things not haunted by evil spirits:* gibbon's skull,<sup>235</sup> water spring (*sih*),<sup>236</sup> a small pool of water (*tuivamit*),<sup>237</sup> crack in the earth (*lei chat*),<sup>238</sup> a broken off tree (*thing lu bul*),<sup>239</sup> a stream flows into a hole (*tui lut*),<sup>240</sup> accidental death (*sarhi*),<sup>241</sup> a mound resembling a grave (*lei ruang tuam*),<sup>242</sup> a reddish deposit found at the bottom of some pools or where water has run (*chham ek*).<sup>243</sup> In fact, all these things were taboos and superstitions, and had some significance in Mizo traditional ways of living. The following sentences were constructed against the then existing Mizo taboos:

1. There is no evil spirit at the saddle of the hill.
2. Huge rocks and big trees are not haunted.
3. *Zamzo* flower can not protect us from evil spirits.
4. Water spring is not dangerous, but drinking dirty water.
5. Offering sacrifices at *jhum* is no use at all while God blesses hard labour.

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<sup>234</sup> Lalthangliana, *History and Culture*, 563.

<sup>235</sup> Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans*, 101.

<sup>236</sup> A spring is believed to be haunted by evil spirits.

<sup>237</sup> J. H. Lorrain, *Dictionary*, 526. A small pool of water found in the jungle not usually far from a stream. To have a *jhum* near such pool is considered unlucky.

<sup>238</sup> J.H. Lorrain, *Dictionary*, 291.

<sup>239</sup> J.H. Lorrain, *Dictionary*, 466.

<sup>240</sup> J.H. Lorrain, *Dictionary*, 525.

<sup>241</sup> J.H. Lorrain, *Dictionary*, 405.

<sup>242</sup> J.H. Lorrain, *Dictionary*, 292.

<sup>243</sup> J.H. Lorrain, *Dictionary*, 73.

6. It is no use to sacrifice animals to the dead person for animals have no spirit.
7. It is no use to observe public holiday due to village fire or someone killed by tiger, but helping them to build houses and clearing jhum is far better.<sup>244</sup>

These enlightening lessons gradually convinced the mind of the Mizos and later they almost abandoned their traditional taboos, which played vital roles in shaping the moral and ethical life, for they were interpreted as superstitions. Zairema, the pioneer Mizo theologian expresses the effect of this as follows:

‘After we were Christianized, we taught ourselves to deride the traditional beliefs which have been observed with deep respect. We were taught not to be afraid of *sarhi*, *leiruang tuam*, *thinglu bul*, *tuivamit*, etc. that are useful to keep the community life secure such as not to build house obstructing the road or at the tributary of the spring, etc. These were all despised as superstitions without any substitutions from the Christian ethical teaching. This makes the Mizo community who fear neither God nor human beings’.<sup>245</sup> [Trans, mine]

Zairema continues to point out that how obliterating and abandoning these traditional taboos, morally degraded the Mizos and paved ways to materialism. He states that in the Mizo Bible translation, 1 Tim 3:6 ‘godliness’ was translated to mean ‘religiousness in new found faith in Christianity’. The Mizos therefore, in trying to be religious, abandoned their traditional rites as superstitions and taboos without any substitutions. Lack of these concepts perhaps virtually leads to materialism. The Bible

<sup>244</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *History and Culture*, 562-563.

<sup>245</sup> Zairema, *Kan Bible Hi [Our Bible]* (Kolkata: Swapna Printing Works (P) Ltd., 2003), 183. Hereafter cited as ‘Zairema, Bible’.

is so concerned with these rites and a person without religious rites will soon be swallowed up by materialism.<sup>246</sup>[Trans, mine]

Negation of a traditional knowledge system that communities preserved for generations had created a vacuum for moral and ethical discourse in science. Educational missionaries expected that the void created by the destruction of traditional knowledge could be filled by Christian morality and faith. What emerged in its place was an unethical and materialistic approach to social and physical realities. In that process science was turned into an instrument of exploitation rather than an agent to liberate the poor and the marginalized from the force of ignorance and exploitation.

## **11. CONCLUSION:**

The advent of the British government and the Christian missionaries inevitably transformed the religious, social, political and cultural life of the Mizo society in many ways. Consequently, the life of the Mizo society was paralysed by the imposition of laws and orders by the British officials in an attempt to secure peace and suppress savage practices. On the other hand it also liberated the Mizos from injustice, social and cultural structures and oppression in various ways. As a whole the works of the British government and the Christian missionaries made constructive as well as destructive transformations and changes not only in physical appearances, but also in psychological and intellectual areas. As a result, the Mizos started to develop the idea that all that is associated with Mizo traditional religion and culture was pagan, profane and secular and not fit for the newly converted Mizo Christians.

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<sup>246</sup> Zairema, *Bible*, 184

As a result, they abandoned their valuable social and cultural elements and regarded them as secular and worldly and even profane while western culture and traditions were automatically adopted as sacred, religious and pious. In other words, the Mizo traditions and culture were alienated in the Mizo land and western culture and traditions were becoming more influential. They began to look with disgust at their traditional values through the glasses of their new European masters. If we look at all of these in the light of the postcolonial perspective, it is a sign of pseudo-European Mizos who had been proselytized to western traditionalism and ways of life. On the other hand, reinterpreting the then rejected traditional cultural elements like the *zawlbuk* institution bring reestablishment of lost identity and social and spiritual transformation in the Mizo Christian context. The next chapter will continue to deal with how these abandoned and lost traditions and cultural elements have been regained and reformulated in the life of Mizo society through the waves of revival.

## **Chapter Three**

### **REVIVAL MOVEMENT: CULTURAL RESPONSE TO WESTERNISATION**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

Christianity in Mizoram is best understood as the product of the interaction of revival movements in the church. This interaction began in 1906 and continued till today. The purpose of this study is to examine the causes of that tension with particular reference to the possible influence of traditional socio-cultural factors. To what extent did the traditional cultural values and practices influence the church and the Mizo society as a whole? To what extent did revivalism reflect cultural reaction to alien church structures? How did the church deal with the situation and with what consequences? How have these abandoned, alienated or lost traditional and cultural elements been regained and transformed in the life of the Mizo society. However, born and nurtured in a revivalistic background and ordained to serve in a revivalistic Christianity, the author is quite familiar with the nature of revivals in Mizoram although the art of putting them down in writing is more complex. It may be difficult to do justice when expressed in English. Since I have strived to represent those ideas in their native settings, some translations and expressions become typically 'Mizo' and may become obscure to non-Mizo readers. However, it is hoped that the main line of argument will not be adversely affected by this.

#### **2. MEANING OF REVIVAL:**

Revival in a Christian sense is differently understood in various contexts. It generally refers to rekindling of worn-out and insensitive souls to a fresh spiritual or religious



sensitivity. According to New Dictionary of Theology,<sup>247</sup> revival means God's quickening visitation of his people, touching their hearts and deepening his work of grace in their lives. It is essentially a corporate occurrence, an enlivening of individuals not in isolation but together. 'Revive' is the AV (KJV) word for this process of spiritual reanimation (Ps.85:6); 'revivedness' would be the appropriate term to describe its result. Eifion Evans, a Welsh revival specialist refers to it as a 'season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.'<sup>248</sup> In describing the general atmosphere of revival Eifion again writes, 'At the risk of over simplification it can be maintained that the revivals of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries came to an apostate, declining, expiring church, while those of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries took place against the background of a dormant, listless and unconcerned church.'<sup>249</sup> To Richard Owen Roberts, 'Revival is an extraordinary movement of the Holy Spirit producing extraordinary results.'<sup>250</sup> The movement associated with revival is referred to as spiritual awakening, charismatic movement or revival movement. This study attempts to reflect such movements in Mizoram in order to make apparent an indigenous perspective. On the whole the revival movement in Mizoram should be understood as an antidote to the relentless process of westernisation.

The term 'revival' as used in this study refers to a phenomena marked by a state of excitement accompanied by enthusiastic activities of singing, body movements, preaching and even of social action. The revival joy is expressed by ecstatic actions including dancing and varying forms, singing new songs to the accompaniment of

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<sup>247</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 588.

<sup>248</sup> Eifion Evans, *Revivals: Their Rise, Progress and Achievements* (Bridgend: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1960), 6. Hereafter cited as 'Eifion Evans, Revivals'.

<sup>249</sup> Eifion Evans, *Revivals*, 6.

<sup>250</sup> Richard Owen Roberts, *Revival* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale Publishing House Publishers, 1983), 17.

traditional drums, feasting, community gathering and group preaching. While it may share features found in charismatic and Pentecostal movements, revival in Mizoram has assumed a distinctive indigenous form and is closely related to Mizo Christian identity. *Harhna*, the Mizo term for revival literally means liveliness or sprightliness. Its cognate term *Hlimna* means joy or happiness. Generally speaking the two terms denote not only a negative state of being awakened or revived from a state of slumbering or slackening but a more positive sense of being energised and endowed for a task. It is the source of the dynamics of all aspects of Mizo Christian life.

### **3. REVIVAL IN MIZORAM:**

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the colonial power came to Mizoram in 1889 followed by the Christian missionaries and revival happened in Mizoram when the two powerful alien systems, the imperial government and the church had been installed in Mizoram. The former aimed at securing peace, law and order while the latter aimed at converting the Mizos from their traditional primal beliefs to those of the Christian religion as interpreted from their stand point. The whole social structure had been dislocated and the people, of necessity, addressed themselves to responding to the changes brought about by the two systems. The Mizos were deprived of their social and cultural heritage, their autonomous existence and their economic independence. The Mizos faced an identity crisis<sup>251</sup>. McCall observes ‘Against these varying contacts the Lushais had no equipment on which to fall back for strength, except the traditions and the stories of their grandfathers.’<sup>252</sup> Yet having been deprived of the minimal weapons they had to preserve their identity and autonomy,

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<sup>251</sup> L. Keivom, ‘Mizote khawvel pahnih’ [The two Mizo world], [article online]; available from [http://www.Mizobooks.com/keivom\\_2.htm](http://www.Mizobooks.com/keivom_2.htm); Internet; accessed; 2 October, 2007.

<sup>252</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 197.

the revival movement came as the means available to them with which to respond to the religious changes in particular and social change in general.

### **3. 1. The Welsh and Khasi background:**

The revival movement in Mizoram commenced under the direct influence of the Khasi revival which in turn was a spill-over of the Welsh revival, although the context of revivals in Wales and Mizoram were quite different. The news of the revival in Wales in 1904 spread far and wide. Moreover, the sister church established by the same Welsh mission in *Meghalaya* started to experience a similar awakening at the assembly in *Cherrapunji*, 1905. On hearing this news the missionaries pleaded with the Christians to pray for such an awakening to come to Mizoram. They even organised a special programme for revival and also sent 10 delegates from the north and south of Mizoram to attend the Assembly at *Mairang*, Meghalaya in March, 1906. The following report by an eye witness missionary gives a picture of the revival scene of the assembly meeting:

The chapel was simply packed out, but we managed to get in through one of the windows. They were singing the hymn , ‘All hail the power of Jesus name’, and I think that the singing of that one hymn must have taken considerably over an hour, they sang it and re-sang it over and over again, as if they would never grow tired of saying, ‘crown him Lord of all .... Everyone seemed perfectly oblivious to everything but the sense of the Divine presence. Nearly all were singing with eyes shut, their bodies swaying to and fro in time with the music. Some were in trances, other were dancing for gladness and joy; one felt that the Angelic choirs were

joining in to 'Crown Him Lord of all.' As soon as the singing ceased prayer ascended simultaneously from all parts of the building.<sup>253</sup>

### 3.2. Revival Stirrings:

As the delegates came back, revival is said to have started in Mizoram on April 9, 1906.<sup>254</sup> That day a farewell meeting for the delegates from the south was organised wherein it is said that hymn singing took hold of the whole congregation. A woman then stood up to confess her sin concerning her divorce. That was followed by confession of all kinds of sins by a number of people. A description of the scene by an eye-witness is similar to those in Meghalaya and Wales.

Someone then began to sing a ringing hymn of victory, and the whole congregation joined with great rejoicing – waving their hands, swaying their bodies, and many keeping time with their feet. The meeting which had commenced at 8 a.m. did not close until two o'clock, and all felt that the spirit of God was present. Another service of six hours' duration was held in the evening.<sup>255</sup>

The revival manifestation during this first stirring appeared to be similar to the features of the Welsh and Khasi revivals. The most prominent feature was conviction and confession of personal sins. Everyone affected by the revival fervour resolved to confess their sins. Most of the writers of Mizo history agreed upon the four dates on

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<sup>253</sup> John Roberts, *The Revival in the Khasi Hills* (Cherapoonjee: Mrs. John Roberts, 1907), 74. Hereafter cited as 'John Roberts, Revival in Khasi'.

<sup>254</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture: Revival Movement as a Cultural Response to Westernisation in Mizoram* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006) 171. Hereafter cited as 'Vanlalchhuanawma, Christianity'.

<sup>255</sup> John Roberts, *Revival in Khasi*, 81.

which revival stirrings came to Mizoram on a large scale during the first forty years of Christianity. The years 1906, 1913, 1919 and the 1930's have been identified as the first, second, third and fourth revivals.<sup>256</sup> In the ensuing years up to the period under study, further revival stirrings happened in 1960's and in 1984 to early 1990's.

The emergence of the revival movements inaugurated a new era in the growth and development of Christianity in Mizoram. The Mizo Christians in the north and the south thus joined hands in welcoming the revival stirrings. Several individuals had a new feeling through their experience of the Holy Spirit and joined Christianity on their own initiative. Firstly, the significance of the revivals was recognized as the main turning point in the growth of Christianity among the Mizos. It is claimed that the entire population of the Mizos became Christians in about sixty years. The Revival movement has been credited for this rapid increase in the number of Mizo Christians.

Secondly, there was a growing sense of ownership and spontaneity among the Mizo Christians. Previously Christianity was looked upon as something foreign, imported and inculcated into the Mizo society by the white people and their native helpers. But today revival movements brought a new dimension into Mizo Christianity; spontaneity gives deeper feeling of the Spirit and this helps them to freely participate in worship and other activities of the church. And their experience of revival further leads to a new sense of ownership and gained new confidence that Christianity belonged to them and the church herself was also their own. This new sense of

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<sup>256</sup> Lalsawma, *Revivals*; V.L. Siama, *Mizo History*; C.L. Hminga, *Life and Witness*; Lloyd, *History of the Churches*; M.Kipgen, *Christianity and Culture*; Saiaithanga, *Mizo Kohhran Chanchin*.

ownership as well as belonging to one another in the church was a result of revival and gave them strength to grow up in maturity and spontaneity.

Thirdly, following from a new sense of ownership, the church in Mizoram became more and more aware that the foreign forms of worship were insufficient in expressing their Christian experience due to the new charismatic dimension brought about by the revivals. They began to look towards traditional culture to find new forms of expression. Thus the revival movements turned out to be vital in shaping Christianity in Mizoram by a process of reasserting traditional Mizo culture in its various forms. Certain revival features like *beirual* (united effort), *lengkhawm* or *mualinkhawm* (gathering together for singing and prayer) and traditional music, dance and drum became permanent features of Mizo Christianity. Therefore, revival movements can be seen as the beginning of the contextualization of the Mizo Christian theology of mission.

In analysing the revivals in Mizoram, it tends to be unique, although somewhat comparable to charismatic or pentecostal movements in certain other parts of the world. For instance, revival movements in Mizoram have some similarities and dissimilarities to revivals in Africa.

Like Mizoram, the most amazing forces that have shaped the Christian faith in Africa have been the African Revivals. Revivals spread like wildfire across Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Congo and Tanzania. The entire Great Lakes Region was transformed. Men were falling, jumping, laughing, crying, singing, confessing and

some shaking terribly.<sup>257</sup> The message was one of repentance and public confession of sins. Due to revival the church in Africa grew from around 10 million in 1900 to over 200 million in 1980's. By 2000 that number is expected to reach 400 million, half the population.<sup>258</sup>

The practice of giving testimonies is widespread all through in African revival just as it is in Mizoram. It is considered to be so normative that hardly any serious gathering can pass without people bearing witness to what God has done in their lives. There were many who stood up in front of huge crowds and confessed their sin and announced that they were turning their lives over to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. These were not superficial testimonies with a comfortable and suitably religious overtone. They were magnificent demonstrations of God's power to change lives.<sup>259</sup>

### **3.3. Continuous or Sporadic Stirrings:**

An interesting debate among the scholars is about the continuity or frequency of revival movements in Mizoram. On this opinions differ. Continuity here means something which continues for a long period of times without being changed or stopped. There are certain remarks that denote the uninterrupted continuity of revival in Mizoram, e.g. in regular intervals and each new revival building on the former. A Welsh magazine, *Y Cenhadwr* (Missionary), April, 1935 carries the following assertion about revival in Mizoram: 'The fire spread from village to village, the people started to flow to the churches but what is most amazing is that the fire did not go out from that day until now. The history of the work on these hills is a series of

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<sup>257</sup> Geoff Waugh, 'A History of Revival: Revival Fire' [article online]; available from [www.holytrinitynewrochelle.org/youth/18132.html](http://www.holytrinitynewrochelle.org/youth/18132.html); Internet; accessed; 21 August, 2009.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Bill Atwood, 'Testimonies and the East African Revival' [article online]; available from [www.ekk.org/node/8](http://www.ekk.org/node/8); Internet; accessed; 21 August, 2009.

constant revivals'.<sup>260</sup> Moreover, E.L. Mendus, former missionary to Mizoram, states that revival in Mizoram 'has continued almost uninterruptedly ever since in one part or another of the hills'.<sup>261</sup> Those who were in favour of the continuity of revival in Mizoram like Mizo theologian, Vanlalchhuanawma, believed that the traditional dating reflects only the years wherein revival hit the Mission compound Church. A closure scrutiny reveals the outbreak of remarkable revival stirrings in different parts of Mizoram in a chain, as an uninterrupted cycle of events.<sup>262</sup>

Obviously the traditional periodisation has been based on scholars who centred on the Mission compound church. Undoubtedly they were influenced by the missionaries, who intended to bring the revival movement under control which, according to them, entailed some unchristian cultural elements was most probably responsible for traditional periodisation. Vanlalchhuanawma argued that the traditional attempt to identify specific revival stirrings as separate entities and to fix the dates for the outbreak as a confusing enterprise was historically unsound. He believed that revival movements in Mizoram were not intermittent occurrences but part of a continuous movement.<sup>263</sup> This continuity was also acknowledged in the *Harhna Hruaina* (Revival Manual) which says, 'the church in Mizoram is bred and nurtured by revival from Wales which first came to Khasi country, and it remains in Mizoram to this day'.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Vera Lloyd, 'Needs in Lushai Hills' in *Y Cenhadwr*, April, 1935, quoted in Vanlalchhuanawma, ed., *Mizoram Presbyterian Church: A History of Departments* (Aizawl: Aizawl Theological College, 2007), 184. Hereafter cited as 'Vanlalchhuanawma, Mizoram Presbyterian Church'.

<sup>261</sup> E.L. Mendus answer to questionnaire, quoted in Vanlalchhuanawma, *Mizoram Presbyterian Church*, 184.

<sup>262</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 455.

<sup>263</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 320.

<sup>264</sup> North Lushai Assembly Committee, *Harhna Hruaina* [Revival Manual] (Aizawl: Presbyterian Church, 1949), 2.



By sporadic the author means something happening or occurring at irregular intervals, having no pattern or order in time. Though revivalism was always present, these were the times during which the phenomena peaked into great waves and spread throughout Mizoram as mentioned above. In the ensuing years to the period under study, other stirrings were found with different impacts on the people. Writers like J.M. Lloyd and M. Kipgen described the revivals as moving like a wave which rises to its peak and falls to low ebb at intervals with an intervening lull.<sup>265</sup> This gives an impression that revival movements in Mizoram alternately came and vanished. In support of this view, it should also be noted that there were some years in which revival stirrings had apparently stopped or ceased. There was a time where people, who came to the church *en masse* during the revival stirrings, switched back to their old ways of life as the revival excitement died down. Therefore, non-Christians who coined the saying were very well justified when they said, ‘wild turmeric and Christians do not last through the dry season’.<sup>266</sup> That is, just as wild turmeric has the habit of flourishing during the rainy days only to wither away again in the dry season, so also were those Christians who fall back to their old ways of life when revival excitement has gone. The Mizo church in the north and the south have encouraged each other and arranged special programmes and prayer meetings week by week for the presence of revival stirrings in Mizoram. Therefore, we may also say that revival movements in Mizoram were not a continuous movement but sporadic stirrings which occurred at irregular intervals and had no pattern or order.

We may conclude that revival stirrings in Mizoram have both the aspects of continuity and of being sporadic. In order to have a firm conclusion about the

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<sup>265</sup> Lloyd, *History of the Churches*, 86; M. Kipgen, *Christianity and Culture*, 283.

<sup>266</sup> Lalsawma, *Revivals*, 75.

continuity and irregularity, one needs to have a deeper and further analytical study on revival movements in Mizoram.

#### **4. REVIVAL MOVEMENT, THE CHURCH AND GOVERNMENT:**

Conflict between the revival movement and the church came to the fore with the increase of theologically trained Mizo pastors and Christians. Those in the ordained ministry normally adopted the mission perspective in their attitude towards the indigenous revival movement. The natural tendency of the church under the leadership of those pastors was to prefer the westernised new awakening to the indigenous revival. For this same reason the indigenous revivalists tended to view higher theological training as retarding higher spiritual experience and even as a way to spiritual dryness. Conflict between the opposing groups became inevitable, and it had become almost a permanent feature of the church's life. It caused one of the most serious divisions in the history of Christianity in Mizoram. The division in the later development resulted in the introduction of the Salvation Army and Pentecostal church in Mizoram.<sup>267</sup> It not only represented an extreme point of frustration with the church but also reflected the continue tension between the official church and the revival movement which then entered the consciousness of the Mizo Christians.

The revival movement in its fourth decade proved to be a watershed in the church-revival relations. The decade has been known mainly for the divisions that took place in the church. The missionaries and the church leaders found themselves unable to bring about reconciliation among the various groups affected by the revival movement. E.L. Mendus, a missionary expressed his frustration at being unable to

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<sup>267</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Kohhran Chanchin*, 175.

win over the leaders of the revival movement who wanted to let people carry on as they like or 'as the Spirit moves them whatever it is.' In a letter to the Home Board in Wales he wrote:

Well, Oliver, I can't stand this much longer. Some of them got rather incensed because I said to one or two of them... it is not my religion. These people don't mind what you think of it as long as you don't try to stop them and express your mind clearly on it.<sup>268</sup>

It became increasingly difficult for the church leaders to handle some of the revivalists who began to break away. The Assembly was ultimately compelled to intervene. The annual reports of the missionaries in 1938 refer this problem. 'During the excitement of the revival many of the converts were carried to extremes, and the Assembly on the field was obliged to take measures to restrain them. As a result a number turned their backs upon the church, refusing to recognise its authority; a number of the extremists also came into conflict with the government.'<sup>269</sup> The upheaval at *Kelkang* village, beginning in May, 1937 was probably the best known incident in the revival history of Mizoram, chiefly because of the harsh interference by the Colonial Government through the person of A.G. McCall, the then Superintendent of the Lushai Hills. McCall treated the upheaval as open rebellion and accordingly meted out punishments as follows:<sup>270</sup>

- a) Three 'ring leaders' were arrested and imprisoned at Syhlet.
- b) Two other unrepentant persons were banished from Kelkang village for 15 years.

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<sup>268</sup> E.L. Mendus letter to Oliver quoted in Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 413.

<sup>269</sup> K. Thanzauva, *Reports*, 156.

<sup>270</sup> Lalsawma, *Revivals*, 198

- c) The village chief Liannawla was fined Rupees 60/-.
- d) Each family of the village had to pay a house tax of Rupees 4/- that year in place of a normal levy of Rupees 2/-.
- e) All the grown up Christians were together impressed to pay Rupees 200/- worth of labour at Aizawl, by levelling grounds for military barracks.
- f) All the guns in the village were confiscated for good.
- g) The circle interpreter forfeited his one year increment of pay.
- h) Kelkang was placed under the direct supervision of the Assembly standing Committee for some time.
- i) Pastor P.D. Sena was transferred to Zote and Pastor Chhawnvunga posted in his place.
- j) Teacher Dothuama was transferred to Zote and teacher Lalthanga was posted in his place.

What were the issues that led the Government and the Mission to take the above actions? The Mizo word '*rui*' could very well applied to the mental state of the revivalists in Kelkang. It means to be intoxicated or drunk primarily with liquor, but here applied metaphorically to people so completely bemused by revival excitement as to have no care for anything. For example, for one full month starting from August 12 to a day immediately preceding the arrival of McCall on 12 September, all week days were spent in feasting and dancing excitement.<sup>271</sup>

At the start both the missionaries and the Mizo Christians seemed to frown upon McCall's involvement. Neither could agree with his extreme suspicion of the

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<sup>271</sup> Lalsawma, *Revivals*, 199.

revivalists to the extent of asking the missionaries to pass on to him any information about any movements among the Mizos that might be termed as subversive. Lloyd observes that ‘after Lewis Mendus return from furlough at the end of 1935, this caused considerable tension between him and the Superintendent.’<sup>272</sup> Mendus resented the idea since it amounted to expecting the missionary to spy on the Superintendent’s behalf. Katie Hughes, a lady missionary pointed out that both the missionaries and the Mizos were unhappy about McCall’s interference:

We feel that he has gone too far and so do most of the Lushais. I am trying to keep them quiet. He has stopped the meeting of the new sect and advised them to come back to us or go back to their own religion. They are very sore of course and several deputations have been to the office to object and to state their reasons for not wishing to come back to us!<sup>273</sup>

The option given to the Mizos was either to adopt the mission-oriented Christianity or to remain satisfied in their traditional religion. The new sect referred to here was a group of revivalists at *Kelkang* village, who were held responsible for causing tension in and around Aizawl. The most shocking incident associated with the *Kelkang* revival was the interference of the British administration. The Superintendent, McCall’s use of arms in suppressing the revival was not so much in keeping with the British policy as with his personal reaction. The excuses he made for involvement in religious matters were concerned with negligence of schooling for the children and the villager’s negligence of their *jhum* work. After having conducted enquiries and hearings, the Superintendent announced his final judgement that all the three leaders

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<sup>272</sup> Lloyd, *History of the Churches*, 298.

<sup>273</sup> Katie Hughes letter to Thomas, 8.10.1937, quoted in Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 413.

of the revival would be imprisoned for three years; all the other villagers were forced to pay a heavy penalty in terms of taxes and manual labour. Again Katie Hughes refers to the severe pain the Superintendent's action brought to the Mizos:

The Lushais feel that the Superintendent has interfered too much with mission work and been too severe in his criticism of the church workers. They think that this is the beginning of Hitlerism. They think that the *Kelkang* village had been punished too severely and that the missionaries ought to obtain a reprieve for the three men sent to *Syhlet* jail to ask for their release. This is just Lushai opinion.<sup>274</sup>

The comparison of the Superintendent's rule with Hitlerism is an unmistakable indication of the bitter indignation on the part of the Mizos. As the Mizo sentiment was hurt, any structure after the European model including the established church came to be viewed with considerable suspicion by the Mizos.

An obvious point of conflict between the Mission and the administration was the use of military force. The missionaries were as perplexed as the Superintendent about the stirring. In fact Katie Hughes privately advised Mendus to ask McCall to give standing orders to the chiefs to stop extreme revivalists and make them responsible for them. And the missionaries considered it appropriate that such an order should come from the Superintendent and not from them.<sup>275</sup> But they regarded the Superintendent's move to put down the stirring with arms as a great mistake because

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<sup>274</sup> Katie Hughes letter to Thomas 2.11.193, quoted in Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 414.

<sup>275</sup> Katie Hughes letter 26.6.193, quoted in Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 401.

they thought that he could quieten everything with the stroke of a pen.<sup>276</sup> Referring to the details of punishment meted out by the Superintendent, Hughes concludes that McCall has no quarrel with us personally but with the Mission policy.<sup>277</sup>

Another point of conflict focussed on the ecclesiastical model of discipline. McCall regarded the missionaries' delay in taking disciplinary action against its employees as well as the revival enthusiasts as a serious failure. To McCall dancing in the church is not a Christian practice but 'an unjustified repression'. If it had been permitted in Lushai by any Christian authority it was utterly wrong by custom, ethics or any other order. He further criticised the missionaries especially for not disciplining their pastors and teachers and regarded their apparent aloofness as 'a surrender of directional authority.'<sup>278</sup> He made this observation in connection with a reference to an alleged plot against his own life, suggesting that the failure of the Mission was responsible for such a scheme by Christians. But the missionaries were not convinced about the plot because they could not find enough evidence concerning the plot. Mendus wrote his independent opinion about the plot that McCall declared that there was a plot by the villagers to assassinate him on his arrival, as he endeavoured to impede their revivalism, which included at that time the giving up of the cultivation and the slaughtering of their domestic animals in the belief that the second coming was imminent. A false or exaggerated rumour was probably the explanation of his belief in such a plot.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Katie Hughes letter 25.9.1937, quoted in Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 402.

<sup>277</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 402.

<sup>278</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 223.

<sup>279</sup> E.L. Mendus Answers to questionnaire, quoted in Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 403.

Another point of conflict seemed to have its root in McCall's imperialistic attitude to the Mizos. Strangely enough, his western mentality occasionally got the better of his social discernment. His description of *Pasina*, who was one of the leaders of *Kelkang* stirring, was brought to him from a prayer spot, shows contempt:

All the way down to the camp a mile away this man clutched a Bible and jumped about with dazed unseeing eyes like a hysterical monkey, talking in tongues as he went. His appearance was suggestive of some creature from the Nether World or some cursed victim of Zoanthropy.<sup>280</sup>

This was only one of the many such remarks that McCall made about the revival dancers. In his attempt to influence the Mission he said that the Mizo church officials were not to be trusted and that the Lushai salaried man is adept at making promises but he makes no effort to implement them until his salary is in danger. Even the missionaries undoubtedly perceived the Mizo revival and culture as primitive and foreign. But their commitment to a religious cause and to the people apparently constrained them to act with caution. Therefore the government and the Mission, in spite of their similar perception of the Mizo culture and revival manifestations reacted differently and chose to take different courses of action.

##### **5. HARHNA HRUAINA (REVIVAL MANUAL):**

*Harhna Hruaina* (Revival Manual) was the most explicit and comprehensive response of the Presbyterian Church to the revival movement.<sup>281</sup> It was meant, as its name suggests, to provide the Christian public with guidance, and to discern the acceptable

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<sup>280</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 222.

<sup>281</sup> North Lushai Assembly Committee, *Harhna Hruaina* [Revival Manual] (Aizawl: Presbyterian Church, 1949).



and unacceptable features of the revival. Some of the major factors leading to the publication of this Manual are stated here. To begin with, the treatise reveals the apparent contrasting natures of the revival which had been perplexing the leaders of the church for several years. On the one hand, revival entailed cultural and emotional elements which in the institutional church's view were 'primitive' in character. On the other hand, it consistently contributed to church's growth even though the credit went to the church and the mission. This confusing situation was clearly expressed by David Edwards, not long after the Superintendent's interference with the *Kelkang* stirring in the following words:

At its best the revival has deepened to a phenomenal degree the personal knowledge of Jesus as saviour and Lord, which has given it significance and permanence far greater than any previous one. At its worst it has been a revolt against authority in any shape or form and an attempt to live under the anarchy of the spirit.<sup>282</sup>

Certain other factors leading to the drawing up of the Revival Manual are given in the treatise itself. Firstly, since the Presbyterian Church had been established it had experienced continuous revivals and was in a position to understand various characteristics of the revival. Secondly, the Standing Committee of the Assembly wished to make revival a real blessing to all. Thirdly, not all the revival features were edifying to the Mizo church. Fourthly, not all the revivalists in different parts of the world were the same, hinting perhaps, that the Welsh or English revivalists were not comparable to the Mizo ones. Fifthly, the church, therefore, had a bounden responsibility of giving guidance to the revival affected people within its fold.

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<sup>282</sup> David Edwards's letter to Thomas 13.1.1938, quoted in Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 450.

Constrained by the above situations and factors, the Presbyterian Church strongly urged its people that they should accept the Manual, however difficult that might be for some, for the good of the whole Mizo church.

One obvious consequence of the Revival Manual was a division of opinion among the leaders and members of the church. According to Liangkhaia, the revivalists flatly refused to accept the Revival Manual saying, ‘I can’t digest it at all’ or ‘if this is seen as dissent’ or ‘who are they to guide the Holy Spirit?’<sup>283</sup> As a consequence, the tension grew worse and the Mizo church was in danger of splitting. The Revivalists’ insistence that the Assembly should amend the Revival Manual, however, fell on deaf ears. Therefore, revival movement has led to the emergence of a large number of indigenous Christian movements. Apart from these groups, major pentecostal denominations like the Assembly of God and the United Pentecostal Church are said to be increasing due to the revival movements in Mizoram.<sup>284</sup> While some revivalists dropped out from the church majority remained to become the nucleus and cream of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram.

To the dissatisfaction of those who wanted not only to accept the Revival Manual as a guide but also to supplement every article with biblical verses, the Assembly took no step whatsoever to withdraw its publication. The Revival Manual remained as the focal point of the church’s reaction to the revival movement. It is true that after its distribution in all the pastorates for consideration to accept or reject, the official

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<sup>283</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizoram Harhna*, 54; Saiaithanga, *Mizo Kohhran Chanchin*, 60.

<sup>284</sup> Roger E. Hedlund, ‘Indigenous Pentecostalism in India’ in Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, eds., *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia* (Philippines: Regnum Books International, 2005), 236.

church made no more significant policy concerning revivalism. How far the Revival Manual succeeded is difficult to assess accurately. A significant achievement was that all the churches came to know the official Assembly's view of the revival movement, although the revival elements chose to persist in a revival culture.

Though the Revival Manual stands as the most significant symbol of the persistent tension between the revival movement and the established church, it also proves to be a unifying force for the whole Mizo Christianity. Generally speaking, it tends to discourage revivalism as a whole, since it disfavours the slightest possible signs of Mizo revival such as the drum, dance and singing as primitive. Its widespread disapproval signifies the indefinite majority of the Mizo Christians who favour revivalism. Again it clearly affirms the practical democratic nature of Mizo Christianity in that the decision of the majority prevailed over the decision of the official leadership. This democratic nature is perhaps, the chief reason that most of the revivalists chose to remain in the church, despite the Assembly's disinclination to amend or rephrase the Revival Manual. It may be said that Mizo Christianity has been unquestionably maintaining the revival culture in its all-round activities and system of decision making.

