

**ABSTRACT**

**Dynamics of Christianity in Select Mizo Folk Narratives**

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The disruption and the influence of colonialism and the anxieties that exists within a colonized community are often seen in post-colonial studies. This chapter will shall focus on the role played by colonialism in shaping the lives of the Mizo people and in relation, their folk narratives as well. With regards to language and education, there can be no doubt that the Mizos certainly benefitted from the rule of the Britishers and the teachings of the Welsh missionaries as well. Their very own alphabet had been prepared for them by the two missionaries, Lorrain and Savidge, and it was because of this language that the Mizo literature itself had a flourishing experience in Mizoram. Education was also an important facet which colonialism provided and the Mizos, (who were prior to the teachings of the missionaries were illiterate) profited immensely from it. On the matter of behaviour and influence however, the impact which colonization had upon the minds of the people was unmistakable. In trying to mimic and copy their white teachers, the Mizos did everything they could to have significant identification with them, so much so that they ignored their own indigenous culture and traditions for a long while. One of the major mistakes they had made in their ignorance was with regard to the late appreciation of their folktales which had left an extending impact on the lives of the people.

The manner in which the Mizos came to revalue their culture as seen through their folklores has been a journey through which they rejected, ignored and shunned their own culture for a very long time predominantly in favour of the white man's culture. "National Romanticism," as Dundes puts it, was the original idea as to how the Grimm brothers had started working on their collective stories. (Dundes, 2007. Pg 15) and it is the only reason as

to why the Mizos have felt the need to relearn and study folklore. The ways by which they came to have a feeling of pride for their cultural heritage again was long and complicated under the strain of being heavily influenced by the need to imitate the white man. This chapter will evaluate this dynamic that befell the Mizos when pressed under colonisation and the long and winded manner in which it had taken them to romanticize about their heritage and culture as presented in terms of their folk narratives.

“One of the greatest obstacles impeding a better understanding of other cultures is what anthropologists term, ‘ethnocentrism,’ says Alan Dundes. He goes on to explain this word as a notion, apparently held in some form by all the peoples of the earth, that the way ‘we’ do things is ‘natural’ and ‘right’ whereas the way ‘others’ do them is ‘strange,’ perhaps, ‘unnatural’ and maybe even ‘wrong.’ The Greek historian Herodotus described ethnocentrism as:

If one were to offer men to choose out of all the customs in the world such as seemed to them the best, they would examine the whole number, and end by preferring their own; so convinced are they that their own usages surpass those of all others. (Dundes, *The Meaning of Folklore*. 2007. Pg 55).

This superior feeling that one group of people have for their own culture is universal as seen from this hypothesis. However when it came to the white man, the tragedy was that they had the power to turn their feelings into actions and implement their customs onto others. It was not as though the Mizo culture, as seen from many of their folktales was not rich and varied and consisted of strict rules and regulations that one had to follow in order to coexist peacefully with one another. They also had a clear view of the world as narrated from their forefathers and their own formulations about the beginning of the world.

The Mizos had for themselves, an idea of how the world was built which was not documented, but had been passed on for generations. According to their lore, at the very beginning, there was no earth but the land was filled with rocks. And there was a vast ocean so cold that it seemed as if a hand would break if dipped in it. At the other end of this ocean was a small patch of mud. Different animals would try to get this mud, but not one could swim even halfway through because it was so cold. A stubborn porcupine one day decided to try his luck and managed to cross the ocean and bring back a little part of the mud on his nose, and all the animals wondered as to what they could do to increase the mud. An earthworm suggested, much to many suspicions that he would eat it and then excrete more mud out of it. The earthworm managed to produce enough mud for 'Chultenu'<sup>1</sup> to put these little patches of dirt over mountains and rivers and level them on land to give them a place to stay. In this way, the earth created came to be for the animals to live their lives. The sky, on the other hand, at the beginning, covered the earth like a bowl and the place where the sky met the end of horizon of the earth was called 'kawlkil.' It was believed that a dung beetle rolled human excreta to the person who guarded the end of this horizon, telling him that humans no longer existed on earth and so there was no need for the earth there. The earth, which was believed to be held up on the back of a giant turtle, would shake occasionally at the request of the 'Kawlkil' guard who would believe what the dung beetle had told him about how the humans were no longer living on earth and thus, there was no need for the earth. However, the humans who were still on earth would shout back that they were still there, alive and well. Only then would the shaking of the earth stop. This was the earthquake and the humans would shout back to the 'Kawlkil' guard whenever there was an earthquake and the earthquake would stop. (Vanlallawma, 2000. Pg 1-3).<sup>2</sup>

Vladimir Propp has denoted an account of how important it is to trace the origin or at least what has been discussed as the origin of a people's culture which every folklore has.

Historical folklore, which attempts to discover the origin of its phenomena, rests upon ethnography, and he believes that there cannot be a true study of folklore independent of ethnography. He asserts:

We do not know precisely just what and how much originates in primitive society. In any event, the folktale, epic poetry, ritual poetry, charms, riddles as genres, etc., cannot be explained without enlisting ethnographic data. Likewise, many motifs (for example, those of the magic helper, marriage to an animal and the faraway kingdom) find their explanation in the ideas and religious-magic practice of the past. Ethnographic data are equally important in the genetic study and in the study of the initial development of folklore ... (Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*. 1997. Pg 9 – 10).

This theory holds that if the Mizos were to study and trace back the origin of their folktales, then the belief that they had, regarding the folktales that was handed down from generations, prior to how their world began, needed to have a significant part in any study. This belief of the genesis of the world is not based on Darwin's evolution or on the more esoteric belief in Christianity and upon how God created the world in seven days. However, it is proof of how the Mizos tried to make sense of the world in which they lived in before other belief systems were thought to be more fruitful.

The motif examples that Propp denotes such as "the magic helper" which can be seen in stories like "Chhura's Magic Horn,"<sup>3</sup> a horn which was given to him by a 'phungpuinu'<sup>4</sup> are significant. This horn could produce an endless amount of food without any work required from the person. "Marriage to an animal," was a common enough theme that penetrated Mizo folktales; the most notable one being "Kungawrhi," who wedded a 'keimi,'<sup>5</sup> and had to be rescued by the brave young men of her village. The "religious-magic" element

can be seen in many stories “Sichangeii,” is a tale where the mother is an animal from the sky whom the father captures and keeps as wife. In the story of “Tlingi and Ngama,” Ngama takes a strand of Tlingi’s hair and uses magic to make her ill so that only his visits would make Tlingi better. “Chepahakhata” denotes the story of an excessively ugly man who marries a witch and who later becomes dissatisfied with him and flies up to the sky with her daughter, leaving their husband and father on the earth to suffer hardships and hunger. (Khangte, 1997<sup>6</sup>; Pachuau, 2008). Such stories were what the people had lived by, and the idea that the ‘keimi’ really existed and lived among them were stories that were told often, and to this day, the ethos of the Mizo people still desire a life where they have a magic horn where one could live a satisfied life without much hard work. However, with colonialism and religion, these rich, strangely coincidental beliefs on how everyone tried to understand their environment slowly ceased and became no more than old wives’ tales. The process through which these beliefs which had been so integral to a group of people became no more than superstitious stories which were rooted in the manner in which the other forces who held the power invaded the lives of these indigenous people. It was not on the conventional treatment of power that concentrates on powerful individuals that the ideas and values changed from one group to another, but as Foucault denotes, through the nature of society as a whole.

Foucault challenges the idea that power is wielded by people or groups by way of ‘episodic’ or ‘sovereign’ acts of domination or coercion, and seeing it instead as dispersed and pervasive. (Foucault, 1998. Pg 63). In relation to this statement, what is to be noted is that the Mizos were very much under the domination of the British for a very long time before the Welsh missionaries made their presence known. They had had disagreements and wars with them, while defending themselves physically from foreign rule. Around 1750, the East India Company had already raided many of the Indian cities and had already placed

themselves as sovereign over the people. The East India Company made good use of the elephants in India for their battles and it has been recorded that a group of people who went out to capture these elephants for the Company, known as the 'Kheddah' were seen around Mizoram. Further more, by 1840, many people came to Mizoram to capture these elephants and so much so that the Mizo chiefs made statements again and again regarding the fact that they did not care for the people who invaded their privacy. In 1850, the Deputy Governor even forbade the Britishers to enter the Lushai Hills to capture any more elephants. (Ralte, 2008. Pg 15 – 17)<sup>7</sup>. So the force of the more powerful outsiders, who could possibly have had to physically overcome them, as they had better equipments for war were known to have existed even then. The Mizos, after the first contact with the white men had many troubles, rivalry and comraderie between them for many years in trying to safeguard their values and customs within and outside their villages. There was, however, no mention of any coercion to change their beliefs and their values, even with the amount of ammunition which they had to defeat the Mizos until the arrival of the Welsh missionaries who used ideas instead of weapons which were a million times more lethal in colonizing the mind of a people. Their words and preachings held more power over the Mizo people than the physical, forceful ways of the earlier non Mizos.

The Britishers might have dominated over the people with better and more intimidating arms and battle regimes, but the values of the Mizo people never shook so hard as when they were taught that the language of the white man was more sovereign and that they had been living in the dark with their own customs which were regarded to be 'primitive' and 'heretic.' The Mizos had fought back on the invasion of the Britishers for a long time but they were united in their rituals and beliefs until these ideas were challenged by another different idea. Foucault holds that 'Power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere' so in this sense it is neither an agency nor a structure (Foucault, 1998. Pg 63).

Instead it is a kind of ‘metapower’ or ‘regime of truth’ that pervades society, and which is in constant flux and negotiation. Foucault uses the term ‘power/knowledge’ to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and ‘truth’:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault, 1991. Pg 168).

What the Mizos believed, no matter how unrooted they were in science or religion, was that their own world view and their origin was regarded to be truth for them. It was how a number of groups and people tried to find the truth regarding their surroundings, which was embedded until the coming of education in different ideas, through the works of the Welsh missionaries who landed in Mizoram. The feeling that they were ‘primitive’ and ‘heretic’ which, (as education flourished) began to make them feel inferior to the white man. Before the coming of the missionaries and the Gospel, even under the colonial rule, they did not have a sense of insecurity. Education for them could therefore be seen as both a blessing as a curse in the sense that it helped developed the Mizo literature while making the Mizos lose their sense of identity at the same time.

The process through which the Mizo people came to have proper dialect as well as the scriptures is largely debatable but none could argue upon the amount of work that the various Welsh missionaries had done in forming the whole endeavour. Their unbeatable zeal to educate the Mizo people is a story of hard work and determination on the part of the missionaries. Even before the arrival of the two Welsh missionaries in Mizoram, there have been narratives regarding how the Arthington missionaries, J. Herbert Lorrain and F.W Savidge had worked hard to educate the Mizos on the Scriptures and also regarding academics. Lorrain had already reached India on 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1891, and he later went to Tripura in Agartala, and had applied for permission to work among the tribes there, but this aspect was rejected. On November 1892, F.W Savidge came to Bengal under the same mission and they soon formed a partnership that was to last for forty years in unbroken friendship. By January 1892, they were both in Chittagong and from there they wended their way to Kassalong in the Chittagong Hill tracts where there were various tribes. Having failed to enter Tripura, they felt compelled to proceed to the Mizo Hills. The attempt was unsuccessful and permission to enter was denied yet again. (Lloyd, 1991. Pg 25). Determined as ever, the two did not give up and still made further effort to enter Tripura, but their hopes were diminished by the Maharaja. Towards the end of 1892, they resolved to settle in Silchar, towards the north of Mizoram, and they were still immensely determined to enter the village in any manner they could. However, a significant part of their stay in Silchar, with relevance to the education of the Mizos was that the two acquired the Mizo language by talking to the Mizos whom they encountered, but most importantly they learnt from a self help book which they found to study Mizo and it was called, *The Progressive Colloquial Exercise in Lushai Dialect*, which T.H Lewin, who was known to the Mizos as Thangliana had written in 1847. In the year, 1899, well after Lewin had left for his home in England, some documents which contained several observations on his life, which he had kept as a diary along with

what others had written about him were discovered at his house in Mizoram. One of these documents was the work of Herbert Lorrain, who had kept a well documented account of their lives in Mizoram. The document held an account of his struggle as well as the hardships which they had endured while entering Mizoram as well as the time that they had spent in Silchar, along with his missionary friend, Savidge. It was in this document that he wrote of how he and Savidge had learnt a great deal of the Mizo dialect from Lewin's book which they found in Silchar. (Ralte, 2008. Pg 116-117).<sup>8</sup>

This book in question was officially published in Calcutta Central Press Company in 1874 as *The Progressive Colloquial Exercise in Lushai Dialect of the Dzo or Kuki Language with Vocabularies and Popular tales*. He used the language which the British government had used for writing down Mizo words, which was Sir William Jones' transliteration system. Unlike Lorrain and Savidge, he did not go out of his way to develop Mizo alphabets for writing these books, but he simplified certain English words so that they would sound like the Mizo words which he heard around him. He produced Mizo (Dzo) to English words ranging about 1300 words and around 1200 words of English to Mizo (Dzo) words which was more than anyone could have done at the time. This book was not as satisfying as he hoped it would be, especially since the task of writing a language that had no alphabets was weighing down on him. He wanted to help the other British officers who had to communicate with the Mizos on a regular basis. Since the relationship between these two different races had to be maintained regularly, communication was very important and Lewin seemed to have been one of the few to understand the importance of communication and who actually took steps to help both of them. The book also contained ninety exercises for better learning of the language, along with three folk stories which were 'Chemtawta,' 'Lalruanga' and 'Kungawrhi'. (Ralte, 2013. Pg 199 -205)<sup>9</sup>. These three stories were some of the most popular ones then and even till today. The fact that he included Mizo folklore in this very

monumental book bore witness to the importance of these stories in their lives at the time. Stories were what the Mizos told each other in order to entertain themselves and they were instrumental in understanding how the world was the way it was. It is also the first book, in Mizo which was to be printed and published.

Another book which he had written was entitled, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein; With Comparative Vocabulary of the Hill Dialects* which he had written in 1869. This book contained not only the language, but the lives of the many different tribes who were residing in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The book richly consisted of 186 Mizo words and it is from these words and phrases that Lorrain and Savidge based the Mizo alphabets on. Another book that was discovered in his house, but which was not published was entitled *Grammer of the Arcanese dialect of Burmese for use of the South East Frontier of India*, which he wrote while he was residing in Tlabung. (Ralte, 2013. Pg 200-201)<sup>10</sup>. The dedication that Lewin gave to the Mizo people could be seen from the manner in which there was a thirst to learn their language for the sake of communication on one hand, and on the other, to speak the language of the other, meant that it would be easier for the white man to control their subordinates.

With the way paved by Lewin, as well as the efforts that Lorrain and Savidge took to educate the Mizos, there underwent a major change in the lives of the indigenous people. The time during which the missionaries arrived in Mizoram was a time of political and military upheaval where the Mizos felt as though they had no friends outside of their own villages. The use of the Roman script as their alphabets over the Bengali script had been influenced by various cultural differences, after the “Thirty-seven Year Bengali captivity” which referred to the attempt to impose the Bengali script on to the different peoples of North-East India. After the Mizos had been through all of these, it was regarded that it was too ‘degrading’ for them to accept the language of the people under whom they had suffered.

(Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 102). However, after the Roman script had been accepted as their alphabets, the literary upheaval took place and flourished and developed under the watchful eyes of the Welsh missionaries and was documented thus:

In the next four years they learnt the vernacular, carried out the stupendous work of reducing the language to writing, published a Lushai primer, a catechism on the Bible, a hymnbook, a grammar and a dictionary, prepared translations of Luke, John and the Acts of the Apostles, started simple medical and educational work, taught many of the Lushai to read and preached the Good News with such effect that two or three hill – men had already accepted Christianity, ( Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 101).

The use of the Roman script as has been already noted much contributed towards the development of Mizo literature, after its confirmation, and the Mizo language to this day thrived with its influence. It has been observed that the Roman Script as opposed to the Bengali Script had been officially authorized just in time for the Mizos because if the Bengali script, which was very much different from the Roman script had been used, the Mizo language, which the Welsh missionaries had carved out in Roman Scripts would not have survived. Further more, language is firmly affiliated with one's culture and if Bengali had been used the Mizos would not have responded well to Christianity and thus preaching Christianity might have been difficult for the missionaries as well. Also, if the government had officiated the Bengali script, the Mizos might not have flourished so much in the field of literature. It was only well after the 1930s that typewriters and the printing press made published books possible. (Ralte, 2008. Pg 213-214)<sup>11</sup>. So, the common language, albeit with certain differing alphabets between the Mizos and the Welsh missionaries made such differences and developments with regards to the number of converts and the level of trust received by them.

With these various missionaries paving the way for the Mizos to make way for their own literature, it would seem that folklore. “which is a class phenomenon, should disappear” as conjectured by Vladimir Propp. With these historic books which formulated the basic of learning and colonizing the people, it is no wonder that their existence can be traced even to this day and are regarded with high value. These books were one of the first aspects of literature to be published about the Mizos and they have survived to this day. Propp has however noted that:

Literature is also a class phenomenon , but it does not disappear...folklore indeed becomes a national property. What is not in harmony with the people dies out; what remains is subjected to profound qualitative changes and comes closer to literature... Folklore is the product of a special form of verbal art, and for this reason, the closest connection exists between the folklore and literature, between the science of folklore and literary criticism. (Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*. 1997. Pg 5).