It may also be said that the Mizo Christians chose to regard the Revival Manual as the Assembly's general advice concerning revivalism in the church. The Mizo Christians were by and large led to a deeper study of the biblical doctrine of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. From the shambles of the scattered autonomous revival groups, the Mizo Christians gradually learned the advantage of well-defined principles for the church and maintaining the identity of the revival community. On the other hand,

through the strong pressure and separatist tendency of the carefree revivalists, the official church grew to be aware of the indigenous cultural values for its survival and expansive influence. The publication of Revival Manual in an attempt to bring revival movement to the terms failed to achieve its goal. Hence the Presbyterian Church tried to keep the revival stirrings under control and then formed a committee called 'Harhtharlehna Committee' (Revival Committee) with a full time worker in 1977 to look into the matters concerning revival.<sup>285</sup> Besides quenching the spiritual thirst of many people, it served to bring churches in various places closer together.

## **6. IMPACTS OF THE REVIVAL MOVEMENT:**

In spite of its tremendous influence and numerous conversions, the revival movement was viewed by the church with open suspicion. This was due to the identification of certain traditional practices as having anti-Christian attitudes within the revival. The appearance of the new denominations particularly the Salvation Army and the Roman Catholic Church as well as the increase of theologically trained Mizos who shared the mission's ecclesiastical bias, led to a more systematic analysis of the viability of the religious phenomenon associated with the revival. Some of the phenomena that alarmed the church are discussed below.

### **6. 1. *Khurh lam*:**

*Khurh lam* (the quaking dance) became a prominent feature in the revival which caused serious division of opinion. D.E. Jones in his report writes,

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<sup>285</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, editor-in-chief, *Mizoram Presbyterian Church: A History of Departments* (Aizawl: Aizawl Theological College, 2007), 186. Hereafter cited as 'Vanlalchhuanawma, Mizoram Presbyterian Church'.

The special character of the revival that visited *Aijal (Aizawl)* was that it affected very young children more than others. In some meetings they would sing and dance till they fell down utterly exhausted and swoon away or become stiff like a dead body lying on the floor or a bench. It affected some so terribly that they would tremble or quake at hearing a revival hymn sung in a house at night. But there were some hymns which did not affect them.<sup>286</sup>

Jones saw many undesirable traits in the revival, yet the people were influenced to come to the meetings and many were brought within the fold. Lalsawma gives a vivid description of the phenomenon as follows:

It was a contagious quaking of nerve racking kind. The whole body quaked and could be brought under control by no other means than dancing. As the spirit of singing arose, some persons began to quake, mildly first, and then it grew more and more intense till they were forced out to dance in ecstasy. The quaking might pass on to the one in the back row, and to the middle row, and to the corner or to several persons at once. Refusal to dance might result into pains in the head, throat or stomachs or it might even turn to paralysis of the whole or parts of the body.<sup>287</sup>

To the foreign missionaries' revival ecstasy appeared to be madness. Such a conception is conveyed by former missionary to Mizoram, Imogen P. Roberts's description of the phenomenon that it is a strange and wonderful sight to see the vast

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<sup>286</sup> K. Thanzaupa, *Reports*, 67.

<sup>287</sup> Lalsawma, *The Work of the Holy Spirit and Tribal Religious Emotionalism* (Jabalpur: Unpublished MTh thesis, Leonard Theological Seminary, 1964), 86. Hereafter cited as 'Lalsawma, Work'.

congregation thus moved. At first the excitement was very great, amounting at times almost to frenzy and many were carried out in hysterics.<sup>288</sup> She found that the people were easily carried away by the ecstasy. The church, then under Mission supervision had to tackle what it considered to be ‘frenzy or hysteria’ which did not appeal to its leaders at all. Lloyd gives his personal opinion that some dancers felt victim to cataleptic trances but these were accepted as normal in the circumstances for it was the Spirit at work.<sup>289</sup>

Discipline, decency and order seemed to have little place in the heat of the revival meetings. E.L. Mendus, who had a memorable experience of revival in Wales arrived in Mizoram in 1921 and was absolutely perplexed by his first experience of the revival in Mizoram which was very different from what he had seen in Wales. He saw the chapel benches removed through the windows to give room for the dancing, people trembling in ecstatic joy and some swooning as the congregation sang. Reporting a visit to one of the revival meetings near Aizawl, he writes,

The little chapel that evening was crowded. The heat of the revival was intense. Three of us missionaries were there, though the congregation seemed scarcely aware of our presence. Mr. Jones was calm as usual. I ventured to suggest to one of the pastors that he should exercise some control. ‘What’ said he, ‘control the Holy spirit?’<sup>290</sup>

A note has been made about how *khurh lam* adversely affected the peace of the church both in the north and south of Mizoram. Broadly speaking the reactions to it

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<sup>288</sup> Imogen P. Roberts, *Interviewed*, (Bala, North Wales: 24 October, 2005).

<sup>289</sup> Lloyd, *History of the Churches*, 193.

<sup>290</sup> E.L. Mendus answer to questionnaire, quoted in Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 253.

by the church in the north was more sympathetic than in the south of Mizoram. A single example of the reaction of the church to quaking dance is Resolution No. 5 of the summer Presbytery meeting on March 11, 1921. It was decided that the Presbytery should send a circular to all village churches warning them against entertaining or encouraging the quaking dance and its accompanying trances, visions and fortune-telling in the name of Christ.<sup>291</sup> This first reaction of the revival movement exposed the tension between church and revival and anticipated more tensions yet to come.

## **6. 2. *Zawlhupuan* (Clairvoyance):**

The most intimidating aspect of the revival to some people was the pronouncement of penalties for disobedience to clairvoyant revelations claimed by certain revivalists. Muka, one of the earliest Mizo evangelists and perhaps the closest lay associate of successive missionaries wrote that since spiritual visions became popular ‘people have had a great desire for supernatural things in the revival.’<sup>292</sup> The supernatural things here mainly refer to the power of knowing God’s will for some particular person or group of persons in a given situation. The clairvoyant revivalists were said to warn people to follow some course of spiritual activity, failure to do which would bring misfortune to the people concerned. The pronouncement was often directed to those who were supposed to stand in the way of the free exercise of revivalism. Muka observes that ‘Threatening, nearly everywhere is practiced and this is one of the worst forms known in revival (*hlimna*).’<sup>293</sup> According to Saiaithanga, some people claimed to know the mind and thought of others as well as what was happening in distant places.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Lalsawma, *Revivals*, 139.

<sup>292</sup> Muka, *Revivalistic*, 1.

<sup>293</sup> Muka, *Revivalistic*, 2.

<sup>294</sup> Saiaithanga, *MizoKohhran Chanchin*, 59.

### 6. 3. *Khurbing*:

The most controversial feature of the revival was most probably, *khurbing* which literally means ‘an exclusive pit’. It is used to describe an exclusive relationship within a small group of like-minded people. It has been noted that there was a strong spirit of oneness and of strong feelings for each other among the revivalists. As criticisms were levelled against different revival features, the community of those inspired by the revival felt a need for each other’s company. *Lengkhawm* (gathering together for singing and sharing) was on the increase. The growing restrictions issued from time to time by the church against the perceived excesses resulted in the withdrawal of several revival enthusiasts from formal church services. Naturally the hard core of the revival community continued to hold informal revival gatherings and the term *khurbing* is sometimes applied to such small groups of revival enthusiasts.

But the term *khurbing* is most commonly used to refer to a special relationship between two persons, usually a man and a woman, as well as to the people involved in it. The relationship seldom happened between persons of the same sex. *Hmangaih rawngbawlina* which means ‘ministration of love’ was the more common term used by the people who are involved. Dokhuma suggests that it was the leading revivalists who wished to become involved in ministry who often fell into *hmangaihna rawngbawlina*.<sup>295</sup> The relationship usually began with a man or a woman who developed a serious feeling for someone else. The feeling might develop out of extensive association or as a sudden flash of love. Lalsawma’s description of

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<sup>295</sup> Dokhuma, James, *Zoram Kohhran Tualto Chanchin* [History of Sectarian Groups in Mizoram] (Aizawl: Tlangnuam Press, 1975), vii.



*khurbing* as a ‘spiritual love affair’ is appropriate to the relationship.<sup>296</sup> Some adherents felt as if they were forcibly thrown into the furnace of the covenant.<sup>297</sup> According to Saiaithanga the *khurbing* had a special attraction to each other and could not spend a day without seeing or physically touching or shouldering each other.<sup>298</sup> The depth of the feeling was inexpressible. A certain woman, according to Liangkhaia, says of her feelings for her male partner, ‘As I see him I want to embrace him hard. Not only so, I really wish that his body and mine be cut into pieces that the pieces are thoroughly mixed together.’<sup>299</sup>

It is presumed that as the spiritual nurturing progresses between the *khurbing* partners human frailty often enters into the relationship. The intense mutual love in certain cases ultimately leads to sexual perversion. It is alleged that children were born out of such unions. As some people claimed to be drawn into covenant by the Spirit, remarks Liangkhaia, they even dared to call such children ‘holy bastards.’<sup>300</sup> It is said that the *khurbing* issue provided the pretext for the church to condemn the revival as a whole.

#### **6. 4. *Thiangzau*:**

The term ‘*Thiangzau*’ is the combination of two words ‘*Thiang*’ which refers to what is lawful, permissible or acceptable in religious, moral or ethical realm; and ‘*zau*’ means wide, broad, inclusive or accommodative. Theologically the term is applied to the teaching which tends to break with the rigid dogma and constitution of the institutionalised church. As a matter of fact, a *thiangzau* is always the one who refuses

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<sup>296</sup> Lalsawma, *Revivals*, 191.

<sup>297</sup> Z.T. Sangkhuma, *Harhna Hi Le* [Revival] (Aizawl: Synod Press, 1987) 75.

<sup>298</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Kohhran Chanchin*, 59

<sup>299</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizoram Harhna Thu* [Mizoram Revival] (Aizawl: V.L. Ringa, 1972) 43. Hereafter cited as ‘Liangkhaia, Mizoram Harhna’.

<sup>300</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizoram Harhna*, 44.

to adhere to the church's traditional beliefs and regulations. But structurally the term has been applied not just to one particular group but to any revival-oriented individual or group considered as *thiangzau*. The *thiangzau* by and large identified revival with the Holy Spirit which they claimed, had left the institutionalised church which they called the Mission church.

They had no written doctrine but oral teaching unlike the established church. The principle of life was absolute obedience to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The greatest of all sins was the unbelieving heart which resulted in disobedience to the Holy Spirit. 'If the Spirit tells them to go naked,' observes Hminga, 'it is a sin to disobey; so they go naked!'<sup>301</sup> They would do anything they perceived to be the guidance of the Spirit irrespective of the church's traditional attitudes towards it.

Concerning ethics, the *thiangzau* advocate controlled indulgence over abstention. For instance, drinking beer with self-control and not abstention from it was victory over beer drinking. For a person who does not consider beer drinking as sin, it was perfectly right to drink and wrong not to. But addiction or becoming a slave to anything was sin. This applies to sex and other ethical issues.

Structurally, they have priest or seers and the members normally learned of the Spirit's will through their priests, although several of them claim to be prophets or seers. Like the Quakers, they have no fixed programme for their meetings. Any member with an inspiration may take any part in their informal meetings. So there is, no set time, no set rule for them. Any member has the right to propose any

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<sup>301</sup> Hminga, *Life and Witness*, 199.

arrangement for conference, spiritual meeting feast and festivals and all would willingly cooperate. This willingness to co-operation is the chief unifying factor for the *thiangzau* movement.

The sacraments of *thiangzau* are highly contextualized. As a rule they used Mizo traditional sticky bread and local rice beer in place of bread and wine respectively for the elements of the Lord's Supper. They reason that if Jesus had lived in Mizoram he would have certainly used the Mizo bread and beer. The sacraments sometimes involve elaborate and expensive feasts depending on the seer's perception.

#### **6. 5. Singing traditional songs:**

Fervent hymn singing accompanied by two unequal sized drums, a prominent feature of the revival movement again caused concern in the church. Sandy briefly remarks about some extraordinary revival meetings in the initial stage at *Mission veng* church, 'the people sang nearly all the time'.<sup>302</sup> After six weeks of such meetings he again writes, 'the special feature of the meetings is the hymn singing and at first the chapel was crowded all day and all night with Christians singing the same hymn over and over again.'<sup>303</sup> After two years D.E. Jones, fresh from his furlough observed the same feature and wrote, 'The most obvious thing in the meetings is the clapping of the feet and hands to keep time when singing.'<sup>304</sup> Even five months later singing and beating time with feet, hands and bodies was a prominent feature.

As a matter of fact, singing happened to take the largest part of the meetings dominating if not altogether eliminating other elements of worship considered by the

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<sup>302</sup> Sandy's letter to Williams Dt. 30 August, 1919, quoted in Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 255.

<sup>303</sup> Sandy's letter to Williams Dt. September 28, 1919, quoted in Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 255.

<sup>304</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 255.

official church as essential. The intemperate emphasis on hymn singing was believed by church leaders to be a lopsided Christianity. Liangkhaia's observation that there was something lacking in the revival, that deeper doctrinal teaching and instruction to do good work in Jesus name was almost absent,<sup>305</sup> seemed to have represented the official view of the church. Reflecting upon the general life of the church, D.E. Jones, senior missionary, concluded that what the people needed was strong spiritual food, given hot. It seemed that the spiritual food which Jones considered necessary for the people was biblical and theological, while the people understood themselves to be better nurtured by hymn singing and dancing in revival. Tension within the community was inevitable.

Traditional inherited missionary theology branded Mizo traditional tunes as secular and pagan and not worthy of being used to praise God. At first, the missionaries forbade the singing of the traditional songs. Zairema writes of the attitude of the church towards Mizo traditional songs as follows:

The church was, however, strict and would discipline any member

Who even hummed the music (*Puma zai*) even unconsciously.<sup>306</sup>

This clearly indicated that the Presbyterian Church was hostile to Mizo culture. But the missionaries soon changed their attitudes and asked the Mizo Christians to compose with their traditional tunes. The first Mizo Christians went through self-alienation by rejecting their culture. B. Lalthangliana's statement is relevant here as he writes, 'when the Mizos embraced Christianity, the missionaries told them that it is

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<sup>305</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizoram Harhna*, 32.

<sup>306</sup> Zairema, *God's Miracle in Mizoram*, 18.

not enough to sing translated hymns and songs, but to compose Mizo Christian hymns and songs using Mizo poetical words, idioms and terminologies. However, the first generation of Mizo Christians rejected the missionary's advice and preferred translated English hymns and songs in prose style without using poetical words<sup>307</sup> this is a clear indication of self-alienation. The missionaries encouraged them to adopt their culture but they preferred to reject it. This attitude gradually alienated the Mizo Christians from their traditional tunes. However, the Mizo Christians rejected the offer for fear of longing for their pre-Christian life. But after two decades, the Mizo Christians were no longer satisfied with western tunes and longed for their traditional tune and poetical words.

## **6. 6. Traditional Drum:**

During the revival movement the traditional drum made its way deep into the church's life and its indispensability in traditional singing and dancing found a parallel exigency in formal Christian meetings. It created a rhythm for the singing and dancing and did help to intensify the exhilaration of the whole revival atmosphere. Its power seemed to the church leaders to upset the formality and solemnity of the church. Saiaithanga, then a theological graduate and close associate of the missionaries from the early twenties relates the influence of the drum and says, 'as long as the singing and the drum beating went on people kept on dancing and would not stop.'<sup>308</sup> J.M. Lloyd represents the official church's mentality towards the drum when he writes, 'it (drum) appeared to dictate to the congregation and even the Holy

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<sup>307</sup> B.Lalthangliana, *Patea leh Damhauhva Hnuhma* [Poetical work of Patea and Damhauhva] (Tahan-Kalemyo: EFCB Press, 1986), 1. Hereafter cited as 'Lalthangliana, Patea'.

<sup>308</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Kohhran Chanchin*, 52.

Spirit.<sup>309</sup> He reasons that the drum was often in unreliable hands since the drummer was always self-appointed.

The most serious known persecution for the use of the drum by the revivalists came not from the established church but from the chieftainship. A confederation of the chiefs at *Champhai* and its close periphery was organised to stop the Christians using drums.<sup>310</sup> A well known incident happened at *Tualte* where chief *Dokhama* hacked open the drum in the church and completely demolished the chapel building itself.<sup>311</sup> He justified his action by accusing the Christians in his village of being too noisy and a nuisance to the society and even petitioned the Superintendent to force the church to build the chapel a mile away from the village. About the same time in 1921 Jones refers to an outbreak of revival stirring in Mission headquarter and all along the east where certain chiefs made a petition to the Superintendent against one of the pastors without specifying the reasons.<sup>312</sup>

It can be safely assumed that by this time the widespread use of traditional drums had found an appropriate accompaniment in the emergence of hymns composed by Mizos with indigenous tunes. These two factors together added much to the attraction of the revival movement. The use of drums by Christians was a cultural threat from the traditional view point. Supplemented by the new Mizo tunes and dancing, the drum proved to be a great factor in pulling the people away from traditional life and from their absolute allegiance to the chieftainship. The melodious music of the drum to the

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<sup>309</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Kohhran Chanchin* 192.

<sup>310</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizoram Harhna*, 113.

<sup>311</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 255.

<sup>312</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 255.

revival enthusiasts, thus, became a noisy gong to the traditional authorities of the Mizo society.

As in the case of chief Dokhama both the Superintendent and the church came to the rescue of the harassed Christians. The Superintendent ordered the chief to allot the Christians the most central place of the village for building a chapel while the church sent Liangkhaia and Suaka, who as its representatives eventually compelled Dokhama and his villagers to erect a new chapel. The motive of the church in defending the Christians was not necessarily to preserve the use of the drum. The established church was faced with the question as to whether the use of the drums was a boon or a bane to its future growth.

Traditionally, the drum was deeply rooted in the Mizo religion and culture. On every religious and festive occasion the drum played a vital role. Without drums, the Mizos did not usually sing. There is a Mizo saying, '*khuang lova chai*', that means celebrating a festival without drums is meaningless. Singing, drumming, dancing and drinking rice beer were inseparably connected with each other. However, when the Mizos embraced Christianity, they abandoned all because it was associated with the old pagan religion. As a result, the drum was seen as unchristian and was not used in the church.<sup>313</sup> Western tunes in tonic solfa were prescribed in the church services to curb using drums and traditional tunes.

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<sup>313</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, 165.

## **7. RE-READING REVIVAL FROM POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE:**

After several years of his departure from Mizoram, E.L. Mendus said that ‘whilst deeply regretting such excesses and frequent moral lapses, one is compelled to state that the Lushai church would not be the large and strong body it is today were it not for the revival. It is not and never has been a calm, placid, lukewarm community.’<sup>314</sup> The changes that took place in the church as well as in the Mizo society as a result of the revival stirrings were so overwhelming and enduring that no other movement seems to have affected the whole society more remarkably than the revival movement has. Looking from the postcolonial heritage and resistant approaches the process of inculturation took place in the course of the revival movement in Mizoram which can be given as follows.

### **7. 1. Revival and Indigenisation of Mizo Christianity:**

The most important impact of the revival movement was the indigenisation of Mizo Christianity. From the revival movement, Christianity in Mizoram developed characteristics indigenous to the people by adopting the cultural elements of the revival movement. Then some western elements under pressure had to give way to certain elements which the missionaries considered primitive and oriental. The result was a conflict between traditional Mizo culture and traditional western Christian culture. As a consequence some foreign elements in the church underwent a process of modification, elimination or change. Through this process of an indigenous Mizo church with a distinctive identity emerged. As a result Christianity in Mizoram tends to be a complete blend of western and indigenous culture. Christianity then ceased to

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<sup>314</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 259.



be in one sense a western set of religious doctrines and practices but became a religion indigenous to the Mizo society. It may be said that the revival movement made the Mizo church an instrument of baptising the cultural elements into Mizo Christianity. The Presbyterian Church in Mizoram today seems to be comparatively indigenous and its enormous strength seems to rest heavily on this fact. Perhaps, no church or no indigenous group had experienced recurrent revival movements of the same sort as the Mizo church. Several cultural elements have been incorporated by the revival movement in Mizo Christianity.

## **7.2. Identity formation:**

As has been discussed earlier, the identity of the Mizos was badly distorted as a result of the Colonial encroachment upon geographical, political and cultural boundaries. The people had been militarily disarmed and they were left defenceless and exposed to assimilation of all kinds. The only weapon at their disposal to defend themselves was their indigenous culture. While westernization was in progress the revival movement served to save the people from total cultural assimilation. It was on the pretext of a patriotic spirit that Thanga, one of the delegates to *Mairang*, participated in the revival. After initial refusal of the missionary's advice to go to Mairang, he finally said, 'Well, I shall go if my participation would mean a benefit for the future of my country and my people.'<sup>315</sup> He eventually became the foremost leader of the revival movement in Mizoram.

The rapid dissolution of the *zawlbuk* in favour of the western system of education and the western ecclesiastical structure threatened the dislocation of the whole Mizo social

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<sup>315</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 168.

set up. To save the situation the YLA (Young Lushai Association), the replacement of the *zawlbuk* system was founded which later to be called Young Mizo Association (YMA), which initially aimed at being an instrument for developing the church and the Mizo society. Moreover, the first political party called Mizo Union came into existence as a result of the general concern for the unity of the all Mizos. There had been an attempt at uniting all the Mizos and the Mizos inhabited areas in neighbouring states and Burma. In any event the Mizo Union movement created an excitement in the Mizo public, the like of which had not hitherto occurred in the history of Mizoram. It is no wonder that the Mizo Union movement swiftly spread all over the country.<sup>316</sup>

In short, it may be noted that while the established church served as an agent of westernization, the Christianity of the revival movement helped the people to maintain their cultural identity to take its own course of development. Hence, the revival movement paved the way for identity reformation of the Mizo society.

### **7. 3. Evolution of Indigenous Mizo Hymns:**

The centrality of singing and dancing in the revival movement signifies the depth of revival influence on the Mizo society. Contrarily it was also true to say that the revival came to be tremendously influenced by the Mizo traditional singing and dancing. Donna Strom observes this phenomenon and asserted that Mizos are singing people. This is perhaps their most outstanding and distinctive characteristic. Taught

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<sup>316</sup> Vanlawma, *Ka Ram*, 90.

by the musical Welsh, Mizos quickly began to compose so many songs that they wanted to publish a new hymnbook every year.<sup>317</sup>

The above statement is not an exaggeration although the publication of a new hymnbook every year had never been possible. It is nevertheless probable that among hymn books published in the world, the Mizo hymn book called '*Kristian Hlabu*' (Christian Songbook) most probably underwent the greatest number of revisions and reprints. It was published, revised and reprinted nine times in between 1899 to 1922.<sup>318</sup>

The Welsh missionaries, who belonged to a world renowned singing nation, imparted in the Mizos an ability to sing any Christian hymns. They had introduced Tonic solfa in the school curriculum since 1900.<sup>319</sup> Through the instrumentation of the solfa some Mizo Christians had started to translate and compose hymns of their own. In the beginning the words were put to western tunes at first but in the second decade of Mizo Christianity new hymns using traditional Mizo tunes were emerged. But the church and the missionaries accelerated their efforts to impart a more deep-seated interest in western music and choral singing and missionaries played a leading role in this effort.<sup>320</sup> They organised a singing festival which involved the congregation in a series of meeting for practice singing under a competent conductor. The continuity of these endeavours to strengthen the western music in the Mizo church either in their original or modified form had lasting success.

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<sup>317</sup> Donna Strom, *Wind*, 73.

<sup>318</sup> K. Tlanghmingthanga, *Zorimawi: Music Ministry of the Mizos* (Aizawl: LTL Publications, 1994), 22, 33.

<sup>319</sup> K. Thanzaupa, *Reports*, 10-11.

<sup>320</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 271.

The missionaries' considerable success in introducing western hymns and music did seem to be lasting but traumatic as well. Firstly, it meant an affirmation of western Christian culture in the Mizo church. Secondly, it tended to promote the mission's *modus operandi* at the expense of the revival enthusiasm and ideology. Thirdly, it appealed to a comparatively small number of the Christian people as a whole. Tension was therefore inevitable when the new Christian hymns appeared and spread rapidly.

More significant and interesting than the rapid multiplication of hymns or choral singing was the transition from the western to the indigenous tunes during the revival movement. This brought about an encounter between western music and the traditional tunes which in turn underwent a series of modifications. The transition was neither abrupt nor absolute. It has been a process not of total alteration but of gradual conglomeration. Lalsawma's assertion that 'the change over from the old to the new was total'<sup>321</sup> must be a reference to the change in theme. The traditional Mizo music itself had undergone a lot of changes from a type of incantation or chant till the end of the seventeenth century to a monotonous tune of low notes such as *Bawhhla*, *Hlado*, etc. during the eighteenth century. Singing to the accompaniment of drums and other instruments presumably became more popular from the nineteenth century when the lyrics having tunes with more variations known as *chai* or *chawngchen hla* appeared. The early twentieth century witnessed the sudden emergence of the *Puma zai* which later developed into various forms of *Tlanglam zai*. Then the new Mizo hymns appeared. In spite of some diversion in theme, contents and in detailed arrangement of verses, the new indigenous Mizo Christian hymn appears to be a further development upon the *Tlanglam zai*.

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<sup>321</sup> Lalsawma, *Revivals*, 125.

A radical paradigm shift took place in the Mizo church in 1920, a new type of hymn-indigenization of the Mizo Christian hymn was born when Patea of *Khawbung* started to respond in terms of Mizo culture by composing Mizo Christian hymns with traditional tunes.<sup>322</sup> This quenched the spiritual thirst of the Mizos. Inspired by the revival movement, gifted Mizo composers started composing new indigenous songs. Vanlalchhuanawma identifies these new hymns as a 'Christian version of *Tlanglam zai*.'<sup>323</sup> Significantly, these new hymns had produced dramatic conversion among the Mizos because these indigenous songs Christianized the Mizos by thousands.<sup>324</sup>

As regard to the novelty of the new hymns Chapman and Clark remark, thus, 'As time went on gifted Mizos began to compose original songs, very musical with haunting distinctive melody of their own.'<sup>325</sup> This innovation was more surprising to the missionaries who regarded the Mizos as traditionally an 'unmusical people'. Lorrain sees it in a definite diversion in tune from the traditional songs, 'in construction they conform largely to the old Lushai songs, but the tune, although Lushai through and through are yet something quite different from those used in the old heathen days.'<sup>326</sup>

Lalthangliana remarks about the new Mizo hymns:

These new Christian hymns of the Mizo origin bear a curious characteristic. They give a clear picture of heaven suitable to the Mizo

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<sup>322</sup> Lalthangliana, *Patea*, 1.

<sup>323</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 292.

<sup>324</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, 'Harhna leh Mizo Theology leh Mission inlaichinna' [Interrelation of Revival, Mizo Theology and Mission] in Vanlalchhuanawma, ed., *Theology leh Mission: Kum Zabi thara Zofate Hmabak* [Theology and Mission: the Future of the Mizos in the New Millennium] (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Association, 2002), 28-29.

<sup>325</sup> Chapman and Clark, *Mizo Miracle*, 97.

<sup>326</sup> *Reports of BMS*, 1930, 266.

culture, experience and thought. Their tunes are not exactly like the traditional one before Christianity and not so highly pitched or sharp as the western tune; the compositions are neither gravely poetic nor simple juxtaposition of prosy words, but have a pleasant flow to read, recite or sing.<sup>327</sup>

The new Mizo Christian hymns resuscitated the traditional spirit of singing and created a fresh enthusiasm to promote the revival movement which in turn promoted the inspiration to produce more of them. Thus the new hymns increased as the revival progressed. To be precise, it was the new hymns which actually promoted public interest in revivalism to an unprecedented degree. The Mizo Christians loved these new songs and sang with ecstatic fervour.

However, the introduction of the new hymns came late in spite of the strong influence they had on the people once they were introduced. The chief cause for the delay was probably the tension between the western choral culture and the Mizo new hymn culture. Thanpuii pa's contention that the missionaries' advice to compose hymns to Mizo tunes was unheeded by the early Christians who considered using traditional melody and the indigenous poetic language for Christian hymns to be profanity,<sup>328</sup> seems to be only partially true.

There is evidence to suggest that some missionaries attempted to maintain the indigenous culture. The minutes of the early Presbytery meetings reveal that discussions on traditional Mizo culture had a central place in the meetings.

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<sup>327</sup> Lalthangliana, B., *Mizo Nun Hlui* [Mizo Traditional Life] (Aizawl: Mizoram Board of Education, 1991), 168.

<sup>328</sup> Thanpuii pa, 'Mizo Hla' [Mizo Hymn] in J. Malsawma, *Zo Nun* [Zo Life] (Aizawl: Aizawl Literary Service, 1971), 177.

Shakespear's organisation of meetings between the Missions from the north and the south at an early date is presumed to have made a reference to aspects of traditional culture compatible with Christian culture.<sup>329</sup> But the mission's efforts along these lines were limited by their bias towards western Christian culture and customs. The policy of keeping primitive people as near as possible to their own habits and customs was conditioned by its consistency 'with the new Christian spirit guiding their lives.'<sup>330</sup> The standard for deciding the consistency of the indigenous habits and customs being based on the biblical norms as interpreted in the western framework of thought, the missionaries tended to be arbitrary in their selection of the indigenous customs to encourage. Moreover, it appears that ultimately the missionaries' attitude to the indigenous culture amounted to being a policy of complete annihilation. Lorrain's observation in this connection may be quoted thus, 'whilst a few of the national customs are worth saving for their innocence and picturesqueness, the majority require the patient energy of the missionary to uproot and destroy.'<sup>331</sup> The indigenous songs or tunes were certainly not included among the selected few of the indigenous customs regarded as worth saving.

C.Z. Huala, a Mizo song composer contends that despite the Christian earnest desire to exploit the indigenous tunes for Christian hymns at an early stage, the emergence of the new hymns was delayed by lingering suspicion about the mission's approval of such compositions.<sup>332</sup> Huala's contention sounds more convincing in view of the general negative attitude of missionaries of the time to any cultural heritage. This was the stage when the church, under the direct patronage of the mission made strict rules

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<sup>329</sup> Lloyd, *History of the Churches*, 77.

<sup>330</sup> M. Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 271.

<sup>331</sup> R. Lewis, *Lushai Hills*, 67.

<sup>332</sup> Based on personal interviewed with C.Z. Huala on 24.1.1994, quoted in Vanalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 300.

and regulations against traditional customs and ceremonies including singing traditional Mizo song. The Presbytery meetings of April, 1910 and 1911 specifically spelled out the need to discourage traditional singing, of which no amendments have been made ever since.<sup>333</sup>

Whatever be the case, it is clear that the revival movement helped to break through the Christians' inhibitions about the use of the cultural heritage of singing for the purpose of worship. Observers commented on the great zeal for singing following the introduction of the indigenous Mizo hymns. A sub-divisional officer posted at Lunglei remarks, 'I have visited several countries but have not come across any place where Christianity is so prominently exhibited as it is in Mizoram, for every Mizo village is reverberating with singing of God's praises.'<sup>334</sup> The tremendous impact of the indigenous hymns could be identified in the strong and widespread interest in the hymns.

The evolution of the Mizo indigenous Christian hymns resulted in the rise of two parallel cultures in the Mizo Christian community. The indigenous or the new hymn culture closely identified with the revival movement and the western or choral culture associated with the official church. This was especially apparent in the second decade of the revival movement and greatly contributed to the emergence of the Mizo church. These compositions of the Mizo Christian hymns not only re-rooted the gospel in Mizo Christianity, but also give Mizo Christians new identities as Mizos and as Christians.

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<sup>333</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery Meeting, April, 1910 Resolution No. 3 and Resolution No. 17 of 1911.

<sup>334</sup> H.W. Carter & Sawiluaia, *History of Mizoram Baptist Church* (Serkawn: Baptist Assembly Press, 1945, reprint, 1981), 74. Hereafter cited as 'Carter & Sawiluaia, Baptist Church'.



#### 7. 4. Christianizing traditional dances:

The aspect of the revival movement that caused the greatest tension in the Mizo church was probably dancing. It used to be said that the Mizos are by nature, dancers. Even in the pre-Christian era they danced in joy, in sorrow or in traditional festivals. Sangkhuma, a prolific writer on Mizo culture observes thus:

The Mizos dance at the time of death, in bereavement, in the celebrative occasions of *Ai* ceremony. They danced even in celebrating chopped heads of their enemies. As singing, song and drum were inseparably linked with one another, singing and drumming was linked with dancing. The standard scale of the greatness of *khuangchawi*, *chawngchen* and other festive occasions was the number of dancers in those occasions.<sup>335</sup>

Mizo traditional dancing took different forms. There were organised types of dancing such as *khual lam*, *sar lam* and *Cheraw* which called for some amount of group practicing. Another type of traditional dancing like *chheih lam*, *tlang lam* was spontaneous and depended heavily on the ecstasy of the dancers as well as on the excitement of the singing. The usual appearance of the dancing bout is described by Sangkhuma in the following words:

When they sang together on joyous occasions, those sitting clapped their hands swaying and stretching their bodies as if to stand and dance, and those dancing in extreme gusto bent so low as if to lay themselves down on the ground. The jollier dancer would even jest as he rose to dance, ‘I

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<sup>335</sup> Sangkhuma, *Missionary-te Hnuhma*, 49.

am joining the dance! Remove the *chem* underneath the *dawthleng* lest I have my ears cut on it.<sup>336</sup>

This description obviously refers to a typical *tlanglam* whose characteristics were reflected in revival dance. Muka's description of revival dancing sounds quite similar to the above description. 'Dancing, not ordinary dancing but various kinds of strange dancing such as one legged hopping, stooping down till the head touches ground, shaking hands, head and body, like anything and the like.'<sup>337</sup> It may be noted here that the Mizo traditional dance was greatly developed in the revival dancing, particularly in its varieties as have been described.

However, the features of revival dancing were so typically Mizo that they shocked and repulsed the missionaries. This revulsion was described by Mendus when first exposed to Mizo revival dancing in the following words. 'My first reaction was: either these people are Christians and I am not, or I am a Christian and they are not.'<sup>338</sup> Lloyd reflects the reservation of the missionaries about the revival manifestations when he says, 'Symbolism was endless in its variety. It was sometime very superficial but sometime profound.'<sup>339</sup> It is true that some slouched, some hopped, some wriggled, some rushed and hustled about, and others crawled or rolled on the ground, while others stood motionless with one leg on top of the other or lay flat on the floor with their arms stretched out and their eyes closed. To the missionaries all those acts appeared to be extreme and indecent. The Mission's unsympathetic attitude towards

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<sup>336</sup> Sangkhuma, *Missionary-te Hnuhma*, 50.

<sup>337</sup> Muka, *Revivalistic Phenomena in Lushai Hills*, a manuscript found in Samuel Davies' file in C.M. Archive (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales), 2, quoted in Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 410. Hereafter cited as 'Muka, Revivalistic'.

<sup>338</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 2.

<sup>339</sup> Lloyd, *History of the Churches*, 193.

the varied postures and symbolic acts is hinted at by Lloyd's remark that nowadays European Christians would view such acts more sympathetically than they did then.<sup>340</sup>

On the other hand the dancers understood the varieties of dancing postures to have definite spiritual implications which were edifying. In defence of the revival dancing, Chhuahkhama, senior Mizo pastor of that time and a guide to the missionaries writes the following:

You may trifle this revival simply as a generator of dancing, but no normal people, except some children and simpletons, fake dancing without sincere weeping and much crying in repentance; hence we cannot condemn this revival.<sup>341</sup>

The above statement is a simple representation of the revivalists' opinion. Tension was caused by symbolism and other physical manifestation. But the missionaries gradually learned to tolerate revival dancing since they understood that 'what did not appeal to us (missionaries) might be the means of doing much good to them.'<sup>342</sup> They were persuaded by the undeniable contribution of the revival movement to the up building of the Mizo Christian community. Dancing became an unbaptised but tolerated element of the worship services in the Mizo church.

Since the church at first strictly forbade the traditional and cultural dances, the dances in the revival movement came in a modified form. The Mizo Christians ascribed dances in the church to the work of the Holy Spirit. The biblical basis of some dances

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid, 193

<sup>341</sup> Chhuahkhama, 'Aizawl Revival' in *Kristian Tlangau* [Christian Herald], September, 1919, 179-180.

<sup>342</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity*, 304.

is also found in Psalms and other scriptures. Therefore, today the Mizo Christian dances in the church and at communal singing.<sup>343</sup> As a result the revival dances are no longer seen as sinful, unchristian, and profane or manifestations of evil spirits, but as a spiritual manifestation through culture that gives the Mizo Christian identity.<sup>344</sup> In fact, these indigenous Mizo dance not only keep the church lively, but also give Mizo identity as Mizos and as Christians.

#### **7. 5. Christianizing traditional drums:**

One of the most significant yet controversial developments of the revival movement was the introduction of the use of the indigenous drum to accompany the Christian hymn singing. The question is why had the church not used the drum earlier and how did it come to adopt it?

First of all, viewed against its traditional use, the adoption of the drum in the Christian worship appeared to the missionaries and their Mizo converts incompatible since it was associated with the old life and culture. Hence some writers assert that it was banned in the early days of the Mizo church because of such associations.<sup>345</sup>

Secondly, the whole revival movement itself, of which the drum became an important manifestation, was looked down upon by the missionaries and the leaders of the church as primitive, unruly and oriental. To aggravate such irreverence, the Mizo traditional way of playing the drum was not suitable to accompany the western tunes which dominated the early years of the Mizo Christianity.

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<sup>343</sup> See Appendix VII.

<sup>344</sup> Lalrinawmi Ralte, 'Dance Theology', [article online]; available from <http://www.Mizobooks.com/dance-theology.htm>; Internet; accessed; 1 December, 2007.

<sup>345</sup> Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, 112; Saiaithanga, *Mizo Kohhran Chanchin*, 50.

Thirdly, the early Mizo Christian leaders were inclined to follow the missionaries' examples and opinions. Kipgen offers much evidence to substantiate the Mizo Christians tendency to imitate their missionary parents whose culture they regarded as superior to their own. He holds that tendency responsible for the resistance to the use of the drum in the early years.<sup>346</sup>

Finally, the church's official resolutions describing most functional elements of the traditional Mizo culture and customs as profane undoubtedly discouraged the use of the traditional drum. It may be noted, however, that the church made no specific resolution concerning the use of the drums. But the Presbytery meeting spelled out specific objections to *kawngpui siam*, *khawhring*, *inthawina*, *Mizo ni serh*, (observation of traditional holidays) *Mizo zai* ( Mizo song) and established varying degrees of penalties to be meted out for participating in different items.<sup>347</sup> Such condemnation could have discouraged anyone who might wish to introduce the drum in the church since most of the condemned items had direct association with the traditional Mizo drum. Moreover, the restrictions on the use of the indigenous drum in the *Mission Veng* church in the North Mizoram and in the *Serkawn* church in the South from the beginning is the obvious evidence of the official church's antipathy. Both of the churches were managed by the missionaries to be models for all other churches. Sandy aptly remarks the *Mission Veng* church was 'quite a Cathedral as compared with the village Bethels.'<sup>348</sup> Its example of restricting the use of the drum

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<sup>346</sup> M. Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 271.

<sup>347</sup> Minutes of the Presbytery Meeting, April, 1910, Resolution Nos. 1, 2 & 3 and Resolution Nos. 17(2), (3) & (4) of the Presbytery Meeting, April, 1911.

<sup>348</sup> K. Thanzauva, *Reports*, 55.

was later adopted in certain villages particularly at *Durtlang* and the churches of its pastorate.

In fact, those who loved to sing with the traditional drum and were not satisfied with the mission churches either joined the United Pentecostal Church or other sectarian groups.<sup>349</sup> Although it was crucial to retrieve traditional drums, it became a serious theological issue. The Mizos of that period had undergone psychologically traumatic times under the impact of foreign rulers whose religion they had come to accept. They were also tempted to think of the western way of life as appropriate to the new religion. On the other hand, the traditional drum was felt important as there could not be either singing and dancing without it in the revival atmosphere. According to Liangkhaia, the traditional drum was used in 1919 at *Thingsai* village for Christian singing in the community gathering. Since then, the Mizo church leaders accepted it as one of the most important instruments to be used for praising God.<sup>350</sup>

But the fact remains that the traditional drum did come into use in the great majority of church services as well as in the *lengkhawm* or *mualinkhawm* (gathering together for singing and sharing). It was later adopted observes Lalsawma, because the Mizo cultural instinct asserted itself through revival excitement and then drum-beating became easier and more natural to Mizo spirituality.<sup>351</sup> This observation is quite valid as far as it links the cultural instinct with the natural introduction of drum beating. It may, however, be put the other way round. The official church with all its strength was protecting itself against any cultural intrusions into its premises, while the revival movement, the most productive Christian event of the time, evolved a new Christian

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<sup>349</sup> Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos*, 188.

<sup>350</sup> N. Chatterji, *Puan- the Pride of Mizoram* (Calcutta: FIRMA KLM Private Ltd, 1979), 12.

<sup>351</sup> Lalsawma, *Revivals*, 79.

culture which gifted the church with the drum along with a vast number of converts who wished to retain their traditional identity along with their new faith. In fact, if the drum were to be rejected, singing, the very hallmark of the revival would have been dropped along with many converts who had embraced the new faith of which the new hymns were an essential part. It must be said, therefore, that the identity and autonomy consciousness embodied in the revival movement obliged the church to pick up certain cultural elements, especially the drum with certain other elements associated with it.

However, the use of the indigenous drum had to undergo some modification in order to suit the singing of the new Christian hymns as well as traditional western songs. For the revival singing two drums, one big and the other small, came to be used while traditional western tunes and traditional Mizo songs were sung to the accompaniment of a single drum. Drumming had become an art in itself and a gifted drummer was almost always sure to give extra life and enthusiasm to the revival singing. Therefore, using the traditional drum was no longer seen as unchristian and worldly, but rather as more spiritual and expressing Mizo Christian identity. Kipgen says, ‘the drum is baptised, as it were to serve the Mizo church.’<sup>352</sup> The traditional drum was re-rooted and Christianised to be used in the Mizo Christian worship services and the community gathering.<sup>353</sup>

#### **7. 6. Traditional poetical words:**

Despite the Mizo language not being reduced to written form before the coming of the Christian missionaries in 1894, the Mizo language was rich in words and

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<sup>352</sup> M. Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 274.

<sup>353</sup> See Appendix VI.

expressions.<sup>354</sup> The missionaries described the native Mizo people as pagan and their traditional songs and tunes were all pagan and worldly. As a result, the first generation of Mizo Christians regarded Mizo traditional poetical words as ‘godless’ and it was almost considered as taboo to compose Christian songs or hymns. Due to this attitude towards their culture, the Mizos gradually lost their valuable culture and identity.<sup>355</sup> In spite of its richness, Mizo Christian hymns were translated hymns. And the first generation Mizo Christians thought that Christian hymns had to be translated ones and subsequently, they refused to compose songs with the Mizo poetical words.

A radical transformation took place when Liangkhaia, the prominent church leader changed his view in 1973 when he confessed ‘we are wrong’.<sup>356</sup> This took place after 58 years of Christian experience. He clearly states the changes of his theological outlook on using the Mizo poetical words as below:

The Mizos are far richer in poetical words than the English people. However, the Mizo poetical words have been used in the compositions of love songs, and the first generation Mizo Christians thought that these are pagan and worldly, and we are against using the poetical words. Now we have realized that using the poetical words does not matter, what matters most is the subject of the songs.<sup>357</sup>

Today, Mizo Christians modify the traditional poetical words and use them for composing Christian hymns. In other words, the interaction of the gospel and the

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<sup>354</sup> D.E. Jones, *Kum 30 Lai Rawng Ka Bawlha (1897-1926)*, [My 30 Years Ministry 1897-1926], trans. H. Liansailova, (Aizawl: Lengchawn Press, 1999), 29.

<sup>355</sup> Sangkhuma, *Missionary-te Hnuhma*, 200.

<sup>356</sup> Liangkhaia, ‘Hla Thu’ [Poetical Words] in B. Lalthangliana, *Hranghluite Sulhmu*, 99.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.



Mizo culture has given birth to a new hybridity culture.<sup>358</sup> The Mizo church now happily sings the Mizo traditional Christian songs to praise God in the church and in the social gathering.

#### **7.7. *Lengkhawm* (Gathering together):**

*Lengkhawm* (gathering together) or *zaikhawm* (singing together) became a unique feature of Mizo Christianity. Either of the term means an informal get-together mostly in a house for singing fellowship punctuated at intervals by short addresses, prayers or testimonies. Sandy's remark on some extraordinary revival meetings in the initial stage at *Mission Veng* church reveals that 'the people sang nearly all the time'. The length of time for which *lengkhawm* lasted was often taken as a measure of the extent of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit or at least, of revival enthusiasm. All night singing and dancing was common in the Mizo traditional life. The success of the traditional festival *chapchar kut* depended on how long the young men and women could continue in singing and dancing. They were supposed to sing and dance the entire night of the first day of the festival, failing which they were not allowed to continue the *chai* or dance the following days.<sup>359</sup> The spirit of this festival with its dance feature embedded in the Mizo tradition found its Christian expression in the revival born *lengkhawm*.

The *lengkhawm* is also similar to the traditional *zu hmun*, drinking bouts in their basic nature which entails a spontaneous get together, chatting, singing and dancing. Its difference lies in the absence of intoxicating drink, the contents of the song, the mode of dancing and in the topics discussed. Neither formal appointment of participants nor

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<sup>358</sup> Lalthansangi Ralte, 'Mizo Culture and its influence on Mizo Songs' [article online]; available from [www.zawlbuk.com](http://www.zawlbuk.com); Internet; accessed; 12 October, 2007.

<sup>359</sup> Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute*, 55.

order of the meeting is as a rule made for *lengkhawm* which provides ample scope for full and free expressions of revival ecstasy such as dancing, jumping, prophesying, symbolic actions. There is no prohibition or restriction of smoking or chewing, tea is normally served at convenient intervals. McCall seems to have some elements of truth in seeing the Mission's prohibition of *zu* drinking and its associated dances as being responsible for the revival phenomenon of ecstatic dancing:

Unhappily, no healthy substitute has as yet been found by the people for this form of self-expression, and excesses are in consequence, inclined to occur in the shape of frenzied hysteria within the four walls of the churches, following the lines of what is sometimes known as revivalism.<sup>360</sup>

The *lengkhawm* may be said with some reservation to be a Christian form of traditional *zu hmun*. Its informality and spontaneity hold a special fascination for the Mizo public. The new hymns were chiefly sung and widely popularised through *lengkhawm*. The *lengkhawm* opened up opportunities for promoting the revival movement either directly or indirectly.

First, this new Christian culture linked the Christians to their traditional culture and imbued the spirit of unity in the community irrespective of the parts of the country in which they lived.

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<sup>360</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 209.

Secondly, it created even in the non-Christian sense, a belonging in the revival community. It gave ample opportunities for participation without inhibition to the rank and file in the process of revival.

Thirdly, it provided an open pulpit to anyone who wanted to share a sermon, testimony, admonition, prophecy, prayer or the like.

Fourthly, the *lengkhawm* custom produced an informal structure which directed and acclimatised the culture in the Christian community. The culture became highly dominant in the formal church service.

#### **7. 8. *Beirual*: New Expression of *Tlawmngaihna*.**

'*Beirual*' literally means 'united effort or community in action'. The Mizos traditionally do things as a community whether in war or peace or constructing houses, especially the chief, the priest, the blacksmith, the widows and the *zawlbuk*. Community service was also called for in erecting village fences, making village springs, carrying the sick, digging graves, clearing inter-village paths and harvesting. With this self-same spirit all the chapels and schools in Mizoram had been erected by voluntary community service until the modern money economy robbed the Mizos of the opportunity to express their community spirit in this way. It was a call for community service to accomplish what was considered best for the society. Therefore, it can be said that *beirual* is the Christian expression of traditional community welfare scheme. *Lengkhawm* which encouraged free expression of revival enthusiasm and adaptation of Christianity to the Mizo culture became the basic characteristic of the *Beirual* project. It also opened up opportunities for full participation of any interested

lay Christian. The effectiveness of such evangelistic effort is recorded by M.E. Browser as follows:

They have a splendid custom whereby every member of the church is expected annually to give up a whole calendar month to do the business of evangelism amongst his near neighbours or in more distant villages. Men, women and children members of the church are admitted to this sacred duty of 'bey rual' or 'attacking together'. When one learns that it was in this determination that the church was nourished and developed, one begins to understand a little the growth of Christianity in Lushai, which has been so conspicuous and so richly blessed.<sup>361</sup>

The *beirual* spirit inspired the Mizos with evangelistic tours with practical *tlawmngaihna*. No consideration of formal planning and organising or remuneration arose in doing the task. Every Mizo Christian had the desire to and did it in the spirit of *tlawmngaihna* to share his/her new found joy with their neighbours, without any consideration of what he/she would get in return. It was the *tlawmngai* people who formed themselves into groups of *zinrual* and *fangrual* (people travelling together) to voluntarily accomplish the task of evangelizing the land. They preached everywhere- in the church, in the street at any time including throughout the night. Even J.H. Lorrain used to join the *fangrual* and to follow the tradition of preaching before day break in the street with a lantern in his hand.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> M.E. Browser, *Light on the Lushai Hills: The Story of a Dream that Come True* (Serkawn: Baptist Church of Mizoram, 1993), 19. Hereafter cited as 'Browser, Light'.

<sup>362</sup> Carter & Sawiluaia, *Baptist Church*, 75.

The upliftment of the poor and the needy pertaining to the evangelistic activities was an expression of Christian virtue in a Mizo fashion. They actually helped the needy in grinding and cleaning rice, fetching water as well as firewood. Even the *fangruai* took out time to help the widows and the weak in weeding their *jhums* besides holding all night preaching. The Mizo custom of helping the widows, the weak and the disabled in drawing water, fetching firewood, cutting and weeding *jhums* and repairing houses were traditionally assigned to the *zawlbuk* inmates. But now the revival enthusiasts irrespective of sex, age or status took upon themselves the responsibility of continuing the *zawlbuk* function of course, with vigour rejuvenated by Christian conviction. The humanitarian service was rendered as a spontaneous expression of the revival joy in a Mizo fashion and promoted evangelism at an unprecedented speed.

#### **7. 9. Promotion of Mizo Language and unity:**

Another significant development brought about by the revival movement was the promotion of the *Lusei* language among all the different Mizo clans which have a rich variety of dialects. The basic reason was that the said language had been greatly promoted by the chiefs over their vast dominion before the British conquest of Mizoram. Several petty and tributary chiefs had adopted the language along with the *Lusei* culture. Acknowledging the contemporary linguistic trend, missionaries based the Mizo alphabet on the *Lusei* language. Consequently the earliest Mizo literature was developed in that language. J.H. Lorrain observes thus:

There are now three missionary societies working in the area over which the Lushai language is used. This language which we reduced to writing in our pioneering days, and in which the scriptures have ever since been

published and education carried on, is fast becoming the *lingua franca* of neighbouring tribes and clans who are through its medium becoming evangelised.<sup>363</sup>

Mention has been made of the spread of revival to the Mizo inhabited areas in the neighbouring states. Not all the Mizos in those neighbouring areas used the *Lusei* dialect but all of them heard and read the gospel in the initial stage. Not only read and heard, but now they also sang the gospel songs in the *Lusei* language which gradually came to be called Mizo, as it tended to be increasingly adopted by all the Mizos. Thus, the dialect which was the natural language of the revival movement grew to be the *lingua franca* of the Mizos and it became a strong unifying factor for the Mizo people. Through the revival movement the awareness of the racial unity of different Mizo dialect groups was fostered in Mizoram and its adjoining states.

## **8. CONCLUSION:**

Revival movement was commenced when the land was subjugated and the society was utterly shattered. The British regime imposed new laws and regulations, and divided the land and the people to suit its administrative convenience and commercial ambitions. To worsen the confused state of mind of the people, Christian mission came to propagate a new religion. The Mizo people suffered losses of their land, identity and selfhood. They were simply bewildered. In such a chaotic confusion the revival movement took place. It tended to be a cultural revival and turned out to be an antidote to the prevailing process of westernisation. The revival movement in Mizoram saved the Mizo people from complete British assimilation. It thus provided

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<sup>363</sup> *Reports of BMS*, 1923, 186.

the people with a setting for regaining and maintaining their identity and selfhood. Several Mizo cultural elements have been incorporated by the revival movement in Mizo Christianity. Firstly, a new type of hymn called ‘indigenous Mizo Christian hymn’ was born from the revival movement with traditional Mizo tunes. These new indigenous hymns really quenched the spiritual thirst of the Mizo Christians and give the Mizo Christian a new identity. Secondly, the rediscovery of the value of the Mizo poetical words in Mizo Christianity was a radical paradigm shift. It was a complete change to the view of Mizo poetical words which had been totally rejected as anti-Christian elements and marginalised as godless but were then retrieved and used to compose the Mizo indigenous hymns for praising God. Thirdly, the mission church strictly forbade the traditional and cultural dances, which were considered as pagan and worldly, but these dances came to the church in a modified form when the spiritual revival broke out. As a result these new forms of dance are no longer seen as sinful, unchristian and a manifestation of evil spirits, but as a spiritual manifestation of God through culture that gives the Mizo Christian a distinctive identity. Fourthly, in the light of a postcolonial praxis model, Christianizing the Mizo traditional drum is a radical paradigm shift because an element which was previously considered as anti-Christian was taken into the fold of Mizo Christianity. Traditionally, the drum played a very important role in all the religious and cultural life of Mizo society. But when they embraced Christianity, they abandoned the traditional drum and using the drum was seen as unchristian. But inspired by the revival movement when the traditional drum interacted with the new indigenous Christian hymns, the drum became more meaningful and brought a new type of singing. Therefore, using the drum in the church and in social gatherings is no longer seen as unchristian but rather as more spiritual and expressing Mizo Christian identity. Fifthly, the Revival movement also

helped the Mizos to develop evangelism on the local level and foreign level. The Mizo custom of *tlawmngaihna*, that is helping others especially the needy one like the widows, the weak and the disabled in drawing water, fetching firewood, cutting and weeding the *jhums* and repairing houses were traditionally assigned to the *zawlbuk* inmates. But now the revival enthusiasts irrespective of sex, age or status took upon themselves the responsibility of continuing the *zawlbuk* functions, with Christian vigour rejuvenated by Christian conviction. The next chapter will deal with the mission and evangelistic work of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram.



## **Chapter Four**

### **AN ANALYSIS OF THE MISSION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF MIZORAM**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

Mission has been integral to Christianity from the beginning. Stephen Neill rightly says that, ‘mission, the extension of the church beyond its existing frontiers, has been characteristic of the Christian fellowship from its earliest beginning’.<sup>364</sup> But as mission faces new challenges in a changing situation, the understanding and practice of Christian mission is changing. The older understanding of mission has been very much challenged as Christians constantly face different contexts of poverty, injustice, other religions and many other issues both inside and outside the church. Therefore, this chapter will explore changes in the understanding of mission over the years or paradigm shifts in the theology of mission. The concern here is reformulating the theology of mission for the Presbyterian Church in Mizoram so that the church may be challenged and inspired to evaluate critically her traditional understanding of mission, and accordingly, redefine mission in the context of Mizoram. To begin, let us briefly survey the history of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram.

#### **2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF MIZORAM:**

Christianity was first preached among the Mizos in 1891 by a Welsh missionary named William Williams, against the background of primitive animism, shrouded by superstitions and fears. Williams could not stay for long in the Mizo Hills, but his appeal to the Presbyterian Church of Wales resulted in the adoption of Mizo Hills as

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<sup>364</sup> Stephen C. Neill, ‘Christian Mission’ in Charles J. Adams, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion Vol. 9* (New York: Macmillan Publishing House, 1969), 573.

one of its mission fields. However, before the church in Wales could send a missionary, unaware of the fact that it had been adopted by the Presbyterian Church of Wales, two Arthington missionaries, J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge arrived in Mizoram in 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1894 and remained for almost four years. The first Welsh missionary, D.E. Jones, arrived on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1897 and stayed with the Arthington missionaries until their departure of that year. Edwin Rowlands joined D.E. Jones in 1898 and the two missionaries devoted most of their time to preaching tours all over Mizoram with its difficult terrain, its wild animals and forests. The missionaries worked with unsparing fervour and as soon as they won over a handful of Mizo converts they left much of the preaching ministry to the Mizos, and they gradually devoted themselves towards administration.

The first two Mizo converts were baptised on 25<sup>th</sup> June, 1899. The statistics of the first fifty five years as shown below to indicate the growth of Presbyterian Church in Mizoram:<sup>365</sup>

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of Christians</u>
1899	2
1905	90
1915	9168
1925	24893
1935	63872
1945	83858
1955	108141

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<sup>365</sup> Zairema, 'The Mizo Church' in Rosiamliana Tochhawng, ed., *Ground Works for Tribal Theology in Mizo Context* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 18.

As the number of Christians increased it was found necessary to organize them into regular congregations with definite programmes of worship. They adopted the practices of the Welsh and Khasi Hill churches. Every Wednesday, evening meetings were held to share spiritual experiences. Later, definite subjects were chosen and guide books were prepared for the church. Saturday evenings were set aside for community prayer meetings. Sunday morning services were devoted to Bible study, now called Sunday school where both children and adults took part. It continues to be one of the most popular services to this day while Sunday afternoon and evenings were set aside for preaching.

A Mizo Presbytery was formed in 1910 under the Khasi Assembly with constitutional powers to organise churches, and to appoint and ordain elders. The first Mizo Presbytery meeting was held in Aizawl, where three elders were appointed and ordained. The year 1913 was a momentous one for the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram as the first Mizo pastor was ordained by the Assembly meeting. As the Mizo Presbytery, established in 1910 had managed all church affairs and acted more or less as an independent body but did not have constitutional authority to ordain ministers. The Mizo Assembly, now known as Presbyterian Church, Mizoram Synod was constituted in July, 1924.

The administrative set up of the Presbyterian Church is highly centralized. The Synod, having its headquarters at Aizawl, is the highest decision making body. The financial operation, the personnel matters, administration management and the execution of works of the Presbyterian Church are directly or indirectly supervised and controlled

by the Synod. It has 14 departments viz: Pastoral ministry, finance, education, hospital, theological education, communications, mission, pension and provident fund, Sunday school, music, social front, revival, youth fellowship and women wing. In addition there are numerous sub-committees functioning under the supervision of the concerned boards. All of these departments are controlled by the Synod through its Executive Committee.

The Presbyterian Church renders services to the poor and the needy by giving funds and grants. The Synod Endowment Fund programme was started in 1994 with an objective of uplifting poor people. A sum of 64, 35, 000.00 rupees was invested in the bank and the interest earned out of it has been utilized for scholarships to poor students and as relief grants to poor families every year. In addition, the Church allots at least 10, 00,000.00 rupees every year to be distributed to the needy people as a relief, primarily to those victims of natural calamities.<sup>366</sup> Moreover, free treatment was given to hundreds of patients due to their poverty by the Presbyterian hospital. As part of the self-help programme the Presbyterian Church runs a Multi-Purpose Training Centre to organise training courses like knitting, tailoring, shoe making, Information technology, etc. for less-privileged people. The church also runs a Rescue Home which is used as a de-addiction and counselling centre for drug addicts and alcoholics.

Lalchhanhima,<sup>367</sup> Moderator, Presbyterian Church of Mizoram has given the statistics of the Presbyterian Church which is given below.

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<sup>366</sup> 'Some Highlights of Mizoram Presbyterian Synod' [article online]; available from [www.mizoramsynod.org/index.php](http://www.mizoramsynod.org/index.php); Internet; accessed; 20 August 2009.

<sup>367</sup> Lalchhanhima, *Interviewed*, (Aizawl: Aizawl Theological College, 19 July, 2009).

General Statistics of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram in 2008 are as follows:

No. of local churches	-	901
No. of Pastors	-	319
No. of Probationary pastors	-	53
No. of Church elders	-	3967
No. of missionaries	-	1449
No. of Church members	-	478853

## **2. 1. Baptist Church of Mizoram:**

The Arthington missionaries, J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge returned to Mizoram and started work as missionaries of the London Baptist Missionary Society in south Mizoram in 1903. There was already a handful of converts there which was largely the fruit of the labour of Welsh missionaries. Since then, Mizoram has been divided into two mission fields, the Welsh Presbyterian Mission in the north and the Baptist Mission in the south Mizoram. From the beginning the work was divided, with Lorrain taking responsibility for the pastoral care of the converts and the organization of the church and Savidge for educational work.

H. Lianggaia, Executive Secretary, Baptist Church of Mizoram has said in an interview that the work of the Baptist Missionary Society in South Mizoram was blessed by God so that when the last western missionary had to leave Mizoram, they left a self-supporting, self-propagating and missionary-sending church.<sup>368</sup> For the smooth administration of the church, four departments – Education, Medical,

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<sup>368</sup> H. Lianggaia, *Interviewed* (Baptist House, Aizawl: 19 August, 2009).

literature and General Department were made to look after different works of the church.<sup>369</sup> From January, 1959, each department started functioning under its departmental committee. From this time onwards, a new era was ushered in the life of Baptist Church of Mizoram.

The personal relationships between the Presbyterian and Baptist missionaries were quite cordial. However, the denominational differences became apparent. The then Political Officer, J. Shakespear was also concerned that the same people should be divided into two rival Christian groups. It is said that he invited the missionaries to talk over the matter. In order to safeguard the Mizo people from disintegration, the British administration did not allow other mission agencies to come into Mizoram for some time. Nevertheless, in the course of time other denominational groups did enter Mizoram. They are as follows:

## **2. 2. Salvation Army:**

Salvation Army was first organized by Kawlkhuma in 1921. Kawlkhuma was once a member of Tlira, one of the first groups judged to be heretical arising out of the revival of 1913. After this group was expelled from the church, Kawlkhuma went to Bombay and joined the Salvation Army. After receiving training he returned to Mizoram and organized the Salvation Army at Mizoram.<sup>370</sup>

The Welsh Mission was not pleased with this development. Since the growth did continue despite the effort of the Presbyterian Church and they confined themselves to social work, there was an improvement in the relationships with the older established

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<sup>369</sup> 'History' [article online]; available from [www.mizobaptist.org/index.php](http://www.mizobaptist.org/index.php); Internet; accessed; 20 August 2009.

<sup>370</sup> K. Lalrinawma, *Interviewed* (Salvation Army Hqrs., Aizawl: 19 August, 2009).

churches in both south and north Mizoram. It has rendered a good service to the people of Mizoram.

### **2. 3. Roman Catholic:**

According to Saiaithanga, the Roman Catholic Church of Mizoram started partly out of belief in the truth of Catholic teaching, and partly because of discontent within the Presbyterian Church.<sup>371</sup> A. Thanglura, a Mizo student in Shillong joined the Roman Catholic Church and he tried to get permission for Catholic missionaries to work in Mizoram. Missionaries got permission and started work in Mizoram in 1947. In the face of stiff opposition from the Superintendent as well as the church leaders, they started a high school and made efforts to gain adherents from among the members of the existing churches. They had very little success.

### **2. 4. Seventh Day Adventists:**

Lallianzuala brought Seventh Day Adventism to Mizoram. He joined this church while he was studying in Shillong in 1941. In 1946 he and ten other students toured Mizoram and distributed the Adventists' book, *Christian Doctrine* which he translated into Mizo. In 1949 he was joined by Mr. and Mrs. Lowry from America. Later Mr. Lowry became pastor and Mrs. Lowry opened an English Medium school for children. This being the first of its kind in Mizoram it attracted the children of those who were in high office. In spite of the enthusiastic propaganda made by Lallianzuala and associates, the Adventists church grew only slowly.

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<sup>371</sup> Saiaithanga, *Mizo Kohhran*, 155.

## **2. 5. United Pentecostal Church:**

The fastest growing church is the United Pentecostal Church. This was the result of the 1935 revival where many people were not satisfied with the existing churches. Kamlova, a Presbyterian compounder (medical worker) and a preacher was responsible for bringing this church to Mizoram. He and his friends went to south India and joined the Pentecostal Church. He succeeded in bringing a woman missionary, R.A. Dover, to Aizawl in 1949 and formed United Pentecostal Church of Mizoram.

## **2. 6. *Isua Krista Kohhran* (Church of Christ):**

*Isua Krista Kohhran* or Church of Christ is a local church which has no connection outside Mizoram. This church is mainly based in the Presbyterian area in northern part of Mizoram. The motivation for its formation was both political and religious revival.

## **3. MEANING OF MISSION:**

The word 'mission' has been derived from the Latin *mitto*, which in turn is a translation of the Greek *apostello* (to send). As an English term with no direct biblical equivalent, it has a broad range of acceptable meanings. The contemporary secular definition of mission is simply 'sending someone forth with a special purpose'. With the broadness of the term, our conception of the Christian mission will to a large degree depend on our theological orientation rather than an etymological analysis.<sup>372</sup>

Christians have always felt that they were engaged in mission in the world, sent by Jesus to proclaim and witness to the good news of the kingdom of God (Mt. 28:18-

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<sup>372</sup> A. Scott Moreau, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 636.



20). But the understanding of their mission and their task has varied in the course of the past two thousand years. And as the historical conditions have changed, mission too has changed even if the word has remained the same.

Thus from the traditional view of mission as exclusively evangelistic to the ecumenical view as the establishment of shalom, could we find a more balance and biblical way of defining of Christian mission. Max Warren defines that Christian mission is God's will for the world, as we know, is that the world shall be saved, shall be made whole, and shall find its true unity of its response to the God, who is the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer. The Christian mission is this will of God as it finds embodiment in active obedience on the part of the Christian individual, the Christian group and the Christian church.<sup>373</sup> For K.C. Abraham, an Indian theologian mission involves committing oneself to the cause of justice, peace and integrity of creation of the dynamic wholesomeness of life. Therefore commitment to the cause of Jesus Christ in a given context and struggle against all forces of oppression are integrally related.<sup>374</sup>

Evidence of current usage shows that the term 'mission' has many meanings and cannot be limited to a single meaning. And we as Christians have no exclusive claim to this word. But this variety of meanings has become a problem even for the churches themselves. Does mission still mean the proclamation of the gospel to non-Christians? Does mission today mean simply no more than humanitarian concern, disaster relief, and ministry to the sick, protest against human rights violations? There is no doubt that the term 'mission' has caused a lot of confusion. As David J. Bosch,

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<sup>373</sup> Max Warren, *The Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1951), 61.

<sup>374</sup> K.C. Abraham, 'Mission as Celebration and Sharing Life', *Seminar paper on Mission and Evangelism*, Bangalore: 1991, 13.

working from Hans Kung's model of paradigm shift has convincingly argued that in the past each major crisis of history has led to a paradigm shift in missionary thinking and praxis.<sup>375</sup> When applied to the church we say that paradigms emerge as Christian communities seek to partake in God's mission. Thus paradigm shift has taken place in mission and missionary thinking.

#### **4. PARADIGM SHIFT IN THEOLOGY OF MISSION:**

Paradigm in theology means an interpretative model commonly agreed and shared by the members of the community. While Bosch traces the contour of paradigm shifts throughout the history of Christian mission, we will discuss here only four major paradigm shifts. However, one should be aware that when we say paradigm shift, it does not mean the eruption of a completely new paradigm without continuity from the past, it always means both continuity and change overlapping one another.

##### **4. 1. Colonial Ecclesial Paradigm:**

The colonial ecclesial paradigm of Christian mission is the result of the success of western Christian nations in exploring the world and subsequently expanding trade and commerce and colonizing Asia and Africa. It is in this context that the colonial ecclesial paradigm of Christian mission was developed. This paradigm covers an era beginning from Columbus to the Second World War; which marked the end of the colonial era.

In the early part of the colonial era, most of the Christian countries were theocratic states in which colonization and Christianization were inseparable like two sides of the same coin. The theological basis of this is drawn from the gospel of Luke 14:23,

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<sup>375</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 185-189. Hereafter cited as 'Bosch, Transforming Mission'.

‘Compel them to come in’ for there is no salvation outside the church. There was direct and indirect missionary war. The direct missionary war was waged by colonizers and crusaders who fought for God and the empire. The indirect war was marginalization of non-Christians who were deprived of certain rights when Christians were granted special privileges and shown favour. The logic of this act was that it was to their own material and spiritual advantage to become Christians. Leaders of the states and the churches together regarded subduing the pagans and taking their land as a divine commission, similar to Israel’s conquest of Canaan.

The right to send ecclesial agents to distant colonies was decisive. Their assignment was known as mission and they themselves became missionaries. The concept of mission seems to originate from the colonial philosophy. As Bosch explained:

The new word ‘mission’ is historically linked indissolubly with the colonial era and with the idea of magisterial commissioning. The term presupposes an established church in Europe which dispatched delegates to convert overseas peoples and was as such an attendant phenomenon of European expansion. The church was understood as a legal institution which had the right to entrust its ‘mission’ to secular power and to a corps of ‘specialists’ priests or religious. ‘Mission’ meant the activities by which the western ecclesiastical system was extended into the rest of the world. The ‘missionary’ was irrevocably tied to an institution in Europe, from which he or she derived the mandate and power to confer salvation on those who accept certain tenets of the faith.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 228.