Drawing on this idea that literature and folklore share a commonality that gives the audience an idea that folklore, which had undergone such a strain under the ideals of colonialism, the literature of facts that were produced during imperialism, always somehow finds a way to make its presence known. Taking into consideration what Dundes had succinctly stated in his first collection of essays that his goal was to “bring unconscious content into consciousness,” (Dundes, *The Meaning of Folklore*. 2007. Pg 1) certain folklore survives in the manner in which they narrate stories that are related to their environment in the only manner they knew. This was regarding the many appearances of ‘Vais’<sup>12</sup> in the stories depicted the idea of how they revered or even hated foreigners in their land. “Mauruangi” is a girl who was sold to the Maharaja of the ‘Vais’ and his affection was greatly contested between her and her sister. (Khangte, *Folktales of Mizoram – I*, 1997. Pg 141-149). Also “Chepahakhata” is a story about a very ugly man and the story denotes his

battle with a 'Vai' chieftain who irrationally hated ugly men for no reason. (Pachuaui, *Handpicked Tales From Mizoram*. 2008. Pg 23-26). These stories, when read in the light of Dundes' analysis of how symbols can be seen in Mizo folktales to bring to light the unconscious of a given culture, and also the representation of these foreign chiefs in each stories seem to be how the Mizos came to perceive of any foreigner, including the missionaries. On one hand, they revered them for their knowledge and aim for their favour, while on the other, before the village was swept with the words of the missionaries, accounts of how the Mizos hated the interference of the white men in their land can be noted. These stories serve as a symbolic representation of the universal love-hate relationship that is the tension between of every colonized country.

Propp goes on to state that there is one important difference that discerns folktales from literature which is that literature in general has an author while folktales do not. It was his opinion that someone must have been the first to compose it even if there was no author. He says he will:

...mention that in its origin, folktales should be likened to literature but to language, which is invented by no one and which has neither an author nor authors. It arises everywhere and changes in a regular way, independently of people's will once there are appropriate conditions for it in the historical developments of the peoples. (Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*. 1997. Pg 7).

So like language, folktales are invented by no one and it changes along with the times of its day. Language in itself has made its importance felt amongst the colonized for centuries during the colonial rule, under the umbrella of imperialism. It is what divides and unites the colonized and the colonizers in ways which had made many theorists struggle for finding a deeper truth regarding the same. It certainly proved beneficial for the missionaries

to continue their work since at the time the Mizos were so dubious of any foreign rule and it is understandable that Lorrain and Savidge had tried hard to learn the language of the people so that they might perhaps win their trust at such a time. For Frantz Fanon had said, “To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture,” (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Pg 78.), in reference to the Blacks and the colonized who want to adopt the language of their white masters. For the Mizos, however, it was more or less the opposite, in that the Welsh missionaries, as has been mentioned before, tried hard to learn the Mizo language to comprehend the Mizo culture and to receive the confidence of the Mizos in any way they could in order that their sermons could be instilled in the hearts of the Mizo people:

Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchal structure of power is perpetuated and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth,’ ‘order’ and reality become established. (Ashcroft, et al, 2002.Pg 7).

The missionaries therefore understood that the only way to assimilation was to enlighten themselves with the language for them to really speak the ‘truth’ of the Gospel to them. The first school that was established on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1894 (Ralte, 2008. Pg 216)<sup>13</sup> was only one of the first steps which were taken to educate the people. The school served as both a place where the newly converted Christians came to worship and it was also rendered for academics for the students who were mostly taught Bible stories. The ‘order’ inside the village which the establishment of a common language contributed to, played a vital role for the Mizo with regards to literature. The Arthington Mission arrived at a time when the Mizos were being coerced by circumstances to adopt any modernizing element imposed on or offered to them. A new administrative structure, legislation, demarcation of chiefdoms, system of taxes, amongst other things, were being introduced for the consolidation of the British rule. The people had learnt to adjust themselves to the new situation which included impressed labour and frequent levy on their provisions. It was a relief to have their own

language in the written form for their own benefit. “The young people,” observes Lewin, “proved to be apt scholars and ready pupils – teachers, and the art of reading and writing spread rapidly.” In his introductory note, Lloyd observes that within a span of a few decades Mizoram from being totally illiterate has become the second most literate areas in the whole of India. The Mizos depicted not only a desire to learn but also a spontaneous desire to share with others what had been acquired. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 102-105). This desire to share had produced a lot of mission – educated people who were eager to please the ‘masters’ who had taught them a new language and had opened a new world for them.

The historical moment where the colonized were educated and made to study cultures outside of their own produced the nineteenth century form of imperialism. Gauri Viswanathan has presented strong arguments for relating the “institutionalization and subsequent valorization of English literary study to a shape and an ideological content developed in the colonial context,” and specifically as it developed in India, where:

British colonial administrators, provoked by missionaries on the one hand and fears of native insubordination on the other, discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of a liberal education. (Ashcroft, et al, 2002. Pg 2).

So with education flourishing in Mizoram, the people were taught and were being taught in a chapel. It was a single ideology which led to the naturalizing of constructed values such as civilization and humanity which, conversely established ‘savagery,’ ‘native,’ and the ‘primitive.’ All these were words which were associated with the Mizos as their antithesis and as the object of a reforming zeal. Their native land was regarded to be much more inferior to the white man’s land and their way of life was labelled primitive and unacceptable and they were regarded to be confused as to what their alternatives other than

conversion should be. To reform, as they were told was to convert and become a Christian in order to rid themselves of all of the hateful words that they were attributed to. The way that could have saved themselves of their sins was to rid themselves of their own identity. Problems arose within the individual at this aspect. The Mizos might have thought it was easy at the time, since they were unable to comprehend how their conversions to a wholly different religion, ergo different culture altogether would affect them years and generations later. Viswanathan deals with the issue of what kinds of problems one might face in the hands of conversions. She writes:

By undoing the concept of fixed, unalterable identities, conversion unsettles the boundaries by which selfhood, citizenship, nationhood, and community are defined, exposing these as permeable borders. Shifts in religious consciousness traverse the contained order of culture and subtly dislodge its measured alignments, belying the false assurance that only change from the outside has the power to disrupt. The indeterminacy of conversion poses a radical threat to the trajectory of nationhood... Conversion to mainstream religion are as disruptive to the state as are the conversions to alternative or minority religions. ( Viswanathan, 1998. Pg 16).

As all assimilation are, the acceptance and conversion was not an exodus from one moment to the next, but gradual and sometimes rather violent and coercive. Viswanathan argues as to how the ones who resisted such acculturation were treated and goes on to denote:

...the resistances of converts to the erasure of their subjectivity are split equally between the two objects: on one hand, against their former community, which threatens to excommunicate and impose civil disabilities; and on the other, against

the state, which promises to protect converts' civil rights but in exchange for subsuming converts' religious conviction and belief within predetermined categories. (Viswanathan, 1998. Pg 17).

With such alternatives, the native had no chance to survive in such a society except on the basis of conversion. The first baptismal ceremony in Mizoram was held in April 1894, where the Welsh minister baptized Roy Singh, a Khasi follower (Ralte, 2009. Pg 217)<sup>14</sup>, and from then on there was a constant stream of natives who offered themselves to be baptised and promised themselves to live as they were taught to live, while following the footsteps of a good Christian.

To some forefathers, the event of this immediate change is still very fresh and there is no doubt that there was resistance. Some Mizos died without ever accepting Christianity, and they practised the ritual of the 'kelmei'<sup>15</sup> to their children in order to protect them in schools where they were taught the Bible. Education was a luxury that only royalty could hope to have, so when the missionaries offered to teach the people for free, it was inviting and even the least religious person would have been a fool to resist. However, the missionaries only wanted to educate the ones who had converted, as Viswanathan said, their civil rights were curtailed and many converted to have the benefits that these conversions entailed. The older generation who remembered the past and who refuted the religion were illiterate and it meant that they could not tell their own stories, so thus it was told for them by the others. The white men who wrote about these accounts and who told their stories for them did not once mention an incident when a Mizo made an argument about the religion that the Welsh missionaries were preaching. It thus meant that some aspects were consciously deleted. The fact that they resisted the power was not relevant to the ones who were documenting the various events which took place in their own villages, or perhaps the idea that everyone converted happily

was a good tale which they could tell at home and it would be a testament to the fact that they did their work well.

This sudden disruption of beliefs, lives and culture brought on a lot of changes so suddenly that “conversion posits a severe challenge to the demarcation of identities set by the laws that govern everyday life and practice.” ( Viswanathan, 1998. Pg 75 ). For the Mizos, once they were converted, their own practices were rebuked and pushed aside and the songs that they used to sing were censored, while the feasts that they used to have were stopped and almost their entire ways of life interfered. Trying to live between the life they were born with and the life they were expected to lead, they soon had problems with the idea of identity, unable to escape the fate of who they really were and wanting to be a part of the white man’s religion and culture which they knew nothing about and could never be a part of. However, the need to leave behind their old ways found problems with their indigenous culture which could be seen in the folktales as examples. Dundes pointed to children’s folklore, not as something to be repressed, but rather to be brought out into the open. He evaluated what children typically relate in folklore to as “areas of special concern,” or anxieties that are expressed more readily in folklore than in everyday conversation. It is his belief that:

Folklore offers a socially sanctioned outlet for the expression of taboo and anxiety – provoking behaviour. One can do or say in folkloric form things otherwise interdicted in everyday life. (Dundes, *The Meaning of Folklore*. 2007. Pg 3).

To grasp why folklore is needed as an expressive outlet, one therefore needs to know the cultural values, taboos, anxieties and beliefs of the society in which individual tradition – bearers operate in everyday life. The story of “Chhura” (Dahrawka, 2008. Pg 243)<sup>16</sup>, and how he picks the brain of his child until the child died therefore questions whether it is a story

which is suitable for children and generates anxiety over the idea of the Mizo people as, hard – hearted human beings. The name of “Mauruangi’s” sister in the story is “Bingtaii or Chhubingtaituki,”<sup>17</sup> (Khangte, 1997. Pg 141)<sup>18</sup>. The revelation of the name itself causes anxiety and taboo. Since folklore mirrors one’s culture, it seems to be that this is actually how the fathers and mothers call their children and to this day, after being ‘refined’ and made to leave their coarse ways, it sounds only derogatory and wrong. The Mizos, in the light of finding out such things about themselves and branding their own names and behaviour also taboo the lure of the white man.

Very soon, the Mizos developed into what Homi Bhabha calls a ‘hybrid.’ Bhabha argues that hybridity results from various forms of colonization, which had sprung from cultural collisions and social interchanges which do not necessarily work together. In the attempt to assert colonial power in order to create anglicized subjects, "The trace of what is disavowed is not repressed but repeated as something *different*--a mutation, a hybrid" (Bhabha, 2004. Pg. 111). As time went on, the Mizos became more and more out of contact with their own neighbouring states which due to the “Thirty Seven Year Bengali Captivity”, they could not really regard as friendly. Their only hope was to communicate with the Welsh missionaries and the Britishers who had stayed with them earlier but this aspect, after independence was not possible after independence. So to this day, the people live in a somewhat disoriented group who felt they had more in common with the white man than they ever did with the other states of India. The implicit impossibility of being a part of that culture which gave the thought more texture and the fascination with the white man still continues. In Wilson Harris’ formulation:

...hybridity in the present is constantly struggling to free itself from a past which stressed ancestry, and which valued the ‘pure’ over its threatening opposite, the

‘composite.’ It replaces a temporal lineality with a spatial plurality. (Ashcroft, et al, 2002. Pg 2).

So then, although it had taken many years, the Mizos soon realized that their worth and values lay in the life which had been confiscated from them by the need to. As Harris says, the present sees a dawn in which the people are awakening to realize how valuable their own indigenous culture and beliefs are and how important it is to try to remain ‘pure’ of their nativism even though the idea which seemed impossible with everything which had happened in their lives.

Harris further explains that “cultures must be liberated from the destructive dialectic of history, and imagination is the key to this. He sees imaginative escape as the ancient and only refuge of oppressed peoples, but the imagination also offers possibilities of escape from the politics of dominance and subversion. One of the most important images for this process has been provided by the folk character of Anancy, the spider man from Akan folklore. For Harris, the trickster character of the spider man, offers a narrow psychic space through which radical transformation may occur. Mixing past, present, future and imperial and colonial cultures within his own fiction, Harris deliberately strives after a new language and a new way of seeing the world.” (Ashcroft, et al, 2002. Pg 34). The question arises, therefore if the Mizos could find a way to attain that same kind of imagination by reliving their past through their own imagination and their folk tales and heroic folk characters. Harris provides, there is nothing more instrumental than folk narratives to bring a people back to their origins and to have them remember that they had survived, albeit through different means, but function properly without the white man for centuries.

However, on a broader spectrum, Dundes reacted negatively to romantic nationalism as the only reason as to why anyone bothered to relocate their folk traditions, and he worked

against the conventional division of folklore studies by every nation. Dundes' philosophical inclination was toward a global view of culture as well as politics. He believed that a fuller international awareness of folklore taught tolerance and social unity and he states that, "folklore has too long been the tool of regionalism and nationalism," and laments that "folklore has more often been a divisive than a unifying influence in the world...surely it is difficult to consider as an enemy someone who shares the same folktales and customs," and he cites as examples, the common traditions of peoples of Europe, Arabs and Jews, and Turks and Greeks. "If the world is ever to be truly united, then the world's people as 'folk' must have a world folklore." (Dundes, *The Meaning of Folklore*. 2007. Pg 15). So, on a more systemic need for peaceful co-existence of not only the Mizos and their colonizers, but the world as a whole, Dundes points out just how important folktales can be for unity. In this regard, colonization and folklore can be said to be of significance in terms of the Mizo sensibility.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Mother Earth

<sup>2</sup> In translation from the original text in Mizo. Hereafter cited as Ibid

<sup>3</sup> ‘Sekibuhchhuak’ in Mizo.

<sup>4</sup> The mother of bogeys, spooks, ogres, goblins and hobgoblins.

<sup>5</sup> A mythical tiger-man, a person possessing the magic power of changing himself or herself at will into a tiger, and then back again into a human being.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Foreigners, (excluding Europeans, and latterly the better known neighboring tribes as well).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Literally a goat’s tail. Specifically, the tail of a goat which is worn suspended by a string round the neck of the person for whom the animal was offered. To lose this precious token or charm is regarded by the owner as a major misfortune that likely to result in sickness or even death. A ‘kelmei’ is never parted with by its owner unless he has decided to abandon his animalistic belief in order to embrace the Christian faith.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>17</sup> Crude name for female genitals.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

The previous chapters have brought to light the impact in which religion had diminished the traditional rites and rituals of the Mizo people. As demonstrated by the various folk narratives that have been mentioned, there can be no argument that the people and their lives have been changed a great deal, but what should be kept in mind is that it does not necessarily mean that they are all for the worse. Change is a part of every evolutionary step and perhaps the Mizo people might have evolved into a group which were very different from the lives they had had before, prior to or the coming of the Welsh missionaries. This chapter will analyze how Christianity for the Mizo could perhaps be an impetus for them to preserve their heritage as seen through the folk narratives.

Culture Studies has developed into a very diversified area and at present, the name has come to signify not only a particular approach to literary studies, but also a discipline in itself. It has introduced, “the approach to study literature within the complex web of relations between the works of literature and the prevailing social, material, historical, and ideological conditions of the time it was written,” and in this way it has taken literature into a broader and wider study. therefore, extending it, “beyond the traditional ideas of what constitute ‘great’ works of literature to include pamphlets or other documents, non-written texts, and even cultural phenomenon of various kinds.” (Nilanjana Gupta, *Approaches in Literary Theory: Cultural Studies*. New Delhi: Worldview, 2008. Pg 1.). In this formulation, the older notion of the study of literature and culture as a discussion of the aesthetic qualities of particular canonized texts no longer holds. All creativity is seen as a result of the material actuality within which it is located. And it is because of this that this

study now takes into account the folk narratives of an indigenous people and thereby branding it as significant in understanding the lives of the people.

The study of folklore with special regard to the 'folk,' the lower class of a group of people has garnered certain attention and study in recent years and folktales saw the emergence of its importance as a discipline. Vladimir Propp has denoted that in the West, folklore means the peasant culture on 'one' people, most commonly of the researcher's own people. Although he acknowledges the possibility of a scientific study of national cultures, "the principle outlined above is completely unacceptable, and it can easily be reduced to the absurd." It is his opinion that the science of folklore embraces the art of all peoples, no matter who studies them. "Folklore is an international phenomenon," he concludes. (Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*. 1997. Pg 5). Folklore, by this definition, contains the art of the lower social strata of all peoples, irrespective of their differing backgrounds and roots and also of the stage of their development. With the Grimm brothers, it was national romanticism that sparked their interest in collecting their tales and reinventing them, and the same can be said about the Mizos. If one attempts to see the fundamental reason as to why Mizo folktales have garnered such attention as of late, one comes back in full circle to the feeling of colonialism that pervades the people for a long time and from which they are slowly coming out of. To go back to conventional traditions which had been suppressed for so long conveys a somewhat freeing, and perhaps even rebellious candour that had not occurred to the Mizos since the feeling of the inadequacy of their culture under the rule of the British had left an everlasting impression. The 'unreal' and fantastical of which folktales were generally associated with, (which had prior to this nationalism been frowned upon since the worldview was dogmatically based on the Bible) were given a better study and this goes on to prove their significance in giving the people a sense of identity. The manner in which their forefathers had lived for years, shocking and undesirable as they might have been in the light of their

new belief and conversion, gave the people a culture which they realized they had lost and wanted to return to.