In this colonial paradigm it is quite right to say that the cross followed the sword. The problem in this approach is not only its theology but also the practice of collaboration with the state government. This had the lasting effect of making people in Asia and Africa sceptical about Christianity. In their encounter with other faiths and cultures, European missionaries learned lessons and gradually changed their opinion about people of other faiths.

The missionary movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which brought about the unparalleled growth and expansion of Christianity to a certain degree abandoned the idea of collaboration with the state government and developed a voluntary Christian mission by forming several missionary societies. Since the missionaries were not directly sent and controlled by the state government, the colonialists and missionaries had different interests. In some places there was bitter conflict between them, but by and large the missionaries profited from the logistics help provided by the colonial structures.<sup>377</sup> Whether the relationship between missionaries and colonialists was good or bad, together they shared the imperial ethos that western values, culture and practices were the only authentic ones to be followed by all people. With this mind- set, both missionaries and colonial administrators could not appreciate other cultures and imposed their own culture on others. Such an approach has created serious problems for mission work throughout history. Though the crusaders were not successful in their mission, the spirit of Christian triumphalism nurtured by western imperialism has continued up to today.

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<sup>377</sup> Michael Amaladoss, 'The church as servant of the coming kingdom' in Gerald H. Anderson, James M. Philips and Robert T. Coote, eds., *Mission in the Nineteen Nineties* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 14.

#### **4. 2. Pietistic Evangelical Paradigm:**

The Pietistic Evangelical Paradigm is second long lasting paradigm; beginning from the pietistic movement of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century through the evangelical awakening of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the present time. Pietism, rediscovering the tradition of the Reformation, emphasized faith over against reason, disciplined life over sound doctrine, subjective experience of the individual over ecclesial authority, practice over theory.<sup>378</sup> The pietistic movement combined the joy of personal experience of salvation with an eagerness to proclaim the gospel of redemption to all. Its emphasis on the individual rather than society has its strength and weakness.

The pietistic movement made significant contributions to Christian mission. Even though the first two missionaries to India were sent by a king, missionary work became a voluntary enterprise. Eventually, pietism transformed Christian mission from being a concern of rulers and church hierarchies to being an enterprise of every committed Christian. Pietism ushered in the age of ecumenism in mission in which the fellowship of believers, drawn from various denominations, worked together in the Christian mission. This cooperation transcended national and confessional boundaries.

The pietistic approach was affirmed, strengthened and transformed by the evangelical awakening in Europe and North America which sent out missionaries in large numbers to various parts of the world. Most western historians considered the 19<sup>th</sup> century the ‘Great Century’ of Protestant and Catholic mission. Though there are several factors in and outside of the church responsible for the worldwide expansion

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<sup>378</sup> Paul Tillich, *Perspective on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Protestant Theology* (London: SCM, 1967), 95-97; David A. Palin, ‘Enlightenment’ in Alan Richardson and John Bowden, eds., *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1983), 179-180.

which made Christianity a universal religion, on the whole the evangelical awakening which gave birth to a large number of missionary organizations dedicated to the task of world evangelization is regarded as primary factor.<sup>379</sup> The internal regeneration of the churches enabled them to grasp the opportunities offered by the favourable external conditions like the colonization of Asia and Africa, new scientific discoveries, which provided better communication facilities and the industrial revolution which expanded trade and commerce.

The watch-word of the Student Volunteer Movement, 'the evangelization of the world in this generation' reflects the motif and approach of the Christian mission. The central thrust of this paradigm was proclamation of the gospel with a view to converting people so that their souls might be saved eternally. Emphasis on personal conversion, purity of life, the imminent return of Jesus Christ, loving obedience and discipleship in the evangelical theology of mission was clear evidence of pietistic influence. The theological motif of the 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary was both soteriological and eschatological.

The most significant contribution of the evangelical awakening to the Christian mission was the development of voluntarism which eventually brought about the existence of many missionary societies. The evangelical Christians, addressing the consequential problems of the industrial revolution, were deeply involved in the struggle for social reform and engaged in charitable works in their home countries. When they came to Asia, they continued the type of work they had done in their

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<sup>379</sup> Rodger C. Bassham, *Mission Theology 1948-1975: Years of World Creative Tension Ecumenical, Evangelical and Roman Catholic* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1979), 4.

home country and got involved in social reform and charitable work. Thus, schools, hospitals and other charitable works became an important means of evangelization.

#### **4. 3. Ecumenical Paradigm:**

One of the greatest developments in the history of the Christian church in 20<sup>th</sup> century was the emergence of an ecumenical movement. Concern for unity arose from the missionaries' experience in the fields. The enormity of mission work, particularly the difficulty they encountered in the task of world evangelization helped missionaries realize the need for unity. Concern for Christian unity gradually became stronger and it was treated as the core issue in on-going discussions of mission. This concern of unity was translated into reality when the World Council of churches (WCC) was formed in 1948 to strive for greater unity. Unity has become one of the primary purposes of the WCC, as laid down in its constitution: 'to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.'<sup>380</sup>

The confusion that has been prevailing within the ecumenical movement was the purpose of calling the churches for the International Missionary Council whose purpose was for evangelism whereas WCC perceived it for unity. That was eventually rectified. Rejecting the dichotomy, the ecumenical movement integrated unity and mission upholding the view that the 'calling of the churches to mission and unity' were inseparable as the two sides of the same coin. As the leaders of the WCC took the context of Christian mission more seriously than ever before, certain issues such

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<sup>380</sup> Thomas F. Best, *Vancouver to Canberra 1983-1990* (Geneva: WCC, 1990), vii.

as the relationship of the older and younger churches, the missionary message in relation to non-Christian religion, the relation of evangelism and social involvement, racism, sexism and ecological issues have appeared as crucial questions in the discussion on mission. The concern for Christian mission was no longer limited to evangelism and unity alone; it has now many more concerns. The increasing concerns and the multiple dimensions of Christian mission have brought about a new paradigm called a holistic paradigm.

#### **4. 4. Holistic paradigm:**

The holistic concept of mission, the idea that the mission of God (*Missio Dei*) to the world in which the churches and every Christian are called to participate through proclamation of the gospel of Christ and action for the realization of the kingdom of God did not come overnight but took many years to develop. It evolved from the past experience of mission work, debate on certain issues, and reconstruction of the theology of mission and reformulation of mission priorities and strategies.<sup>381</sup> The change was not merely initiated by a few leaders and missionary scholars from within; it was brought about by the external context in which the missionary enterprise existed. The shift was basically from understanding mission as God's mission to the world through the church, to an understanding of God's mission to the world in which the church participates. It is a shift from church oriented mission to the world oriented mission. Here mission is conceived in the spirit of Ps. 24: 1, 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell there in'. It is God who loved this world so much that he sent his son to it. Mission is therefore, God's loving act of sending his son to save, liberate and reconcile the world to

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<sup>381</sup> Phillip A. Potter, 'Mission' in Nicholas Lossky, et. al. eds, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC, 2002), 695.



himself. Mission is God's turning to the world in respect of creation, care, redemption and consummation. It affects all people in all aspects of their existence. And the mission of the church is to participate in this mission of God.

#### **4.5. Critiques on Mission Paradigms:**

In the history of Christianity, a shift of theological paradigm has taken place from time to time as mentioned above. The colonial ecclesial paradigm of the church was overlapped by pietistic evangelical paradigm, and then came the ecumenical paradigm and the holistic paradigm and so on. A new paradigm of theology usually emerges due to the change of situation. The shift of theological paradigm today is mainly due to the breaking down of the old paradigm in Third world countries. The old paradigm could not develop a relevant theology to effectively address the situation where poverty, exploitation, oppression dependency and pluralism were major issues. It is quite evident from history that whenever an old paradigm become obsolete and inadequate to meet the contemporary needs, a new paradigm emerged.<sup>382</sup> Whenever such a shift of paradigm occurred, the old paradigm seldom disappeared completely. David J. Bosch rightly asserts that in the field of religion, a paradigm shift always means both continuity and change, both faithfulness to the past and boldness to engage the future, both constancy and contingency, both tradition and transformation.<sup>383</sup> It is the failure of traditional paradigm such as the colonial and evangelical paradigms to address the problems faced by the churches which necessitates new contextual theological models. Contextual theological models

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<sup>382</sup> Hans Kung and David Tracy, eds., *The Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1989), 20-23.

<sup>383</sup> Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 366.

propounded by Stephen B. Bevens will be used in this study because they are complementary and are open to different interpretations.<sup>384</sup>

In the history of Christianity, we are dealing with a shift from evangelical paradigm to a holistic mission paradigm. The concern in the past for winning converts and planting local churches was shifted to the concern for meeting the need of the human beings in their respective contexts, of course without totally rejecting the earlier concern. This is the reason why humanization, liberation and preferential option for the poor are used to explain the meaning and nature of mission. Thus churches were to witness God in six continents declaring the whole world as mission field and this marked the end of the view that mission was an enterprise of the Euro-American churches.

For our purpose, we employ Stephen B. Bevens's contextual theological models instead of traditional exclusive paradigm because models are complementary. Moreover, contextual theological models critiques the old paradigms and at the same time need to construct new models based on the reality of the time and the socio-cultural factors directed by a new vision. This vision was formed by the revival as explained in chapter three. These new theological models can consist of old conversion and new type of conversion as synthesis is the guiding principle of contextual models.

In response to the complex situation of the Mizos where identity crisis, economic dependency, ecological crisis and social injustice become the theological agenda, the

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<sup>384</sup> Stephen B. Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002).

concern is to integrate both social transformation and inculturation of the Christian gospel. Since no single paradigm is perfectly adequate for the construction of theology, a theologian may be using two different models depending on the situation. It is these concerns which compel the author to combine the synthetic and postcolonial models both of which take the culture of the Mizo seriously and at the same time emphasize social transformation and openness to a change for the good. The choice of these models in no way means that all other models are irrelevant for the Mizos. We need the older paradigm in order to appreciate the scope of the present challenge and to be able really to understand the world today and the Christian response to its predicament. We should also be aware of the fact that there is no rigid boundary between various models. So, in future we may also use a new model which is concern to build up new relationships with people of other faiths in a postcolonial and pluralistic society.<sup>385</sup>

## **5. MISSION HISTORY OF PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF MIZORAM:**

The evangelistic and missionary concern of the Mizos has been evident since the formation of the Mizo Presbytery in 1909 as a part of Khasi and Jantia Assembly. Following the first Welsh missionary, D.E. Jones, the first Mizo Christians took upon themselves the task of evangelising their fellow Mizos. All believers, including new converts were enthusiastic about telling any person they came into contact with about their new found faith and experiences. The early mission of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram was carried out by the Christians who laid down their lives for the cause of the gospel. A separate Mission Committee was formed by the Mizo Presbyterian Church only in 1953. A brief history of the mission work before the formation of

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<sup>385</sup> S.J. Samartha, 'Dialogue in a Religiously Pluralistic Society' in Israel Selvanayagam, ed., *The Multi-Faith Context of India: Resources and Challenges for Christians* (Bangalore: Board of Theological Text book Programme of South Asia, 1994), 6.

Mission Committee may be helpful in setting the Mission Board's work in perspective.

### **5.1. Voluntary mission work:**

The earliest recorded gospel venture outside Mizoram by members of the Presbyterian Church came in 1910. Three students at Aizawl Vanzika, Taitea and Savawma went to Senvawn in Manipur in May, 1910. The following year 1911, Hrangvunga migrated to Tripura, the neighbouring land of Mizoram to do mission work among the people. In 1913, Mr. Thianga also migrated to Haflong in Assam for the sake of the gospel.<sup>386</sup> Mr. R. Dala, an elder in Aizawl also migrated to Manipur in 1913 to preach the gospel among the Mizos. Individuals and families went as voluntary missionaries and this was followed by the youth groups and the women's wings of the Presbyterian Church, who gave support to mission and evangelism work. More volunteers raised support which was channelled through the office of the Presbyterian Church. This brief account shows very clearly that the Mizo Christians were imbued with the missionary spirit from the earliest beginnings of the church in Mizoram.

### **5. 2. Mission becomes an integral activity of the church:**

It will be recalled that the missionary movement in the west started with missionary societies, which were organised mostly among different denominations and that the churches gradually became aware that mission was their primary task. Likewise the Mizo Presbyterian Church was constituted as an Assembly in 1924 and in its first meeting held in January, 1925, the Assembly decided to launch mission work among

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<sup>386</sup> R. Lalauva, *Mizoram Kohhrante Thiltih 1894-1992* (The Works of the Churches in Mizoram 1894-1992) (Aizawl: Maranatha Printing Press, 1993), 13.

the *Langrawng* people in Cachar, Assam.<sup>387</sup> Two evangelists were sent there during the same year. The Assembly searched for more mission fields to work during the subsequent years and considerations went as far as the hill areas in Burma. The concern for evangelising the *Bru* and *Chakma*<sup>388</sup> people inside Mizoram and surrounding areas was first expressed in the Pastoral committee in 1937.<sup>389</sup> The Mizo Presbyterian Church launched the *Bru-Chakma* evangelistic work in 1949 by sending three missionaries.<sup>390</sup>

### **5. 3. Formation of the Synod Mission Board (SMB):**

In 1952, the Mizo Presbyterian Church became aware of the need for a better organizational structure in their missionary activities which were looked after by the Synod Standing Committee. With the increasing concern for mission, a separate committee for mission called the Synod Mission Committee was formed in 1953 which was later transformed into the Synod Mission Board in 1961. Though the immediate changes were few they were significant as for example, the Mission Board became self-sufficient and was given a free hand to decide its own fund raising method and make its own policy. The main task of the Mission Board has been regulating and co-ordinating the services of the missionaries in various mission fields.

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<sup>387</sup> The Mizo Presbyterian Church Assembly Resolution no. 3 of 1925.

<sup>388</sup> The *Bru* and *Chakma* were formerly known as *Tuikuk* and *Takam* respectively which stood for the Mizos as a symbol of primitive and contemptuous culture. The people themselves consistently used their present names which the Mizo missionaries started to use referring to them only from recent years when they had gained better understanding of the people.

<sup>389</sup> Liangkhaia, 'Assembly Pastoral Committee' in *Kristian Tlangau*, September, 1943, 180-182.

<sup>390</sup> Thanzawna, 'Tuikuk leh Takam ramthar chanchin' in R. Lalaupa, *Ramthim Entu* [Light of the Mission](Aizawl: Maranatha Press, 1975) 49.

#### 5. 4. Policy of Synod Mission Board:

The Synod Mission Board had no organized policy or constitution of its own in the beginning. It mainly depended upon the general policy of the General Assembly of the Church and there was no specific demarcation between the Mission Board and the Synod Executive Committee in the matter of policy making. The only printed material referring to some basic policies of the Mission Board mixed with some pastoral advice was '*Ramthar Rawngbawltute Tanpuitu*' (Missionary Helper) written by V.L. Zaithanga,<sup>391</sup> who later became the first full time secretary of the Synod Mission Board. Moreover, the reason for the absence of a clearly stated policy can be found in the nature of the Mizo cultural practices. The Christianised concept of *tlawmngaihna*<sup>392</sup> played an important role in the enterprises of the Mizos. The *tlawmngai* missionaries did not consider the task they undertook to be defined by any written constitution. It was simply a voluntary commitment to the task irrespective of the reward they might receive. They worked under a conventional agreement to earn what the Mission board considered to be sufficient. Again, the Mission department underwent frequent structural changes and this gave little chance to formulate a regular constitution policy. In addition differences of various mission fields also made it difficult to formulate consistent mission policies.

It was only in 1984 the Synod Mission Board made its working policy in a written form called the 'Manual of Synod Mission Board'.<sup>393</sup> According to this Manual, the

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<sup>391</sup> V.L. Zaithanga, *Ramthar Rawngbawltute Tanpuitu* (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1973)

<sup>392</sup> Putting it contextually, a person who possesses *tlawmngaihna* must be obedient and respectful to the elders; courteous in dealing with the weak and the lowly; generous and hospitable to the poor, the needy and the strangers; self-denying and self sacrificing at the opportune moments in favour of others; ready to help those in distress; compassionate to a companion who falls sick while on journey or becomes victims of wild beast in the hunt; heroic and resolute at war and in hunting; stoical in suffering and in facing hardship under trying circumstances; and persevering in any worthwhile undertaking however hard and daunting that might prove to be.

<sup>393</sup> Lalfakzuala, 'Synod Mission Board' in Vanlalchhuanawma, ed, *Mizoram Presbyterian Church*, 17.

Mission Board had four mission policies to achieve its aims, such as to help and supervise the missionary effort of the Mizo church, to look for an opportunity for missionary work and to seek and create partnership with other mission agencies, to mobilise the churches for missions and to provide teaching and training as the changes in mission demand. The Mission Board's overall direction of the ministry outlined as follows:

- 1) It will appoint members for the Board of Executive Committee from the existing members of the Mission Board.
- 2) It will recommend constitution and by-law changes to the Synod Executive committee.
- 3) It will approve the policies, plan and strategies of the Synod Mission Board.
- 4) It will approve the projects to be undertaken by the Mission Board.
- 5) It will prepare financial budgets subject to the approval of Annual Synod Meeting
- 6) It will make administrative arrangements necessary for the smooth running of the mission work.
- 7) It will receive and approve reports from the Secretary, Synod Mission Board.

In view of the present principles of world evangelisation, special emphasis is laid upon partnership with churches and mission organisations to facilitate wider scope of mission and evangelism work in different parts of the world. There is a vast expansion

of mission fields in different parts of India.<sup>394</sup> Overseas missionaries were also sent in collaboration with the Council for World Mission and other international mission organisations.<sup>395</sup> Today the Mission Board is still continuing to explore opportunities to widen its horizons of mission work within India and neighbouring countries.

## **5. 6. Mission Strategies of the Synod Mission Board:**

The Synod Mission Board has used different methods in communicating and establishing the gospel among the various communities. The following methods were extensively used in mission work.

### **a) Knowing the people and being with them:**

Before choosing a place or people the Mission Board looked for a particular people, assessing their geographical location, language, culture, political and economic life and religious beliefs. Most of the Mizo missionaries went directly to the people and stayed with them and learned the language and customs. They started by having contact and interaction with the people. They tried to win the acceptance and confidence of the people. Apart from imparting a new faith, the missionaries also served the people in many ways. They taught the people various skills for industrial works, carpentry, tailoring and improved agriculture methods. For example, the Mizo missionaries in Assam, India have made efforts to teach better methods of agriculture and gardening with new and improved seeds.

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<sup>394</sup> See Appendix IX.

<sup>395</sup> See Appendix X.



**b) Establishing mission compound:**

Like the western missionaries the Mizo missionaries usually developed mission compounds wherever they went. They chose a place where they built their headquarters. Making their base in such centres, they reached out to the people around them. These compounds served as centres for new activities such as opening school, meeting or chapel hall, and teaching vocational skills such as carpentry, tailoring and weaving. Slowly the natives were attracted, some out of curiosity, others out of interest for change and new life. Soon a church building was erected and regular worship services were conducted. Slowly native Christians were trained as evangelists besides teaching the new converts about Christian life and conduct.

Modern missiologists criticize this mission compound approach as unrealistic, taking away people from their actual environment, transmitting a colonial kind of church organization where missionaries are looked upon as leaders, owners and actors in everything. There is some truth in these accusations; mission compounds can create a feeling of division and artificiality. But one should not fail to notice that there are other things which necessitate this approach. Two reasons that support a mission compound approach are continuation of the biblical pattern and the organizational and administrative necessity.

In the Old Testament God's people had their particular centres or places from where national activities, festivals or worships were conducted. Even their judges, prophets, priests and kings had certain prominent places. Thus Shiloh, Bethel, Jerusalem were places of importance in the OT. In the NT the early churches were associated with cities while most of them evolved as house churches. Thus we have the Jerusalem

church, Antioch church, Corinthian church, etc. The mission compound approach is thus a continuation of the biblical pattern.<sup>396</sup>

### **c) Planting churches:**

The main goal of the Mizo mission is establishing and planting churches. Churches were planted where people were converted followed by preaching, teaching and instruction of the word of God, all of which took place in those churches. When a number of churches have been planted, they are taught to have a link through regular interactions and visit to one another. This has also been done through annual gatherings and conferences and this strengthens the solidarity and identity of the newly churches.

The churches planted by the Mizo missionaries in different parts of India are architecturally very foreign and very different from the architecture of the worship places in India. While the churches are very beautiful and valuable to Christians, non-Christians look at them with suspicion and contempt as if Christians are traitors and agents of foreign countries. People like Devi Lal, former Deputy Prime Minister of India urged Christians to go to Rome or America.<sup>397</sup> The whole country was angered by this kind of comment but I personally feel that there is a lot of truth in this statement. The church in India is a church with a misleading identity. For a simple non-Christian it is extremely difficult to understand what Indian Christianity is all about. Look at the some of the names of the churches and missions in India. We have

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<sup>396</sup> Krickwin C. Marak, 'Reflection on the Missiological Approaches to the Tribals of North East India' in Joseph Mattam and Krickwin C. Marak, eds., *Missiological Approaches in India: Retrospect and Prospect* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1999), 182-183.

<sup>397</sup> P. Moses Manohar, 'Political Challenges and Mission Perspective' in W. S. Milton Jegathanan ed., *Mission Paradigm in a New Millennium* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 312.

Roman Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, American Baptist and Irish Presbyterian. It is very important to establish and plant churches which have an Indian identity.

**d) Establishing Christian Institutions:**

Western missionaries established institutions wherever they went and this was an unavoidable aspect of Christian mission in the colonial period. Following the footsteps of the western missionaries, the Mizo missionaries established educational institutions in their mission fields. The primary purpose was to enable the new converts to read the Bible in their language and participate in worship services. Along with education development of knowledge in various fields came along. Many more schools were opened with the native converts as teachers who also acted as evangelists. The middle schools were followed by high schools for both male and female. These mission schools were meant to prepare the students for evangelism and were found to be more effective than the institutions run by the government. For example, the three high schools run by the Synod Mission Board namely Oriental High School, Silchar in Assam, Rowland's Memorial High School, also in Assam and Loktak Christian Model High School, Moirang in Manipur have a continuing good reputation because of their excellent academic results every year.

**6. MOTIVATING FACTORS FOR MISSION:**

There could be various factors that might have motivated the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram to send out missionaries to different places in India and abroad. One may wonder why Mizo Christians have been very enthusiastic about mission work and what makes them to put such effort into this task. Mizos have drawn motivation for mission from the Bible, although the Presbyterian Church is yet to have its official

statement of a biblical theology of mission. This does not mean that the Mission Board does not have a biblical basis for mission. As already discussed the Mizos have an unwritten but smoothly agreed upon theology of mission. At this stage one has to study their songs, messages, teachings and writings and even mission related actions to understand the motivation for the mission and evangelism work.

## **6. 1. Biblical and Theological Factors:**

One important thing in mission is the biblical-theological perspective that not only motivates people but also determines the priority given in mission. Biblical and theological factors that motivate Mizo Christian can be discussed as follows:

### **a) Obedience to Christ:**

Mizo mission in general seems to have been influenced by the old paradigm in its outreach and literal understanding of the so-called the great commission given by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20, ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching to observe that all I have commanded you; and lo I am with you always, to the close of the age’. This commitment to mission is clearly expressed in the report of the Review Committee of Mission of the Presbyterian Church;<sup>398</sup> it can also be clearly seen in the official record of the Synod Assembly meeting.<sup>399</sup>

The Presbyterian Church therefore, is committed to mission as its responsibility, in order to show obedience to Christ. The commitment is so intense that the church

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<sup>398</sup> Mizoram Presbyterian Church, *Ramthar Rawngbawlina Enthatu Committee Report, 1996*[Review Committee of Mission] (Aizawl: Synod Mission Board, 1999), 2; 72<sup>nd</sup> *Synod Book* (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1996), 409.

extends its areas of operation, sending more missionaries and increasing its financial contribution to mission. V.L. Zaithanga, a retired pastor, who helped and shaped the Synod Mission Board stressed, that obedience to the great commission of Jesus Christ is the core of missions.<sup>400</sup> Besides the missionary mandate biblical text, there are theological reasons for people to be committed to mission.

#### **b) Constrained by love and thanksgiving:**

Another prominent motivation for mission is the love of God. R. Lalthanmawia, former Executive Secretary, Mission department of the Presbyterian Church writes, ‘Those who experienced God’s love perceive others with the attitude of love. That love leads and motivates one to deny himself/herself to be a blessing to others’.<sup>401</sup> Many Mizos are involved in mission because of the impinging ‘constraints by the love of Christ’ (2 Cor. 5:14). Besides the love of Christ, K.Thanzauva, a Mizo theologian strongly believes that the Mizo mission springs from gratitude and thankfulness. He called it ‘doxological mission’.<sup>402</sup> The Mizos are grateful to God for all he had done for them and are therefore actively involved in mission to show their gratitude to God for what he has done for them. They feel that what they received freely must be given out freely as an expression of their gratitude to God.

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<sup>400</sup> V.L. Zaithanga, ‘Theology of Mission’ in *Aizawl Theological College*, (Aizawl: Aizawl Theological College, 1986), 12.

<sup>401</sup> R.Lalthanmawia, ‘Theology of Mission’ in *Welsh Presbyterian Mission in Mizoram Centenary Souvenir 1897-1997*(Aizawl: Synod Literature and Publication Board, 1997), 40.

<sup>402</sup> K. Thanzauva, ‘Mizo Kristiante leh mission’ [Mizo Christians and mission] in R.L. Rinawma & Tlanghmingthanga, eds., *Kum 100 Kristian Zofate Hmabak* [The future of 100 years Mizo Christians] (Bangalore: Bangalore Mizo Christian Fellowship, 1995), 77. Hereafter cited as ‘K. Thanzauva, Mizo leh Mission’.

### c) Election:

The other motive is the election of the Mizo Christians for mission. The Mizos claim that as God has chosen Israel out of many nations, so God chose the Mizos to evangelize the people of India. With such feeling Mizos earnestly believe they have a special responsibility to spread the gospel. Zohminga, a missionary of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church narrates the rationale for this:

Mizos are the only tribe who claim to be one hundred percent Christian. The Gospel came to us across the oceans, valleys and hills. We have grown so fast and received so much of manifold blessings. Therefore we feel strongly that God has chosen the Mizos to be his agent in spreading the gospel.<sup>403</sup>

B.Thangchina, former General Secretary of the Mizoram Baptist Church asserted that God has made the Mizos as a nation and chose them out of many nations to work for the mission with manifold blessings.<sup>404</sup> Moreover, the Mizos considers themselves to be ‘ambassadors’ for Christ, quoting Paul who says, ‘we are ambassadors for Christ’. (1Cor.5:20). Lalchhuanliana, a retired pastor from the Presbyterian Church has asserted that missionary work is doing the work of an ambassador for Christ.<sup>405</sup> Though this concept of election and ambassador seems to be fruitful among the Mizo people, it needs to be restrained as it could lead to the extent of claiming themselves as God’s only chosen people among other people.

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<sup>403</sup> Zohminga, *Interviewed* (Hyderabad: Mission Quarter, 27 September, 2009).

<sup>404</sup> B.Thangchina, ‘Zoram Baptist mission rawngbawlina tlangpui’[The mission work of the Zoram Baptist Church] in *ZBM Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1938-1989*(Serkawn: Baptist Literature and Publication Board, 1989), 20.

<sup>405</sup> Lalchhuanliana, *Nilai leh Beirual Thupui* (Aizawl: Synod Literature and Publication Board, 1996), 110.

#### **d) Eschatological factor:**

The Mizo Christians believe in the imminent coming of Jesus Christ and therefore shouldered the responsibility of evangelizing the whole world before Jesus returns. S.Lalkhuma, a retired missionary pastor says that Christian mission as understood by the Mizos is to proclaim the good news to the whole world before Jesus comes again.<sup>406</sup> This created in Mizo Christians an irresistible urgency to preach the gospel. Lalsawma, a Mizo church leader, wrote that due to the driving sense of urgency, many left home to preach the good news of salvation to others not only in Mizoram, but also in the states of Tripura, Manipur and Assam. Like Paul of old, they felt convinced that it was necessary for them to preach at home and abroad.<sup>407</sup> The conviction that gospel proclamation is urgent has not died out even after the whole Mizo population has become Christian. Songs are still composed to impress and motivate people on the urgency and the need of mission. However, this concept could easily lead people to other-worldly Christian thinking that Christians should not be involved in this sinful world and there is therefore no point in tampering with the structure of society because Jesus is coming at any moment.

#### **e) Missionary Songs:**

Mizos are very fond of singing and it is a part and parcel of their life. K. Lalhmingliana, Lecturer in Mission studies, Aizawl Theological College claims that Mizos sing mission. 'The zeal for mission and evangelism has been nurtured and inspired by missionary songs'.<sup>408</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma believes that music became not only a part of worship service but also one of the Mizo churches' effective instruments of revival and evangelization. Christianity gave music to the Mizo church

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<sup>406</sup> S.Lalkhuma, *Mission Hna* [The Mission Work] (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1986), 3.

<sup>407</sup> Lalsawma, *Revivals*, 55.

<sup>408</sup> K. Lalhmingliana, *Interviewed*, (Aizawl: Aizawl Theological College, 15 July, 2009).

and the Mizo church gave life to Christianity through music.<sup>409</sup> Donna Storm comments that ‘Mizos are singing people. This is perhaps their most outstanding and distinctive characteristic. Significantly, recent Christian’s compositions tend to be evangelistic and missionary songs’.<sup>410</sup> Let us look at some of the recent missionary songs written by the Mizos. Lalsangzuali Sailo, one of the most popular female songwriters and soloists has composed ten missionary songs. One of the most popular ones goes like this:

Let us labour with endurance and courage,  
Obeying the voice of our lord  
To send out more missionaries  
Dedicate our prayers and offerings. .<sup>411</sup>

Here is another missionary song composed by Lianmanga, which would be helpful for the understanding of the Mizo concept of Christian mission.

Lord, lover of Mizoram  
You have freely given us the gospel,  
So long we kept it to ourselves  
We beseech you, forgive us.  
  
Our duty is to proclaim the gospel  
To give it out freely,

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<sup>409</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Synod Mission*, 155.

<sup>410</sup> Donna Storm, *Wind*, 73.

<sup>411</sup> R. Lalrawna, ed., *Lalsangzuali Sailo Hla Phuahte* [Songs composed by Lalsangzuali Sailo] (Aizawl: Joe and Ben Production, 1984), 147.



Till the whole wide world

Become the kingdom of God.

This song has quickly swept through the length and breadth of Mizoram. From this song we can clearly observe the Mizo concept of Christian mission which is quite traditional and triumphalistic. Thangzalana, a Presbyterian Church missionary has composed sixty one (61) songs of which twelve songs are missionary songs. One of the most popular songs on mission is *Pen ru, pen ru, Kristaa nun thar neite u*<sup>412</sup> (March forward those of you who have new life in Christ). Vanlalbela, Secretary, Synod Mission Board commented that these missionary songs have been instrumental in calling out many people as missionaries and also strengthened many existing missionaries in many ways.<sup>413</sup> However, Mizos have been singing to motivate not only their fellow Mizos inside Mizoram for mission, but various parts of the world.

What makes the Mizos to have this triumphalistic attitude in their mission? Can it be the influence of missionaries of the colonial period? Or is it their triumphal hermeneutics of biblical passages? The first one is very possible, while the second one may not be ruled out. Taking the first one as true, one may assume that since the western missionaries came under the banner of British colonial power, it is likely that they had some influence on the Mizo Christians with regard to the idea of superiority feeling, that the gospel and the missionaries are supposed to conquer all, and those who carry the gospel will have victory over others. The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram seems to understand herself as an agent that has been authorised by the

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<sup>412</sup> *Kristian Hlabu*, No.324 (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, Fifth Edition, 1987), 350.

<sup>413</sup> Vanlalbela, *Interviewed* (Aizawl: Synod Office, 19 August, 2009).

commission of Jesus Christ who says, 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'.

**e) Spiritual revival factor:**

As has been already discussed in the previous chapter, revival has a very prominent place in the Mizo church. F.S. Downs, a church historian remarked, 'the area in which Christianity grew most rapidly at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Mizoram'.<sup>414</sup> He attributed the rapid growth of the church in Mizoram to a series of revivals and many Mizos are the fruit of spiritual revivals. Revival in Mizoram brought not only rapid growth to the church but also enormous mission awareness among the Mizos. It strengthened the believers and sowed the seed of a burden for proclaiming the gospel to those who have not heard the gospel.<sup>415</sup> For instance, after the 1913 revival, a number of Mizo Christians who were influenced by the revival movement visited Manipur voluntarily with the purpose of evangelising those who are closely related to them ethnically. This does not seem to be a rare case, of course for it is said to have happened in different places that revival brings about both awareness of and interest in missionary endeavours.<sup>416</sup>

Revival not only created mission awareness, it also affirmed the missionary call to members of the church. Lalmuanpuia joined the SMB as missionary in 1986 said in an interview that he attended the revival camp and could not ignore God's call during

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<sup>414</sup> F.S. Downs, *Christianity in North East India* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1983), 122.

<sup>415</sup> V.L. Zawnga & C.L. Hminga, *Revival and Social Reformation* (Serkawn: Baptist Church of Mizoram, 1995), 26.

<sup>416</sup> V.L. Zawnga and Hrangkhuma, *Revival and Social Mission*, collected information about the revival influences on interests in missions in China, Africa and other countries; See Phuvey Dozo, *The Cross Over Nangaland* (New Delhi: Zuve and Ato Dozo, 1992), 32.

the revival camp.<sup>417</sup> Revival camp caused a shaking and sweeping revival movement all over Mizoram during the late 1980's and early 1990's. Revival in Mizoram was marked with ecstatic experiences with singing and dancing which at the same time brought motivation for mission.

## **6.2. Ethno-political Identity factor:**

No one would deny that the Mizos are identity conscious, for this has been reflected in their mission ventures. Since the time the Presbyterian Church started mission work, there seem to have the tendency to go first to the people with whom they think they are related ethnically and culturally.

Vanlalchhuanawma, a Mizo Church historian strongly contends that the motive behind the mission endeavour of the Mizo Christians was their love for their fellow Mizos.<sup>418</sup> He believed that Mizos have suffered identity confusion due to colonisation. The Mizo church therefore, searches those people who are identical with them but have dispersed in different places by political and geographical divisions. In other words, Mizos want to share the gospel first with their fellow Mizos, who have not yet received the gospel. Even if evangelisation is the basic reason for mission, the secondary purpose is to find identical people in terms of racial origin and culture. Only after they settled politically following the formation of Mizoram as one of the district of India, Mizos made attempts to reach non-Mizos inside and outside Mizoram. Even if they turned to evangelise non-Mizos, they still tried to find similarities with them in terms of vocabularies, cultural practices and so on.

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<sup>417</sup> Lalmuanpuia, *Interviewed*, (Diphu: Mission Quarter, 23 July, 2009).