Alan Dundes had spoken, written and lectured about the academic necessity of folklore in the understanding of a culture's consciousness and at the beginning he had gained a formidable number of followers as well as detractors, who were of the view that folklore was a thing of the past and what people used to know but had more or less forgotten. Dundes' innovative analyses however, could not be ignored and it forced scholars from an extensive range of fields to reconsider aspects that were related to the study of folklore. His emphasis on this analysis gave impetus to an unusual perspective on intellectual purpose. Dundes, however, committed himself to the broad mission of uncovering and understanding meaning. "Folklore is crucial to a knowledge of human experience," he observes, because "as autobiographical ethnography," it permits a view, "from the inside-out, rather than from the outside-in." (Dundes, *The Meaning of Folklore*. 2007. Pg 1). In this manner, folklore becomes the ideal tool for the understanding of the culture of a group of people in as much as it reveals differences and similarities in ways of thinking. However, if Propp's idea that one's own culture holds importance as compared to any other culture is unacceptable, then there is a need to view these cultural tales as having a universal strain of worldview for it to have a meaningful contribution to the broader study of folklore as a universal discipline. For this to happen, the Mizos had to store away their romantic inclinations for the heroes and heroines of folklore and instead of using folklore as a dividing agent, they must try to find the universality of these independent and diverse tales to the equally culture specific tales of other cultures.

For the Mizos, folklore was the only way in which they could connect to their indigenous culture mainly because of the fact that they had no concrete written history to base their origin on, and also because the ones that were traced back were done only after

the influence of religion and the missionaries within a post-colonial ethos. However, as time went on, after the missionaries left, the Mizos were soon left with the emerging confidence that one need not look up to the white man for every aspect of one's life. The Mizos began to understand the importance of their folklore. The history of folklore studies reveals that folklorists in many different countries have often been inspired by the desire to preserve their natural heritage and so also, the same applied to the Mizos. In 1964 (years though it might have been after the coming of the missionaries), Mizo folklore in written form was first published by P.S Dahrawka and it not only re-introduced the subject, but also paved the way for the emergence of the study of folklore itself in Mizoram. Following Dahrawka's sensibility about the significance of these stories for the lives that had almost been forgotten, various writers and scholars have taken up the work of collecting these stories as well as the art of translating them to give them a broader understanding of the cultures outside of their own. Dundes has cited the Grimm brothers as fore runners for establishing the feeling of nationalism through the aspects of folklore:

The Grimms, for example, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, imbued with nationalism and romanticism, and armed with the fashionable methodology of historical reconstruction, collected folktales and legends with the hope of rescuing something ur-German, that is something truly Teutonic, before it faded from the scene altogether. (Dundes, 2007. Pg 56).

By this definition then, it leads to the conjecture that every culture, though different from each other, have tried to find their roots. Folklore conveys the idea of security that one belongs to a group who share a culture with one or the other, which is best denoted in oral folktales.

The Mizos, as depicted in some of the selected folktales were seen to be a people of rich and varied traditions as well as characters. In the story of ‘Liandova leh Tuaisiala,’ there is a very strong bond between two brothers who were abandoned by their unfaithful mother for another man while they were yet very young. The two brothers, Liandova and Tuaisiala lived on their own and were supported by the older brother, Liandova. They were so poor that they did not even own their own dao to work in the jhum with, and Liandova, the older of the two would earn his living while working in other people’s jhum and doing various manual work for the other people in the village who took pity on them. There were days when they did not even have anything to eat except a grain of millet which, though small it might be, the siblings shared with love. Even the riches and fortunes that befell them at the end of the story did not hamper their affection and devotion for one another. They were described as good and kind hearted children who had no qualms about helping the poor. The brothers displayed mercy on a snake and it led them to a good hearted witch who fed them. The chief then took pity on them and showered them with gifts while telling them that they could choose the best animal he had for their upkeep. The clever nature of Liandova can be seen when he showed no covetous inclination towards fat and desirous animals that paraded in front of him for him to choose, but he chose the meekest of the animals which the chief offered. The narrative also denotes that siblings can be fair and kind hearted to each other.

On the other hand, the tale of Chhura, the most notable of Mizo folktale heroes and his brother Nahaia did contain aspects that were related to the love and devotion which they had for one another. Rather, their stories are filled with mischief and manipulation, betrayals and trickery. In one of the many famous tales, Chhura lived contentedly in a well built house, whereas his brother, Nahaia’s house was not properly completed and it was so beaten down that it became unbearable for Nahaia to live in and so he decided to trick his brother into exchanging their houses. Questionable though it may be, Chhura sometimes displayed how

gullible he could be when it came to the trickery of his brother and in this tale, when Nahaia suggested that they exchange houses because of the poor condition of his house, Chhura agreed. Falling for his brother's rhetoric about how the holes in the roof had been left deliberately thus, so as to watch the beautiful stars as one slept, he moved in and he appreciated the holes in the roof for a night. Chhura, however, did not anticipate the storm and the rain which started plummeting down on the ridden house by the next night. The harsh wind and weather bothered him so much so that he had to work hard in order to restore the house that he had exchanged with his brother due to his gullibility. (Khangte, *Folktales of Mizoram – I*, 1997. Pg 49; 122-132). It is in such varied characteristic nature that the dynamics of fraternity have been embedded in the relationship between the siblings within the Mizo folktales. If folktales are representative of people, these two tales denote how siblings can display love and affection for one another, and also trick and deceive each other as well.

What can be deduced from these stories as well as from almost all of Mizo folktales is that the people have demonstrated a life which had been led from day to day in search of food and living. It was a life where each meal was not guaranteed and a lot of these tales denote the story of how hungry they can be when they had no food to eat. Vladimir Propp has analyzed that folklore is, “first and foremost, the art of the oppressed classes, both peasants and workers, but also of the intermediate strata that gravitate toward the lower social classes.” (Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*. 1997. Pg 5). All the folktales that the Mizos can boast of contains stories of plight and hardships that every man went through to make a living. As seen from various tales like ‘Hualtungamtawn,’ ‘Lalruanga and Keichala’ and ‘Tlingi and Ngama,’ among many others, what was conveyed unmistakably was that these were people who hunted everyday for their meals. It was a time when bravery and the art of sharp shooting expected to be possessed by young men was admired and revered. This was

because it was essentially a culture which respected people who could shoot animals and one's esteem was measured only by how well men provided for their family. A young man was expected to be brave and self-sacrificing, willing to fight any supernatural beings in order to defend the honour of the ladies (even despite dangerous situations), while the women only had their beauty to boast of. Although in tales such as 'Chepahakhata,' (Pachau, 2008. Pg 23-27), there is a surprising change of portrayal in the hero who is described as so ugly "that no one wanted to marry him." The only wife he could find was a witch. The wife, after getting tired of waiting for her husband to come home, "took her daughter up to the heavens and went to dwell with Pu Vana."<sup>1</sup> Such tales denote the close relations with the humans and witches and their various encounters with the gods appear as easily (without any apology) for their improbability.

The idea that the animal kingdom holds as much presence in Mizo folklore as did the humans can be seen in various tales. Supernatural beings and gods interject in stories such as the tale of 'Rahtea,' who is a boy whose death was being conspired upon by his parents for no reason at all, and so he ran away and would not come home even when asked again and again to do so. In the end, he turned into a dragon and flew away from home. In the tale of 'Phawthira and Hrangchala,' Sairama, the husband of the heroine Kungi turned into a huge elephant, much to the surprise of Kungi and he carried his newly wed bride to his home. The two heroes after having found out that their own human being had been deceived and held captive by such a horrendous being, went after him and killed him while returning Kungi to her rightful place in their village, after much contest between the two. Another fantastical tale is 'Kungawrhi,' who was born out of a wound on her father's thumb. She was so small that when she was born one grain of millet was a meal for her. Amazingly, this little girl grew up to be a normal, beautiful young girl whom every young man in the village coveted. 'Tualvingi and Zawlpala,' denotes the tale of how a loving husband and wife, who were

separated all because a village chief wanted Tualvungi for her beauty. It denotes how Zawlpala sold her off as his sister, while claiming a great price for her, because he felt that the chief would not be able to pay the same. However, but as the chief was a magician, he paid her bride price in full. Realizing his mistake and his longing and love for his wife, Zawlpala went to Phuntiha, Tualvungi's new husband, but Phuntiha served him poisonous food and Zalwpala died soon after. Tualvungi, heartbroken and determined to return to her former husband's grave, betrayed Phuntiha and she requested an old woman to kill her so that she could rest next to her husband. The two lovers, to this day are believed to have turned into two beautiful yellow butterflies. The tale of "Chemtatrawta" is one which is filled with interactions of humans animals and the animals. They communicated with each other as freely when a crab bit Chemtatrawta in his testicles. The animals blamed each other for the incident arguing and talking with Chemtatrawta. Therefore, the animals in Mizo folktales, play an essential role in conveying the theme, plot and even the morals of many of the tales. (Dahrawka, 2008. Pg 241- 257).<sup>2</sup>

In analyzing the connection regarding the presence of the fantastic elements in the folktales, Propp has come up with different ideas as to how these representations could be significant. He cites the idea of Tudorovskaja, who believes that the presentation of social, behavioural attitude in the

wondertale acquires the "form of fiction" and this 'somewhat limits the realism of the wondertale.' The wondetale emerges as a realistic genre, but allegedly it has one defect, which is that it contains an element of fiction which diminishes and limits its realism. A logical consequence of this opinion would be the assertion that if there were no fiction in the wondertale it would be better. (Propp, 1997. Pg 16-17)

Propp goes on to state that this theory was not without contest as V.P Anikin has argued upon the importance of animals and supernatural beings in folklore. “Immediate social and historical experience is the source of faithful representation of reality in folklore,” he says, and continues, “social allegory is a most important feature of animal tales and without it, people will not need the folktale.” (Propp, 1997. Pg 16-17). When taking Anikin’s idea into consideration, (for instance, he has given the example of the wolf as the “oppressor of the people,”) it becomes easier to understand that perhaps the elephants and the ‘keimi’<sup>3</sup> in Mizo folktales could somewhat be portrayed as significant symbols of danger. The allegory states that when a young beautiful woman fell under the captive of the enemy, the animals and the hero, with unmatched fearlessness come to rescue her runs. This aspect is found in a lot of these tales and it only concludes that the symbols which these animals and supernatural entities, which are sometimes embedded in these tales and its implications are indeed not only essential but also play a most important part of these stories. They denote, as any allegorical tale does, a more comprehensive understanding of the culture and social norms which these folktales are so much a part of.

Alan Dundes, in this subject goes further to denote that by studying the nature of these various folklores from different backgrounds and places, the scholar discovers a “general pattern of culture” and raises “levels of consciousness.” The assumption of this statement is the existence of an unconscious – a part of the mind containing repressed instincts and their representative wishes, ideas, and images which are not accessible to direct examinations. He goes on further and states that folklore holds psychological as well as cultural significance, as an often momentary and social outlet of expression. It uses symbols in elaborated narratives and in rituals to encapsulate or intensify experience and provide a release from reality. He points out:

The apparent irrationality of much folklore poses problems for literal minded, historically oriented folklorists. It is not easy to find a rationale for the irrational, to make sense of 'nonsense' but that is what folklorists seriously interested in interpretation must try to do. (Dundes, 2007. Pg 56).

On such theory, folktales will gain more credibility and importance if some plot, behavioural pattern or even a theme may be interpreted beyond what is written in the text. The image of a good hero may not always conform to society's moral code. 'Chhura,' the famous Mizo hero for example perform several deeds that are sometimes incompatible with the morality of the people's mindset. He has been described as the most stupid as well as the cleverest of men at the same time. He exchanges jhums with his brother Nahaia while believing his brother's lies every time, also picks his child's brain, thinking it was a carbuncle, and he carries his family heirloom, a huge vessel to sell to another village. Since his wife was afraid that he might break the vessel she told him not to put it down on the ground. As he goes on his way as the vessel was too heavy, he wonders how he can exchange the vessel from one shoulder to the other without breaking it and he came up with the solution of turning around in his path and in this manner he thought that the vessel was on the other shoulder. (Khangte, 1997. Pg 47). He displayed such levels of foolishness and unthinkable lack of resourcefulness in these stories that it is hard to believe that such a human being could exist. However, in his travel to 'Mawngping Khua,' he displayed a paradoxically intellectual episode whenin he tricked the villagers while escaping their anger and their bid to capture him. In the end, he even slept with all the women in exchange for a firebrand. (Dahrawka, 2008. Pg 241).<sup>4</sup>

There is no external logic in everyday life as depicted by folktales, and perhaps in any case, such logic is not a requirement of folk aesthetics. If it is required to be interpreted, then perhaps folklore provides a socially sanctioned form of behaviour in which a person may do

what cannot be done in 'real life.' Lifetimes of social convention which have been practiced and institutions by themselves have barricaded us from acting in the manner that Chhura does sometimes. Propp, in his analysis of reality and its relation to the folktale has cited Lenin who said, 'In every folktale, there are elements of reality...' And in folktales these elements are most common:

The fox, wolf, bear, hare, rooster, goat, and others are the very animals the peasant deals with; peasants and their wives, old men and women, stepmothers and stepdaughters, soldiers, gypsies, farmhands, priests, and landowners also entered the folktale from life... However, if we examine Lenin's words more closely, we will see that in his opinion, the folktale does not consist entirely of elements of reality. He said only that they are present. As soon as we turn to the question of what these realistic peasants, soldiers and other personages do in the folktale, that is, as soon as we turn to plots, we plunge into the world of the impossible and the invented. (Propp, 1997. Pg 17-18).

Propp even makes the comment that in the Russian folktale, there is not a single credible plot. This might be true as well of the Mizo folktale; magic, demons, fairies, man eaters posing as human beings; demi-gods and even gods themselves make appearances and communicate with humans as if it was conceivable in the realities of everyday life. However, the more important part of it is that folklore is constantly being created anew in contemporary life and it is not a relic of the past. Supernatural beings and talking animals may count for a good story and even a joke but the amazing aspect is that they are a part of a particular culture and somehow they are a part of people's belief narratives. They are, ultimately an expression of present-day issues. In contemporary Mizo scenario too, in August 2012, there was an incident in Aizawl, Mizoram which revealed just how much folklore and the belief narratives still played an important part in the people's lives. There was a heavy current of

rainfall for a few days and a young woman and a young man disappeared during this tumult of disastrous weather. The people's first reaction was that they were drowned in the sudden heavy rush of flood that drained down their way while they found shelter, waiting for the rain to stop as they were driving around on a bike. When the two young people did not return home, the community ordered a search for them, and people from all over searched and looked for them in the places where they were ostensibly last seen. Even their bike was untouched and it was still left where they were last presumed to have been. The Tlawng river, which is the longest in Mizoram was where they searched but it did not contain their bodies or any sight of any human remains even after thorough search. Obviously, the disappearance of not one, but two people, so suddenly, garnered a lot of interest. After a few days had passed with no sign of them, people started to have a lot of beliefs about where they could have been. The fact that their bodies or their clothes were not found in the river or in the rain led many to believe that they were alive and had perhaps even run away. Some even claimed they saw them together in Silchar<sup>5</sup>, having eloped on the way.

However, the most interesting belief of all and the one which people most revered was that of 'Khawmuchawi.' It is an old belief of folklore that in the olden days people were taken away by spirits while they were still alive. This recent incidence regarding the dubious disappearance of the two young people, denoted that there was a lot of talk about how in olden days, people who were working in the jhum<sup>6</sup> or young men who spent the night alone in the field used to be taken away by these spirits. Presumably, (according to the accounts that were told by the people who were returned to their homes safe and sound) when in captivity, the spirits would fly them around from place to place, changing their locations constantly so as to confuse the people whenever the search party came out to look for them. The captives were to be able to hear and see everyone around them and they would often call out to the people for their attention, but they were never heard. It was as if the spirits had

taken them to another realm in the earth where they were not wholly a part but not separate from it altogether either. This belief increasingly spread and was equally more and more believed by the Mizos who searched for the two young people even as time passed especially as there was no indication that these two people were either dead or alive.

To make this belief more interesting, a man even claimed to have seen these two young people as a vision in his dream and he stated that these lost youths called out to him and he informed the local community, (which in turn carried the tale on to their families) and soon it became a matter of the local news. The man was even interviewed on local television channels and the man narrated his dream of how he saw these two people who had disappeared and that they were indeed taken by these spirits and were trapped in the realm of the spirits. He led the search party to places where the youths had called out to him in a dream. There were reports of the place where they had slept the night before, which was a deserted place outside the town and how it was even still warm, presumably from where they had spent the night there. For days, this search went on as did the interest of the people. Shopkeepers and their customers talked about it daily, officers and their staff discussed aspects regarding where these spirits were taking them and the talk in general in town, reflected upon how this particular episode was not an isolated case. They remembered how some other people they knew or had heard of had undergone the same circumstances. People adamantly recounted how they had heard or known of tales regarding how these spirits originated in the time of their forefathers and how usual it had been then and they could only wonder as to why there were lesser accounts of these happenings as of late. Pastors and church goers too prayed for their safe return on a consistent basis.

After the grieving family were prayed for and after a long search led by the man who had dreamt about them, one body was found at the foot of the river after the weather was clearer and the currents were no so high. It had been washed so far down south of the river

that the initial searches were in vain and perhaps the belief in the idea of the spirit taking them away had convinced the search party, enough to search only to a particular limit down the river. Even then, the belief of the community regarding the corpse, has been undecided. Whatever the reason as to why they were not found before, what was most significant was how much the people, (in a day and age when demons, spirits and witches are thought to be alive only in folktales and story books), still had so much belief in the belief narratives of the community and how easily a mere strain of thought could jump back to beliefs of olden days when their basic belief in Christianity could not explain the logic. This episode has truly accounted for the fact that folktales are not a mere relic of the past but are an expression of present-day issues. Following further on Dundes' analysis which is based on psychoanalytical study of folklore, the two young people and the belief in spirits seemed to take on more meaning than by the account of itself. He gives a presupposition that:

...the existence of an unconscious – a part of the mind containing repressed instincts and their representative wishes, ideas, and images which was not accessible to direct examination. Although some critics would posit that mental activity can only be conscious, Freudian theory holds that unconscious ideas can be recognized when resistance and repression, processes of internalizing disturbing thoughts, are overcome, so that the ideas become conscious, that is externalized (Dundes, 2007. Pg 3)

The repression which Dundes could perhaps mean in this context might be a way for the Mizo people to harbour their indigenous cultures and replace it with another culture, namely the white man's culture. For years, the Mizos had thrived on the teachings of the Bible and their belief system does not go beyond the idea of Christianity where spirits do not randomly (and literally) take people away. The teachings of the Bible were taken as more of a symbolic and metaphorical allegory, and it was a far cry from what the people went through

when dealing with things that were outside of their belief and understanding. What was also interesting was how quickly the mind of the people rushed to the safety of folklore when religion failed to give answers to their own environment. Folklore had always been a tool to understand one's culture and to give reason for the world as it is. However, for years now, these beliefs were thwarted under the gradual influence of Christianity and these tales had been regarded as nothing but old wives' tales and bedtime stories. The only conclusion that one can derive from this experience was that culture and religion are not something that can be separated; religion is always the subsidiary category, a cultural deposit influencing and informing the wider historical and philosophical interests and in a way, this could be representative of the Mizo ethos as well.

Foucault, for the later part of his life, had been occupied with the idea of religion and culture. He primarily sees religion as nothing but a set of enforced relations and discursive practices which dictate human life and their culture, forcing answers on its followers with no room for questions. His treatment of religion is one of scrutiny and suspicion, but he holds that "religion is a part, a central part, of the cultural conditions of knowledge. In this sense, it is very difficult to separate religion and culture; they are interconnected parts of each other." On this subject, Jeremy Carrette has deduced of Foucault's research and learning on the subject of religion and culture significantly thus:

Foucault's work can therefore be seen to move within a discursive space of 'religion and culture' – where one mutually informs the other. As Foucault's work demonstrates, a culture cannot understand itself without first understanding its implicit connection and development within the constructs of religious belief and practice. Contemporary culture is born out of religious traditions and the conditions of our knowledge are therefore embedded in religious discourse. (Foucault, *Religion and Culture*, 1999. Pg 32-33).

The contemporary culture of the Mizos was born out of the culture clash as well as the tension between the colonizer and the colonized and the direct cut from the manner of life which they had earlier known. The Mizos had, prior to their conversions to Christianity had believed wholly in the idea that humans could be carried off by spirits if the evil spirits that they believed in were not appeased by ritualistic sacrifices. Although there are no accounts as to the orders given by the missionaries, to not believe in their folktales or made any actions against these inherited beliefs that they had, religion and culture do abide together. For the Mizos, letting go of their previous heathen religion was tantamount to letting go of their culture. The sudden break that they were forced to endure when they converted and also to let go of their culture repressed them so much so that they forgot about the importance of folklore for a long time. However, in various cases such as the one depicted earlier, it presents itself when they could find no other answers as it had always been embedded in their subconscious. Yet they had been ‘internalized,’ to use Dundes’ term, and it took a traumatizing event such as the disappearance of their fellow human beings for them to even ‘externalize’ this repression. For Dundes, it is not always the written (word which is taught by educational institutions which always holds the truth to things, but he believes that many beliefs and treasured cultural heritage can be found in oral narratives such as folklore:

We tend to trust what is ‘down in black and white.’ ‘Put it in writing,’ we say; we tend to distrust oral testimony, regarding it as unreliable. We forget that much of what is written down – in newspapers, in books, circulated as oral communication first. Even the Bible was oral tradition before it was committed to written form! (Dundes, 2007. Pg 58).

Dundes did not go further to state that oral folklore was to be treated as truth and as reliable, but what he asked is for it to be treated on par with religion. Foucault too, only sees religion as “entirely woven through with elements that are imaginary, erotic, effective,

corporeal, sensual, and so on.” (Foucault, 1999. Pg 107). On the event of the two young people’s disappearance in Aizawl city, for instance, the fact was that they had been lost for a number of days and the people searched the entire length and breadth of the river but did not find them. Perhaps, they had been there, at the foot of the river all along and it was the search party that they had not found them. Or perhaps they were indeed taken by the spirits and had travelled with them from location to location as the man with the dreams had claimed to have seen. However, the fact also remains that no one will ever really know. Dundes then asks, on such occasion that one should not dismiss the theories of oral testimonies in favour of the ones written down only because they were not credible. He wants to leave a significant space to reflect and give both folklore and religious beliefs some benefit of doubt, which as Foucault says is neither based on empirical evidence or on chance as there is room for possibilities in both of them.

It is only with the wide open-mindedness of the people that culture and religion will ever stand a chance to co-exist. If folklore can be detected in the practice of religious faith and worship, equally religion has left its mark on the science. This is unquestionably true because folklore is a social phenomenon; a cultural trait arising within the communal life of the peasantry. When it becomes detached and unorganized it survives merely as a collection of quaint and naive " bygonees ", or else degenerates into not very edifying superstitions, devoid of any serious purpose and meaning, like palmistry, crystal gazing and beliefs about "luck". “Survivals that have lost their original function are, often a cause of considerable embarrassment, and unless they can be utilized for beneficial ends and so acquire a new functional value for the organism, sometimes, they are definitely harmful, as in the case of the vermiform appendix and similar rudimentary organs.” (James, “Influence of Christianity on Folklore. 1947, Pg 361). All efforts to perpetuate or resuscitate the culture of the folk by artificial sophisticated devices, whether as pastimes or picturesque adjuncts to modern

mechanized civilization, are doomed to failure because it is only when traditional ways of life are embodied in a 'living' culture that they retain their vitality. They must be socially accepted like all other cultural traits and are determined by cultural conditioning. They must express the attitudes to life of the group in which they occur as an integral part of its social, economic or religious tradition. In the case of the Mizo, it becomes evident that the culture of the folk had not died and is in fact 'living', perhaps in the unconscious of the people's minds and it needed a traumatizing event for it to break down on its repression and to reveal itself. It is still, however, very much a part and parcel of the people's lives and it could perhaps give the people a much better meaning to their living if they continue to openly accept that the culture which they had denounced as taboo and caused them anxiety is still very much existent as a part of their lives. This folk culture cannot disappear only because Christianity has refused to embrace these beliefs.

Dundes argues that in folklore, more than in other forms of human evidence, "one finds a people's own unconscious picture of themselves." The picture is not always pretty, as it is exposed to the unconscious belief that a lot of the Mizo Christians still have for old heathen, supernatural beings, or even the disturbing behavioural pattern which one recognizes in a folk hero or a heroine and somehow finds a co-relation between the two. He did not think of traditions as a relic of the past, and he often took to the lectern to demonstrate that folklore was very much a part of the modern, even perhaps the conventional religious world. On this endeavour taken by Dundes, his editor, Simon Bronner has said:

When asked to speak, he gave a generic title of "Folklore in the Modern World" to cover contemporary joke fads, customs and speech that reflected current issues and conditions. In this concern for the emergent nature of folklore, Dundes was a champion of the modern view that folklore is an artistic process rather than a dusty artefact, since in his words, it is 'something alive and dynamic' rather than 'dead and

static.’ It is not something relegated to primitivized others – historically or socially – but rather a behavioural pattern that everyone exhibits. (Dundes, 2007. Pg 1).

For him, folk mannerisms, beliefs and customs live on to this day and is present in our everyday lives if only we take a moment to recognize it. In another study of religion and culture, E.O James has come up with the idea that religion, Christianity, in particular is not and has never been the agent which tried to separate folk tradition from the religion. He gives examples from the time of Constantine in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, which has been used to placate the pagans and he threw all the weight of his office and prestige on the side of the Church as the new spiritual dynamic and unifying centre of the Empire, and depaganization of emperor began gradually. James does not deny that the spread of Christianity at the turn of the century was rampant and to follow it meant that it was required to leave their old ways and embrace the new faith entirely and so therefore, causing a break with the folk traditions. It changed a lot of things for the people. However, taking the Christmas Festival for example, he traces how almost every culture in history had always had a ‘les rites de passage’ festival, a sacrificial festival of their own folk tradition. He observes various traditions that “at the turn of the year when supernatural forces were thought to be rampant and the sun was believed to be in a precarious state, a number of festive and riotous folk customs were observed in the Roman Empire, ranging from the Saturnalia from December 17<sup>th</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup> to the Kalends of January...” (James, 1947. Pg 364-366). When Christianity ultimately became the directing force in the world which was politically Roman, culturally Hellenic and popularly Teutonic, “it absorbed into one specifically Christian Feast of the Nativity where all the folk festivals and transitional rites were connected with the New Year and the beginning of winter.” (James, 1947. Pg 364-366).

What James’ research had proved was that festivals were usually observed in every culture at the end of the year and the beginning of a New Year, but the Christians had

changed the festivals which were unquestionably pagan in origin and which belonged to the New Year rather than to Christmas. James observes:

It was not so much that the pagan festivals and beliefs were Christianized since the Church took a very definite stand against the old rites and customs. What it did was to make its own myth and ritual—using these terms in their technical anthropological meaning — the living reality, believed once to have happened and forever after to have influenced the world-and 'human destinies.' (James, 1947. Pg 373).

Therefore, in the process of transition a good amount of folklore narratives and numerous folk customs were incorporated in the Christian culture pattern. The transformation had a revitalizing effect upon the indigenous tradition, preventing it from degenerating into merely decadent and meaningless superstition. James goes on to conclude that even though the Church might condemn with horror and consternation the relict of pagan feasts and ancient revelries, but as time went on “it was Christianity that influenced folklore”. The lore of the folk and Christian faith and practice represent parallel growths under kindred conditions and similar influences. Neither tradition consciously has borrowed from the other, but the two have coalesced and reacted upon each other because both are expressions of certain fundamental attitudes to life, and to the social and religious conditions in which they arise. The Church, it is true, has succeeded in eliminating a good deal of the more ephemeral, wanton and transitory elements in its pagan background and folk environment, and by giving a more serious meaning and purpose to ancient beliefs and customs, it has clothed afresh the dry bones with flesh and blood. The old feasts were resuscitated as an integral part of a calendar that entered into the daily life of the people at every turn, providing them not only with spiritual sustenance and edification but with diversion, amusement and all the

exhilarating distractions that went to the making of holy days and seasonal observances. This aspect could perhaps be encapsulated in the Mizo sensibility, in as far as religion and folklore are concerned.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The God of the heavens.

<sup>2</sup> In translation from the original text in Mizo. Hereafter cited as Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> A mythical tiger-man, a person possessing the magic power of changing himself or herself at will into a tiger, and then back again into a human being.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Silchar is a region located at the north of Mizoram.

<sup>6</sup> An area where Mizos used to plant their harvest.

This study will focus on the tension that exists within the Mizo community with the coming of the Welsh missionaries and will delve on the impact and further influence it had on the Mizo people. The Mizos, known as the Lushais by the Britishers and the Welsh missionaries are a tribe of “Mongoloid hill-men inhabiting parts of the wild forest – covered mountainous region forming the watershed between Indian and Upper Burma.” (Lorrain, 1975. Pg. v), and since many sub tribes even within the Mizo tribe could be included, this study will be confined to this particular geographical domain. Prior to the coming of the missionaries, they had no written language or any kind of historical documentation and their way of life had been handed down through the oral form, which were basically in the form of folklore. A sudden change in their lives occurred when the missionaries started their work by preaching the religion of Christianity and most of the inhabitants of the region, needing education and acceptance converted to this religion. With conversion came such a disruption in their lives, especially with regard to their customs and traditions that certain aspects of their pre – Christian ways were denounced for Christianity. This study will attempt to trace and analyze the changing dynamics of Christianity on select Mizo folk narratives.

Religion has garnered a lot of research and fascination from researchers and philosophers alike. It has been called a great many things from great spiritual exaltation to a mere political force (Foucault. 1999. Pg 107). For some, religion provides “a framework which gives substance and reality to the poet’s sympathy,” and leads us to a reality deeper than “social preferences of a people,” (Coulson, 1984. Pg 9). Citing *Macbeth* as example, John Coulson talks of how, its origin being based on the Bible, in such circumstances, the

culture is the incarnation of the religion. For the Mizo folk, religion, specifically Christianity, becomes incarnated in their everyday lives and consequently their stories as well. Mizo culture, its origin being rooted in pagan beliefs and rituals, undoubtedly produced folk narratives which were based on this very culture. This culture then underwent such religious changes that folk narratives were ignored for a more dogmatic search for the truth. The significance of the religion of Christianity in the Mizo sensibility as seen through folk narratives has been a central sensibility.

The study of folklore has for a certain amount of time taken precedence. After the publication of Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* in 1928, folktales which had previously been seen as the stories of peasants and the lower classes began to gradually earn priority. It has been established that "historians have been notoriously wary of memory as a historical source. In challenging orthodoxies about historical sources, methods and aims, and by using memory for contemporary political purposes, oral history has generated fierce debates." (*The Oral History Reader*. Pg x). Perhaps, it is because of this that until the nineteenth century, folklore was not seen as a scholarly venture. In accordance with Russian formalism, Propp believed that all folktales, no matter what its origin are composed of one discrete identifiable units and that appropriate analysis would result from the description of these elements and their relationship to both one another and the story as a whole (Propp. 2009. Pg 26 -65). If this is true then, it will also be justified that folktales from different parts of the world might have another thing in common, which is that they have been at one point of time been influenced by the religion which had been dominant at that time. History holds that Western Europe, England in particular fought wars in the name of the God of Christianity and due to their political stronghold, there is no doubt that this belief was spread across the continents. In the fourth century, Emperor Constantine legalized the religion of Christianity, with his own conversion, which became a turning point for early Christianity,

sometimes referred to as the “triumph of the Church.” (Watts. 2010. Pg. 113). But it was during the reign of Theodosius from the year 379 – 395 B.C that the war between Christianity and Paganism really began. The war for de-paganization of the empire rose in full strength and the Church steadily gained ascendance and its influence on its environment grew more and more, spreading gradually all over the continents. (James, *Folklore*. Pg. 362). However, just as Christianity has left its mark on folk belief and customs of the people, folklore too can be detected in the practice of Christian faith and worship. Christianity, though not through bloody war but in terms of missionaries who were on their way to Burma located the Mizo community in 1891, (Ralte, 2008. Pg 168).<sup>1</sup>

The common conception about the origin of the Mizo tribe is the legend of the ‘Chhinlung,’ which holds that numerous sub – tribes emerged from a cave called ‘Chhinlung.’ (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg15 – 16). The obscure origin of the Mizo, regarding whether ‘Chhinlung’ is a person’s or a place’s name, which has never been decided has contributed to the rich and varied folk tales that is intrinsic to Mizoram. Several theories as to how the various Mizo sub – tribes came to settle in Mizoram, ranging from the cave from which they emerged was a hole; a passage at the Great Wall of China through which the oppressed sections of the society (including the Mizos) left the country, to the widest accepted theory that the Mizos belonged to a Mongoloid stock have gradually testified to the love of stories and folk legends amidst the Mizos corpus. How the religion of Christianity came to Mizoram, through the writings of various missionaries are, on the other hand neither legend nor lore, but are aspects that are grounded firmly in documentation. Around the year 1800, there arose a great Gospel Revival in Wales where the Church felt the need to spread Christianity. And for around forty years, this revival garnered the spread of missionaries all over the world (Ralte, 2008. Pg. 159)<sup>2</sup>. This upheaval allowed the arrival of Rev William Williams into the village of Mualvum,<sup>3</sup> the northern part of Mizoram, which consequently led

to the spread of Christianity all over the state. Characterized as “an enthusiastic missionary, a man of adventurous spirit, born – pioneer, full of enthusiasm to break new ground,” Williams believed that the Gospel was the only power in the world that would bring peace amongst the Lushais. A native of New Quay in Cardiganshire, and a sailor for some years, he was twenty three when he arrived at Shella in the Khasi Hills in 1887. “It is Williams...who first brought the name of Christ to the hearing of the Lushai people; it was he who also first brought the needs of the Lushais into prominence among our churches in Wales,” wrote Lloyd. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 95 – 97). It was on a Sunday, 15<sup>th</sup> March of the year 1891 that Rev. Williams stepped foot in the village of Mualvum and the day on which the Gospel was first introduced to the Mizos. Williams wrote of how they distributed picture books and sang songs, all presumably Christian, to the children in this village, (Ralte, 2008. Pg 168)<sup>4</sup>. As true to his description of being enthusiastic by nature, Williams made a lot of progress during his stay in Mizoram. What was significant about Williams’ visit to Mizoram was that he kept a well documented report of his travels and experiences amongst the Mizos. As a result, posterity was able to recollect the emergence of Christianity in the state. He reportedly visited thirteen villages and his reports of his experience in Mizoram states that as far as Christianity was concerned, there were only about two natives who could read and only one who owned a Bible. During his entire mission in the state, he revealed that only two or three had the urge to convert to Christianity. He also wrote about how he came to understand their “belief in the good God” whom they called, ‘Khuavang,’ and “he became the first to attempt interpreting the meaning of this God, ‘Khuavang.’” (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 96). These subtle records were intrinsic in understanding the Mizo sensibility and also helped in locating the various folk narratives which came into existence since most of their narratives were grounded firmly in this belief.