<sup>418</sup> Vanlalchhuanawma, *Interviewed*, (Aizawl: Aizawl Theological College, 16 August, 2009).

This assumption is understandable when one looks at the mission movements of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram. Wherever the church goes for evangelisation, whether it is in other states of India, they seek first their fellow Mizos. This is true to the Mizos in Burma (Myanmar). A project which gave much incentive to foreign mission was the *Chanchin Tha Dak* (Gospel Mail), undertaken by the Young Mizo Association (YMA). With the initiative of Robuanga, a zealous evangelist of Champhai village in Mizoram, who appealed to Christians in Mizoram to contribute books and any kind of school literature for the Mizos in Burma, who at that time had nothing to read. Collections of used literature both religious and secular were put in the wooden box called '*chanchin tha dak*' (gospel Mail). These boxes were carried through numbers of villages by young volunteers after the customary manner of carrying the sick or corpse. Almost every village welcomed with revival singing and dancing and donated articles varies widely since the people became more aware of the poverty of their fellow Mizos in Burma. As a result of this project, the Presbyterian Church was firmly established in Burma even till today.<sup>419</sup>

One important element in the gospel mail project is the willingness to share with others. Sharing one's resources with others is a Mizo cultural virtue. By practicing sharing from the Mizo cultural perspective, the teaching of Jesus Christ is taking root deep in the Mizo culture. The Mizo traditional way of sharing becomes meaningful when it interacts with the gospel. In the light of this, the gospel mail teaches sharing and being a blessing to others which is very much part of the Christian mission.

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<sup>419</sup> S. Nengzakhup, *Amazing Missions* (Bangalore: SAIACS, 1999), 47.

### **6. 3. Socio-cultural factor:**

In seeking various motivating factors for mission, one discerns that the Mizos are culturally oriented to be concerned for the good of others and are at the same time sharing oriented. In this section we will discuss these two characteristics of Mizo cultural traditions that are found to have influenced their attitudes toward mission.

#### **a) The Principle of sharing in relation to mission:**

One outstanding feature of the pre-Christian traditional culture of the Mizo is found in the principle of '*sem sem dam dam, ei bil thi thi*' which means to generously share with others whatever one has. The Mizos were taught to be kind to one another even before the coming of the gospel. It was a common practice to help anybody who was in difficulty in terms of food, ploughing and clearing of the field for harvest. Even the *khuangchawi* feasts have a sharing motive because a lot of rice would be spilled in the brewing of beer and in cooking. The leftovers were for the poor who would come and collect it. Alwyn Roberts, former missionary to Mizoram believed that the influence of the traditional culture as one of the factors for the growth of mission. He said that the Mizos have a desire to give to those who do not have and those who are helpless, and to tell those who have not heard the good news'.<sup>420</sup>

The Mizos not only shared their goods, but also news. One important source was the *Zawlbuk*, the bachelor's dormitory where unmarried young men slept at night. Along with all kinds of instructions and sport activities, they shared any news with one another. When Christianity came, they carried on the principle of sharing and within a short period they engaged themselves in spreading the gospel to people around them.

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<sup>420</sup> Alwyn Roberts, *Interviewed*, (Bangor, North Wales: 23 October, 2005).

When a person hears and experiences the joy of the good news of Jesus Christ, the first thing she/he did was to share others. In other words, the simple Mizos lived in a sharing community in which the rich and poor had respect and mutual concern for one another.

However, the readiness to share news does not go easily beyond one's own community. While they are passionate to share the gospel to other Mizo clans scattered in other parts of India, they relate in another way to the *Meiteis* in Manipur and *Karbis* in Assam. While the Mizos have considerable zeal to share the good news to others they have some reservations of making relationship with people who have different cultural and social background. That may be the reason why the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram delayed the mission work among the Hindus and Muslims.

#### **b) Ethical foundation of Mizo culture and mission:**

Some Socio-cultural aspects contribute to help the church to be a dynamic mission church. One aspect is *tlawmngaihna*, which literally means resistance to being helped by others and helping others who are in need. It is an act of charity used in everyday life. F. Hrangkhuma, a Mizo missiologist called it the most beautiful word for the Mizos. Parents taught their children to be *tlawmngai person*.<sup>421</sup> K. Thanzauva, another Mizo theologian says that *tlawmngaihna* is based on the principle of self sacrifice and it is a social principle as well as the norm for good conduct of the people

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<sup>421</sup> F.Hrangkhuma, *Mizoram Transformational Change: A study of the process and Nature of Mizo Cultural Change and Factors that contributed to the Change*, (Pasadena: PhD Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1989), 61. Hereafter cited as 'Hrangkhuma, Mizoram Transformational Change'.

in the community.<sup>422</sup> This powerful concept of *tlawmngaihna*, Christianised in Mizo society and culture played a vital part in the missionary enterprise of the Mizos. This may be one of the most appealing dynamics, propelling the Mizos out to help those who have never heard the gospel. In other words, we may say that *tlawmngaihna* is communication in action. The whole work of Jesus as saviour-liberator can be seen as the highest form of *tlawmngaihna*, which is ‘to serve but not to be served’ and to sacrifice one’s life for others. It is the same *tlawmngaihna* that sends the Mizos to preach the gospel and it is therefore, possible to say that *tlawmngaihna* is a motivating principle for doing mission. This is true even today as many Mizo people visit mission fields either to spend passion week or Christmas to do voluntary works for the newly convert Christians.

However, one wonders how far this concept of selfless love and sacrifice to others is being practised when it relates to non-Mizos. Will the Mizos, who had to defend their respective village communities from intruders in pre-Christian era, be able to practice the same *tlawmngaihna* in relation to people, who have different social and cultural background? This is the significant and challenging question the Mizo Christians should ask themselves in their mission with people of other faiths.

## **7. Financial Contribution for mission:**

With the increase in mission operational areas and the number of Mizo missionaries to 1449<sup>423</sup> in 2008, a proportionate increase in mission fund is a prime necessity. The zeal for Christian mission ultimately inspired Mizo Christians to give generously. The

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<sup>422</sup> K.Thanzauva, *Theology of Community: Tribal Theology in the Making*, (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997), 120. Hereafter cited as ‘K. Thanzauva, Theology of Community’.

<sup>423</sup> Zoramthanga, ‘Engkim phut Chanchintha’ [Good News demand everything] in Zoramthanga, ed., *Ramthar* [Mission], Aizawl: Ramthar Association, May, 2008. 1.

importance of giving for Christian mission was expressed very well by one Mizo pastor Lengluta in his song ‘ *Pe rawh u tichuan pekin in awm ang* ’ (Give and you will be given).

To save who are perishing in this world  
God gave us his begotten son  
For the redeemed but lost in sin may find the way of life  
He calls us to do the ministry of giving.

Give then you will be given  
You cannot out do God in giving  
God never owes human beings  
He is the source of blessing.

The zeal for mission and evangelism has been nurtured and inspired by the type of song given above.

Secondly, there is a Mizo proverb, ‘*sem sem dam dam, ei bil thi thi*’ meaning the more you give the longer you live, the more you eat for yourself the sooner you die. This means that if you are generous and give liberally, you will live longer but if you are stingy you will die soon. With such a background, Mizo Christians give liberally and cheerfully for the Lord especially for mission and evangelism work. When the Mizos became Christians, their culturally ingrained giving was reinforced through the teaching from the Bible by the missionaries and the Mizos as well. And the establishment of the Synod Mission Board to handle mission funds in a proper way



helps to increase contributions to the church mission funds. It is clear from the above discussion that a large amount of money has been collected and spent on mission and evangelism by the Presbyterian Church. The statistical chart given below provides a good indication of the commitment of the Mizo Christians to mission.

**Figure one: Mission contribution<sup>424</sup>**

Year	Contribution for mission
1932	Rupees. 26.00
1942	Rupees. 840.00
1952	Rupees. 758.00
1962	Rupees. 13,896.00
1972	Rupees. 143,203.00
1982	Rupees. 2,093,891.00
1992	Rupees. 30,165,066.00
2002	Rupees. 112,519,256.00
2007	Rupees. 205,547,900.00

From the above table, we noticed that the income was low in the years 1932, 1942 and 1952 which were before the formation of the Synod Mission Board; this was when the individuals carried out most missionary activities and evangelism work. Since the formation of the Synod Mission Board there has been a rapid growth in mission funds. One of the reasons for the growth in mission funds may be that more and more local churches support mission and evangelism work with generous and sacrificial

<sup>424</sup> 'Mission and Evangelism' [article online] available from <http://www.mizoramsynod.org>; Internet; accessed; 10 January, 2008.

giving. Zaithanga, the first Mission Board Secretary said that The Mission Board does not seek to get financial help or support from outside the church; rather the main source of the mission fund comes from the free will contribution of the members of the local churches. Local churches are the backbone of the Synod Mission Board mission and evangelism work.

It would be quite rare to find a regional mission board which spends more than 40% of the total income of the church for mission and evangelism. The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram spent 40% of its annual income for mission and evangelism work, but they find it difficult to spend 10% of their income for social work to uplift its own people. The dominant concept of Christian mission as crossing the geographical boundaries of the state with the gospel to convert people of other faiths and to plant churches hinders the church from seeing the needs of their own society. The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram does not think that social transformation is one of the concerns of Christian mission. Rather the common opinion is that first of all it is the task of the government and the NGOs with foreign money. Why have the Mizos developed this attitude? I suspect that it is due to the lopsided concept of Christian mission.

Moreover, people are not concerned about how such a large amount is spent; they are satisfied with the explanation that it is spent on mission and evangelistic work. I am not suggesting here that the mission fund has been spending in improper way but we need to explore how it has been utilised. As an example, let us look at the minutes of Synod Executive Committee meeting held in November 5-9, 2007. In Resolution no. 63 there was a petition from the Mission Board to write off an amount of money

which was lost in Barak mission field and Arunachal field respectively.<sup>425</sup> Misuse, mismanagement and even misappropriation of funds may not be common in the Mizo Church, but it is important to be very careful in handling finance. Moreover, many churches in mission fields are dependent upon the grants made by the Mission Board or some local churches in Mizoram. Even to repair a church building or a mission schools, financial help has to come from the Mizo church. Easy money makes people lazy and irresponsible. Some of the issues raised against the Christian community in India are lack of financial accountability, over-dependence on foreign fund and lack of sensitivity to people of other faiths.

## **8. CRITIQUE ON MISSION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF MIZORAM:**

The old missionary movement in the west had a history which ran almost parallel with the history of western colonisation. This came to an end as the process of colonisation came to an end and the former colonial countries became independent one after another. The ex-colonial countries then had an opportunity to think for the first time of their own history and the churches also became independently responsible for their own mission and evangelism work. The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram also took up her mission work seriously and sent missionaries to different parts of India. It is indeed good to see the church aware of its missionary obligation, while it is continues to increase its effort in mission and evangelism work all these years. Starting from a small corner in Mizoram and spreading out through several parts of north and central India to other parts of the world. From a starting point of few hundred rupees, the mission funds have grown to several millions of rupees, which is indeed a big leap for

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<sup>425</sup> Minute of the 214th Synod Executive Committee, November 5-9, 2007, Mizoram Presbyterian Church, Aizawl, 36-37.

the Presbyterian Church. Moreover, the mission and evangelism work creates a good atmosphere of oneness among the members of the church. However, the Presbyterian Church still works with the traditional understanding of mission and reveals little or nothing of what has been taking place in the ecumenical movement since the New Delhi WCC Assembly in 1961. The main aim is to make converts, produce numerical growth of the members of the church and plant churches. F. Hrangkhuma has pointed out that the main concept of the Mizo mission is mainly winning souls to the Lord and planting churches. It is not the intention of the church to save from economic and political injustices which are inflicted upon the society. He further commented that though the Mizos often say that their mission is the extension of the kingdom of God, yet it is always limited to saving souls and church planting.<sup>426</sup> If one closely looks at the mission and evangelism work of the Presbyterian Church, much serious thought and careful analysis seems to be needed.

**Firstly**, the missionary mandate given to Christians is ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching to observe all that I have commanded you; lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.’<sup>427</sup> Obedience to the great commission demands willingness to enter into different cultures of the world and communicate the gospel meaningfully. Therefore the church has been called to bear witness to God’s love by proclaiming Jesus Christ as the life of the world. Since Jesus Christ is the good news to the whole world, it makes great impact in society and transforms it. But in reality most of the time Christian mission focuses on proclamation alone and neglects

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<sup>426</sup> F. Hrangkhuma, ‘Mission lama Zofate hmasawwna tur’ in Vanlalmuankima, K. Lalrammawia, eds., *Chhualhtlang* (Serampore: Serampore Mizo Fellowship, 1994-95), 70.

<sup>427</sup> Matthew 28: 19-20.

practical part. The Mizo missionaries forget to recognise that proclamation and participation are two sides of the same coin of the gospel.

It is true that throughout the history of the Presbyterian Church, the main goal of mission is proclamation of the gospel and making of disciples. In so doing, the *modus operandi* is exclusive, triumphalistic and of a dominant nature. Pluralism whether religious, cultural or ethnic is revealed as part of God's purpose in the biblical vision of healing, wholeness and reconciliation, but the church is not obedient to this biblical vision. It is a fact that most of the Christian mission songs and stories still continue to stress the religious superiority complex and arrogance, perpetuate religious fundamentalism and reduce the vision inherent in the gospel to a narrow parochialism.

If we look at the history and mission strategies of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, it can be seen that her mission aimed foremost at saving of the souls from eternal damnation. The idea of saving souls is backed by a concept inspired by the evolutionary theory that views the 'cultured' western Christian race to be highly superior to the 'uncultured heathen' elsewhere. Mizo missionaries were sent, therefore, not only to save the souls of the heathen from damnation, but also to civilise them. Mission therefore, primarily aimed at the conversion of the heathen into Christian race through which it expanded Christendom by inculcating its values among the heathens. The driving force at the heart of this mission was the spirit of crusade backed by the colonial expansionism. Various strategies were devised to achieve the goal of conversion and the expansion of Christendom. This understanding of mission continues to dominate a large number of 'mission minded' churches including the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram and individuals of today.

**Secondly**, there seems to be a one sided emphasis on one aspect of the great commission and that is baptism. A Christian recognises the place of baptism as a sacrament signifying our unity with Jesus Christ. In a significant passage about baptism Paul says, ‘do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into his death, so that just as Christ was raised from dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.’<sup>428</sup> But the same Paul in another context says, ‘Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel.’<sup>429</sup> Most commentators say that Paul had to say that in a situation where divisions were developing in the Corinthian church around the issue of baptism. The context makes it sound quite likely.

No doubt we have accepted baptism as a sacrament being celebrated ever since the inception of the church. And a verse like ‘he who believed and is baptised will be saved’ (Mark 16: 16) makes it appear to be a condition for salvation. Quite apart from the possibility that this particular text may not have been in the original gospel, the question is how we to understand this text? Did Jesus place baptism as a condition for being saved on a par with faith? All through the pre-resurrection ministry of Jesus we find him ascribing great value to faith, but he says not a word about baptism by way of prescribing it as a sacrament to be administered. He sends out his disciples to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God, but he does not ask them to baptize.

It is in the light of this understanding of faith and baptism the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram need to perhaps review the whole question of baptism, which has been

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<sup>428</sup> Romans 6:3-4.

<sup>429</sup> I Corinthian 1:17.

raised at different stages in the history of the church. Should baptism determine the boundary of the church? There are at least two notable examples of the rejection of baptism as a necessary sacrament, namely the Salvation Army and the Society of Friends (Quakers).

The issue is not to be mixed up with any fear of persecution from Hindu fundamentalists or religious fanatics. It is only an honest way of facing the seriousness of costly discipleship. Do we not find Christians who believe that since they are baptised and have become part of the body of Christ, they have now arrived in the safety zone of salvation? They feel content that they are part of the community destined for salvation and that whatever the quality of their life they have a claim with God. If baptism has lost its original meaning and value, is there any point continuing it? Or do we still believe we can regain its value as an appropriate sign of one's becoming a member of the body of Christ in the true sense of the term? Is it humanly possible to determine where the saving influence of the love of Christ stops? It is Christ who draws people of different cultural and social background to himself. Should the Presbyterian Church not then be open to the possibility of developing fellowships of believers beyond the circle of baptised community, whose centre is still the Lord Jesus Christ?

**Thirdly**, the Mizo missionaries firmly believe that the revelation in Jesus Christ is final once and for all. This means that outside the institutional church there is no revelation of God. There is no revelation in other religions. It is therefore not correct to say that God is present among other peoples or religions and he works among them. It is therefore the duty of a Mizo Christian to proclaim the gospel and bring people to

faith in Jesus Christ. For the Mizo Christians, the revelation through Jesus Christ is supreme and crucial. This fact can be highlighted in the reports of the Missionary Annual Convention, as it reports replete with statement such as, ‘soul being added to the church’, winning non-Christians and bringing them into the Christian fold’, and ‘there being more land to be possessed and more soul to be won for the Lord’. Thus proclaiming the salvation in Jesus and adding people to the church constitutes the mission of the Presbyterian Church.

It is rather unfortunate that Jesus call to the people to enter the kingdom of God has been misconceived as entering the gates of the church. Much serious thought need to be given to the missionary mandate of Jesus recorded in Mt. 28: 18-20. Did the commission imply the formation of separate religious community with its creed, code and labelled as Christian? Mission indeed is praying and working for the kingdom of God on earth.<sup>430</sup> It is important that the Presbyterian Church should broaden its concept of mission, in which the kingdom of God would come into individual and corporate life, through words and deeds.

Moreover, the Mizo concept of spirituality and its theological orientation is otherworldly and not down to earth in character. This idea seems to be against the very nature of Christian mission. As Hans Kung has pointed out, the church exists for the world by being linked to the world. Of course it must not simply conform to the world. But knowing as it does about the mercy of the one true God, who so loved the world that he gave his only Son for it, the church has from the first be deeply linked with the world. The church cannot shut itself off from the world in a ghetto and live a

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<sup>430</sup> Roger Gaikward, ‘Contextualization of Theological Education and Mission in North East India’, Seminar paper presented at Aizawl Theological College, Aizawl, 1994, 8.



life of its own in splendid isolation. It must rather face up to the challenge of the world, accept it, share in its hopes and anxieties, its venture and its failures.<sup>431</sup> As the mission of Jesus is meant for the world, so is the mission of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram. It should never be limited within the four walls of the church.

**Fourthly**, one of the characteristics of the Mizo concept of mission is the saved and the lost or a sender and receiver relationship. The sender possesses the full truth and has the inescapable commission from God to bring this truth to the receiver. The receiver is the heathen, who still walks in darkness and has no knowledge of truth. His/her religion is the way of darkness. If he/she does not receive the truth he/she will die in sin and lose eternal life. Hence we see the urgency of mission and evangelism.

I have often felt that Mizo Christians have made too easy for ourselves to preach about salvation to people of other faiths saying that believe in Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. And we presume that we possess that kind of faith whereby we are already saved and they are all doomed to hell. When the Mizo Christians take up the task of evangelism and approach the other people with such an attitude, are they not really being guided by the notion that what really saves them is the fact of being 'Christians' and what leads others to judgement is the fact that they are 'non-Christians'. Here saving faith get mixed up with religious identity. Also there could be a kind of hidden arrogance in the very use of the term Christians and non-Christians when used in the mission context. When we approach the people of other religions, we generally go with the idea that since we belong to the Christian community, we have already passed the test of salvation and have been qualified for

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<sup>431</sup> Hans Kung, *The Church* (London: Burns & Oates Limited, 1969), 485-486.

eternal life. Those who still remain outside the baptised community of Christians are liable to eternal punishment. Is it possible to think of salvation and judgement in terms of religious identity?

In any case, who are those people for whom the Mizo Christians are so much concerned, and for whom they feel a burden for their salvation? Are they the ones who had never heard about Jesus Christ? That is certainly not the case, because a large number of Hindus, Muslims and others know much more about Jesus Christ than many of the Christians. Are they then the ones who have not come to a real commitment to Christ and have no real faith? This again is not a legitimate reason for crossing the religious boundary between Christians and others as though that boundary is the boundary between salvation and judgement, for how many of the Christians have such a real commitment and faith? In that case, can we look upon them as unbelievers ready to be eternally damned unless they take baptism and join the church? Surely the more educated and enlightened among the people of other faiths would only laugh at the idea of Christians being saved. We ought to completely agree with Lesslie Newbigin when he says that we must refuse to engage in speculation about the ultimate salvation of other people. The question of eternal salvation and judgement is not for speculation about the fate of other people; it is an infinitely serious practical question addressed to me.<sup>432</sup>

**Fifthly**, one of the most troubling features of the mission or the evangelistic witness of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram is the sense of threat that is experienced by those to whom the message is brought. On the one hand, the Mizo missionaries

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<sup>432</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret, An Introduction to Theology of Mission* (London: SPCK, 1991) 88.

announce that the motive of mission is the announcement of the gracious love of God that has been made available to all humankind. They claim that in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, they have God as a loving and forgiving God, who brings healing and wholeness into the lives of the people, irrespective of whom they are and their situation in life, spiritual and material. They also proclaim that in and through his life and death, Jesus revealed to them that the challenge of participation in this love involves a radical realignment of their lives, not only in relation to God but also in relation to their neighbours. This is both good and challenging news and we are aware that from the very beginning while many responded to the message, some opted to become part of a community that became the bearers of, witnesses to, this good news in word and in life.

However, on the other hand, people of other faiths do not experience Christian mission as an activity that concentrates on healing and wholeness of life, but as one that creates a rival community, by offering a salvation to those who would come into it, which was claimed to be superior and which was not available elsewhere. Thus people of other faiths perceive the motive of Christian mission as Stanley Samartha has aptly put it, ‘as the extension of the church and the extinction of other faiths.’<sup>433</sup>

The Christian preoccupation in the understanding of mission with the expansion of the church, numbers of converts and the open attitude of measuring the success of mission in terms of the numbers who have been won for Christ has been one of the major problems of the Presbyterian Church. In much of Christian mission this

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<sup>433</sup> S. Wesley Ariarajah, ‘Mission in the Context of religions and Cultures’, in Lalsangkima Pachuau, ed., *Ecumenical Missiology: Contemporary Trends, Issues and Themes*, (Bangalore: United Theological College, 2002), 193. Hereafter cited as ‘Ariarajah, Mission’.

approach of counting is seen as both desirable and necessary, leading to the other problem the Mizo Christians face in their practice of mission.

**Finally**, ever since the emphasis in mission moved to the creation of a community, away from the task of healing of the nations and from disciplining them to the reign of God and teaching them all that Jesus had taught about what leads to the Life and what does not, the Christian mission fell into the trap of creating yet another religion. There is of course nothing wrong with being a religion. But then we must accept that is what we are. In Matthew's account of the Sermon on the Mount, what fascinates me on the teaching on giving alms, praying or fasting so that 'others may see' is Jesus comment that 'they have received their reward.' Of course one could give alms or pray or fast so that others may see, and others would indeed be impressed, but insists that the matter ends there.

Our understanding of mission also needs to make choices. If the creation of a religious community is our primary goal of mission, we have had our reward. And that reward, since Christianity is not a reform movement within any existing religions in India, but is brought from outside, can come only by breaking up existing community and not by transforming it. Thus, Christian mission as we understand and practice today is experienced by other religious communities as that which disrupts communities, that which breaks up communities and set up a rival community.<sup>434</sup> The lack of success points to the silent resistance to it during colonial days. This is how the powerless deal with the powerful. Today, with the change in power balance, resistance is also organized and unsurprisingly Christians face resistance.

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<sup>434</sup> Ariarajah, *Mission*, 194.

The traditional type of missionary approach adopted by the Mizo missionaries is seen by others as one which exhibits an intolerant and arrogant attitude. Therefore Mizo Christian missionaries are accused of engaging in proselytisation. The missionary activities among the poor, the outcastes and the tribal in India under the pretext of rendering social service and development are seen with suspicion and are strictly forbidden in some areas like Bihar and Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. The old 'holier than thou attitude' towards people of other faiths, the one way traffic in mission and the proclamation as a monologue are no longer appreciated in India. Rethinking in mission approach becomes indispensable and urgent for the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram today.

In this context, the mission of the Presbyterian Church should be re-oriented and should not be understood only in terms of pastoral care. The mission of the church must be understood in terms of witness to the world. The church is called to render to do a loving service to humankind irrespective of culture and race, rich and poor, men and women. Mission therefore, is sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of the wholeness of life in its individual, social and cosmic dimensions. Again, the mission of the Presbyterian Church must be concerned with all humanity, not only its members. It is the mission of the church to go out and get involved in the struggle for human dignity, freedom to break the fetters of various kinds of oppression and exploitation. In short, the mission of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram must be conceived as to be on the side of the oppressed, to be involved in their struggle for justice, to be identified with the poor in the light of the gospel.

I am also convinced that the most urgent need in the mission of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram today is contextualization. Contextualization broadens the understanding of culture to include social, political, and economic questions. In this way, culture is understood in a more dynamic and flexible ways, and is seen not as closed and self contained, but as open and able to be enriched by an encounter with other cultures and movements. Unless the church presents the gospel locally in ways that connect to people's language, culture and worldview, the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram will not succeed in her missionary endeavours.

## **9. CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, when we look back the analytical study of the mission of Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, it can be said that the impact of western theology was so great that it captured the whole theological norms of the Mizo Christians. Even shifts in the theological thinking in other parts of the world have no effect on Mizo Christian theology. The influences of western theology upon Mizo Christians can be stated as follows.

Firstly, the imported western theology that dominated the Mizo Christian theology is the pietistic evangelical paradigm, an exclusive theology which ignores the Mizo world view, religious and traditional culture.<sup>435</sup> As the Mizo religio-cultural was neglected, it not only created alienation but also gave a superiority complex to the Christians. Christianity is the only right religion and all other religions are false religions and the adherents of other religions will go to hell as they are the idolaters. They respect neither Hinduism nor Buddhism or any other religions except

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<sup>435</sup> K. Thanzauva, *Mizo leh Mission*, 178.

Christianity. This spirit or mentality is cultivated in the Mizo Christianity. Theologically speaking, dialogue between Christianity and other religions is seen as unchristian and totally rejected. Further, the strategies of Mizo mission remain converting and saving souls and church planting. Other forms of mission like development projects and social works are not regarded as real mission at all. The Mizo Christians inherited a western conservative evangelical theology which totally neglected the values of the Mizo traditional religion, customs and cultural practices. As a result almost all the values of the Mizo culture and traditions were marginalised as secular and pagan. Therefore, Christianity inevitably takes the form of a western image.<sup>436</sup>

Secondly, from the analytical study of the Presbyterian mission, one can conclude that the existing Mizo theology of mission interprets salvation in terms of 'salvation of souls'. It is true that the Mizo theologian Tlanghmingthanga pointed out that even today, the primary goal of Mizo mission is 'only for the salvation of the souls, neither including the whole person nor creation'.<sup>437</sup> In fact, this dichotomized or dualistic view of salvation separates human beings as having body and soul separately. According to the Mizo traditional concept, human possess soul and body. Soul and body are interdependent and inseparable. If they were separated, the person would feel sick or ill or even die. The Mizo traditional view integrates body and soul and in the light of this view, the existing Mizo theology of mission about the salvation must be corrected. They must interpret salvation in terms of not only salvation of souls, but with the body and all creation. This is very much in agreement with the biblical concept of salvation which will bring social transformation in the society.

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<sup>436</sup> H. Vanlalauva, *Theology in Mizo Thought* 28-29.

<sup>437</sup> Tlanghmingthanga, 'Mizo Christian view of Eschatology' in *Didakhe*, vol. XXIV, No. 9, 1996, 10.

Biblical salvation, therefore, is not for souls but for persons, for the natural world (Rom. 8:19-23), and the universe. The blessings of salvation encompass everything that gives life, including but not limited to divine life, sanctifying grace, or beatific vision. It is not narrowly limited to the private sphere of the individual person but also has to do with the social, political, economic and other dimensions of life.<sup>438</sup>

This new view enriches Mizo theology of mission and corrects the concept of salvation to include the social, political, economic and other dimensions of life for the transformation of the society here and now.

Thirdly, from the above discussion, we may conclude that the Mizo Christian spiritualities tended to be exclusive. The more Mizo Christians maintained this exclusive position, the better Christian they became. For example, to be an authentic Christian means excluding other religious adherents as pagan and outside the revelation of God. In fact, this position does not encourage peace and reconciliation in a religious pluralistic context like India where the Presbyterian Church is doing mission work. As Hindus are the majority and Christians are the minority, there exist a religio-cultural inequality and discrimination. The experiences of the Mizo Christians in this regard become theological issues and call for reflection. In this context, the author suggests 'dialogue' as the best way to deal with people of other faiths. The Mizo church cannot be in mission without dialogue. Mizo spirituality must go beyond the existing exclusive theological position. A new understanding of

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<sup>438</sup> Carlos H. Abesamis, 'Salvation' in Virginia Fabella & R.S. Sugirtharajah, eds., *The SCM Dictionary of Third World Theologies* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 181-182.



ecumenism, which unites all the religions through inter-faith dialogue, co-operation and fellowship with the purpose of achieving love and creating peace, social transformation, will generate deeper spirituality in the inter-faith context. This new understanding, the new inclusive or pluralistic religio-spirituality will bring a change in the existing Mizo theology of mission.

The western evangelical exclusive theology which the Mizos inherited from the missionaries can not cope anymore with the present context with all its problems. The time has come to develop Mizo theology of mission that would squarely address the present reality by taking into account the social, economic and political problems for the transformation of the society.

## **Chapter Five**

### **TOWARDS A MIZO THEOLOGY OF MISSION**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

The idea of paradigm changes in theology which has been discussed in the previous chapter is of importance and relevance for the understanding of Christian theology of mission in our contemporary world. The primary purpose of this chapter is to create a relevant contextual theology of mission for the Mizo church out of the interaction between the gospel and the traditional cultural practices of the Mizos. This chapter looks at the traditional concept of God-human-world relationship and its significance for the construction of a contextual Mizo theology of mission for social transformation. It will be helpful to discuss briefly the centrality of the God-human-world relationship in Christian theology and how the gradual shift in the understanding of God-human-world relationship has been taking place before discussing the actual Mizo concept of God-human-world relationship. This will help us to see the validity of the Mizo understanding of God-human-world relationship for the formation of a Mizo theology of mission. We will also look at the significance of this model for the eco-theology and the Mizo feminist theology of mission for the transformation of the Mizo society. It is quite obvious that unless certain principles of life or philosophy provide the basis, no society can practise such a communitarian way of living. The author will look at the underlying principles of the Mizo communitarian society called '*tlawmngaihna*', its meaning, theological validity and its significance for the transformation of the Mizo society towards the fullness and realization of God-intended life for human community.

## **2. GOD-HUMAN-WORLD RELATIONSHIP:**

It will be helpful to discuss briefly the centrality of God-human-world relationship in Christian theology and the gradual shift in the understanding of the God-human-world relationship which has been taking place before discussing the actual Mizo concept of God-human-world relationship. This will help us to see the validity of the Mizo understanding of God-human-world relationship for a Mizo Christian theology of mission. Since our world view or understanding of God-human-world relationship affects our attitudes, the way we understand ourselves, the way we relate to other people, and the way we relate to the environment, the earth and all other creatures, a proper articulation of the Christian understanding of the God-human-world relationship is important. A right understanding of God-human-world will not only give us an appropriate vision of society, it will also inspire us to struggle to build a new social order.

Theology itself may also be defined as a systematic and coherent articulation of how the community of faith perceives God-human-world relationships, to assist the community and individual believers to be more effectively engaged in the mission of Jesus Christ for the realisation of the reign of God here and now.<sup>439</sup> For David Tracy, ‘God-human-world’ is an analogical imagination of an ordered relationship, which expresses the inseparable inter-connection of these realities. It remains possible to distinguish them, to understand them distinctively in order to unite these mutually reinforcing realities into the similarities-in-difference, the ordered relationships of a

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<sup>439</sup> K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 149.

systematic theology.<sup>440</sup> Theology is concerned to explain how people have perceived and experienced the interrelationship of these three realities.

### **2.1. Theological debate on God-human-world Relationship:**

In the history of Christian thought this relationship has been described basically in two models – the transcendental model and the immanental model. These models have been used to classify the two types of God-human-world relationship in the history of religions as indicated below:

<b><u>Transcendental model</u></b>	<b><u>Immanental Model</u></b>
Kathenotheism	Animism
Henotheism	Fethism
Deism	Polytheism
Monotheism	Dualism
Absolute Monotheism	Pantheism

Though this distinction of two types is in some respects superficial, it reflects the basic trends of religious thought in general and in Christian theology in particular. The transcendental model insists that God is prior to, distinct from, and thus beyond the world, not to be confused with anything in the world but has its being and comes to the world from ‘beyond’. Karl Barth summarises his early point of view as an emphasis on God as ‘wholly other’ breaking in upon us perpendicularly from above’, and on the ‘infinite qualitative distinction’ between God and man’.<sup>441</sup> This concept

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<sup>440</sup> David Tracey, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM, 1981), 429-430.

<sup>441</sup> Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (London: Collins, 1961), 39.

of God 'out there' or 'up there' necessitates the 'creator-creatures' or 'master-servant' or monarchical model of God-human-world relationship.

J.A.T. Robinson argued that the idea of God 'out there' or 'up there' and 'wholly other' was overturned by the Copernican view, the spatial view of transcendence was interpreted by Christians in a symbolic sense. The idea of God 'out there' for Robinson lost its significance. It is 'a projection, an idol that can and should be torn down'.<sup>442</sup> Increasingly theologians have either made the shift from a traditional transcendental model to an immanental model or are at least having sought to reconcile the two.

John Macquarrie reacted to the idea of the otherness of God and said that some theologians have made it more difficult because they have assumed a concept of God which separates him so absolutely from the created order that the gulf between can never be bridged. If there is no affinity whatever between God and the human race, if God is 'wholly other' and separated from us by an 'infinite qualitative' difference, then it seems to me that the incarnation of Jesus Christ is not only an absolute paradox but a sheer impossibility.<sup>443</sup> Between these two extreme poles of immanence and transcendence of God, the Mizo vision of God-human-world relationship can also provide an integrating concept, and may be used to develop an authentic Christian doctrine of God-human-world relationship.

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<sup>442</sup> J.A.T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM, 1963), 17, 41.

<sup>443</sup> John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM, 1990), 376.