“Little by little, we are becoming aware that the solution to many diverse phenomena of spiritual culture is hidden in folklore,” (Propp, 1997. Pg 3), denoted Propp and the study of the meaning of certain spiritual beliefs that the Mizos had, which was so completely different from Christianity that the Welsh missionary preached was not in vain. By understanding the various beliefs that the Mizos held at the time, it was perhaps easier for the missionaries to associate Christ and the concept of the Christian God with the God, ‘Khuavang’ that had been innate in their culture. For what could have been a difficult task of preaching a completely new existence of God to them, the missionaries were able to subvert the earlier mode of worship and replace it with their own. This task was taken up by two missionaries, Frederick William Savidge and James Herbert Lorrain, who carried on what Rev. William Williams regretted he could not achieve during his stay in Mizoram.

Under the sole enterprise of a millionaire, Robert Arthington from Leeds, the two Christian missionaries mentioned earlier, came to settle in Mizoram with the hope that the Gospel might be embraced by people who earlier had no knowledge of the same. Arthington was a model for the missionaries that he sent out.

He denied himself all the luxuries and some of the necessities of life, not for any delight in heaping up money, but because he was under the constraint of his conscience ... As the years passed, he became more and more deeply concerned that the Gospel might be offered to all men without delay. It was for this purpose that he dressed shabbily, ate frugally and lived in penury. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 98).

A man who seemed not able to turn down a challenge when it came to the Gospel, his inspiration for setting up his funding for sending missionaries to the North-East of India came when “St. Dalmas, a missionary in Calcutta, who when on furlough spoke about the “‘untamed’ hillmen of Assam who were quite unreached by the Gospel.”

(Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 98). With his haste to spread the Gospel everywhere he could, he could see no delay in sending three pioneer missionaries in North-East India; William Pettigrew, Frederick William Savidge and James Herbert Lorrain. On 16<sup>th</sup> December, 1890, these three missionaries left London and sailed for India. While they were on board the ship for thirty six days, they had the company of another missionary from Bengal, who was on his way back. This bilingual missionary taught the keen missionaries the Bengali language. The most ingenious amongst them was Dr. Lorrain, who was a Ph. D. from Cambridge University, a teacher and a YMCA<sup>5</sup> worker, (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 98). He managed to learn enough Bengali to communicate, (Ralte, 2008. Pg 174).<sup>6</sup> The knowledge of this language was particularly significant as it became the root language through which the Mizos were to learn a language and consequently utilize the same for purposes of documentation. While they were in Chittagong, (before they reached Mizoram), Dr. Lorrain found a book written by Thangliana, entitled, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Dwellers Therein*, 1869, which held the study of the Mizo language. Thangliana or Captian T.H.Lewin was one of the first Englishmen to come to Mizoram. The District Commissioner of the Chittagong Hills Tracts, who entered Mizoram by way of Demagiri (Tlabung)<sup>7</sup> in 1865, became so popular with the local tribesmen that as a mark of respect, he was called Thangliana which meant 'greatly famous'. He lived with the Mizos for nine years and authored the first Lushai book. His memorial stone at Demagiri remains as evidence of the extent of his popularity with the Mizos (National Information Center, 'Mizoram.'). This book written by him, not only held aspects related to the study of the Mizo language but also to the various languages of the Hill people residing on the Hill Tracts. It was the first book that they found which helped them with the study of the language of the people to whom they were to preach the Gospel to. (Ralte, 2008. Pg 177 – 178).<sup>8</sup>

The two determined missionaries reached Silchar<sup>9</sup> on January, 1893 and broadened their knowledge about the Mizo people with stories from the Deputy Commissioner. They settled at the outskirts of Silchar in Assam so that they could see and talk to the Mizo people. The Mizos they happened to pass in Silchar, even though the missionaries tried to talk to them, were suspicious of them since it was the advent of “Vailian.”<sup>10</sup> While they were in Rangamati, a doctor there happened to give them a book called, *Grammer of the Lushai Language, To Which are appended a few Illustrations of the Zau or Lushai Popular Songs and Translations from Aesop’s Fables*, written by a Bengali doctor named Brojo Nath Shaha. The book was published in 1884. Another source of their knowledge in the language came not from a book but from a person, the only person that was named specifically by Lorrain himself, whom he called “Liana.” (Ralte, 2008. Pg 186 – 208).<sup>11</sup> Two years were spent in Silchar, honing the Mizo language from all the invaluable and varied sources that they could find. They started preparing for alphabets that were to perhaps become the most significant part of Mizo literature.

It was in 1893, while they were still in Silchar that Lorrain and Savidge laid out the Mizo alphabets which became the ground on which Mizo literature was later able to thrive. (Ralte, 2008. Pg 208)<sup>12</sup>. The fact that these two missionaries worked hard enough to lay out these alphabets testified to the efficiency of their work and also how determined they were to earn the trust of the Mizos who were wary of every non Mizo. These two missionaries however tried their best to communicate verbally with any Mizo whom they came across and learned as much as they could about their culture and language from the borders. In 1893, after a long wait outside their destination, they were finally granted access to Aizawl, the destination which they had tried to so hard to reach and as denoted by Vanlalchhuanawma the events happened thus:

A.W Davies, the then Political Officer of North Lushai Hills, granted them permission to go to Aizawl on the condition that they do not interfere with the administration. Overjoyed, they set off on Boxing Day, 1893, following the same route as Williams Williams. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 99)

Therefore, with the promise that they would not impose on the already well established administration of the village, Lorrain and Savidge set off on their journey and they eventually landed safely at Sairang on January 11, 1894. From this day forth, they did everything they could to earn the trust of the natives so that the Gospel might be preached and so that they would listen. The Mizos were quite different from what they were used to in Europe. They were very suspicious of the foreigners, but eventually, perhaps because “they carried the Bible and their only defence was love,” (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 99), mutual confidence started building up between the two races. “Under the colonial protective umbrella, the two missionaries worked in Mizoram for four fruitful years.” (Pachau, 1998. Pg 73). They accomplished commendable socio-religious work which began an unprecedented social transformation in Mizoram. Their chief and most important work consisted in the creation of laying the foundation for Mizo literature and education as well as in paving the way for future evangelism.

In Mizoram, the work of the two missionaries could surpass any work which the Mizo people had ever known before. During the four years that they spent in the place, both Lorrain and Savidge made ample differences, changes and paved the way for the latter development for Mizo literature. Their work has been denoted thus:

In the next four years they learnt the vernacular, carried out the stupendous work of reducing the language to writing, published a Lushai primer, a catechism on the Bible, a hymnbook, a grammar and a dictionary, prepared translations of Luke, John and the

Acts of the Apostles, started simple medical and educational work, taught many of the Lushai to read and preached the Good News with such effect that two or three hill – men had already accepted Christianity, ( Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 101),

As mentioned before, their contribution to the field of literature was unmistakable and perhaps it would not be far fetched to state that it shaped the religious, cultural ethos of the whole of Mizoram with their timely deliverance of it. At around this time, the British Government had been developing plans to issue Bengali as the official language for the Mizo people. (Ralte, 2008. Pg 213 )<sup>13</sup>. With the help of “three young prospective chieftains, Suaka of Durtlang, Thangphunga of Sairum or Chaltlang and Khamliana of Lungleng”, they managed, within a year, to make use of what they learnt and created the first Mizo alphabet by using Roman letters. The basic reason for the success of Roman letters over the Bengali script could be what was called, “Thirty-seven Year Bengali captivity” which referred to the attempt to impose the Bengali script on different peoples of North-East India. Moreover, owing to some in-auspicious earlier contacts, the Mizos had developed unfavourable attitudes towards their Indian neighbours in general, and their immediate Bengali neighbours in particular. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 101 – 102 ).

Mizos considered themselves superior beings and looked at all the rest of Indians as second class creation of the Good Lord. Learning their language was too degrading. The Hindus of the pre-independent days too looked down upon the Mizos as barbarians, jungle-men and dog eaters (which they considered a delicacy), to be treated not much better than monkeys. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 102).

Therefore, there arose a clash of cultures as well as misunderstandings about each other which only added to the rejection of the Government issued script in favour of the ones that the white missionaries had laid out for them. It also denotes how the Mizo natives were

gradually beginning to put their trust on these two missionaries while even allowing them to make important political decisions for them. Another significant reason as to why the Roman script won over the Bengali script was something more profound. The Mizos and the Bengalis were not on good terms. It was mostly based on the terms of what had fascinated natives for centuries before and what has registered later to this day which was the lure of the white man and search for identification with him. The term for the non Mizos whom they crossed path with irrespective of caste or language for the Mizos is “Vai”, “which implies physical frailty, moral infidelity or corruption and any kind of infirmity.” (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 102 ). With a deeply negative attitude towards their neighbours, the white missionaries, slowly but surely gained their confidence and trust. It was no wonder that when the time came to choose between their neighbouring regions with whom they have had so much problems with, they chose the white man.

The above concept of “vai” may also explain why the Mizos had never been influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism or Islam which had for ages been in practice in the surrounding areas of Mizoram. As it has been denoted:

‘In view of the tremendous enthusiasm which the Lushais later evinced for the religion of their choice,’ observes McCall, ‘it remains a matter of considerable curiosity that they never fell to the teachings of Buddha, Confucius, or other great preceptors, with whose disciples they must have been in intermittent contact all through the ages....’ (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 102).

It was not a matter of how these beliefs and religions held a lesser extent of truth or that their general philosophy of life were effete, but it was simply a fact that the Mizo people had never had any contact or even felt any remote identification with any religion other than their own, until the Welsh missionaries came along. The fact that these missionaries

understood and helped them immensely with their education as well as their well being could also come into perspective in trying to deduce how the Mizos could remarkably accept Christianity. It could perhaps be that the missionaries themselves appealed to them very much and so their teachings immediately invoked a feeling of a shared affinity as well. As D.E Jones observed while spending time and trying to comprehend as to why the religion of Hinduism, which was less foreign to the people never attracted them, the Hindus were not as accommodating about accepting the Mizos either just as much as the Mizos could not accept their way of life:

‘Hinduism is looked down upon by the Lushais,’ observes D.E. Jones, ‘ as are most of the other religions of which they see examples in daily life.’ .... The last element of distinctive identity left to them was their religious culture which they faithfully maintained till the arrival of the Christian missions. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 102 – 103).

Lorrain and Savidge, to further their influence and their power of knowledge amongst the Mizo people, Lorrain and Savidge , after they had settled in Mizoram established a school on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1894. (Ralte, 2008. Pg 216 )<sup>14</sup>. At this time, the small school served as both an education centre as well as a Sunday-School and was referred to as “Biak In.” It “basically meant a sacred house of worship. But it was originally used as a centre of both general and theological education as well as of worship.” ( Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 107 ). Thus, in introducing the “Biak In” structure, the Arthington Mission challenged the social traditions on one hand and paved the way for Christianity to take a central place in the Mizo social setup on the other. It is through this medium of school and language that the missionaries and the influence of the white man in general started to take stronger foothold upon the lives and culture of the indigenous people of Mizoram. As denoted by Ashcroft at al, “it is through an appropriation of the power invested in writing that this discourse can take hold of the

marginality imposed on it and make hybridity and syncreticity the source of literary and cultural redefinition.” ( Ashcroft, et al, 2002. Pg 77 ). And since the missionaries wanted to make the people understand the full impact of the Gospel and since their hard work on the Mizo dictionary which they had been preparing for quite some time now would be of no use without the knowledge of reading and writing on the part of the Mizos, the best method, they found was to produce a “self – propagating church of the Mizos...starting and elementary school to help the people read and write.” (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 108 )

The establishment of the school became the source of what was later to be seen as the cultural hegemony. This later became so much a part of their lives that it was not something one could just simply let go as soon as the area became independent and rid of the white man. Even though the missionaries taught them their own language, (which ironically was developed by the white man,) it was gradually understood that the language of the white man was deemed superior by the Mizos.

One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all ‘variants’ as impurities.... Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth,’ ‘order,’ and ‘reality’ become established. (Ashcroft, Griffith, Tiffin, 2002. Pg 7).

It was clear that the Mizos wanted nothing to do with their neighbours at that point of time and also when they were given a choice between the Bengali script and The Roman script, the fact that they rejected the Bengali script for the Roman script cemented this theory. The missionaries had done everything they could, as innocent as their aim might have been, to learn the language of the ones they were to rule over, politically and hegemonically.

Language had always been one of the most important part of earning a peoples' trust in the colonial regime and the white men did exactly that, and ultimately this trust was extended to their religion as well as to their emotions.

The linguistic system that was involved in influencing the emergence of the Mizo alphabets was also no doubt, all sprung from Western origins. Lorrain and Savidge adopted two forms of systems – Sir William Jones'<sup>15</sup> system, which was *Exercise in Lushai Dialect* and Sydney Edle's system, *Grammer of the Lushai Dialect*. Using these two systems and with the natural flair for linguistics which Rev. Lorrain possessed, they managed to chart out the alphabets. They also researched upon various systems of writing, thinking only about what could work best for the scripts which they had prepared and also which could be easier for the Mizo people to understand and apply. Finally, they chose the *Hunterian System of Orthography* while they were still in Silchar in 1893. (Ralte, 2008. Pg 212 )<sup>16</sup>.

With such efforts to win over the people, it was only inevitable that the Mizos would find the missionaries quite unlike any other white men they had come across and mostly, unlike the people in their neighbouring states. Slowly, but gradually they trusted the white men and this thus led Mizoram from being totally illiterate to becoming one of the most literate states in the whole of India in less than a century.

The Mizos showed not merely a desire to learn but also a spontaneous desire to share with others what had been acquired.... The literary work of the pioneer missionaries consisted of a child's primer published by the Government in 1895, a dictionary, a hymnbook of about a dozen songs, a catechism and a well known Lorrain's *Lushai English Dictionary* containing 33,000 words, published by the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1940. 'The literary work done by our predecessors,' ponders D.E. Jones, 'has given the language a written form which will probably be permanent.' .... The

lasting impact of the Arthington Mission to the Mizos in the field of literature can hardly be overemphasized. ( Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 105).

Starting from the education system and slowly merging over to the main reason (which was to spread the Gospel of Christ), that they had stepped foot in the land, the two missionaries began to take steps in preaching the Gospel to the people. On 21<sup>st</sup> April 1895, Lorrain and Savidge organized the first Bible study class amongst the Mizo people, (Ralte, 2008. Pg 224)<sup>17</sup>, and on 16<sup>th</sup> September, 1895, Lorrain preached his first sermon in Mizo. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 108). The school-cum-chapel became the centre of preaching and evangelism. It was in this manner that the religion of the white man, which is Christianity started to gain popularity among the people. But evangelism was not all smooth sailing for the missionaries either. The Mizos had, for years developed their own ways of living, their own religion, their own, very rigid culture and they were also becoming increasingly suspicious of the white men who had been telling them about the salvation of Christ which was so inherently different and radical from their own beliefs. Their difficulties had been described as thus:

The Mizos in spite of their initial disregard of the missionaries...later sensed an inexplicable link between them and the alien British government. They were suspicious of their real motives.... It was against the people's (Mizos) nature to surrender to intruders until they had been utterly overpowered or to adopt religious ideals without overwhelming conviction. The people were yet to see if they would be undisputedly bound by the foreign power since some of their chiefs, most notably Kairuma and his allies, still persisted in resisting the imposition of the British regime. Moreover, they could identify in the intruding alien religion some inborn characteristics incompatible with their traditional religious culture. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 109).

The belief that Foucault had of religion as a “political force” (Foucault. 1999. Pg 107), was becoming more and more apparent to the Mizo culture especially since the Gospel started changing their lives at different levels. The Mizos too, rejected the new religion partly because their chiefs, mainly the Sailo chiefs were still very powerful. The people naturally took a suspicious view when it came to the white man and his religion. Foucault also denotes that the Church is a “superb instrument of power for itself. Entirely woven through with elements that are imagery, erotic, effective, corporal, sensual, and so on.” (Foucault. 1999. Pg 107). For him, it was a struggle for power and domination. Faith, which is the basic tool for religion is unfounded and pointless when it comes to controlling or changing a culture. What was more important was the dominant power, which the Church was gradually reaching for, so much so that when the Sailo chiefs converted to Christianity it signified the end of one political domination altogether. “On 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1896, the first formal Church was established.” (Ralte, 2008. Pg 233)<sup>18</sup>. The power of the Church upon the Mizo began to dominate increasingly.

The dynamics brought about by this replacement of belief systems was that as the belief in all things Christian arose, the disbelief and condescension towards their own cultural beliefs gradually receded. It was further unfortunate because the Mizo society prior to the British arrival consisted of an immensely diverse and rich culture which were relegated to the background in favour of the new white religion. Amongst the cultural beliefs which were increasingly lost to the culture for a long time was the rich folklore and narratives that the Mizos were so much a part of. Folklore, as a study, according to Vladimir Propp arises out of the conflict that exists within a given society. It can be heralded by different elements and complications and in the case of the Mizos, the abrupt change from the old, traditional culture to the religious, Christian culture contributed majorly to this change. When traditional folklore comes into contact with these changes, although these changes may not entirely

reject the tradition, it certainly changes certain important aspects to its study. Propp goes on to state:

Folklore is a historical phenomenon and the science of folklore is a historical discipline.... We cannot ascertain all the processes that occur in folklore with the transition to new forms of social structure, or even with the development within the existing system, but we know that these processes occur everywhere with surprising uniformity. One of them is that inherited folklore comes into conflict with the old social system that created it and denies this system. It does not deny the old system, directly but rather the images created by it, transforming them into their opposites or giving them a reverse, disparaging, negative colouring. The once sacred is transformed into the hostile, the great into the harmful, evil or monstrous. But sometimes, the old is preserved without any noticeable changes and gets along peacefully with new forms and relations. Folklore enters into contradiction with itself, and such contradictions are always present. Folklore formations arise not as direct reflection of life, but out of the clash of two systems and their ideologies (Propp, 1997. Pg 11),

In accordance with this view, Vladimir Propp is often referred to as the father of folklore. The very same becomes true for the Mizo people and their fast changing values and culture under the influence of Christianity. This change under the colonialism of the white man, the systems of education and evangelism and the traditional culture as depicted in folklore, being the one that had been a part of them for so long were denied in favour of the white man's religion. Images such as the concept of the 'pialral',<sup>19</sup> the culture specific lore which directly forms the idea of the afterlife as believed by the Mizo people were "transformed into the hostile, the great into the harmful, evil or monstrous," in the words of E.O James. The idea of 'pialral' which had been, prior to the belief in heaven and hell which

is rendered as sacred was merely reduced to a fable or myth like status. In this regard, there were many beliefs that were regarded as redundant. For instance, the concept of the afterlife as the Mizos had believed had been a legitimate belief before the advent of Christianity. The fall of man as seen in Old Testament of the Bible was also rendered debatable as were other illustrations in the Bible. “Christianity took up the motif of death and reinterpreted it in terms of its own doctrine of redemption and gave it ritual expression in the Eucharistic oblation as the perpetuation of the supreme re-creative event in history so that the sacred story , having become incorporated in the cultus, had lived on from age to age in the faith and practice of an organized religious community.” (James, 1947. Pg 361).

The Welsh mission seemed to indeed produce new kinds of people in the Mizos. Even decades after colonization, in the year 1963, in its annual Synod meeting, the Presbyterian Church still voiced its disapproval the old rites and customs, saying thus:

Christians are not to do anything to revive the old culture and lifestyle which they have denounced. (Quoted from “Synod Executive Committee Minute [Mizoram Presbyterian Church , 1963).

As much as one tried to bring back the once forgotten folk narratives, with a different outlook on life and belief system, it was decidedly difficult. Along with a whole new set of practices and beliefs, Christianity brought about a somewhat refined set of behaviour and manner in every aspect of their lives. The Grimm brothers, who were very innovative in their restructuring of folktales, wrote in the introduction of their book, *Kinder und Hausmärchen*, which could perhaps be in tandem with religion and folklore in the Mizo ethos:

“In our translation of these ‘Household Stories’ ... we have omitted about a dozen short pieces to which English mothers might object, and for good and satisfactory reasons have altered, in a slight way, four other stories. The mixture of sacred subjects

with profane, though frequent in Germany, would not meet with favour in an English book.” (Household Stories, 1853. Pg. iv).

As seen from the manner in which the Grimm brothers decided to revise and omit certain part of their very own folktales, it becomes clear that there were some aspects to folklore that were no longer acceptable. Suddenly profanity, violence and gore no longer had place in history, even though “Folk material involves personal and societal anxieties that are repressed or avoided and, when expressed, typically disguised.” (Dundes. 2007. Pg 4).

With regards to power and resistance, Foucault asserts that although the Church, could not stand the heathen pagan rituals of the natives, it is still understood that “where there is power, there is resistance,” (Foucault, 1990. Pg 122). So it used its own Christianized terms and transformed these rituals into what came to be known as Christmas. They were aware that folklore was “a cultural trait arising within the life of the common peasantry” which when untended to or unheeded by the people, “survives merely as a collection of quaint and naïve ‘bygones’, or else degenerates into not very edifying superstitions, devoid of any serious purpose or meaning, like palmistry, crystal gazing and beliefs about ‘luck’... All efforts to perpetuate or resuscitate the culture of the folk by artificial sophisticated device, whether as past-times or picturesque adjuncts to modern mechanized civilization, are doomed to failure because it is only when traditional ways of life are embodied in a living culture that they retain their vitality. They must be accepted like all other cultural traits and determined by cultural conditioning. (James, 1947. Pg. 362).

However, E.O James believe that this phenomenon is not one sided, but that it moved in two directions. In that, if folklore can be detected in the practice of Christian faith and worship, Christianity too has equally left its mark upon folk narratives. He cites examples from different cultures and depicts how the religion of Christianity denotes folk narratives,

while subverting it into its own beliefs and customs. It was not that with the implementation of a new religion, the traditional festivals and certain customs were totally diminished. However, with Christianity, what occurred was that some of the traditional customs were taken and subverted to fit the ideals and regimes of the current religion and custom. For instance, at the end of the year, around the fourth century, when supernatural forces were thought to be rampant and the sun was believed to be in a precarious state, a number of festive and riotous folk customs were observed in the Roman Empire, ranging from the Saturnalia from December 17<sup>th</sup> to the 24<sup>th</sup>, to the Kalends (First day of the month) of January. In Scandinavia, and the Germanic area Yuletide extended apparently from the middle of November to the beginning of January (James, 1947. Pg 366 ). It was not so much that the traditional Pagan festivals and beliefs were Christianized since the Church took a very definite stand against the old rites and customs. What it did was to make its own myth and ritual – using different terms in their technical anthropological meaning – the living reality, believed once to have happened and forever after to have influenced the world and human destinies.

In like manner, ‘Pawl Kut’ is a festival of the Mizos which was originally a festival that had been celebrated to ask for blessings of prosperity for the New Year. It was also to render thanks for the harvest at the end of the year. 25<sup>th</sup> of December is also observed as an important date for many folklorists of the world. It is said that about the middle of fourth century, the Feast of the Nativity was established in Rome. This brought the observance into very intimate contact with the mythological victory of light over darkness and the rebirth of the sun as the author and giver of life. This is followed by the Roman New Year, the *Vota*, or the solemn wishes of prosperity for the emperor. Bountiful gifts were presented to the emperor by dancers who dressed up in the hides of animals, in masks also in and women attire suggest that before the rite was modified the people supplanted a sacrificial offering of

seasonal renewal in which perhaps the royal victim or his substitute perished. This doubtless explains the strong measures taken by the Church to condemn, and when possible to prevent these celebrations. (James, 1947. Pg 366 - 367). “Pawl Kut” perhaps was not as barbaric, but it was definitely a pagan festival and the Christian missionaries who had come to work in Mizoram were quick to discourage it. In Western Europe, Christmas was celebrated on December 25<sup>th</sup> as a rival and counterblast to the pagan winter feasts. Perhaps Christmas too is a counterblast to ‘Pawl Kut’ in this regard.

The phenomenon by which these changes occurred had been studied by Foucault under the study of power struggle and religion. Foucault recognizes Christianity as an ultimate power structure which imposes an obligation on its followers to accept its dogma, its sacred text and, most importantly, its authority as truth through confession and the pastoral power.

It was a question not of treating the body, en masse, ‘wholesale,’ as if it were an indissociable unity, but of working it ‘retail,’ individually; of exercising upon it a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself - movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body. (Foucault, 1991. Pg. 136 -147).

To use Foucault’s term, the Welsh mission never changed the culture “en masse,” (Foucault, 1991. Pg 136 -147), or tried to wholly dissolve their indigenous culture on to their own. It was more of a matter of a “subtle coercion,” whereby the missionaries won over their emotions and sensibilities with words and rhetoric. It was not so much that the pagan festivals and beliefs were Christianized. The Church took a very definite stand against the old rites and customs and thus all were near abolition. What it did was to make its own myth and ritual – using different terms in their technical anthropological meaning – the living reality, believed once to have happened and forever after to have influenced the world and human

destinies. (James., 1947. Pg 366 ). Discipline and training were utilized to produce new gestures, actions, habits and skills, and ultimately new kinds of people. In this way, some Mizo folk narratives survived:

In such survivals the influence of Christianity on folklore and popular custom has been very slight. But so long as the Church was the dominant force in the peasant communities, it exercised supreme control over all the major activities and significant events in the daily life of the folk. (James, 1947. Pg 376).

As politically driven as Foucault would believe religion to be, or as coercive and as much as the tales and narratives, language, behaviour and manner have changed due to the hybridity of the colonizer and the colonized, E.O James still believes that pagan folk narratives survived because of all these influences, different as it might be from its origin. The Church, which was equipped with the power could have abolished many of their traditions and cultures, but it did not. Instead, by converting the pre-Christian religion of the Mizo with that of the Christian, there were able to preserve some of the culture that had once been celebrated.

Speaking generally, however, the policy of the Church throughout the ages has been to discountenance, and where practicable to suppress, unorganized and detached survivals of pagan practices and beliefs and then to create its own folk tradition. This it has done for the most part-by a carefully conceived selective process, incorporating into its own tradition and institutions those elements of the earlier culture which could be so adapted, and by making them an essential and integral part of a highly organized movement, thereby giving them a new significance with all the prestige of official recognition. (James., 1947. Pg 376).

Therefore, folk materials survive and perhaps will continue to do so. However, the manner in which these would survive may not be up to the people. Just as the coming of the mission of Christianity had changed certain aspects of every day life, it has also given them significance. The Church, after the conversion and acceptance of Christianity by the Mizo people is the dominant force in the community and it is a fact that this entity will always rule over the lives of the people. When the culture of a pre-Christian era which was grounded on animal sacrifice and various sacrilegious traditions comes in contact with Christianity, there is bound to a clash or an impact which could not be ignored. It is upon this tension and give-and-take relationship between the power of the Church and the beliefs and customs of the Mizos which had been reflected in the folk narratives that this research will expound upon.

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<sup>1</sup> In translation from original Mizo Text. Hereafter cited as Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> A village on the far north of Mizoram.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> The Young Men's Christian Association is a worldwide organization with more than 58 million beneficiaries from 125 national associations

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Tlabung is a village on the south of Mizoram having Bangladesh as its neighbouring country. It was through this village that the early foreigners usually entered Mizoram.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Silchar is located at the north of Mizoram and it is on the outskirts of this region, that the missionaries stayed while they were denied entrance into the place.

<sup>10</sup> British expedition on the Mizo people as the Britishers tried to take back Mary Winchester who had stayed with them since 1871. The events which followed as the gradual colonizing power of the Britishers which were first felt on the Mizo people (1865-1955) were usually referred to as the time of the 'Vailian.'

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>15</sup> Sir William Jones (28 September 1746 – 27 April 1794) was a scholar and visionary, who came to India as a judge of the Supreme court, and with the help of Charles Wilkins, in 1784 started the Asiatic Society of Bengal and the journal *Asiatic Researches*. These two institutions were instrumental in establishing the field of Indology.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> The equivalent of the Lushai paradise – (*Lit.* the further side of the Pial River).

This chapter will trace the establishment of the Church in Mizoram and the significance it had upon the Mizo people. With the establishment of the Church, the Mizos gradually came to regard it as a monumental setting on which they were to denounce their earlier way of life and thereby embrace Christianity. The Church held an enormous amount of power over the community in every aspect of life. When it came to their folktales, it did not necessarily condemn them, but the content of some of these tales were so opposed to the teachings of the Bible that it became difficult for the Mizos themselves to accept them as their own reflection of the way they had lived their lives before and consequently in terms of how they were expected to live. It is this power which the Church held over the folk narratives of the Mizo people that this chapter will expound upon.

The Mizos possess little or no written records of their past and their origin and so it is difficult to give a definite idea as to how they came to settle in Mizoram. The state covers an area of 21,087 sq. kms. and it straddles the Tropic of Cancer. Since it was the Welsh missionaries who first gave a documented measurement of the area, it is said to be roughly the size, but not the shape of Wales. Wedged between Myanmar and the present-day Bangladesh, it has been one of the remotest parts of India and it continues to be so. (Lloyd, 1991. Pg 1). Before the arrival of the missionaries and the religion of Christianity, the Mizos were thought to be nothing but vicious marauders and had rendered the name, 'head-hunters' for their rituals of beheading the head of an already dead chief of another village that they had defeated when they went to wars or raids. The misconception that the Mizos raided other villages with the sole intention of getting their trophy of heads made many foreigners

apprehensive of the place and since the Mizos were then illiterate, the idea still continues to surround Mizoram even to this day.

The gory descriptions of their rituals had by and large a lot to do with the nature of their practice of paganism. Illiterate and with nothing to turn to except towards their oral traditions and rituals which had been handed down from one generation to the other for ages before the arrival of Christianity, the Welsh mission saw that the Mizos went to great and arduous lengths to appease the Good spirits and Evil Sprits. Christianity, before the coming of the missionaries was an alien concept that did not have a place in the lives of the Mizos at all. What they practiced was what was termed as ‘Ramhuai Bia’<sup>1</sup> by the Mizos. It was a form of religion in which the people held sacrifices and elaborate rituals for the spirits which they believed reigned over their land and their lives as well. Pagan worship was not a practice in isolation to the Mizos as Romans and Viking warriors, before the turn of the century were on record to practice it as well. The built monuments and temples which exists till today stood as testament to this practice. For the Mizos, the spirits that they conducted mediations with were not beneficent or rewarding. They were cruel, malicious and capricious and they inhabited the non-human world in and around the village. They had good and bad spirits and the one and all who ruled above them was the God, ‘Khuanu’<sup>2</sup>, a protector of their land and everyday living, the God over all the animals, themselves and their harvest. It is interesting to note that the Mizos did believe in one high God:

...it was he who created the world. He was powerful and knew what was happening among men. He was also thought to be good and kind, but he never interfered with human affairs or in the daily life of the people. As a high remote impassive being did they regard him. Their favourite name for him was Pathian, the word later adopted by the Christians for God. (Lloyd, 1991. Pg 9).

The good spirits and the bad spirits largely comprised the religion of the Mizos before the advent of Christianity and the idea of Good and Evil, God and the Devil, 'Pathian' and the evil spirits, which the missionaries later coined as 'Setana' (the Devil,) was, somehow detrimental for the Mizos to be a part of a religion that incorporated more or less the same ideology. It was under the guidance of missionaries such as William Williams, Savidge and Lorrain that the Mizos slowly let go of these pagan rituals and beliefs and embraced and converted to the Christian religion. It was not by force nor were coerced into accepting the doctrine, but it was more to do with the fact that the Mizos had a deep understanding of the kind of idea that the Church taught them, which was that everything in the world was divided into good and bad.

Christianity started to take definite foothold in the Mizo community by 1900, and it was recorded that thirteen members had been committed to the faith of Christianity. It was within this same year that the earliest known Mizo Church was established as well. The Welsh mission flourished immensely well, so much so that by 1902, there were forty Mizo Christians which indicated the gradual rise of the Mizo people's conversion into the Christian faith. The establishment of the Church in Mizoram was not, as all cultural transitions were, a smooth process as one might have been led to believe. The Mizos had been suspicious of foreign rule, but the missionaries gradually gained their trust with their gentle ways and patience over their harsh and often violent lives. The establishment of the Church was, at first in school:

On 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1898, on his 28<sup>th</sup> birthday, D.E. Jones opened a school on the verandah of his house. Soon about thirty boys and girls came to be taught." (Lloyd, 1991. Pg 42).

And then, gradually as Mizos started to feel the lure of it, the Church developed into an all purpose hut in front of the bungalow, where people worshipped and it was used to conduct Sunday Schools as well as regular school where they were taught the alphabets and Bible verses as well, and then ultimately the principle evolved as the Church.

What made the transition easy for the Mizos to convert was that the traditional Mizo faith and Christianity both focused upon spirituality which was a concept which had been, for a very long time, (perhaps even as early as the beginning of their origin), a part of the Mizos lives and culture. The Mizos were not a group of people who were wholly alien to the idea that there was another element greater than them, or to their existence. Belief, which is the main requirement for Christianity was also a central part of how the Mizos had perceived their religion. The Welsh missionaries preached Christianity on the Christians' claim of inexplicable power and bliss which was attributed to the Christian God which the Mizos easily attributed it to their own spiritual God, 'Pathian.' It was not difficult for them to hear about God in Sunday Schools and to easily associate the concept of the same with their own indigenous beliefs because the aim and intention of these two Gods were more or less the same. The easy acceptance for them could be attributed by the fact that:

Traditional belief in the reality of a spiritual world, found its more tangible expressions in the Biblical teachings about the Devil and the host of demons exorcised by Jesus. The presentation of Jesus as Victor over the Vanquisher of the Devil was more appealing than the intricate 'puithiam' rituals for the Mizos, for whom the Christian God had such impact on them and they were inclined to understand religious benefits in concrete terms. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 149 – 151).

Baptism was a testament to cement their dedication and surrender to Christianity and the Mizos were more than eager to receive it. According to the records of J.Meiron Lloyd, “On 25<sup>th</sup> July, 1899...Khuma and Khara became the first two Mizos to confess their faith openly in baptism.” Very soon, the Church grew larger and larger in terms of organization and educational work. Until 1923, the Mizo Church was a part of the Khasi Assembly and by then, the Christians there numbered 15,678 members and there were 396 churches and places of worship. (Lloyd, 1991. Pg 55). The conversion could be seen, in part, as a form of appeal and seemingly more trustworthy for the Christian faith which was tangible in the written form such as the Bible as well as songs that were soon to be printed and accompanied to Church. It certainly held a more authentic and palpable dynamic than their previous rites and rituals to which they could not boast of any documentation of its proof of authenticity. The only vindication that they had was that it was handed down to them from time unknown, which was hardly proof of anything. The Welsh mission came with written books and songs that were uncontestedly equipped with the history of how Christianity had saved so many regions from the horror of the pagan rituals that the Mizos had been following. It was only right that the Mizos believed this to be true for they had never known life outside of what had been told to them by the white men.