## 2.2. The Mizo voice in the Debate:

In the Mizo traditional religious belief, there was an implicit idea of a Supreme Being which anthropologists generally called the 'high God' or *Pathian*, a God of all humanity and goodness.<sup>444</sup> Apart from the Supreme Being, they also believed in the existence of celestial beings that are more personal and more involved in human affairs than the Supreme Being, who is remote. They also believe in both benevolent and malevolent spirits. As they regarded the malevolent spirits to be the cause of their suffering, they used to offer sacrifice to evil spirits. When the missionaries saw the Mizos offering sacrifice to evil spirits for appeasement, they generally thought that they were worshipping evil spirits. The idea of worshipping evil spirits seems to have been developed by the observers, not the Mizo themselves. This observation of anthropologists on tribal religion, which influenced the missionaries, is what the Native Americans have called the legacy of Columbus.<sup>445</sup>

Based on their cosmology or the science of the universe, heaven is above and the earth below. They believed that the abode of the Supreme Being and all other celestial beings is heaven, though they frequently visited human beings and lived with them.<sup>446</sup> Thus human beings who lived on earth saw their existence as living in the midst of spirits and so they offered sacrifices to spirits. One may think that the Mizos in reality worshipped the evil spirits, not the Supreme Being because they offered sacrifices to the evil spirits. In the light of theodicy, the offering of sacrifices to evil spirits may be explained as the solution to the problem of evil. How is the existence of evil and suffering in the world consistent with the existence of a supreme God who

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<sup>444</sup> K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 152.

<sup>445</sup> Bartholomew Mella, 'Indigenous Culture and Evangelization: Challenge for Liberating Mission', *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 81, No. 324, October, 1992, 551-561.

<sup>446</sup> Wati A., Longchar, *The Traditional Tribal Worldview Modernity* (Jorhat: N. Limala, 1995), 33-34.

is believed to be both omnipotent and good? Adherents of all religions faced this question and pondered on the possible origin of evil.

The Hindus regarded *karma* (the deeds of human beings) as the root cause of evil whereas Christians regarded sin as originating from Satan. The Mizos held malevolent spirits responsible for all evils. For the Hindus it is the human being who is responsible, whereas the Christians and the Mizos found the root cause not merely as originating from human beings, but from a power beyond human control known as Satan or evil spirits. The traditional Christian idea of Satan and the Mizo idea of evil spirits have certain affinities. The Mizos, who experienced human limitations in their day- to- day encounter with nature tried to protect themselves from misfortunes and blamed malevolent spirits instead of blaming either God or human beings. In this way they removed God from the picture. Ultimately, the Supreme God was seen as uninvolved in human affairs.

The seeming transcendence of God in Mizo tradition was a product of the problem of evil. In other respects, however, they believed in the immanence of God. The Supreme Being was believed to be a compassionate and gracious God who acted not coercively, but persuasively and lovingly. The Supreme Being was not a silent spectator. The chant or invocation used by a Mizo priest during the sacrificial offering to the guardian spirit of the clan or family given in chapter one reflected that the Supreme God is acting through a particular guardian spirit who is believed to be everywhere.

The apparent hierarchy in the relationship of beings is sacred order rather than a social ideal of gradation. The spirits, humans and animals are differentiated at the existential level, but there is no real distinction in the Mizo cosmology that may convey the ontological separateness between the Supreme Being, the spirits and human beings. Perhaps the best way to grasp the differentiation is to think of the functional aspects of interrelatedness of all existing things and beings in the larger context of the cosmic process.<sup>447</sup> In spite of functional differences, God-human-world formed a community in which they are interrelated, it is therefore, quite legitimate to describe this relationship as a 'community model of relationship'.

### **3. MODEL OF GOD-HUMAN-WORLD RELATIONSHIP:**

It is quite clear from the preceding discussion that the Mizo concept of God-human-world relationship is derived neither from strict ideas of transcendence nor immanence, nor monotheism nor polytheism. None of these categories reflects adequately the Mizo understanding of God-human-world relationship. A Community model seems to be the most appropriate model to express the Mizo concept of God-human-world relationship. In the Mizo understanding God is never perceived as wholly other but as the one who participates in the life of the world. David Hasselgrave rightly notes that the tribal worldview transcends the sacred-secular dichotomy peculiar to western thinking, and brings together in a single system, nature and super nature, space and time, this world and the other world. Thus unity is not that of monism or pantheism, however, it is rather a unity of continuance in which boundaries between deities, spirits, animals, humans and natural phenomena are more

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<sup>447</sup> B. Saraswati, *Tribal Thought and Culture* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1991), 17.



or less obscure and shifting.<sup>448</sup> If we are going to explain this complex relationship with the help of a model, it is a community model of God-human-world relationship which would certainly provide the best explanation.

A brief discussion of three different models may help to further clarify the meaning of a community model of God-human-world relationship.

### **3.1. Monarchical or Transcendental model:**

This model maintains a sharp distinction between God and all other creatures. The idea of extreme transcendence of God is developed from the monotheistic concept of God which is a belief that there is but one Supreme Being, who is personal and moral and who seeks a total and unqualified response from human creatures.<sup>449</sup> It was a great achievement on the part of the people of Israel to acknowledge God as distinct and different from all other creatures, over against pantheism and polytheism which dominated the world of religion. This idea of transcendence was continued and developed by Christianity to the extent of making God ‘wholly other’, living ‘out there’. In the portrayal of God’s relation to the world, the dominant western historical model has been that of the absolute monarch ruling over his kingdom.<sup>450</sup> In this model, the relationship of God-human-world is made possible by mediators such as prophets, priest and finally Jesus Christ. A group of theologians brought together by WCC to discuss the theme of *Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation* in Canberra Assembly expressed the problem of this model. ‘As we think about the way to express the relationship of God to the world in our time, we realise that metaphors

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<sup>448</sup> David J. Hasselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross Culturally* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 149.

<sup>449</sup> John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1963), 3.

<sup>450</sup> Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: The Nature of Scientific and Religious Language* (London: SCM, 1974), 156.

such as king and lord limit God's activity to the human sphere; moreover, these metaphors suggest that God is external to the world and distant from it'.<sup>451</sup> God was thought to be worldless and accordingly, the world could be conceived as godless. Since this concept of God is considered partly responsible for the ecological crisis today, J. Moltmann insisted that 'the first change we must make is to our image of God, because the way we think about God is also the way we think about ourselves and nature.'<sup>452</sup>

### **3.2. Organic or Immanent Model:**

The organic model of God-human-world relationship emphasises the interconnectedness of all else and uses the self-body analogy to explain the nature of this relationship. The relationship of the body and self is transposed to the relationship of God as the self of the universe which is his body. From this perspective, an organic model seems to be the most appropriate to express both the immanence of God in the entire creation as well as God's transcendence of it. An organic model means that humans and other living creatures live together within the body; they are part of each other and can in no way exist separately.<sup>453</sup> While the interconnectedness of all creatures and God is profoundly expressed, the model seems inadequate to explain the doctrine of sin, human freedom and uniqueness. Does God also become sinful along with human beings as a part of the body? How do we explain human responsibility and freedom within the same organ? These are the fundamental questions which cannot be convincingly explained by the organic model. Some of

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<sup>451</sup> Charles Birch, William Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel, eds., *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 276, quoted in K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 158. Hereafter cited as 'Charles Birch, *Liberating Life*.'

<sup>452</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, 'Reconciliation with Nature' in *Pacifica*, Vol. 5, 1992, 304, quoted in K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 159.

<sup>453</sup> K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 159.

these problems can be clearly seen in the WCC's convention in Seoul (1990). It sounds to many observers that the relationship of human beings and fellow creatures is romanticised. Genuine agreement is possible only between partners who are capable of entering into reciprocal relationship.

### **3.3. Communitarian Model:**

Like the organic model, the communitarian model affirms the common origin and interconnectedness of all creation, but unlike the organic model it maintains the distinctive identities of all creation and acknowledges the unique position of humans in the created order. The uniqueness of human beings is certainly not an ontological discontinuity, but by degrees of development in the evolutionary process in which humans become more capable, rational, free and powerful. This unique condition of human beings is expressed by the priestly writers as endowed with the image of God.<sup>454</sup> It is important for human beings to be constantly aware of the fact that we were a part of the larger living community and unable to exist in isolation from other creatures. The concept of human community, the feeling of oneness, a sense of identity is widened to include all creatures. In this community, God is seen as the originator and ground of community. Thus, the act of creation is regarded not as what a potter or an artist does, but as bringing forth as the mother does. This means that the universe including our earth with all its creatures lives and moves and has its being in God. Creation is an event in time, a dynamic of becoming, from which human beings emerge and in which they find themselves involved. They are therefore, creatures

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid, 160.

among other creatures in the community of creation. Many of these ideas have been helpfully developed in conjunction with feminist approaches to theology.<sup>455</sup>

### **3. 4. Significance for Mizo Theology of Mission:**

We now turn to what positive contributions this model may make as part of the basis for social transformation. Primarily, the ‘Communitarian model of God’ means for the Mizo Christians, returning to their roots or original understanding of God-human-world relationship. The idea of ‘other worldliness of god’ and the ‘dichotomistic concept of reality’ were not original Mizo concepts. They were inherited from the western missionaries who were the product of the evangelical revival in Europe. The theological seeds that they sowed in Mizoram were of the conservative evangelical theology which emphasized the transcendency of God, verbal inspiration of the Bible and salvation of souls for life after death. Eventually this has made Christians other-worldly, maintaining sharp distinctions between the soul and the body, secular and religious. It is important to explain these problems briefly before exploring the theological significance of the community model of the God-human-world relationship for social transformation.

The problem of a dichotomistic concept of reality, developed mainly among the educated or enlightened people, was that their religious conviction and moral teaching are meant only for the purpose of religion, they had nothing to do with their day-to-day life. This dualistic concept of reality, separation of secular and religious, body and soul is partly responsible for the present rampant corruption and increasing social evils in the Mizo society. This theology, although it was inherited from missionaries

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<sup>455</sup> Sally McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age* (London: SCM, 1987). Sally McFague has made significant contribution in this book.

gained momentum since 1960's and penetrated the whole Christian community in Mizoram. Since saving the soul for life after death was the ultimate concern, they stressed the 'born again' experience in order to be saved.

Unconsciously or consciously, Luther's 'two-kingdoms' theory, developed from Augustine's idea of 'two cities,' was adopted and has become a lasting, dominant social theology since the time of Christian missionaries till today. While this is a social political necessity, many Christians neither see the need nor make efforts to bring Christian values to bear upon the social system. They lived with a dichotomistic view of reality.

While the imported theology, to a certain extent, is responsible for the orientation of the Mizo Christians towards other worldliness, we have also to look into the history of Mizo Christianity itself. It is quite probable that the hardship and frustration of the early Christians in Mizoram resulted in other worldliness. It is interesting to note how the traditional celebration of life turned out to be a longing for eschatological celebration. For example, the Mizo communitarian society celebrated life together not only in the many festivals but also in their daily work and leisure time. When they were converted to Christianity, they gave up drinking rice beer, abstained from participation in the festivals and became a lonely, isolated, marginalised minority group. When the revival movement came, the frustration and hardship turned into a hope for greater and everlasting celebration in heaven. The gift of the Holy Spirit was perceived as a foretaste of a celebration to come, accordingly heaven was perceived

as a place of endless congregation and celebration.<sup>456</sup> The problem with this hope is its ‘other worldliness’ a consequent mystification of life’s problems and escapism from life struggle among a common people. The hope of heaven has to a certain extent, made them irresponsible and escapists avoiding struggle for the better society.

The understanding of God-human-world as belonging to one community helps the Mizo Christians to rediscover a holistic concept of reality from their tradition. Such a concept would be in contrast to the dominant theology in Mizoram, with its sharp distinction between secular and religious. It would provide a theological basis to inspire and orient the churches towards a social involvement to bring about social change. A holistic concept of reality emphasises the inter-relatedness of all things, against dualism. The significance for social transformation is primarily a theological re-orientation of the churches to be more realistic and subsequently be inclusive in their mission. A holistic concept of reality is a call to Mizo Christians to be more inclusive and balanced in their theological articulation and actual mission and evangelism work.

This would lead the Mizo Christians to broaden the circle of salvation, from salvation of individual souls for life after death to an understanding of cosmic salvation – the total salvation of human beings with their body, soul, spirit, society and all other creatures as well, here and now and in the future. Along this line, Gustavo Gutierrez has written, ‘Salvation is not something other worldly, in regard to which the present life is merely a test. Salvation is something which embraces all human reality;

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<sup>456</sup> This hypothesis is supported by many songs and hymns composed by the Mizo Christians in the early period.

transform it to its fullness in Christ.<sup>457</sup> Paulos Mar Gregorios said that human redemption can be understood only as an integral part of the redemption of the whole creation.<sup>458</sup> Accordingly, history will be regarded as 'one'. There is no separate history of salvation and profane history. There is only one human destiny, irreversibly assumed by Christ, the Lord of history. The idea of singular history rejects the monopoly of the historical process by the privileged group of society, putting the vast majority of the people on the underside of history. The concern of Christian mission for the Mizo church also has to be broadened from conversion for saving souls to include liberation of the total human being, society and nature from the bondage of sin. Above all, it implies reconstruction of the Mizo theology of mission in order to re-orient the Mizo churches towards a holistic approach in mission and evangelism.

#### **4. SIGNIFICANCE FOR ECO –THEOLOGY OF MISSION:**

The Mizo concept of 'God-human-world relationship' is making a significant contribution to the emerging ecological theology. In the Mizo concept of this relationship there is no place for an arrogant approach to nature, to treat land and its creatures as mere object of human use. The land and all creatures are sacred, a holy temple, the self expression of God and above all it is part of their lives. Nirmal Minz, an Indian Tribal theologian rightly observed,

Tribal life is based and built upon a vision of human existence in which they are aware that land, forest and the country they occupy are the gifts of God. Therefore man, nature, spirits continue as the basic texture of

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<sup>457</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation, History, Politics and Salvation* (London: SCM Press, 1974, reprinted; London: SCM Press, 2001), 151.

<sup>458</sup> Paulos Mar Gregorios, 'New Testament Foundations for Understanding of the Creation' in Charles Birch, *Liberating Life*, 39.

existence, as what makes man truly human. Balance and harmony of man-nature-spirits are essential for man to continue to remain human. Any imbalance between and among these initiates a dehumanising process and hence this harmony has to be protected and promoted from generation to generation.<sup>459</sup>

Seeing the urgency of the environmental crisis, it is important to rediscover and revitalise the traditional Mizo concept of God-human-world relationship and utilise it as a theological basis for the liberation of life as a whole. Since the issue of land is so fundamental in the Mizo life, we will first deal with the Mizo traditional concept of land.

#### **4.1. The Mizo traditional concept of Land:**

##### **a) Land is a Temple:**

Land, for the Mizos is sacred because their religion does not centre on a temple or a church or a particular shrine, but the whole earth is sacred and holy, animated by spirits. For them the whole earth is a temple where they worship God. The Mizos performed several ceremonies such as purification of forest at the beginning of a jungle clearing, purification of soil after burning of the jhums, dedication of fields to the Supreme Being, thanksgiving and harvest festivals.<sup>460</sup> Here most of the ceremonies are directed by the process of jhum cultivation, and therefore directly connected with the fields. Since the Mizo life depends heavily upon the fertility of the soil, they developed respect for the earth. They invoke the soil to be kind, fertile and generous as they work and sow seeds on it. A religious rite was performed to the

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<sup>459</sup> Nirmal Minz, 'Primal Religion's Perspective on Ecology' in Daniel D. Chetti, ed., *Ecology and Development* (Madras: Gurukul Theological College and Research Institute, 1991), 49.

<sup>460</sup> Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos*, 138-148.



Supreme Being that the soil may become more fertile and fruitful. As the activities of the sacrifice were taking place on the ground, the earth for the Mizo people is a temple, the dwelling place of God.<sup>461</sup>

#### **b) Land is Life:**

For the Mizo people, land is a living entity endowed with spirits. Because of this concept of land, Mizos were described by the missionaries as animists. From the Mizo perspective, this attitude expresses recognition of the value, power and validity of the land. Land for them is sacred, a temple in which they worship God. In a non-literate society, land is their scripture through which they read about the spirits and God and create myths and songs. For the Mizo people, land is life and no land would mean no life. It is in the light of this that we are able to gauge the depth of degradation and deprivation in the tribal people's experience in the face of growing land-alienation in India in the name of development. For a people who experience God in and through their relationship with the land, theology cannot make light of this legitimate yearning.<sup>462</sup>

#### **c) Community ownership of land:**

The tribal theology of land regards community as the only legitimate custodian of the land, because land is the gift of God. 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein' (Ps. 24:1).<sup>463</sup> The exclusive ownership by God implies for the Mizo people that land equally belongs to all with equal rights and the freedom to live in it, and that no human being can claim it exclusively for

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<sup>461</sup> James Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo*, 65-67.

<sup>462</sup> Mathew George, 'Sources of Tribal Theology' in *Mission Today*, Vol. IV, Oct- Dec, 2002, 290-300.

<sup>463</sup> Geoffrey R. Lilburne, *A Sense of Place: A Christian Theology of the Land* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 3, quoted in A. Wati Longchar, *Tribal Theology: Issue, Method and Perspective* (Jorhat: Tribal Study Centre, 2000). Hereafter cited as 'Lilburne, Theology of the Land'.

themselves nor can they sell it as though , it is their own property. So even though the people own land, they do so only within the greater recognition that all land belongs to God. People's perception of land as the gift of and owned by God is the basis of the community's claim of a legitimate ownership of land, because God is the God of the people. The resources of the earth are for the benefit of all. Private ownership may be an appropriate way of administering those resources for certain cultures, but private ownership means stewardship or trusteeship, not the right to exploit the land and deprive others of access to land. Private ownership has to be subordinate to common use.<sup>464</sup>

The major problem with the Mizo people today is that, as a result of frustration with the existing system,<sup>465</sup> there has been a dangerous transition from constructive to destructive dependence on forests. The fundamental problem is that the government officials who, living in a distant place and having no knowledge and love of the land of the village are controlling the land from their office table. The village council, mediator between the people and the government is a political body which has become a destructive instrument, for it is no longer accountable to the community but to government. In the context of these problems, the following elements seems essential in the process of social transformation – community ownership, recognition of land as the people's place and their life and the recognition that land rights are human rights.

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<sup>464</sup> Leonard Weber, 'Land Use Ethics: The Social Responsibility of Ownership' in Bernard F. Evans and Gregory D. Cusack eds., *Theology of the Land* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1987), 30.

<sup>465</sup> The present land system in Mizoram is that all lands are now considered to be government land. Ownership of land is classified as follows: **Temporary pass** is a licence issued for a certain period of time and implies no right of transfer or sale. **Periodical patta** is a licence to use the land for the period of a lease. The land can be used in any manner the owner likes and if the land is required for public purpose, the government may take it back without any compensation. **Land Settlement Certificate** confers on the owner a permanent heritable land and transferable right of use. If the government wants to get it back for public purpose, due compensation is required to be paid. People enjoy those rights which are recognized by the government.

Theological affirmation of community ownership is made here not merely because it is a traditional practice of the Mizo people. It is rather, an attempt to restore the sense of communal ownership and to protect people from further alienation and exploitation.

**d) Land is a place:**

Land is not merely a space; it is a place which gives identity to the community. 'Space' means an arena of freedom, without coercion or accountability, free of pressures and void of authority, freedom from constraint and absence of responsibility. 'Place' by contrast, connotes 'home' and is bound up with a sense of belonging, a story which conveys an identity, a basis for participating in history.<sup>466</sup> As noted earlier, the Mizos until recently identified themselves with their village. A Mizo stranger, rather than telling his/her name tells the name of the village. Since the land holds the community together, there is no genuine community without communal ownership of land. Since the community owns the land, individual personal identity is subordinated to community identity. But as we have seen, a change of land system shattered the tribal sense of belonging and eventually created identity crisis. Alienation of the tribal land means alienation of their culture, personhood and sense of place.

**4. 2. Significance for Eco-theology from Mizo Perspective:**

It was observed that the Mizo society is in the initial stage of transition from a subsistence economy to a market economy. It is evident that it is a difficult process

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<sup>466</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 5.

for the Mizo community to switch over to a market economy since they have to compete with those who have been living with a market economy for more than a century. While this transition is an imperative result of development, it is currently worsening the position of the villagers and the common people, which directly relates to the loss of easy access to their land, and this, requires serious reconsideration of the land system in Mizoram. It is quite evident from the villagers and common people in the towns that much of the land traditionally owned by the community has been transferred to individual property. Many of the land owners are not members of the community; they are living in the city or towns. The gradual process of *latifundialization* in Mizoram began with Indian independence, when community land was transferred to the government, then was intensified with the dawn of development, particularly with the introduction of the New Land Use Policy in 1990.<sup>467</sup>

The lands which were owned by the community and freely used by all members of the community have now passed into the hands of the rich and the privileged people. The common people have become landless, victimised by the new land system and life has become harder and harder for them. Because of this system people began to lose their sense of belonging to the land and developed dependent and destructive uses of the land. Land which was traditionally never been regarded as a commodity is increasingly treated as a private property which can be owned by legal fiction and used as one likes.

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<sup>467</sup> K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 189.

To meet this challenge, the traditional concept of land must be theologically rediscovered and reclaimed to make the local community responsible for their land. Theology certainly does not provide an alternative system of land tenure but may enlighten the people to evaluate critically and challenge the existing system. It is also important to understand that the root cause of the present systems and practices in the Mizo society is the modern mindset that spawned and rationalised the existing system. While legal reform is important and necessary, it is not the whole solution to the problems. In a region where Christians form 86% of population, a Christian theology of mission has an important role to enlighten, orient, inspire and enable the people to understand, challenge and seek appropriate changes to the system.

The Mizo church needs to reflect on how far it has helped in perpetuating social and ecological injustice in the contemporary society. It must challenge the sinful greed that has led to wanton exploitation of earth's resources and pollution of its land, water and air. The liberating message of Jesus Christ is not restricted to human beings alone, but to all God's creation, for God is present in the whole world. As Jurgen Moltmann affirms:

An ecological doctrine of creation implies a new kind of thinking about God. The centre of this thinking is no longer the distinction between God and the world. The centre is the recognition of the presence of God in the world and the presence of the world in God.<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 13.

This calls for a new sensitivity in our relationship as human beings to the rest of creation. We are not only intricately related to the other elements of creation, but we are profoundly dependent on them for survival. Every creature is in community with every other creature. Our concept of stewardship of the earth must help us move away from our sense of owning the earth and doing with it as we please. Instead, we Christians are called to be brothers and sisters of nature since we are united to the nature in our origin from the same mother earth as well as the same father God.

At this juncture, a rediscovery of the inter-relatedness of the whole creation or creation-centred theology from the Mizo perspective is imperative. As already mentioned above, the land or creation occupies a very centre place in the Mizo world view. Their ethics, religion, culture, politics, identity and other social patterns of the people are perceived in relation to creation or land. Poverty, oppression, ethnic conflict and identity issues cannot be understood without creation. Justice to land or creation is the key to liberation and human dignity. Commitment and dedication to the harmony of creation spring forth in love, care and acceptance. When there is justice in the land, the fields and forests and every living things will dance and sing for joy (Ps. 96:11-12). Thus an awareness of being with one with the whole creation is the spiritual foundation of the Mizo people. By affirmation of the creation as the central point of reference in Mizo Christian theology, we conceive our vision of God-world-human relationship in a new and distinct way.

**Firstly**, the Mizos conceive of God as the one who is organically related to the whole creation. Though God is a distinct and transcendental being, yet God is an integral part of creation. Without the land and creation, God ceases to be God and becomes

inactive. This idea rules out a conception of God as monarch who ruled the world from above imposing his divine laws. But God is immanent in the world that comes and drinks, speaks and is revealed to us as a person and even through animals, trees, wind and so forth. This helps the Mizos to affirm God's creativity, his active involvement in the whole earth, but is not limited to a rational being alone. Since God is an integral part of creation, God suffers pain when creation suffers, because the Mizos conceive of God as one who comes out from the soil not from above.

Moreover, the land belongs to God, the creator and humans are simply the stewards. Hence the ownership of land by the community or individual has to be understood within the greater recognition that the land belongs to the Supreme Being. Thus the land equally belongs to all with equal rights and freedom to live in it and should be shared among the members of the community. Sharing of the ecosystem should be at all levels: at the level of a local community, among the states of the same country or even among different countries. The Mizos' eagerness to share is noteworthy, especially in the context of what we are trying to emphasize. Mathew George writes:

The most beautiful tribal virtue is an eagerness to share. Whatever can be spared is to be shared. In traditional tribal society, the season of abundance is the season after harvest. There is no shortage of generosity during this period. The feasts and celebrations of this season are indicative of the eagerness of the individual to share with the community whatever he has in surplus or whatever he thinks he has in surplus.<sup>469</sup>

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<sup>469</sup> Mathew George 'Sources of Tribal Theology' in *Mission Today* Vol. IV, Oct- Dec, 2000, (Shillong: Vendrame Institute), 290-300.

The Mizo approach to land economy based on highly egalitarian principles can be of immense help in the Mizo church's attempt to usher in the kingdom of God based on justice and equality.

**Secondly**, this understanding of God leads the people to conceive of Christ in a new and distinct way. Christ is no longer conceived as the one who works only in the hearts of the believers. But humans are all challenged to see Christ as the incarnate one, who is organically related to the total ecosystem. Jesus shares his being with the whole created order. Since Jesus Christ is an integral part of creation, all parts of creation are now reconciled to Christ. The incarnation of God in Jesus represents God's entry into finite space. It marks the consecration of all the hope for a land of peace, security and plenty.<sup>470</sup> For the Mizos, the whole land is sacred and holy; it is a temple where they worship the Lord of creation Jesus Christ.

**Thirdly**, this understanding also helps the Mizos to conceive of the work of the Holy Spirit in a wider perspective. The Holy Spirit is understood as the one who works not only in the hearts of believers, but also sustains all creation. It is the Spirit who makes all living possible and dynamic. The Spirit works in every life and inspires everything including land, animals and plants in a different ways. Therefore, there are strong grounds for saying that it is the Spirit that is responsible for the interconnectedness of the ecosystem. John V. Taylor, in particular, in describing the Spirit as the 'Go-Between God'<sup>471</sup> has opened up a whole new avenue for missiological exploration. Though the Supreme Being and Spirit are understood as the creators and sustainers of

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<sup>470</sup> Lilburne, *Theology of the Land*, 105.

<sup>471</sup> John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM, 1972).



all living things, they are also perceived, though distinct, as part of the total ecosystem.

**Fourthly**, this land or creation-centred theology challenges the Mizos to revise our understanding of salvation. Since the Supreme Being is seen in creation and human as an integral part of it, we are able to affirm that human attains redemption only in relation to the rest of creation. Together with God, Spirit and the mother earth, we are redeemed. This idea of redemption further leads us to conceive of salvation as a reality which can be experienced authentically here and now. A redeemed person is the one who lives in harmony not only with fellow beings, but also with the mother earth, God and spirit. This affirmation rules out the narrow understanding of salvation in terms of personal salvation.

**Fifthly**, The Mizos perceive humanity as an integral part of the macro-organism. Humanity relates to creation not in a hierarchical sense, but as family members. The relationship is rather understood as circular. In a circle, there is no beginning or end, all are interrelated and all in the circle are equal value. In this circle, human lose the status of primacy and dominion over other creatures. All mutually share and affect each other. The possession of intellectual faculty does not give human the right to dominate others. However, this does not mean that in the Mizo world view, humans, animals and plants are the same, humans have a unique place and role to play. Humanity possesses a special ethical quality.

**Finally**, for the Mizos, the land is life. The land is the source of our origin and identity. It is a place and symbol of unity which gives identity to the community. If

there is no land, there is no community, personhood and identity. The land is also sacred and people observe earth's day to pay respect to the land. Humanity has no moral right to treat the land as a mere object to be used and exploited. A creation-centred theology demands a radical change in our attitude and use of the land and resources. The land cannot be commercialized. The Mizos believe that a person cannot become wealthy by selling the land. People often compare the land with a bird.<sup>472</sup> If one forcibly takes the land from others through unjust means, it will fly away within one or two generations. It is said that the land cries out if it is placed in the hands of greedy people. Moreover, the land does not belong to one generation alone, but belongs to future generations also. Therefore, the present generation does not have the right to commercialize, exploit and abuse it. It is the moral right and duty of every person to take care of, defend, preserve and protect the land for the future generations.

Since the whole earth is God's body, the use of the land and resources becomes an ecological sacrament for the Mizos. A.P. Nirmal, an Indian theologian recaptures the theological meaning of the aspect when he writes:

If the whole world is God's body; and if God offers us His/Her body and blood, then the use of the world's resources becomes an ecological sacrament for us. As we eat and drink the body and blood of our Lord reverently and not greedily, so also the world's resources must be share reverently and without selfish greed. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a fellowship meal and has a community setting. What a tremendous ecological implications this has, if

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<sup>472</sup> A. Wati Longchar, *Tribal Theology: Issue, Method and Perspective*, (Jorhat: Eastern Theological College, 2000), 81. Hereafter cited as 'Wati Longchar, Tribal Theology'.

we are to conceive of different eco-systems having a fellowship meal in God's *oikos*.<sup>473</sup>

Therefore, the centrality of land or creation in understanding the reality and its inter-dependentness cannot be ignored if Christian theology is to make sense and be meaningful, especially to the Mizo community.

## **5. SIGNIFICANCE FOR MIZO FEMINIST THEOLOGY:**

The non-hierarchical structure of the community of God-human-world is meaningful for feminist theology in the struggle against the Mizo social structure dominated by men. As in many other communities, the relationship of men and women in the Mizo traditional society is certainly not an equal partnership. The weakness of Mizo traditional society lies in the relationship of men and women in which women are regarded as subordinate to men, and have been oppressed and deprived of opportunities. This should have been transformed by the power of the Gospel when the Mizos embraced Christianity, but the relationship seems to have basically remained unchanged. However, this is certainly not a denial of the Mizo communitarian life as a whole, the author will attempt to examine the relationship between men and women in order to rectify and transform the Mizo communitarian society to make it more effective. In this effort, the concept of 'co-humanity' is used as the vision and criteria of the Mizo community.

The concept of co-humanity is used here to express the relationship of men and women in which equal partnership is regarded as the fundamental nature of human

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<sup>473</sup> A.P. Nirmal, 'Ecology, Ecumenic & Economic in Relation: A New Theological Paradigm' in *Ecology and Development: Theological Perspective*, 24, quoted in A. Wait Longchar, *Tribal Theology*, 91-92.

relationship. According to the biblical creation story, God did not want man to be alone and said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'<sup>474</sup> Here we notice that God's intention in his creation is that man and woman should be together, but opinion differed in the perception and practice of partnership. The phrase 'helper fit for him' has been used to justify subordination of women. The English term 'helper' connotes the role of servant or of the superior. However, the Hebrew word '*ezer/ozzer*' which is inaccurately translated in English as 'helper' is consistently used in the Old Testament for Yahweh who is a helper par excellence.<sup>475</sup> This means the word 'helper' does not denote subordination, for Yahweh is never subordinate to the people of Israel. The feminist interpreters seem to be correct when they claim that it is the male bias which has influenced traditional interpretation of the text to imply subordination of women; the correct interpretation is that women are the only competent persons who can help men in as much as men are also the helper for women. Men and women without each other are incomplete. Humanity is therefore, co-humanity in which man and woman compliment one another in equal partnership.

### **5. 1. Position of Women in Mizo traditional Community:**

J. Shakespear, who subdued the Mizo people and later became the first Superintendent of Mizoram expressed his observation on the condition of women that the Mizo women fetched the firewood and water, cooked food and did the greatest part of the weeding and harvesting; they also made all the clothing for the whole household from cotton grown in jhum, which they themselves gathered, cleaned, spun, and wove into strong cloth.<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> Genesis 2:18

<sup>475</sup> K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 193.

<sup>476</sup> Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans*, 16.

In spite of their daily busy life, sparing no effort and strength for the welfare of the family, Mizo women were not respected nor were their words heeded. A Woman had no voice in the family administration, and even if she did, her words were never accepted just because they were the words of women.<sup>477</sup> The position of Mizo women is revealed when we study some of the sayings and traditional Mizo social practices. ‘Crab’s meat is not a meat, women’s word is not a word’; ‘the wisdom of a woman does not cross the brook’; ‘a woman and a walnut tree, the more you beat them the better they become’; ‘an old fence and a wife should be changed’. A woman was bound by taboos. She was not allowed to participate in some of the religious rites and functions. Her menstruation and pregnancy made her in some cases taboo or unclean which prevented her from active participation in social functions and limited her freedom and activity. The Mizo customary law did not recognize the right of women to own immovable properties like land and house.

## **5. 2. Position of Women after Christianity:**

The conversion of Mizo people to the Christian faith brought about radical changes in the Mizo society; but opinion about the change differed widely. Most of the Mizo theologians and sociologists believed that Christianity had transformed the Mizo society and without this the Mizo society would never become what it is today.<sup>478</sup> Taking the middle course, a few scholars have admitted erosion of Mizo culture but held the British administration and the process of modernization as the primary factors responsible for this. They regard Christianity as providing an alternative

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<sup>477</sup> Lalhmuaka, *Zoram Thim*, 84.

<sup>478</sup> Hminga, *Life and Witness*; J. Puthenpurukal, ed., *Impact of Christianity in North East India*; M. Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*.

ideology to cope with this change.<sup>479</sup> On the other hand, non-Christian writers with a few British administrators are critical about the change. They argue that Christianity is responsible for the erosion of Mizo culture which consequently has alienated and caused them an identity crisis.<sup>480</sup> In spite of differences in the opinion of scholars about the change in general, most of them seem to acknowledge with appreciation the contribution of Christianity towards the upliftment of women.

Education was one of the primary factors responsible for the emancipation of women. As a result of the emancipation of women, the quality of human life in general improved. By educating women and marginalized children, Christian missionaries revolutionized the Mizo society, changing the social structure and the status of women. Eventually the poor children became the leaders of the society. Comparatively, the progress of girls' education was slower than that of boys, since girls were very useful at home and less favoured by their parents than boys.

It is interesting to note that in the formative stage of the Mizo Christian church, there seemed to be no discrimination against women; they actively participated in the church as evangelists, teachers and deacons. Active participation of women in the early church could be due to lack of human resources and non-availability of competent male leaders. Though the Mizo society was critical about educated women, they were more competent than their fellow uneducated girls and were given respect and important responsibilities in the church and society; their contribution and leadership were eventually accepted. The church not only provided education, but also a new avenue for women to interact with their male counterparts, and freedom to

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<sup>479</sup> F.S. Downs, *Christianity in India: North East India in the Nineteen and Twentieth Century*. (Bangalore: Church History Association of India, 1992), 123.

<sup>480</sup> Animesh Ray, *Mizoram Dynamic of Change*, 15.

preach and teach which they had never done in the traditional society. A number of Mizo women were employed as Bible women (evangelists) from 1917.<sup>481</sup> The formation of a separate women's department in the church provided an enormous opportunity for women to develop their leadership qualities. This certainly contributed towards the improvement of women's status, but equal partnership is still far from being realised. There were certain traditional practices which remained unchanged even after the Mizo community had embraced Christianity. For instance, right of ownership was not changed and men continued to be the sole owner of the immoveable properties and inheritor of ancestor's property. Even after Christianity, Mizo women are still oppressed, alienated and discriminated against on the ground of sex, the following factors are commonly held as the root causes of sexism:<sup>482</sup>

- i) Patriarchal social structures in which men dominate the social, economic, political and religious affairs.
- ii) Some of the Mizo traditions are responsible for shaping the attitude of the society towards women.
- iii) The traditional theology which advocates the superiority of men over women had shaped the attitudes of missionaries and eventually leaders of the Mizo church.
- iv) Traditional interpretation of the Bible.

### **5. 3. Present Position of Mizo Women in the Churches:**

Despite the amount of work they have contributed to the church, Mizoram seems to be one of the areas where the church is most orthodox and unopened to the full and

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<sup>481</sup> Chhuanliana, R., 'Luke's understanding of mission of Jesus and its missiological implications for the Mizoram Synod of Presbyterian Church of India' in H. Vanlalauva, ed., *Mizoram Theological Journal*, Vol. III, January-June, 2001, (Aizawl: Aizawl Theological College), 2-15.

<sup>482</sup> K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 81.

free participation of women in the ministry of the church. Women are devoid of equal status and opportunity in the church. Lalrinawmi Ralte, a Mizo feminist theologian from the Presbyterian Church has critically examined the traditions which she thinks responsible for the subjugation of women. She observed that once a committed and dedicated lady, Saptawni was elected as an elder by the Mission Veng Church along with one man in 1980. But her ordination was rejected by the decision making body based on historical precedent that 'it (ordination of women) has never been that way' whereas no question was raised with regard to a man and he was ordained by the church.<sup>483</sup> Such obvious sex discrimination is frequently seen in the church, and it is difficult at least for the victims of injustice and discrimination to regard the church as the body of Jesus Christ or the place where Christ is honoured. Saptawni was completely silent regarding the failure of her ordination.

With regard to theological education, very few women have undertaken it. The answer as to why few women have undertaken theological education could be due to the unemployment problem which arises from sex discrimination in the church. Women have less opportunity of getting jobs in the ministry of the church. R.L. Hnuni, a Mizo feminist theologian, is critical of the existing structure of the church which has deprived women of equal participation in the ministry and decision making bodies. She shared that the present situation in the Baptist Church of Mizoram is that any trained man is given an opportunity to take up a post of Probationary pastor whereas women were not given any such chance. Moreover, women graduates are not included in the 'induction service' regularly arranged by the church to consecrate and rededicate the new graduates to enter into full time ministry. This is indeed, a painful

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<sup>483</sup> Lalrinawmi Ralte, *Crab Theology*, 147.



discrimination for women who are also entering full time ministry.<sup>484</sup> Hnuni thinks that re-interpretation of the Bible is necessary in order to bring change in the Mizo church.

#### **5. 4. The vision of Mizo women for a new co-humanity:**

‘Co-humanity’ is used by Karl Barth<sup>485</sup> to define his concept of the ‘image of God’. For Barth, the image of God is to be found in relationship of God and human beings, man and woman rather than in the quality of human beings. A Mizo feminist theology may be explained as a theology that seeks for a new community in which the traditional relationship of men and women is transformed by the power of the gospel into a new relationship of equal partnership of men and women. It is committed to transforming the traditional Mizo community, transcending the old pattern of relationship between men and women. It also aims to build a new, just, participatory and harmonious society, free from discrimination of human beings by fellow human beings on the ground of sex, colour or race. In other words, Mizo feminist theology seeks to make the traditional communitarian life effective and relevant in today’s situation. Its purpose is to let the new style of Mizo community pervade the relationships of men and women which, in the traditional community, based on the relationship of master and servant.

The Mizo traditional life and the church may believe that women’s silence is a virtue but the effects of silence can be described in different ways. Women feel helpless and worthless. The Mizo cultural traditions and moral teaching are based on men’s interests. These are not helpful for the social and religious life of women. Mizo

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<sup>484</sup> Hnuni, *Women in Mizoram*, 85-86.

<sup>485</sup> J.D. Godsey, ed., *Karl Barth’s Table Talk* (Richmond Virginia: John Knox Press, 1962), 57.

women are beginning to look critically at their situation in the Presbyterian Church. They are also angry because God's name is being used to silence them. Women can no longer sit in silence and silence does nothing to improve their status. Lalrinawmi Ralte believed that Mizo women need to break their silence because silence is perpetuating the cultural degradation of women. Woman can no longer accept any ideology that can manipulate them and suppress their potential. She believed that God wants Mizo women to speak out against injustice inflicted on women in Mizoram.<sup>486</sup>

In short, it must also be mentioned that today's Mizo women's liberation movement does not seek for a post of leadership as such nor claim superiority but it tries to do away with all forms of discrimination on the basis of gender. It seeks for equal recognition, equal acceptance, equal privilege and opportunity, equal rights and freedom in all spheres of life both secular and religious and especially in the ministry of the church where sex discrimination is most serious. It is therefore, time to give up the tradition that always expects only women to be the ones who would adjust to the situation, but to treat them equally with men. It will also be necessary to re-examine and restate the unjust traditional view, restructure the church to be accommodative and do away with the evil of inequality, injustice and discrimination so that all may live together in peace and harmony with one another and glorify in reality the Lord and Liberator, Jesus Christ. There will be many more suggestions and strategies for empowerment of women, it will be the context which will decide the methods. What really matters is commitment to the cause of building a society envisioned by the Mizo women. It is the task and mission of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram to struggle for the realization of co-humanity.

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<sup>486</sup> Lalrinawmi Ralte, *Interviewed* (Aizawl Theological College, Mizoram: 21 August, 2009).

## **6. REINTERPRETING *CHAPCHAR KUT* FOR MIZO THEOLOGY OF MISSION:**

Since the coming of Christianity, the church declared the celebration of traditional festival of *chapchar kut* as anti-Christian; it was considered as secular and worldly. In other words, it was profane, outside Mizo Christianity.<sup>487</sup> The Mizo Christianity needs liberation from enslavement to secular and sacred. In fact, the gradual awareness of the religious values of traditional festivals came only after 1990. Gradual liberation slowly accommodated the Mizo traditional festivals into the folds of Christianity. Today, contemporary Mizo Christians have begun retrieving and reinterpreting traditional festivals, in particular *chapchar kut*, with the aims of contextualizing and reviving the lost culture. They think that it is a Mizo cultural festival in which Mizo should participate as Mizo and as Christians. In due course, *chapchar kut* has become one of the burning theological issues in the Mizo Christian context. If we re-read this festival in the light of postcolonial hermeneutics, it is possible to enlist the following elements as honouring God (*Pathian*), peace and harmony, cleansing and sharing as liberating in the Mizo Christian context.

### **6. 1. Honouring God (*Pathian*):**

The origin of *kut* (festival) among the Mizos is mythologized as follows. Many years ago, there was a great famine in the Mizo land. It lasted for three years. The fourth year was good and prosperous. They richly harvested crops and everyone had enough to spare. This prosperity was ascribed to the blessing of gods and the chief instructed

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<sup>487</sup> Lalsangkima Pachuau, *Ethnic Identity and Christianity: A Socio-Historical and Missiological Study of Christianity in Northeast India with special reference to Mizoram* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Gmb h, 2002), 104. Hereafter cited as 'Lalsangkima, Ethnic Identity'.

the people to honour their gods.<sup>488</sup> This was the origin of the Mizo *kut*. This indicates that *kut* and God are interconnected in Mizo culture. Therefore, to celebrate *kut* without honouring God is to neglect God's providence and blessings. And according to K. Zawla, a school teacher and Mizo historian, celebration of *chapchar kut* is to praise God for the protection, security and safety while cutting *jhums*.<sup>489</sup> This view is worthy of development in the Mizo Christian context. Whatever its origin might be, it is increasingly understood as honouring god. In this sense, to celebrate *chapchar kut* can mean 'to honour God' and this validates the presence of god in every culture.

## 6. 2. Peace and Harmony:

Secondly, another important element of the *chapchar kut* is peace. To elaborate briefly, before the *chapchar kut* began, the village herald would make a public announcement to all the villagers that during *chapchar kut*, there must be no quarrel or riots in the village, everyone must be happy and peaceful, and must celebrate the festival with joy. This was an official announcement from the chief. In addition, it did not allow quarrelling between husband and wife during the festival.<sup>490</sup> Peace occupied the central stage in the celebration of *chapchar kut*. If we look at the Bible the central message of the gospels is peace. What Isaiah idealized in his message is also peace (Isaiah 11:1-9) and Christ's incarnation is to bring peace to the whole world. If we utilize these two passages as theological hermeneutics to link the message of the gospel and the message of the *chapchar kut*, the gospel and Mizo culture are harmoniously focussing on peace and goodwill towards human beings. In the light of this interpretation, *chapchar kut* has a new meaning and it becomes the festival of peace in which all the Mizos should participate because it is in complete agreement

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<sup>488</sup> Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos*, 139.

<sup>489</sup> Zawla, *Mizo Pi Pute*, 122.

<sup>490</sup> Challiana, *Pi Pu Nun* [Life of the Ancestors] (Aizawl: Lalriniana & Sons, 1996), 6.

with the message of the Bible. In this way, the gospel enriches the Mizo cultural festival.

### **6. 3. Cleansing:**

Cleansing is one element found in the *chapchar kut* as it was celebrated by washing away dirty things in order to make them clean and renewed. Houses would be cleaned and dirty clothes would be washed on the day of *chhawnghnawt*.<sup>491</sup> This cleansing of self, society and community transforms Mizo society and makes *chapchar kut* meaningful. The author proposes to wash away in celebrating *chapchar kut*; one is Mizo traditional way of drinking rice-beer which is no longer relevant because it can bring immodesty and is not in tune with the gospel teaching. Secondly, the barbaric Mizo traditional way of killing animals on the festive day (*se chaih*) needs to be stopped as Mizo Christian's kindnesses to animals should indicate that we are worshipping the living and loving God. This process of cleansing can liberate and transform Mizo society towards the realization of the reign of God.

### **6. 4. Sharing:**

Another element of *chapchar kut* is sharing one's food or resources with neighbours and others. Sharing is a Mizo cultural virtue. N.E. Parry describes *chapchar kut* as a feast,<sup>492</sup> and a feast meant sharing one's resources with the community. One of the main teachings of Jesus was sharing by feeding the five thousand. In this sense, the message of the gospel and the message of *chapchar kut* are in line with each other. If we reflect this sharing with others theologically, it is equivalent to love in action which is against selfishness, exploitation, corruption and misappropriation. While

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<sup>491</sup> Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo*, 79.

<sup>492</sup> N.E. Parry, *Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, 90-91.

celebrating *chapchar kut*, we are practicing sharing our resources with one another and *chapchar kut* becomes meaningful to the cultural life of the Mizo society. Through sharing from the Mizo cultural perspective, the teaching of Jesus is taking root deeply in the Mizo cultural life. In the light of this, *chapchar kut* teaches us ‘sharing’ and ‘to be a blessing’ to others who are in need.

The present Mizos continue to celebrate *chapchar kut* with new perspectives by honouring God in their respective places, it will give the Mizo society a new identity as a Mizo and as a Christian. *Chapchar kut* contributes an alternative way of honouring God by making peace, sharing resources, renewing morals and uniting all people to build the kingdom of God here and now. *Chapchar kut* is no longer seen as a pagan festival but as a cultural festival with a new religious meaning, crossing denominational barriers that gives corporate Mizo Christian identities as Mizos and as Christians.

## **7. REINTERPRETING *TLAWMNGAIHNA* FOR MIZO THEOLOGY OF MISSION:**

We have discussed about the Mizo communitarian life and one may wonder how such a communitarian society actually operated in the complex ‘mix’ which is life, be it primitive or sophisticated. Indeed one may question whether the nature of communitarian society is a reality of the past or a romanticised construct or simply the naive dream of post-modernists. Though that was more than a reality of the past, it is to a certain extent the actual life of the Mizo community today. It is quite obvious that unless a certain principle of life or philosophy provides the basis, no society can practise such a communitarian way of living. This underlying principle of the Mizo

communitarian society is called '*tlawmngaihna*', a social ethical principle of the Mizo community which provides the basis for a communitarian society to exist and function effectively. In other words it is a philosophical and ethical foundation of communitarian society.

### **7.1. Meaning of *Tlawmngaihna*:**

*Tlawmngaihna* is a Mizo term which literally means resistance to being helped by others by helping others who are in need. The emphasis is on a denial of self rather than an effort to be independent. The purpose of this self denial is to serve the community and any person in the community who is really in need of help. It is an act of charity wherein self interest is subordinated to the interest of community, and self sacrifice for the need of others is to come spontaneously as a natural part of one's life. Without the principle of *tlawmngaihna* communitarian societies like the Mizo community cannot function. Without the principle of *tlawmngaihna*, it would not be possible to build a harmonious society where members of the community practised 'decision by consensus', sharing their joy and sorrows and caring for one another.

Several attempts have been made to define *tlawmngaihna* by both the Mizo themselves and the non-Mizos who know the Mizo culture. The problem of defining and translating *tlawmngaihna* is clearly reflected by the range of vocabulary and phrases employed by J.H. Lorrain, the pioneer missionary of Mizoram, who tried to explain *tlawmngaihna* as follows:

- a) *Tlawmngaihna* is to be self sacrificing, unselfish, self denying, persevering, stoical, stout-hearted, plucky, brave, firm, and independent, to be loth to lose one's good reputation, prestige, etc.

- b) To persevere, to endure patiently, to make light of personal injuries, to dislike making a fuss about anything.
- c) To put one's own inclination on one side and do a thing which one would rather not do, with the object either of keeping up one's prestige or of helping or pleasing another or of not disappointing another, etc.
- d) To do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient it may be to oneself or to one's own inclinations.
- e) To refuse to give in, give way or be conquered.
- f) To not like to refuse a request, to do a thing because one does not like to refuse or because one wishes to please others.
- g) To act pluckily or show a brave front.<sup>493</sup>

Another British observer, N.E. Parry wrote, 'it is really a very good moral code enforced solely by public opinion'.<sup>494</sup> He felt sorry because he saw that the spirit of *tlawmngaihna* was deteriorating due to the coming of enlightenment through education and also more contacts with outside cultures and their influences.

K.C. Lalvunga, the Mizo poet and writer defines *tlawmngaihna* as the manifestation of internal goodness of human beings in an external way of life and effort of human beings to be useful for individuals and society. It is a morality which is manifested in various aspects of external life including many things such as unselfishness, humility, diligence, courage, patience and endurance which should be beneficial for as many as possible.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>493</sup> J.H. Lorrain, *Dictionary*, 513.

<sup>494</sup> N.E. Parry, *Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, 19.

<sup>495</sup> B. Lalthangliana, *Zikpui Pa Kutchhuak* [The Works of Zikpui's Father] (Aizawl: R.L. Press, 1990), 90.



C.L. Hminga, a Mizo theologian described it as a Mizo ethical code. He said that a person who possesses *tlawmngaihna* must be courteous and industrious. He must also be ready to help others even at considerable inconvenience to himself and must try to surpass others in doing ordinary daily tasks efficiently. In theory, *tlawmngaihna* must enter into every compartment of the Lushai's life and in general a good citizen was one who was foremost in meeting calls on his time which were really necessary for the good of the village.<sup>496</sup>

According to Remkunga, an elder in the Mizo church *tlawmngaihna* comes out of the inward being and mind of human beings and appears as excellent and desirable as it can be. He said that *tlawmngaihna* is not just performing and fulfilling requirements and one's duties, rather it is doing anything beyond one's own duty and not with an expectation of respect and praise, but because of love towards others from the innermost heart. This kind of duty requires a sense of duty for the benefit and welfare of others, which may even cost one's life. It includes endurance, patience and the capacity for hard work, bravery and readiness to suffer.<sup>497</sup>

Mangkhosat Kipgen, a renowned church historian said that a person who possesses *tlawmngaihna* must be obedient and respectful to the elders; courteous in dealing with the weak and the lowly, generous and hospitable to the poor, the needy and strangers, self denying and self sacrificing at the opportune time, must be ready to help those in distress, compassionate to a companion who falls sick while on a journey or becomes victim of a wild beast in the hunt by never abandoning him to his fate; heroic and

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<sup>496</sup> Hminga, *Life and Witness*, 30.

<sup>497</sup> Remkunga, *Mizo Pi Pute* [Mizo Ancestors] (Aizawl: Nazareth Press, 1980), 148-149.

resolute at war and in hunting; stoical in suffering and in facing hardship under trying circumstances; and persevering in any worthwhile undertaking however hard and daunting that might prove to be. A *tlawmngaihna* person will do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient that might be to one or to one's own inclinations; vie with others in excelling in sports or any other corporate labour; and try to surpass others in hospitality and in doing his ordinary daily task independently and efficiently.<sup>498</sup>

*Tlawmngaihna* is the Mizo social principle as well as the norm for good conduct of the people in the community. The Mizo moral ethos is based on good deeds for the welfare of the community, on putting the interest of the community above one's own individual interest. Thus the Mizos in their judgement of conduct would say, 'it is shameful' rather than 'it is wrong'. Doing anything that the society does not accept, whether wrong or right is shameful. Parents forbid their children doing certain things not necessarily because it is wrong to do them but shameful. In a society like Mizo society where community is placed above individuals, this kind of ethical judgement is inevitable. It is both moral and logical.<sup>499</sup>

*Tlawmngaihna* embraces various types of human qualities and activities and manifests itself in various forms and aspects of community life which can be summed up as 'community over self' wherein self-sacrifice for the need of others is the spontaneous outcome. A person who practices the precepts of *tlawmngaihna* is highly respected in the community.<sup>500</sup> It is *tlawmngaihna* that turns the steep mountains and the dense forests with all the toilsome labour of jhum cultivation, poverty and

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<sup>498</sup> M. Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 65.

<sup>499</sup> K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 122.

<sup>500</sup> M. Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 65.

hardship into a pleasant dwelling place. It is because of *tlawmngaihna* that poverty, misfortune, death and sickness, have not traumatised the people. Every one in the community has been taken care of by the practice of *tlawmngaihna*. It is because of *tlawmngaihna* that every one tries to be self-sufficient in order to avoid receiving help from others. The Mizo code of ethics revolves around *tlawmngaihna*, a composite term for such human qualities as kindness, courage and helpfulness. It indicates that compelling moral force which expresses itself in selfless service to society. *Tlawmngaihna* lies at the basis of the Mizo attitude to life. In war or peace, in private or public life, the Mizos are guided by the spirit of *tlawmngaihna*.<sup>501</sup>

## **7. 2. Critical Analysis of *Tlawmngaihna*:**

Though the Mizos uphold with honour the spirit of the objective of *tlawmngaihna*, it nevertheless needs critical analysis as the principle of *tlawmngaihna* does have both positive and negative aspects. It is the *tlawmngaihna* teaching of selflessness which makes the Mizo people reserved, slow to express themselves even to the extent of telling a lie. Even a seriously sick patient, on the verge of death will tell a doctor that he/she does not feel pain. The major weakness of *tlawmngaihna* is its lack of critical basis of assessment of its own actions, since it has been so much socialised and people simply assume that what is expected in and by the society is right or good. Mizos are generally and indeed traditionally uncritical. *Tlawmngaihna* was conventionalised into the system of society. The same is true of Mizo contemporary Christianity. There is a strong tendency to consider everything done in the name of Christian faith as justifiable.

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<sup>501</sup> *Mizoram: Era of Peace and Progress* (Aizawl: Directorate of Information and Public Relations, 1987), 11.

*Tlawmngaihna* is based on the principle of self sacrifice. It is not merely a system of social control for equilibrium as some sociologists have suggested. ‘Social control’ implies seeking to contain an individual or group resistance within tolerable limits.<sup>502</sup> *Tlawmngaihna* certainly contributes to social equilibrium, but it is not merely social obligation in terms of social control, as suggested by A.G. McCall.<sup>503</sup> Since the principle of *tlawmngaihna* prohibits criticism against others, *tlawmngaihna* could be one of the indirect causes of rampant corruption in the Mizo society today. Rather than challenging the wrong structures and misdeeds of the politicians, government officers and leaders of the local organisations, the principle of *tlawmngaihna* avoids pointing out the wrong doing of others.

Another weakness of *tlawmngaihna* is that its practice in the actual life is limited to those who understand the meaning of *tlawmngaihna*. The Mizos who are exposed to other cultures have realised that it is practicable only within the society where it is understood and practised by the people. First of all it began in the Mizo village community, then expanded its circle to the larger society but rarely crossed beyond the boundary of the Mizo society.

### **7. 3. Validity of *Tlawmngaihna* for the Mizo Theology of Mission:**

*Tlawmngaihna* is a message of Jesus Christ hidden in the Mizo culture. It is an active love or love in action. If love is the essence of the Gospel teaching, *tlawmngaihna* is the hidden gospel written in the heart of the Mizo people even before they embraced Christianity. The affinity of *tlawmngaihna* with love may be seen more clearly when

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<sup>502</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of A Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1968), 24, 29. Berger’s distinction between socialisation and social control is used to distinguish *tlawmngaihna* from social control of the authoritarian type. Quoted in K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 124.

<sup>503</sup> McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, 47.

K. Saibela, former missionary replaces the Pauline definition of love in 1Corinthians 13:4-7 with *tlawmngaihna* as follows: ‘*Tlawmngaihna* is patient and kind; *tlawmngaihna* is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. *Tlawmngaihna* does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. *Tlawmngaihna* bears all things, believes in all things, and endures all things.’<sup>504</sup>

K. Saibela continues that *tlawmngaihna* and love have very similar functional relations because *tlawmngaihna* means self-sacrifice, diligence, courtesy and commitment for the sake of others, bravery, hard work, kindness, charity, forbearance, patience and so on.<sup>505</sup> *Tlawmngaihna* is a self-giving love which sets aside self-interests and seeks the betterment of others. Among the Mizos, there are a number of stories of those who laid down their precious lives for the cause of *tlawmngaihna*.<sup>506</sup> Such a love is depicted by Jesus himself as the highest form of *agape*. If Jesus Christ is the expression of the embodiment of God’s love, the incarnation, the ministry and the cross may be perceived as paramount act of *tlawmngaihna*. This may provide a basis for Christological understanding of *tlawmngaihna*. The mythical heroes of the Mizo people were neither their warriors nor powerful chiefs, but the *tlawmngai* persons who laid down their lives for the service of the community. Jesus Christ might thus be seen as the embodiment of

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<sup>504</sup> K. Saibela, ‘Mizo Khawtlang Nun [Mizo Social Life] in *Mizoram Kum 100: Kum 100 Chhunga Mizote Awm Dan* [The Mizo Life within 100 Years] (Aizawl: Synod Literature and Publications, 1995), 13.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

<sup>506</sup> Taitesena, Khuangchera, Zampuimanga, Chawngbawla, Vanzema, Vanapa and others were said to lay down their lives for the cause of *tlawmngaihna*. They are the heroes of the Mizo people even today.

*tlawmngaihna*, who transcends the Mizo *tlawmngaihna*. Jesus is the *tlawmngai* par excellence.<sup>507</sup>

#### **7. 4. Significance of *Tlawmngaihna* for a Mizo Theology of Mission:**

Reinterpretation of certain traditions and beliefs including the Bible itself become inevitable if they are to be relevant and meaningful in our changing world. Mizo society is moving from personal towards an impersonal society where the right system becomes more important than personal *tlawmngaihna*. In fact, the present social, economic and political problems are becoming increasingly complex such that they can no longer be solved by personal *tlawmngaihna*. The need of creating a social, political and economic system which should enhance justice, peace and harmony in the Mizo society is an urgent and important task. In this situation, the issue of *tlawmngaihna* has to be shifted from the personal to the social level, which means creating a social economic system which should perform the functions of *tlawmngai* persons in taking care of the poor and the needy. The *tlawmngaihna* approach to social need is a charitable approach which has its own role, but is inadequate to deal with the modern Mizo society which is becoming increasingly complex.

In other words, the traditional *tlawmngaihna* must be incorporated in the social system in which the structure, planning for development and the legal system of the society must be made *tlawmngai*. Seeing the need of the reinterpretation of traditional *tlawmngaihna*, it is necessary to incorporate the universal concern of Christian teaching for love and justice into *tlawmngaihna* to meet the challenges of

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<sup>507</sup> K. Thanzauva, *Theology of Community*, 129.

today. Then only *tlawmngaihna* in modern society will be the insightful praxis of love to protect and uphold the marginalised, and to create a just, harmonious, progressive, participatory and sustainable society. Protection and upholding of the marginalised and commitment to the cause of the community today can no longer be confined to charitable service. It requires involvement in the struggle against all exploitative systems and structures which spoil the harmony of the community. Doing justice by overcoming evil with good must be perceived as an important element and a necessary outcome of *tlawmngaihna* because this is a more effective way of caring for the poor and the marginalized.

*Tlawmngaihna* advocates individual freedom but rejects individualism as it puts society over individual. *Tlawmngaihna* is Mizo praxis in the sense of practicing its theoretical teaching of living for others. Helping others is part and parcel of the principle of self-reliance. In other words, in the teaching of *tlawmngaihna*, helping others is the means by which one should become self reliant. It is similar to the principle ‘give and you will be given.’ In fact, the Mizos have a saying, ‘those who eat themselves will die, those who share with others will live.’ Life for the Mizos is living for others; selfishness is death. In sharing of their joy and sorrow, the Mizo people find life that is the life of a true community.

The rediscovery of *tlawmngaihna* which is rooted in Jesus Christ will not only enhance a new understanding of life in Christ, but also deepen the interconnection of the gospel and Mizo culture. Jesus is seen possessing *tlawmngaihna* par excellence. In reality, this is a new face or an image of Jesus that makes it ‘Christology from below.’ The Mizo Christian will realize that when practicing *tlawmngaihna* in their

daily lives, they will feel the presence of Jesus Christ. This is the new incarnation of *tlawmngaihna* as the word becomes incarnated. P.L. Lianzuala writes,

Mizo Christians are being transformed and led to live moral ethical lives imitating Christ. We must discover that a refined form of Christian *tlawmngaihna* is rooted and perfected in Christ. Only then regardless of external criticism, a refined and transformed form of Christian *tlawmngaihna* will be lived out with a new life in Christ.<sup>508</sup>

In this way, Mizo Christians will perceive that the unbounded Christ is present through *tlawmngaihna* in their culture. Practising *tlawmngaihna* will be seen as the presence of Jesus Christ in them. In addition, Christ's *tlawmngaihna* reveals God who sacrifices himself for the redemption of the whole world. Further, it contributes hermeneutical links between the gospel and Mizo culture. Chapman and Clark describe how the Mizo understood the gospel in terms of *tlawmngaihna* or in other words how the Mizo moral teaching meets the gospel of love. Mizos will see for themselves that practising *tlawmngaihna* is accepting the teaching of Jesus and to serve God is to fulfil the Mizo ethical moral ideal.<sup>509</sup> It is apt to quote here as they put it:

To the Mizos to accept the teaching of Jesus meant to be *tlawmngai* and this made them feel that it fulfilled their highest aspirations, and to serve this God, at whatever cost, was to fulfil the Mizo ideal of *tlawmngaihna*.<sup>510</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> P.L. Lianzuala, 'Tlawmngaihna Theology' in H. Vanlalauva, ed., *Mizo Miziaa Pathian Thu* [Theology in Mizo Thought] (Aizawl: Synod Publications Board, 1988), 117-118.

<sup>509</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah, 'Matthew 5-7: The Sermon on the Mount and India' in Daniel Patte, General ed., *Global Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 363

<sup>510</sup> Chapman & Clark, *Mizo Miracle*, 90.



In this way, *tlawmngaihna* enriches Christianity and Christianity affirms Mizo *tlawmngaihna* and re-roots it in Christianity. This *tlawmngaihna* becomes spiritual and transformative when it is used for solidarity with the poor, marginalized, outcast and oppressed to stand against injustice in the social, political and economic system and addressing the present realities of the Mizo society.

Secondly, *tlawmngaihna* is a social ethic essential for the sustenance of harmony and integrity of the Mizo community. For the Mizos, harmony and sustainability of the society has been regarded as the primary objective of development. Thus the goal of development envisaged in this study is not mere economic growth; it is the well-being and symbiotic progress of the society. In other words, the vision of the society is a shalomic society. *Tlawmngaihna* is an essential principle for the establishment and enhancement of such community. The principle of *tlawmngaihna* is in essence a 'kingdom principle' and it is essential for the realization of the reign of God in Mizoram and other parts of the world.

Thirdly, *tlawmngaihna* is voluntarism which theologically advocates and empowers the voluntary organizations to bring about social transformation. Traditionally, voluntarism was regarded as charitable work within the system for the purpose of keeping social equilibrium. It was not expected to bring about a radical change. But the underlying assumption of voluntarism today is that people are the primary subject of change and have the power and responsibility to change their own situation. In the Mizo context of today, *tlawmngaihna* is concerned both with equilibrium as well as social transformation through various voluntary organisations and movements. In fact, voluntary organizations in Mizoram are known as *tlawmngai pawl* (*tlawmngai*

association or organisation). The principle of *tlawmngaihna* should not be confined within static institutions or organisations, although they are important. It should pervade the fabric of the society, as it did in the past, in order to bring about transformation of the society. The church as a voluntary organisation is an institution of *tlawmngaihna* or love. But *tlawmngaihna* cannot be contained in the institutional church; rather the church is one of the instruments of *tlawmngaihna* for the transformation of the society.

Fourthly, *tlawmngaihna* is a communitarian discipleship, a commitment to the cause of community. It was the community which called the people to be *tlawmngai* or to be self sacrificing for the sake of the community. Today, in the Christian community, it is Jesus Christ, who calls people, the believing community to follow him in the *Missio Dei* – the establishment and extension of the reign of God. The call to be *tlawmngai*, before the advent of the Christianity in Mizoram, was also the call to that same mission through the community. The calling as such, be it in the pre or post-Christian era to serve the interest of God within the community is the same. Thus, we may say that *tlawmngaihna* before the arrival of Christianity was a discipleship of Christ in a different form.

The norm for Christian existence for all ages must be self-giving love, an expression of radical obedience to Jesus Christ. Discipleship is essential for participation in the establishment and extension of the reign of God, which is central to the mission of Jesus Christ. The disciples in the Mizo context are the *tlawmngai* persons. The social transformation envisaged in this study is a transformation towards the realization of the reign of God. The disciples of Jesus Christ are the *tlawmngai* people for the cause

of the reign of God. *Tlawmngaihna* is a commitment to the cause of society as discipleship is to the cause of the reign of God. Realisation of the kingdom of God here and now would certainly require Mizo Christian *tlawmngaihna*.

## **8. CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, I would like to recapitulate what has been discussed in this chapter. Firstly, contextualization is the way theology has been done in the history of Christian thought. It is therefore, a theological task for those who are doing theology irrespective of nationality, culture and colour. The concern of Mizo contextual theology is how to articulate the faith of the community in Christ in a way which can be understood and is meaningful to the Mizo Christians in Mizoram. That is to help the Mizo Christians understand and confess that Christ might become part of their identity. Theology can also help them to realize the significance of Christ for them in bringing transformation in the Mizo society. The task of Mizo theology is to achieve this goal and for that purpose the author has brought out some of the Mizo traditional cultural practices such as the Mizo understanding of the cosmology or God-human-world relationship for theological hermeneutics.

Secondly, reinterpretation of Mizo traditional values such as God-human-world relationship makes a significant contribution to the emerging ecological theology because the Mizo Christians have been neglecting the environment or ecological issues. This makes the Mizo theology one sided. Since the issue of land is so fundamental in Mizo life, this study focused on the Mizo concept of land. For the Mizos, land is sacred because land is the dwelling place of God, therefore it should not be treated as a commodity or as a space to be exploited. This new understanding

calls for new sensitivity in their relationship with the rest of the creation. It has also opened a new way of theologizing to meet the ecological crisis and contributed a great deal to the Mizo understanding of the relationship of God-human-world. To know that God loves the world and makes revelation through nature and creation facilitates the Mizo Christians to understand the holistic salvation. The significance of this new interpretation is that it serves as a corrective to the limited traditional interpretation of salvation that excludes 'nature and the world.' This initially brings out a new eco-spirituality in the Mizo context.

Thirdly, a Mizo feminist theology may be explained as a theology that seeks a new community in which the traditional relationship of men and women is transformed by the power of the gospel into a new relationship of equal partnership of men and women. The Mizo feminist theology is committed to transform the Mizo traditional community transcending the old pattern and to build a new, just, participatory and harmonious society free from discrimination of fellow human beings by fellow beings on the ground of gender, colour and race. In other words, Mizo feminist theology is making the traditional communitarian life effective and relevant in today's situation.

Finally, there is the significance of the traditional festival of *chapchar kut* and *tlawmngaihna*, a Mizo social principle as well as the norm for good conduct of people in the community. The author believes that the rediscovery of the *chapchar kut* and *tlawmngaihna* deepens the interconnection of the gospel of Christ and the Mizo culture. Jesus was seen as possessing *tlawmngai* per excellence. Therefore, the Mizo Christians realized and felt the presence of Jesus when they practised *tlawmngaihna* in their daily lives. In this way Mizo Christians perceived that the unbounded Christ

is present in their culture. *Tlawmngaihna* becomes spiritual and transformative when it is used for solidarity with the poor, marginalised, the outcaste and oppressed to stand against injustice in the social, political and economic system thus addressing the present realities and transforming the Mizo society

## **CONCLUSION**

### **EVALUATION AND PROSPECT FOR THE FUTURE**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

It is clearly mentioned in the introductory part that the primary purpose of this study is to construct a relevant Mizo theology of mission out of the interaction between the Gospel and Mizo culture in the context of Mizoram. The whole task of this study can be seen as re-rooting the Gospel in the Mizo cultural soil to remove alienation of the Gospel or the western theology of mission introduced by the missionaries. Mizo religious and cultural practices have been re-read with the purpose of finding hermeneutics for reinterpretation of the Mizo theology of mission. For this purpose, this section highlights some of the contributions made by this study to the Mizo Christian theology and also makes suggestions for further research.

#### **2. CONTRIBUTIONS TO MIZO CHRISTIANITY IN MIZORAM:**

The author will highlight some of the contributions this study has made towards Mizo Christianity, including Mizo hermeneutics, recognition of God's revelation in the Mizo traditional religion and culture, shift in subject matter of theology, narrowing the gap between church theology and the academic theology and awareness of the validity of Mizo traditional religious and cultural elements for constructing a Mizo theology of mission.