It was not so much a question of whether they wanted to convert to Christianity or debate over whose God was better or which religion held more tangible truth, but more of an inevitability, a matter of time until the Mizos were converted. Gauri Viswanathan has argued to this point that conversion is an interpretive act that belongs to the realm of cultural criticism. To that end, she further has examined key moments in colonial and postcolonial history to show how conversion questions the limitations of secular ideologies, particularly the discourse of rights central to both the British Empire and the British nation-state. Implicit

in such questioning is an attempt to construct an alternative epistemological and ethical foundation of national community. She asserts:

By undoing the concept of fixed, unalterable identities, conversion unsettles the boundaries by which self-hood, citizenship, nationhood, and community are defined, exposing these as permeable borders. (Viswanathan, 1998. Pg. 16)

This is a statement which is inherently political and one which transforms the whole idea of the conversion of the Mizos. Even with its entire links to spirituality it could, perhaps be seen as nothing but a political debate. This is what had also been dealt in great detail by Michel Foucault who agrees that religion is nothing but a political force. By connecting the idea of power and subject of the situation, based on his interest in Christianity, Foucault's enterprise involves, "repositioning religion in the space of the body and the politics of the subject" (Foucault, 1999. Pg 6). According to Foucault, the analytical framework through which Christianity can be understood is not as the path of or to the path of transcendence, but rather as that which takes charge of non-transcendent corporality. In relation to the Mizo's, the emergence of what they believed to be such a rooted religion in Christianity (their conversions), then seemed to be only a matter of political convenience rather than that of their deep seated spirituality and belief in the Christian God. Their "selfhood, citizenship, nationhood, and community" were disrupted and the one way in which they could find a way back was through conversion. It was easy and accepting and it markedly disapproves of wars and hardships which had greatly appealed to the weaker people of the society. Conversion also gave the Mizo people the idea that if one was not a part of that particular group, he was denied the experience of conversion and thereby denying the very idea of being a member of the Mizo community as well.

The problem arising out of Christianity's discursive strategies has necessarily led to a problematisation of Christianity as a political structure to the degree that it:

... reveals the battles, struggles, and strategies of religious ideas in terms of ordering the body, the sexual, the origin of states, the individual relationship to self and the religious construction of subjects. (Foucault. 2009. Pg. 132).

By revealing the multiple strategies in which Christianity has been involved in the construction of the individual's relationship to his body and the institutions which engage in the ordering, (self)-control and surveillance of that very same body, Foucault challenges " the politics of defining religion as a specific practice within a specific culture " (Foucault. 2009. Pg. 144). To this end, there are accounts of how the Welsh missionaries had developed the notion of Christianity in such a way that it appealed to the people:

Life after death was expressed in a more inclusive Christian concept of resurrection. The eschatological concept of 'mitthi khua'<sup>3</sup> and 'pialral'<sup>4</sup> found their counterparts in the Christian idea of heaven and hell. The Christian concept of God's incarnation gave the Mizos a clearer and better idea of the relation between the transcendent 'Pathian'<sup>5</sup> and the imminent 'Khuavang'<sup>6</sup> or 'Khuanu'. Christian presentation of God as judge over human sins and rebellion, though absent in traditional religion, was vivid to the Mizos against the picture of alien rule which was conceived as sanctioning the missionaries; operation. The Mizos with their cultural heritage were thus well prepared to respond to the aggressive evangelising activities of the Western missionaries. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 151)

What had happened was, (as established before) not so much a transcendent experience as a careful understanding of the subject culture and adhering it to meet the needs of the Mizos with Christianity. What resulted was a blurring of the idea that religion is an

autonomous and marginalised social practice in an apparently progressively secularised world. Indeed,

Religion, after Foucault, always exists as a system of power, meaning that it orders life through a set of force relations ; not through a violence which forces people to do things but through the shaping of individual subjects to voluntarily carry out a particular way of life ” (Foucault. 2009. Pg. 149).

Put bluntly and echoing the secularisation thesis initiated by the Death of God theology, Foucault’s problematisation of the foundational aspects of Christianity — its marginalisation of the body in its dualist ontology and its politically informed techniques of social control — leads us to the realization that Christianity is not a religion but is above all “ an immanent political experience which attempts to govern human life ” (Foucault. 2009. Pg. 142). The Mizo people were, (the missionaries believed), without an inherent sense of order and there was nothing to sustain their existence. The arrival of Christianity and more importantly, its acceptance was the only way of saving these degenerate clans who were different and that further led to horrifying ways of life from the white man’s perspectives. However, what was not given importance was that the Mizos led a very ordered, well structured way of life. They had festivals to commemorate various times of the year, they had chiefs to rule over them, ‘Bawlpu’ or priests to preside over their religious experiences, and they even had their own notion of an afterlife which was a major part of Christian beliefs. What all this testified was that the Mizos were made to believe (because their way of life did not coincide with the white man’s way of life), that their indigenous religion which had (prior to the coming of the missionaries had given them basic rules on how they were to live), was inferior, irreligious and therefore, could not be a part of their lives.

The transition of the Mizo culture and religion at this time too came with much debated political issues and continued to do so. A significant moment in history came on 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1972, and the Prime Minister of India had inaugurated Mizoram as a Union Territory and the status remained as such all through the Mission of the Welsh, until the land attained full state-hood on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February, 1986. Within this union territory, there were a variety of people who inhabited the lands, and as such Mizoram boasted of different clans who were as different in their cultures and ways of lives as they were similar in looks and attitude. The Aizawl area, which was most densely inhabited by the Ralte people, the Hualngo and Fanai, who collectively termed themselves the Mizos, was then known as the North Lushai Hills by the Britishers. All political and sociological comings and goings were administered from Assam then and even the Church was under the Assam government at the time. It was a political officer who was stationed in Aizawl who gave permission to the missionaries of the Arthington mission to enter the land at the end of 1893. The other side of the region, the Lunglei Area and the Pawi-Lakher area was known as the South Lushai Hills and it was separately administered from Bengal. Due to the distance between Aizawl and Lunglei (about 104 miles) and also due to the gradual rising tension between the chiefs who still held on their old ways of lives and the new Christians who had fully adapted their lives as according to Christianity, it was proposed that some mission fields be stationed in the south. However, when this was done, separation of denominations was encountered under the politics of the religion itself.

Denominational rivalry was a very real as well as a stubborn element in church life during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. As history holds what had happened in many mission fields on every continent is sufficient proof of this. In Wales itself, in many small villages, Baptist and Presbyterian Churches often existed cheek by jowl with frequent tension and minimum cooperation between them and this very same tension seemed to have

stemmed into the churches that were established in Mizoram as well. With the separation between the North and the South in Mizoram, by 1901, the Baptist Missionary Society had turned their attention to the South Lushai region and its possibilities for growth under their leadership. When they first realized that the South would be separated from the North, Jones and Rowlands wrote and telegraphed to the Home Board of the Presbyterian Church of Wales in Liverpool to express their disapproval of the plan. They argued that the region would suffer if divided denomination-wise, but the Home Board, according to D.E Jones, seemed to have the impression that the North and South were totally different regions. The attitude of the Mission board this time, and for many years later, seemed to indicate that the main work of the mission lay in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills which therefore merited more attention and needed greater resources than the work in Mizoram. The other factor that the Mission Board had in mind was that the B.M.S (the Mission station that was to take over the South) was a larger and wealthier organization with more manpower to deploy. (Lloyd, 1991. Pg 70 – 75). Ultimately, the territory was divided into the Baptist Church in the South and the Presbyterian Church in the North.

Subsequently, even with the implication which religion gave in terms of peace and uniformity, what can be discerned from the way the establishment of the Churches panned out in Mizoram is that politics always played a part in the most peaceful situation. The missionaries had done their work and played their part in converting as many Mizos as they could and baptising as many as were willing. However, at the end of the day, it was not Christianity that ruled over the people, but the power of the head of the Churches that had them separated even till the present time of writing. It is always the power of the one in control as Foucault might argue, especially in the realms of religion that hold sway. As Jeremy Carrette has analyzed of Foucault's work, religion, for him, was always a part of a set of force relations and discursive practices which order human life. Foucault's work thus

presents a reading of religion outside theological traditions and belief – a reading that does not position religion in some separate realm but inside a political struggle of knowledge – power. (Foucault. 2009. Pg. 32).

With so much disruption in the lives of the Mizos with such diverse dynamics pressuring down on them at once, with conversion comes, as Viswanathan says , “undoing the concept of fixed, unalterable identities,” the Mizos were deprived of their cultural heritage, their autonomous existence and their economic independence. They faced an identity crisis.

‘Against these varying contacts’ observes (A.G) McCall, ‘the Lushais had no equipment on which to fall back for strength, except the traditions and the stories of their grandfathers.’ (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 158).

Against this complicated backdrop of Christianity, folklore can be seen, then as a backbone of a culture, an essence that defines people and identifies them as to who they are and denotes a sense of identity which they had lost. It gives them a sense of place in their surroundings which was alien to them. William Thoms coined the term ‘Folk Lore’ in 1846, in England, and up until then, ‘the folk’ were considered the illiterate peasantry of a given region, and “the term ‘folk’ in its initial meaning referred to European peasants and to them alone.” (Dundes, 1980. Pg. 4). Stories go back as far as the beginning of existence people secured a sense of identity by means of these various folklores that gave them an idea of their surroundings.

Folklore is a social phenomenon; a cultural trait arising within the communal life of the peasantry. When it becomes detached and unorganized it survives merely as a collection of quaint and naive ‘ bygones ’, or else degenerates into not very edifying

superstitions, devoid of any serious purpose and meaning, like palmistry, crystal gazing and beliefs about ‘luck’. (James, 1947. Pg. 362).

After the publication of Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* in 1928, folktales which had previously been seen as the stories of peasants and lower classes of people began to gradually earn priority as a study and not just as means to identify peasants and lower classes with. It also became a way by which people of a region in general could find a sense of identification with. It has been established that “historians have been notoriously wary of memory as a historical source. In challenging orthodoxies about historical sources, methods and aims, and by using memory for contemporary political purposes, oral history has generated fierce debates.” (*The Oral History Reader*. Pg. x). Up until the nineteenth century, folklore was not seen as a scholarly venture. In accordance with Russian formalism, Propp believes that all folktales, even if their origin are composed of discrete identifiable units would result from the description of these elements and their relationship to both one another and the story as a whole (Propp. 2009. Pg. 26-65). If this is true then it will also be justified that folktales from different parts of the world might have another thing in common, which is that they have been at one point of time in history, all been influenced by the religion which had been dominant upon their culture at their given time. History holds that Western Europe, (England in particular) fought numerous wars in the name of the God of Christianity and since they had been the ruling power, there is no doubt that this belief was spread across the continents.

In terms of the Mizo culture, the reason as to why folklore was viewed as “a collection of quaint and naïve ‘bygones’ ” was that since folklore has a lot to do with the idea of the spirits that they had believed before, with the acceptance of Christianity, they were soon dismissed as irrational and eventually supernatural. The first graveyard in Mizoram was

established in 1930, which meant that belief in the afterlife as legend was gone. It stood as proof to the fact that the Mizos had denounced their belief in their notion of the afterlife such as 'pialral' and 'mitthi khua' and were replaced with a more 'rational' idea of heaven and hell. The lure of folktales was soon lost as children were taught parables from the Bible rather than their indigenous cultural lores which were so beautifully portrayed in the folklore.

In the portrayal of an afterlife, in order to go to 'pialral,' a person had to perform various rituals and customs which included expensive community feasts at each stage or hunt down a number of wild animals including a bear, a deer, a wild gayal and a wild boar. (Lalthangliana, 1992. Pg. 97-127; Dokhuma, 1992. Pg 36-48). The folklore, 'Tlingi leh Ngama' is a tale about two lovers who meet in 'Mitthi Khua.' After Tlingi, the heroine had died, Ngama her lover was heartbroken and found his way into 'Mitthi Khua' while still alive in his human form. In this story, there is a clear illustration of the Mizo idea of the afterlife. Everything was different or contrary for the living being in the land of the dead. While the Christians believe that there would be no need for life's harsh everyday life, for the pre-Christian Mizos, it was still a very big task. The first thing Ngama discovered in the place was that his beloved had become extremely thin because she did not have enough to eat. The dead had their own perception of reality or their own perception of their respective realities which were very different. A bear, for the people who had passed on was nothing but a caterpillar, fishes were dry leaves and when Ngama tried to roast them, they turned into ash, while Tlingi could roast them to perfection. Thinking it was impossible to live in the like manner, Tlingi suggested that Ngama go back to the land of the living and reserve for her the freshest of his harvest. Ngama then, went back and did as he was asked. When the people in the land of the living saw what he was doing for his beloved who had died, they did the same for their loved ones who had gone to 'Mitthi Khua.' When Ngama died of a broken heart and

he went back to 'Mitthi khua,' he found that Tlingi had gained weight from the harvest that he had reserved for her (Dokhuma, 1992. Pg 36-48).<sup>7</sup>

The matter of life and death has been denoted by many religions in many different ways. Could afterlife as the Mizos had believed been a legitimate belief had Christianity not arrived? The Mizos certainly lived by their belief, so much so that a festival held for the dead where the living reserved their fresh harvest was commemorated upon at the end of the year, known as 'Mim Kut.'<sup>8</sup> This festival, after the arrival of Christianity was no longer celebrated and it is all but unknown now, especially for the younger generation. The rituals, customs and rites performed in this ceremony can only be traced back by the older generation and is slowly losing its relevance at the present time of writing. Therefore, folktales such as 'Tlingi leh Ngama' become a treasured reminder of a culture that was all but lost on the Mizos before they found out the important element which these folktales have in terms of reminding people about their roots and origins. However, since the Mizos had their beliefs firmly rooted in the afterlife in general, it was not hard for them to believe in the structure of another afterlife according to the Christians. The concept of the place and names of where the people who have died were merely changed, but the basic idea that the dead souls do have someplace to go to as determined by the way a person lived his life on earth was very much still the same. It was simply that:

Christianity took up the motif (which is what the natives had already had in their culture such as the stories of life and death) and reinterpreted it in terms of its own doctrine of redemption and gave it ritual expression in the Eucharistic oblation as the perpetuation of the supreme re-creative event in history so that the sacred story , having become incorporated in the cultus, had lived on from age to age in the faith and practice of an organized religious community." (James, 1947. Pg. 373).

What the missionaries did for the Mizos, was to replace their own doctrines, the doctrine of Christianity for the traditional beliefs that they had had for years and years and by which they had lived a well structured life. Hymn books for the Church, in the Mizo language was published in 1922. There were no official books that contained these rich and diverse stories of Mizo legends and myths until 1964. There were however, records of small excerpts and selections in school books. (Dahrawka, 2008, Pg vii). The resurgence of folklore into academic study and its continuing importance in the twentieth century is mostly concerned with the idea of nationalism which the Mizos had not been able to account for themselves for a very long time. Under the predominant influence of the Church and the lifestyle and certain aspects to life which had been imposed upon them, the Mizos had pushed, not only their indigenous rituals and traditions aside, but also their rich and varied folktales as well, replacing them with the scriptures from the Bible which, under the strain of living according to the doctrine of the Church was something every student at the time had to learn. However, in the contemporary society, the Mizos are constantly struggling to maintain an ethnic identity and thus the question of who the people actually are has been scrutinized in diverse forms. Living in a position and time where people are constantly enforced to think, redefine and elucidate their identities to different social institutions, folklore and religion have been significant in the creation of the sense of self and of identity as well.

For Alan Dundes, folklore is prime evidence of culture and of humanity. It is central to individual and group identity behaviour, manner of development, and other elements that are found in any individual, group or culture. He pointed to children's folklore:

...not as something to be repressed, but rather to be brought out into the open. As he showed, it reflects, as only folklore can, issues of sibling rivalry, puberty, and parent/child relationships. He distinguishes folklore – as evidence – from the use of other materials, because it is 'autobiographical ethnography, a people's own

description of themselves.’ He evaluated what children typically relate in folklore to ‘areas of special concern,’ or anxieties that are expressed more readily in folklore than in any everyday conversation. (Dundes, 2007. Pg 53).

With the feeling that their folktales were much inferior to the stories from the Bible, the Mizos repressed their own culture for a very long time. As had been established before, the first folk narrative book which Dahrawka<sup>9</sup> had only published in 1964, there was a difference of more than four decades before the Mizos finally realized the importance of their culture and how this very culture was much incorporated in their folktales. Dundes further expounds upon how folklore can be seen as “A mirror of culture,” (Dundes. 2007. Pg 53), which meant that it revealed differences and similarities in ways of thinking, and he hoped that its very study could therefore be a tool for teaching cultural understanding. The folktales of the Mizos, in many ways act as a reflection of their culture. In such tales like ‘Kelchawngi’ (Vanlallawma, 2000. Pg. 50-51), the possibility of travelling between the abode in the sky and earth with ease and comfort is reflected upon. The God above is called, ‘Pu Vana,’<sup>10</sup> a God who is benevolent and sympathetic to Kelchawngi, a young girl who cooked her younger sibling to death for a meal and is subsequently punished by her parents for her action and this denotes the nature of Pu Vana, the God of the Mizos revered during the pre – Christian era. He was a God who did not punish the sibling who killed her brother, but rather placed her on a higher realm, showering her with gifts and taking her away to live with him in the heavens.

Both Western and Mizo culture had a God to call their own, as seen from these stories and the matter of life and death, though different, were somehow similar in treatment and its ideas. Supernatural beings and the relationship between sky and earth are treated with the same attitude as one would treat a plausible story about logical tales. These elements of the fantastical are portrayed in some of the tales such as ‘Sichangneii,’ ( Dahrawka, 2008. Pg.