##### **2. 1. Mizo Tribal Hermeneutics:**

With the emergence of various contextual theologies from third world countries, people of different cultures are beginning to find new ways of reading the Bible in

their respective context. Similarly it is also necessary for the Mizo Christians to find new ways of reading and understanding the Bible. The older habits of biblical interpretation in fact, take the social and cultural conditions of the Mizo society into consideration. As a result, the Bible continues to contribute towards alienation of the Mizo from their culture and customs. In reflection on their first ten years experience in Mizoram, the two pioneer missionaries J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge reported that:

Our first message, as soon as we could speak the language was to proclaim a saviour from sin. But the people had no sense of sin and felt no need for such a saviour. Then we found a point of contact. We proclaimed Jesus as the vanquisher of the devil as the one who had bound the strong man and taken away from him 'all his armour wherein he trusted' and also had made it possible for his slaves to be free. This to the Lushais (now known as Mizos) was good news indeed and exactly met their great need.<sup>511</sup>

It is evident from the above statement that what was considered as a meaningful message for missionaries trained in England was no longer meaningful when it was preached to a different culture. The task for the two missionaries was to interpret the Gospel in the context of Mizoram.

The question which confronts us in the construction of the Mizo theology of mission is how to interpret the Bible in the context of Mizoram. As Moltmann has rightly

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<sup>511</sup> *Reports of BMS*, 93-94.

expressed, 'reading the Bible with the eyes of the poor is a different thing from reading it with the eyes of the man with a full belly'.<sup>512</sup> There are different ways of reading the Bible; the Mizo people read the Bible in the context of alienation from their land and culture. The way they read the Bible cannot be the same as that of those who do not face the same problems. Their context requires a reinterpretation of the Bible to address the problems that encountered their lives. Unless the Mizos are allowed to be different in their interpretation of the Bible, the Bible will not only lose its significance, Christianity will remain superficial without really taking root into the Mizo culture. In fact, Christianity is quite visible and popular in the Mizo society and to a great extent it appears indigenized. But an in-depth study, however, reveals that Christianity has not taken root, deep within the Mizo culture. It is therefore, the task of Mizo tribal theology to develop a hermeneutical principle to fill this lacuna.

## **2. 2. God's revelation in Mizo primal religion:**

Recognition of God's revelation in the Mizo primal religion and culture is a new contribution this study has contributed to the Mizo Christianity. The dominant theology in Mizoram was the theology inherited from the missionaries which rejected other religions as false religions and did not even recognize the revelation of God in other religions except Christianity. However, this study maintains that the Mizo traditional religion did not end with animism alone, but with the worship of the Supreme Being or God. Theologically, F. Hrangkhuma reinterprets Acts 17:26-28 in the Mizo context and states that the Mizos also were not left without God's revelation.<sup>513</sup> Hermeneutically, there can be a point of contact between the unknown

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<sup>512</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1977), 17.

<sup>513</sup> F. Hrangkhuma, *Mizoram Transformational Change*, 145.



God and the Mizo traditional concept of God called *Pathian*. C. Pazawna, a Mizo pastor has written thus:

The Mizos knew something about the good god '*Pathian*'. As the ancient Greeks used to offer sacrifices to the 'unknown God', they worshipped him and used to offer sacrifices so that they might receive his blessings at home and in jhums. But *Pathian* remained a hidden god, about whom only a little was known.<sup>514</sup>

This statement claims that God's revelation in Mizo religion as the unknown God is valid. This accommodates the Mizo traditional understanding of God into a new theological paradigm and advocates the validity of divine revelation in Mizo traditional religion. The unknown God in Acts 17:23 was a valid revelation of God among the Athenians, so it was also valid in the Mizo context. After comparing the common ground in Christianity and the Mizo traditional religion, C. Rosiamana makes the following theological statement:

If we make an assessment from all these common grounds between Mizo traditional religion and Christianity, it was certain that God had already revealed himself among the Mizos, and the then Mizo primal religion was like the present day Christianity. In the past, in search of a god who was vaguely conceived, the Mizos did some animistic practices worshipping stones and trees. However, when the Mizo realized that Christianity is the

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<sup>514</sup> C. Pazawna, 'Christianity in Mizoram: Vision for the Twenty-First Century' in Rosiamliana Tochhawng, ed., *Ground Works for Tribal Theology in the Mizo Context* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2007), 49.

final goal of their long expected religion, they firmly believed and never wavered.<sup>515</sup>

In the light of this, the Mizo religion can be re-read in a new perspective. When the Mizo traditional concept of God interacts with the biblical concept of God, new images of God appear in the Mizo context. This does not mean that Mizo traditional religion was a perfect one, rather it was a religion in which God revealed himself through the Mizo practice of their religion. Recognizing the revelation of God in Mizo religion has contributed theological hermeneutics which spearhead the dialogical model, moving from monologue to dialogue in Mizo Christianity.

Similarly, the recognition of Mizo traditional culture for theological interpretation is a new contribution in the Mizo context because the Mizo culture was considered as an invalid basis for doing theology. However, this establishes the principle that Mizo culture is not nonsense, but has a mixture of good and negative aspects. The task here is to reject the enslaving aspects and critically enlist the liberating aspects and utilize them for theological hermeneutics. Therefore, Mizo Christian theology must continue to recognize the validity of the Mizo culture in constructing a Mizo Christian theology of mission.

### **2. 3. Church Theology and Academic Theology:**

The expectation of the author is that this work will narrow the gap between church theology and academic theology in Mizoram. As already mentioned in the previous section, with the inherited western traditional theology, the Mizo theologians and

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<sup>515</sup> C. Rosiama, *Mizo Sakhua*, 96.

leaders of the church rejected and neglected the traditional religio-cultural and it was not utilized for theological interpretation. But today new ways of doing theology have emerged and the theological colleges have re-read the Mizo traditional culture and religion and have started developing theology of their own. To this the church criticized theological colleges for being unspiritual and of course liberal while the theological colleges branded the church as conservative. This creates a gap between the institutionalised church and the theological colleges.

The author believed that this research has contributed a new way of narrowing the gap between the church and the theological institutions. By interaction between the Gospel and the Mizo culture, a relevant contextual theology which is faithful to the gospel and to the Mizo culture emerges to respond the present realities meaningfully. This will not only bridge the gap between the church theology and the academic theology, but also bring mutual recognition and understanding, mutual enrichment and peaceful transformation in Mizo theological education in the Mizo context.<sup>516</sup>

### **3. EVALUATION AND PROSPECT OF THE FUTURE:**

Under **Pre-Colonial Mizo Religion and Culture**, an explanation was given of the concept of the Supreme Being (*Pathian*), who was worshipped by the Mizos by performing different social and religious sacrificial ceremonies. However, due to the inclusion of drinking rice-beer in their religious worship, the western missionaries, without having proper and critical assessment of the concepts and teachings of Mizo religion, branded the Mizo traditional religion as heathenism. In addition, there were some practices in the Mizo primal religion which were described as animistic because

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<sup>516</sup> R.S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading The Bible and Doing Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 121.

they offered sacrifices to evil spirits for healing from illness and sicknesses. The then missionaries failed to understand that in the Mizo primal religious practices, there was ‘*sakhaw biak or sakung*’ (worshipping God) and ‘*ramhuai biak*’ (propitiating evil spirits). These two religious practices should be clearly differentiated if we aim to do theological hermeneutics in the present Mizo context.

The author view is that when the missionaries branded the Mizo primal religion as animism, there were concrete elements of worshipping the Supreme Being in the Mizo traditional religion. This study substantiated the claim that Mizo traditional religion did not end with animism, but with the worship of *Pathian* (God). The concept the Supreme Being and celestial god, and the concept of *Khuanu, Pu Vana* pave the way to accept the classical Christian doctrine of trinity. Moreover, the concept of *khuanu* brings new images to the female model and this contributes relevant theological interpretation for the Mizos. The male-female model is useful to substantiate equality between male and female in feminist theology in the Mizo context.

**The Advent of Colonialism and Christian Mission** dealt with the transformations of the religious, social, political and cultural life of the Mizo society in many ways. Despite the fact that the life of the Mizo society had been paralysed by the imposition of laws and orders by the British rule, it also liberated the Mizos from injustice social and cultural structures and oppression in various ways. It can be seen that the impact of the British government and the Christian missionaries was both constructive and destructive, resulting not only physical transformation but also psychological and intellectual change. One result of these changes was that the Mizos started to develop

the idea that all that was associated with Mizo traditional religion and culture was pagan, profane and secular and not fit for the newly converted Mizo Christians. As a result, they abandoned valuable social and cultural elements and regarded them as secular and worldly and even profane while western culture and traditions were automatically adopted as sacred, religious and pious. They began to look at their traditional values from the perspective of their new European masters. If we look at all these in the light of the postcolonial perspective, we find evidence of pseudo-European Mizos, who had been proselytized to the western traditionalism and ways of living.

The vision of the author for the Mizo theological future will be that conversion to Christianity will no longer be an enslaving experience for the Mizos, rather it will be a liberating and enriching experience which gives new religious culture and new identity in the Mizo context. The Mizo Christians will begin re-rooting their traditional practices like festivals and others to transform the contemporary Mizo society.

**In Revival Movement: Cultural Response to Westernisation,** we see that as soon as the British subjugated Mizoram, they imposed new laws and regulations, and divided the land and the people to suit its administrative convenience. To worsen the confused state of mind of the people Christian mission came to propagate a new religion. The Mizo people suffered the loss of their land, identity and selfhood. In the midst of this chaotic confusion, the revival movement took place. It tended to be a cultural revival and turned out to be an antidote to the prevailing process of westernisation. The revival movement saved the Mizos from complete British

assimilation. It thus provided the people with a setting for regaining and maintaining their identity and selfhood. Several Mizo cultural elements have been incorporated into Mizo Christianity by the revival movement.

To re-establish the lost identity, the accommodation of Mizo culture has been taking place. Firstly, rediscovery of the value of Mizo poetical words is a radical paradigm shift because Mizo poetical words which were totally rejected as anti-Christian elements are retrieved to composed hymns. A new type of hymn called 'indigenous Mizo Christian hymn' was born from the revival movement with traditional Mizo tunes. These new indigenous hymns quenched the spiritual thirst of the Mizo Christians and gave new identity to the Mizo Christians. Secondly, the Mission Church strictly forbade the traditional and cultural dances, which were considered as pagan and worldly, but these dances gradually reappeared within the church in a modified form when the spiritual revival broke out. Therefore dance was no longer seen as sinful, unchristian and manifestation of evil spirits, but as a spiritual manifestation of God. Thirdly, the drum played a very important role in the religious and cultural life of the Mizo society, but when the Mizos embraced Christianity they abandoned the traditional drum and using the drum was seen as unchristian. However, inspired by the revival movement, when the traditional drum interacted with the new indigenous Christian hymns, the drum became more meaningful and a new type of singing emerged. Therefore, using the drum in the church and social gathering is no more seen as unchristian but rather as more spiritual and expressing Mizo Christian identity.

In reinterpreting and reclaiming these traditional elements, the Gospel and Mizo culture enriching each other and the question which remains is to what extent the Mizo Christians are going to reinterpret their religio-cultural elements in contemporary Mizo Christianity.

In **An analysis of the mission of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram** it can be seen that the imported western theology is the pietistic evangelical exclusive theology which captured the whole theological norms of the Mizo Christians. This mentality is cultivated in the Mizo Christianity and they have the understanding that Christianity is the only right religion and all other religions are false religions. Therefore, the strategies of Mizo mission remain converting and saving souls and church planting. Other forms of mission like development projects and social works are not regarded as mission. As a result almost all the values of the Mizo culture and traditions were marginalised as secular and pagan. Therefore, Christianity inevitably took the form of the western image.

Secondly, from this study one can conclude that the existing Mizo theology of mission interprets salvation in terms of 'salvation of souls'. It is true that a Mizo theologian, Tlanghmingthanga pointed out that even today, the primary goal of Mizo mission is 'only for the salvation of the souls, neither including the whole person nor creation'.<sup>517</sup> In fact, this dichotomized or dualistic view of salvation separates human as having body and soul separately. According to the Mizo traditional concept, humans possessed souls and bodies. Soul and body were seen as interdependent and inseparable. If they were separated, the person would fall sick or ill or even die. The

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<sup>517</sup> Tlanghmingthanga, 'Mizo Christian view of Eschatology' in *Didakhe*, vol. XXIV, No. 9, 1996, 10.

Mizo traditional view integrates body and soul and in the light of this view, the Mizo understanding of salvation must be reinterpreted in terms of not only salvation of souls, but also of the body and all creation. In this way this study enriches the Mizo theology of mission and corrects the concept of salvation to include the social, political, economic and other dimensions of life for the transformation of the society here and now.

The view of the author is that western evangelical exclusive theology which the Mizos inherited from the missionaries cannot cope anymore with the present context with all its problems. The time has come to develop a Mizo theology of mission that would squarely address the present reality by taking into account the social, economic and political problems for the transformation of the society. Mizo spirituality must go beyond the existing exclusive theological position. A new understanding of ecumenism, which unites all the religions through co-operation and fellowship with the purpose of achieving love and peace, social transformation, will generate deeper spirituality in the inter-faith context. This new understanding, the new inclusive or pluralistic religio-spirituality will bring a change in the existing Mizo theology of mission.

In **Towards a Mizo Theology of Mission**, the concern of Mizo contextual theology is how to articulate the faith of the community in Christ in a way which is understandable and meaningful to the Mizo Christians in Mizoram. There is a need to help the Mizo Christians understand and confess that Christ might become part of their identity. The task of Mizo theology is to achieve this goal and for that purpose the author has highlighted some of the Mizo traditional cultural practices as



postcolonial theological hermeneutics. It is expected that a new theology will be born out of the interaction of the gospel and the Mizo culture.

Firstly, reinterpretation of Mizo traditional values such as the God-human-world relationship makes a significant contribution to the emerging ecological theology for the Mizo Christians. Since the issue of land is so fundamental in Mizo life, land for the Mizos is sacred because it is the dwelling place of God, therefore it should not be treated as a commodity or as space to be exploited. This new understanding calls for new sensitivity in their relationship with the rest of the creation. It has also opened a new way of theologizing to meet the ecological crisis and contributed a great deal to the Mizo understanding of the relationship of God-human-world. To know that God loves the world and makes revelation through nature and creation facilitates Mizo Christians a holistic approach to salvation. The significance of this new interpretation is that it serves as a corrective to the limited traditional interpretation of salvation that excludes 'nature and the world.' This initially brings out a new eco-spirituality in the Mizo context.

Secondly, a Mizo feminist theology may be explained as a theology that seeks a new community in which the traditional relationship of men and women is transformed by the power of the gospel into a new relationship of equal partnership of men and women. The Mizo feminist theology is committed to transforming the Mizo traditional community transcending the old pattern and to building a new, just, participatory and harmonious society, free from discrimination towards fellow human beings by fellow beings on the ground of gender, colour and race.

Thirdly, reinterpreting *Chapchar kut* contributes alternative way of honouring Pathian (God) by making peace, sharing resources, renewing moral and uniting all people to build the reign of God here and now. The author believes that the rediscovery of the Mizo *tlawmngaihna* has deepened the interconnection of the gospel of Christ and the Mizo culture. Jesus was seen as possessing *tlawmngai per excellence*. Therefore, the Mizo Christians realized and felt the presence of Jesus when they practised *tlawmngaihna* in their daily lives. In this way Mizo Christians perceived that the unbound Christ is present in their culture. *Tlawmngaihna* becomes spiritual and transformative when it is used for solidarity with the poor, marginalised, the outcaste and the oppressed to stand against injustice in the social, political and economic system and thus address the present realities and transform the Mizo society.

In conclusion, the present Mizo theology is an exclusive converting approach which is not relevant for today. It is necessary to change its content, strategy and approach into a two way or dialogical cross-cultural approach. To construct a relevant Mizo theology of mission, the Mizo Christians must critically analyse their past religio-culture and traditions with the purpose of rediscovering and discerning the revelation of God. It is also vital to criticize cultural transformation and changes not only in term of going back to the cultural roots but also in the light of the Gospel in order to discover relevant theological and missiological hermeneutics. This will re-root the Gospel and contribute to a 'theology of mission from below' which addresses contemporary realities and fosters participation in the *Missio Dei*, in building the reign of God here and now.

#### **4. CHALLENGE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH:**

This study is a single attempt to explore a contextual theology of mission in the Mizo Christian context in Mizoram. It covers the encounter between Christian mission and Mizo culture and the mission and evangelism work of the Mizo Christians. Therefore, there are a number of other areas of subjects worthy of further research. For example, the theology of Mizo Christian hymns would be both interesting and valuable theological research as these hymns are the products of the Mizo Christians. It would also be worthwhile to do further research on Christian mission from a dialogical perspective which is concerned with mutual co-existence through tolerance with neighbours of other faiths for the construction and enrichment of a Mizo contextual theology.

## APPENDIX I

### Personal Interviews:

- Lalchhanhima, *Interviewed.* Aizawl: Aizawl Theological College, 19 July, 2009.
- Lalhmingliana, K., *Interviewed.* Aizawl: Aizawl Theological College, 15 August, 2009.
- Lalmuanpuia, *Interviewed.* Diphu: Mission Quarter, 23 July, 2009.
- Lalrinawma, K., *Interviewed.* Aizawl: Salvation Army Headquarters, 19 August, 2009.
- Lalsawma, *Interviewed.* Aizawl: Durtlang Presbyterian Hospital, 23 August, 2009.
- Lianngaia, H., *Interviewed.* Aizawl: Baptist House, 19 August, 2009.
- Ralte, Lalhrualtuanga, *Interviewed.* Aizawl: Synod Press, 11 September, 2009.
- Ralte, Lalrinawmi, *Interviewed.* Aizawl: Aizawl Theological College, 21 August, 2009.
- Roberts, Alwyn, *Interviewed.* Bangor, North Wales: 23 October, 2005.
- Roberts, Imogen, P., *Interviewed.* Bala, North Wales: 24 October, 2005.
- Vanlalbela, *Interviewed.* Aizawl: Synod Office, 19 August, 2009.
- Vanlalchhuanawma, *Interviewed.* Aizawl: Aizawl Theological College, 16 August, 2009.
- Zohminga, *Interviewed.* Hyderabad: Mission Quarter, 27 September, 2009.

## APPENDIX II

### General Statistics of the Churches in Mizoram:

Name of the church		Total members of the church
1. Presbyterian Church of Mizoram	-	478853
2. Baptist Church of Mizoram	-	113837
3. Salvation Army	-	45038
4. Roman Catholic	-	24081
5. Seventh day Adventist	-	16982
6. United Pentecostal Church	-	110941
7. <i>Isua Krista Kohhran</i> (Church of Christ)	-	23535

From the above statistics it can be seen that the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram is the largest church comprising 59% of the Mizo Christians. It remains the oldest and predominant Christian body in Mizoram. Therefore, one will not too bias if it is projected as the representative body amidst the others.

*Source: Statistical Handbook 2008, (Lunglei: Pastoral Department, BCM Headquarters, Mualchin Publications & Paper works, 2008), 6.*

### APPENDIX III

#### **1. Lists of British Political Officers, North Lushai Hills:**

- |                        |                          |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Captain H.R. Browne | - 1890 - September, 1890 |
| 2. R.B. McCabe         | - 1890 - 1892            |
| 3. A.W. Davis          | - 1892 - 1893            |
| 4. Captain G.H. Loch   | - 1893 - 1894            |
| 5. A. Porteous         | - 1894 - 1896            |
| 6. Major J. Shakespear | - 1897 - April, 1898     |

#### **2. Lists of Superintendents, Lushai Hills:**

- |                        |                      |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Major J. Shakespear | - April, 1898 - 1899 |
| 2. Major H.W.G. Cole   | - 1899 - 1900        |
| 3. Major J. Shakespear | - 1900 - 1903        |
| 4. L.O. Clarke         | - 1903 - 1904        |
| 5. Major J. Shakespear | - 1904 - 1905        |
| 6. J.C. Arbuthnotth    | - 1905 - 1906        |
| 7. Major G.H. Loch     | - 1905 - 1906        |
| 8. Major H.W.G. Cole   | - 1907 - 1911        |
| 9. Major W.N. Kenedy   | - 1911 - 1912        |
| 10. Major G.H. Loch    | - 1912 - 1913        |
| 11. F.C. Heniker       | - 1912 -             |

12. J. Hezlett	- 1912 - 1917
13. A. Playfair	- 1917 -
14. H.A.C. Colquhoun	- 1917 - 1919
15. W.L. Scott	- 1919 - 1921
16. S.N. Mackenzie	- 1921 - 1922
17. W.L. Scott	- 1922 - 1923
18. S.N. Mackenzie	- 1923 - 1924
19. N.E. Parry	- 1924 - 1928
20. C.G.G. Helme	- 1928 - 1931
21. Major A.G. McCall	- 1931 - 1943
22. A.R.H. Macdonald	- 1943 - 1945
23. J. Dumbrack	- 1945 - 1946
24. A.R.H. Macdonald	- 1946 - 1947
25. L.L. Peter	- 1947 - 1949
26. S.N. Bhartakati	- 1949 - 1951

## APPENDIX IV

### **Lists of Missionaries:**

- |                                    |               |
|------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. F.W. Savidge                    | - 1894 - 1897 |
| 2. J.H. Lorrain                    | - 1894 - 1897 |
| 3. Rev. & Mrs. D.E. Jones          | - 1897 - 1926 |
| 4. Rev. Edwin Rowlands             | - 1898 - 1907 |
| 5. Rev. & Mrs. Robert Evans        | - 1907 - 1908 |
| 6. Dr. & Mrs. Peter Fraser         | - 1908 - 1912 |
| 7. Rev. Mrs. Frederick J. Sandy    | - 1914 - 1926 |
| 8. Rev. & Mrs. E. Lewis Mendus     | - 1922 - 1944 |
| 9. Miss A. Catherine M. Lewis      | - 1922 - 1925 |
| 10. Miss Katie Hughes              | - 1924 - 1962 |
| 11. Rev. & Mrs. Gwilyn Jones       | - 1927 - 1930 |
| 12. Miss Catherine M. Davies       | - 1927 - 1930 |
| 13. Rev. Dr. & Mrs. John Williams  | - 1928 - 1931 |
| 14. Miss W. Margaret Jones         | - 1928 - 1934 |
| 15. Rev. & Mrs. W. Hendry Williams | - 1929 - 1932 |
| 16. Rev. & Mrs. Lewis Evans        | - 1929 - 1937 |
| 17. Rev. & Mrs. David Edwards      | - 1933 - 1938 |
| 18. Miss Eirlys Williams           | - 1933 - 1938 |
| 19. Miss Gladys Evans              | - 1936 - 1962 |



20. Rev. & Mrs. Samuel Davies	- 1937 - 1952
21. Dr. G. P. Roberts	- 1938 - 1962
22. Miss Nancy Dorothy Harries	- 1938 - 1940
23. Rev. & Mrs. Basil Edward Jones	- 1942 - 1953
24. Rev. & Mrs. J. Merion Lloyd	- 1944 - 1965
25. Miss Gwen R. Roberts	- 1944 - 1968
26. Miss Edith M. Parker	- 1945 - 19 51
27. Miss Imogen P. Roberts	- 1947 - 1952
28. Miss Sybil Roberts	- 1950 -
29. Miss Morfydd Jones	- 1951 -
30. Rev. & Mrs. O. William Owen	- 1952 - 1957
31. Dr. I. Bonar Lindsay	- 1953 - 1954
32. Miss May Bound	- 1954 - 1968
33. Miss Gwen C. Evans	- 1958 - 1959
34. Rev. & Mrs. Bruce T. Nelms	- 1959 - 1961
35. Rev. & Mrs. Alwyn Roberts	- 1960 - 1967
36. Miss Joyce M. Horner	- 1965 - 1968
37. Miss Mair A. Roberts	- 1965 - 1968

## APPENDIX V

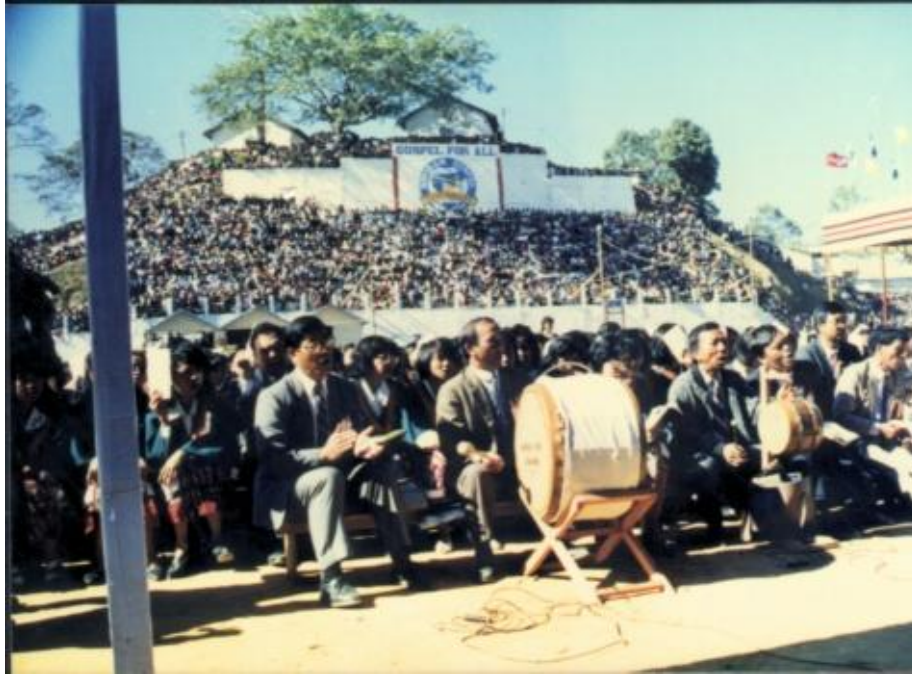


*Zawlbuk*

*Zawlbuk* was a big house built for young men to sleep together and keep vigil at night against enemies. It was one of the most important social-political institutions in Mizo history. *Zawlbuk* was the foundation of the Mizo *tlawmngaihna* (altruism) and the centre of learning socio-religious matters. Missionaries often slept in the *Zawlbuk* and preached the gospel to the Mizo young men. In this sense *Zawlbuk* was the forerunner of Christianity in Mizoram. In spite of the advantages, the church was far from enthusiastic about the perpetuation of the *Zawlbuk* system. How and why such important institution has disappeared from the Mizo society is not known, but emerging new culture introduced by the colonial administration and Christianity may put the *zawlbuk* to an end.

Nowadays, *zawlbuk* could not continue to exist in its traditional form, but the spirit of *zawlbuk* was resurrected in the Mizo society in a different form. As a result in all villages and towns, a voluntary organisation called, 'Young Mizo Association' is formed in order to help people in various ways. Though no *zawlbuk* institution is to be seen, but the spirit of *zawlbuk* together with *tlawmngaihna* has been still survived and actively functioning within the Mizo community. The other significance of *Zawlbuk* for the present Mizo Christianity is that some Mizo theologians have developed a contextual Mizo ecclesiology on the basis of *Zawlbuk* institution.

## APPENDIX VI



**Singing with traditional drums at the *mual inkhawm* (gathering together), Aizawl, Mizoram, 2004.**

All night singing and dancing was common in the Mizo traditional life. The success of the traditional festival *chapchar kut* depended on how long the young men and women could continue in singing and dancing. *Khuang* (Traditional drum) became a routine part of singing in all the Mizo social and religious life. Even after they embraced Christianity, *lengkhawm* or *mual inkhawm* (gathering together) became unique features in Mizo Christianity. Either of the terms means formal and informal get-together for singing and dancing with short sharing and prayers. The length of time for which *lengkhawm* or *mual inkhawm* last is often taken as a measure of the extent of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit or of revival enthusiasm. During the missionary period singing with *khuang* (traditional drums) was discouraged and even constrained in many places.

However, today singing with traditional drums has become a part of life in all religious and cultural practices of the Mizo people. However, the use of the traditional drum had to undergo some modifications in order to suit singing of the Mizo Christian hymns as well as western songs. For revival singing two drums, one big and the other small drum came to be used while western tunes were sung to the accompaniment of a single drum. Therefore using traditional drum is no longer seen as unchristian, but rather as more spiritual and expressing Mizo Christian identity. *Khuang* was re-rooted and Christianised to be used in the Christian worship services and the community gathering.

## APPENDIX VII



**People singing and dancing at *lengkhawm*, Aizawl. Mizoram, 2007.**

It used to be said that Mizos are by nature dancers. Even in the pre-Christian era Mizos are danced in joy, in sorrow or in traditional festivals. Mizo traditional dancing took different forms. When revival came to Mizoram, the features of revival dancing were so typically Mizo that they shocked and repulsed the missionaries. Since the missionaries at first strictly forbidden traditional and cultural dances, the dances in the revival movement came in a modified form. Dancing then became an unbaptised but tolerated element of worship services in the Mizo church since the Mizos ascribed dances in the church to the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore today, the Mizo Christians dances in the church and at *leng khawm*.

In every Mizo church or *leng khawm* or *mual inkhawm*, a space is always reserved for the people to dance. If people feel like dancing, they would go to the space provided for dancing. They dance rotating anti-clockwise several times, mainly clapping their hands and shouting “Halleluiah!” Sometimes hymns and songs are repeated several times without stopping as the Holy Spirit prompted them to sing and dance. The primary purpose of the researcher is that these dances reflect the traditional dances that had been abandoned as pagan or worldly but reappeared in the Mizo churches. The lost cultural elements are retrieved and transformed by Christianising various dances into spiritual dances.

## APPENDIX VIII



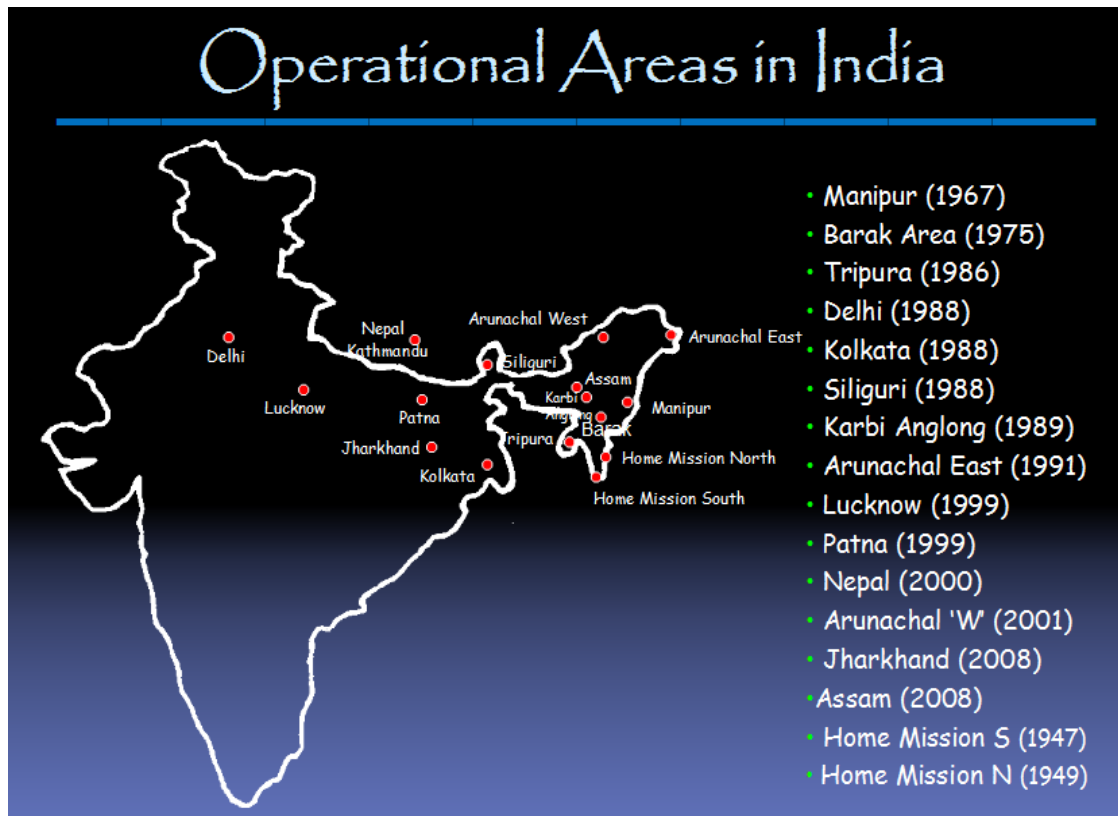
*Chapchar kut celebration, Aizawl, Mizoram, 2009.*

Traditionally, *chapchar kut* was held as soon as the *jhum* had been cut. It lasts for about a week and was a festival intended to be a festival of joy, all disputes and differences should be settled. Everyone in the village have a role to play. Abundant supply of meat and rice-beer must be over-flowing to keep the spirits high. They sung and danced and make merry all night long. This was the most important festival in the life of the Mizos. After Christianity was introduced in Mizoram, the missionaries and early Mizo Christians regarded traditional festivals as an agent of demonic worships and banned festivals like *chapchar kut*, thereby abolishing what they thought was antichristian. Instead the missionaries introduced Christian festivals such as Christmas, Good Friday and Easter.

However in recent years *Chapchar Kut* has been revived and is celebrated in a different fashion to that of the past. It is now a festival for public entertainment and to celebrate the ancient traditions, songs, dances and dresses of the different culture groups of the Mizos. Though singing and dancing plays an important part in the celebrations rice beer is no longer served in the festival. *Chapchar Kut* is seen as a gift of God to the Mizos in which cultural renewal takes place and new cultural development have been reformulated through *chapchar kut*. *Chapchar kut* is no longer seen as a pagan festival but as a cultural festival with a new religious meaning, crossing denominational barriers that gives corporate Mizo Christian identity as Mizos and as Christians.



## APPENDIX IX



### *Mission fields of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram.*

The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram started her mission and evangelism work in a small corner in Mizoram which is now expanded to different parts of India. The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram is presently doing mission and evangelism work in sixteen (16) mission fields as shown above. The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram has continued to increase its missionary personnel, widen its mission fields and increase its mission support resources at a remarkable rate over many years.

## APPENDIX X



*Mizo missionaries are working in different parts of the world.*

The Synod Mission Board has laid special emphasis upon partnership in mission with other churches and international and national organisations to facilitate wider scope of mission service. The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram is presently working in collaboration with the following churches and mission organisations: Council for world Mission (CWM), United Mission to Nepal (UMN), Church Missionary Society (CMS), Operation Mobilisation (OM), Christian Reformed World Mission, CONCERN, INTERSERVE, Indian Mission Association (IMA), India Evangelical Mission, Friends Missionary Prayer Bands, Emanuel hospital Association, Presbyterian Church of USA, Presbyterian Church of Wales, Presbyterian church of Taiwan, Church of North India and Presbyterian Church of Sikkim.

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