76-85.)<sup>11</sup>, which is a story about how a man on earth entraps a being from heaven, takes off her wings and horn and keeps her as a wife. The seven children of ‘Sichangeneii’ are demigods who climb up to the sky where their mother’s brother is a man-eater who tries to kill them. Similarly, ‘Chawngchilhi,’ (Zofa, 2011. Pg. 13-19)<sup>12</sup> is the tale about the love between a giant snake and a young woman. It depicts how she eventually became pregnant with the babies of the snake and when her father strikes her, the baby snakes come sliding out of her stomach. ‘Kungawrhi.’ (Zofa, 2011. Pg. 35-50)<sup>13</sup> denotes that the heroine had been created out of, a bruise on a man’s thumb. She eventually grew up to be a lovely young woman and she caught the eye of a ‘keimi’<sup>14</sup> and after elaborate preparation and black magic, he marries her. In the tale, there is an episode where Kungawrhi was taken by ‘Khuavang,’ a supernatural beings who played a large part in the lives of the humans.

These stories, among many other tales are filled with irrational plots and ideas, supernatural beings and beings from the sky and the earth. In the Mizo folktales especially, there are a lot of stories that denote the relationship between the beings living in the sky and the humans on earth. They are unnatural and seem to deviate from reality as is reflected often. However, it had been long held by folkloristic scholars that logic played no part in the plot of folklore and Vladimir Propp has denoted in this regard:

There is no external logic in tales of everyday life either, or in any case, such logic is not a requirement of folk aesthetics. In the tale of the ill – fated corpse, the actions of the simpleton who killed his mother and played pranks with her corpse are not externally motivated (as the actions taken by Kelchawngi in murdering her own sibling is not); he never plays his pranks for the purpose of deceiving people...he just takes the opportunity and swindles people, and this causes the listener’s delight. Fortuity of events, which determines the course of action and its favourable outcome,

would be a defect in terms of realism, but it is not a defect in terms of the folk narrative. (Propp, 1997. Pg 26).

It is perhaps because of the unrealistic and fantastical, all these folktales are from the Christian perspective that the Mizos had ignored their traditional folklore for a long while and perhaps regarded it to be a part of their pre-Christian lives which they had discarded in favour of perhaps a more realistic, more grounded belief in the Bible. However, belief in realism and the perception of it comes in many forms as perception of realism is not quite the same. For the Mizos, after they had converted to Christianity, their one and true realism was founded on the teachings of the Church. For Foucault, the teachings of the Church and the Church itself is:

a superb instrument of power for itself. Entirely woven through with elements that are imagery, erotic, effective, corporal, sensual, and so on. (Foucault. 1999. Pg 107).

For him then, the worlds of the supernatural beings which can be realized in folklore are no different from what can be denoted in the teachings of the Church. It was as though it simply replaced one form of folktale. Foucault recognizes Christianity as the ultimate power structure which imposes an obligation upon its followers to accept its dogma, its sacred text and, most importantly, its authority as truth through confession and the pastoral power. People willingly submit to this aspect of Christianity much in the same manner in which they submit to governmental and medical authority. Foucault does not seek to understand why this phenomenon has occurred. From his decided conclusion of the Church as a mere political tool, it can be understood while analyzing some of the changes and differences or rather similarities in folklore and Christian practices that perhaps the early Christians were 'manipulating' the customs and beliefs of the people. This could perhaps be instrumental in replacing pre-colonial beliefs with that of the post-Christian traditions.

The loss of identity that Viswanathan and Vanlalchhuanawma advocate in their analyses of conversion and revival, respectively could also be because of the fact that the Mizos had neglected their cultural traits that were rooted in these aspects of folklore. The life that they were expected to lead whether imposed upon them or not, was Western in origin because of the religion that they had embraced. When the clash between two opposing cultures are too abrupt and violent, the imagination of a person could become “impaired” (Coulson 1984. Pg 7). For the Mizos, the biggest disruption that they could have had on their culture was the arrival of the missionaries and the impact that they had left on the people who had “impaired” certain beliefs and imagination that went along with some of the stories. Perhaps, in the sudden change of their faith and with education they could no longer imagine their culture as depicted through folklore. If indeed, folklore can be seen and accepted as the “mirror of culture” it is no surprise that the Mizos had such an identity crisis for a significant period of time. Many Mizos continue to believe that folktales were insignificant and were a string of supernatural ordeals that would not have any important role to play in the growth and development of identity at large. However, the Mizos have gradually rediscovered the importance of these folktales for culture and have also contributed a great deal in trying to spread the necessity for the identification of a group of people.

In the introduction of C. Vanlalawma’s book, *Hmanlai Hian Mawm* (2000), B. Lalthangliana, a noted Mizo cultural historian had listed several reasons as to why folklore is important for the Mizo people. He lists four reasons, first of which is that it is an ideal arena to learn language as was spoken by the forefathers. He also denotes that language is dynamic and can change easily with time and he denotes that going back to these stories will help relearn a forgotten language. Second, and perhaps most important for this study, is how relevant it is for the culture. Traditional folktales have testified to the fact that the Mizo culture is rich and varied and that it holds much more than many other cultures in the world.

Thirdly, he narrates how these tales enrich one's knowledge and understanding of idioms which these stories all have contributed to. Finally, he states that the songs and rhymes which are inherent in the content of these stories; rhymes that children would recite while playing, and which children no longer know are immensely contributive to cultural sensibility. (Vanlallawma, 2000. Pg. v.)<sup>15</sup>

Dahrawka was one of the few people who understood the importance of folklore for the Mizos. In 1932, along with a couple of peers, he had already started the collection of these folktales. Against the hardships of having to collect them with any machines and amidst the chaos of the World War II, he managed to collect many of them. The idea of orality and how they could easily lose their way from one generation to the other was not lost on him as he cites the fact that these stories would soon lose their coherence if it was not in written form for documentation. He also denotes that the Mizos had never had written record of their past before and thus, the stories which were told then, were not similar to the contemporary tradition. (Dahrawka. 2008. Pg viii.)<sup>16</sup>. Dundes' idea that "folklore is constantly being created anew in contemporary life...it is not a relic of the past. As many people believe, but an expression of present – day issues," is noteworthy of consideration at this juncture. (Dundes, 2007. Pg 54). With the idea that folktales are constantly evolving, Dahrawka had somehow understood the importance of how the stories needed to be preserved in as original a form as possible, before they could further be influenced by Western culture.

Under this western culture, which was heralded by the establishment of the Church in the region and the influence it had on the Mizo people, it can be concluded that the Mizos had been negligent of their folktales. There are no known records that the Welsh mission, when they worked with the people tried to persuade the Mizos to ignore these folklores, however, it was the people themselves who believed that they could no longer be a part of a life which was so decidedly different from the one that they had embraced. These folktales are a treasure

trove for the pre-Christian lives, and that it seemed almost heretic to still hold on to them. Under the umbrella of the Church and its doctrine it was difficult to wholly accept these tales as a reflection of their past life and how they were to be identified with because some of the tales are so sacrilegious and crude especially when compared to the attitude that the Church expected from its followers. As has been denoted earlier, it took the people decades before they could finally realize that these tales need not necessarily interfere or that they need not be denounced to live a Christian life. Instead, they gradually understood just how important they were to understand their sensibilities and ethos. This was necessary not only for them but also for other groups of people as well. The missionaries and the mission itself might have changed their festivals and their belief in sacrifices, but it was done in order that the importance of these folk narratives would never lose their sense of place with the Mizos.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Conversing with the evil spirits which the Mizo people believed they had to appease with sacrifices to let them live a life of peace.

<sup>2</sup> A poetic name for a God or 'Pathian.'

<sup>3</sup> Hades; the abode of departed spirits. (*Lit.* dead man's village)

<sup>4</sup> The Lushai Paradise. (*Lit.* the further side of the Pial river).

<sup>5</sup> God, the Giver and Preserver of life.

<sup>6</sup> The name of a guardian spirit.

<sup>7</sup> In translation from the original text in Mizo. Hereafter cited as *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> The name of a Lushai feast or festival held in honour of the dead, at which the first – fruits of certain vegetables and harvests are offered or presented to them.

<sup>9</sup> P.S. Dahrawka (1896-1978) was one of the foremost Mizo to be educated. He, with a few of his friends were instrumental in establishing the 'Mizo Academy of Letters' and this group published a journal called, 'Thu Leh Hla.' This journal has continued to render a major contribution to the arena of Mizo literature.

<sup>10</sup> The name of the Lushai God who lives in the heavens.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Half man, half tiger. It can take the form of a man or a tiger whenever it chooses.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

This study has attempted to analyze and elucidate upon the different dynamics that exist within the Mizo society with regards to the coming of the religion of Christianity. This has been established through the folk narratives of the Mizos. As denoted earlier, the Mizos were a group of people who were rather isolated from the rest of the world and other people's culture, content with their way of life and trusting the politics of their village chiefs. They were satisfied with what (under the influence of Christianity), could now be labelled as heretic and primitive, but even then, they had always had structure and formality of any well functioning society. The study has also denoted that the myth about the Mizos converting to Christianity as soon as they heard the gospels of the Welsh missionaries should be dismissed. As denoted in the previous studies, and as a part of the objectives of the same, it should be remembered that there were different forces and elements which shaped the culture of the Mizos society as it can be seen at the time of writing. They were an autonomous group of people who fought hard for what they believed in and they held on to it under the rule of the Britishers and the political forces of other cultures until the coming of the Welsh missionaries.

The Mizos initially dreaded and were very suspicious of Christianity as it was purely Western in content. It was regarded to be the psychological and philosophical weapon of the British, to help consolidate the imposition of the British rule by political power. The missionaries preached about salvation but the Mizos did not feel the need for a saviour because there had never been the concept of being saved, prior to the advent of the missionaries. For a traditional, conventional Mizo, the religion was based entirely on

satisfying the demon ('ramhuai'). Every sickness was caused by evil spirits and bountiful sacrifices had to be offered to the demon of sickness to release the person from its clutches. The concept of sin and of being saved through the blood of the saviour Jesus seemed to have no connection or has no kinship with the people's belief in sacrifice and the actions which they performed on earth, in order to secure their place in 'pialral'<sup>1</sup> (or the Mizo concept of heaven) after death. This explains the tremendous tension that followed shortly after the introduction of Christianity.

Therefore, the trauma caused by the successive dislocation of chieftainship, the traditional administrative structures, and of traditional 'sakhua,'<sup>2</sup> namely the 'Puithiam'<sup>3</sup> structure, and several cultural elements associated with them, left the people in inexpressible dilemma. It was the concept of spirituality which the religion of Christianity encompasses and a sense of spirituality which the Mizos had believed in their own way for as long as they had existed which had then made the transition easier for them. "Traditional belief in the reality of a spiritual world, found its more tangible expression in the Biblical teachings about the Devil and the host of demons," said Vanlalchhuanawma and it has been this identification that the Mizos found in the similarity of the two beliefs which had driven them to a fuller understanding of why they needed to let their own indigenous beliefs go. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 149). When two cultures clashed, Homi Bhabha has spoken of how that clash could produce "hybridity." The Mizos were mimicking the white men, who with their vast knowledge held more power than the native. He writes, "The interstitial passage (liminality) between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.' (Bhabha. 1994. Pg. 4.). The liminality of hybridity is presented as a paradigm of colonial anxiety. The principal proposition is the hybridity of colonial identity, which, as a cultural form, made the colonial masters ambivalent, and, as such, altered the authority of power. The Mizos were

subverted subtlety to believe that their culture held no challenge against the far more superior culture of the white man and it took years for them to find the need to revive their folktales again. John Coulson, with reference to religion and imagination states that often “culture is so violently disrupted that the imagination becomes (in Wordsworth’s sense) ‘impaired.’” (Coulson 1984. Pg 7). For the Mizo, the biggest ‘disruption’ that they could have had on their culture was the arrival of the missionaries and their conversions, and the impact that they had and left upon the people, and this in turn impaired certain beliefs and imagination that went along with some of the stories.

What is most important for this study is in terms of how they laid a solid foundation of solidarity amongst the people which contributed to the dramatic changes of their lives. They spent many years, even well after the Britishers had left them in trying to reinvent and identify themselves as an entirely different people with different culture which they could never really grasp or fully understand. It was something which they could not completely identify with because they were different from the white men. However, the refusal to accept this fact and the trials and tribulations they had undergone, to be a part of something they could never be made them ignore their own personal heritage in trying to embrace a culture which had never been their and could never be. In this process of mimicking the white men, the Mizos did not stand a chance under the strain of the new and alluring religion of Christianity which they felt was the only way to feel a kinship to their colonizers. Against this confusion and complication, folklore offered a sense of identification to which the Mizos could always return to, in order to give them a sense of belonging. Folktales had always served as a solid foundation to which a culture could remember and understand their surroundings and it was also the same for the Mizos. As has been clearly denoted by Vanlalchhuanawma, on the idea of how much the Mizos were nothing in comparison to the

coming of the Welsh missionaries it becomes clear that they never had a choice but to convert and accept the religion of Christianity:

The Mizo society having been subjugated and disarmed by the alien power, had nothing but the milieu of cultural heritage to fall back upon, to stand the wholesale assimilation threatened by the Western imperialism and mission. (Vanlalchhuanawma, 2007. Pg 456).

Folktales then, became the most ideal example of the forgotten, but treasured cultural heritage that they could hope to have. The distressing ordeal was that it took them a very long time to understand the importance of this heritage under the power of the religion that they had accepted, namely Christianity. It was a combination of political and religious power which invaded the society with such force. Prior to 1964, there were no official books that contained these rich and diverse stories of Mizo legends and myths. There were however, records of small excerpts and selections in school books. (Dahrawka, 2008, Pg vii)<sup>4</sup>. P.S Dahrawka, along with his friend, Suakthuama<sup>5</sup> decided to go forth and collect these stories. They went with blank books and asked the elders in villages to contribute tales that had been passed down to them. From the steps taken by these two forerunners, it is significant to note that more than four decades had passed before the Mizos learned just how important their culture and tradition had been and how essential the folktales were in providing the same. By this time, sentiments and certain attitudes to one's own culture that they had based their lives on before had no doubt changed. It may be difficult to outline exactly how it had changed, since culture changes all the time but as E.O James has denoted:

When it becomes detached and unorganized it survives merely as a collection of quaint and naive " bygones ", or else degenerates into not very edifying superstitions, devoid of any serious purpose and meaning, like palmistry, crystal gazing and beliefs

about "luck". Survivals that have lost their original function, are, often a cause of considerable embarrassment, and unless they can be utilized for beneficial ends and so acquire a new functional value for the organism... James, 'Folklore', 1947. Pg. 361).

The revered rites and rituals that the Mizos used to perform too, turned into mere superstition and their previous beliefs were often regarded to be a source of embarrassment for the Mizos upon the advent of Christianity. As they were suspicious of the customs which they had practiced earlier, there was a radical change in the belief system. The attitude, the ethos and the sentiments against the pre – colonial ethos had gone against a generation who had ignored their heritage for a very long time. It has also been established that “historians have been notoriously wary of memory as a historical source. In challenging orthodoxies about historical sources, methods and aims, and by using memory for contemporary political purposes, oral history has generated fierce debates.” (*The Oral History Reader*. 1998. Pg x). So, folklore, has been regarded to be basically a forgotten past which held no truth to a people’s environment because it was of oral origin and something which was inferior to the ‘evidenced’ teachings of the Church. Dundes has, in this regard denoted thus: “

We forget that much of what is written down – in newspapers, in books, circulated as oral communication first. Even the Bible was oral tradition before it was committed to written form! (Dundes, 2007. Pg 58).

And this can be seen as the similarity that folk narratives share with religion that have not garnered a lot of attention before. The idea that the older beliefs of the Mizos as depicted through the folk narratives are not to be taken seriously because they are not based on the evidence of a printed book, but handed down from generation to generation orally thus gradually becomes defeated. After all, original concepts of books and newspapers begin with oral narratives.

Taking Dundes' statement into perspective, it could simply mean that the folk narratives which the people had chosen to ignore for so long might hold as much reliance and truth as the Bible does because their origin was very similar. The only difference was that Christianity came to the Mizos at a time when the Western thought of learning was at its zenith and also because it held a much higher power as compared to the religion of the Mizos in all realms. It was the idea of being given higher education by the missionaries which had not been provided earlier by any administrative set-up and the compassion that they perceived in the Welsh missionaries which appealed to them immensely. Amidst the wars and raids they had been going through from the neighbouring regions and mostly the lure and the desire of finding some kind of similarity, a kinship or a connection to the foreigners was what they hoped they could aspire to be. The Mizos held the white men with too high an esteem and revered their ways and religion so much that their influence on them was felt strongly and their knowledge was much too impalpable for them to understand and refuse since they had never come across something so 'alien' that they were inherently intrigued and amazed by the power of Christianity.

Perhaps, in the sudden change of their faith and with education, one could no longer imagine their culture as represented through their folklore. However, Wilson Harris has formulated that "hybridity in the present is constantly struggling to free itself from a past which stressed ancestry, and which value the 'pure' over its threatening opposite, the 'composite'" (Ashcroft et al. 2002. Pg. 34). As much as one tried to revive or even reinvent the once forgotten or rather, ignored folk narratives, with a different outlook on life and belief system, it may not be that easy. Along with a whole new set of practices and beliefs, Christianity brought a somewhat refinement of behaviour and manners in every aspect of life as well as in the folklore. The Grimm brothers, who had been extremely innovative and

undoubtedly the forerunners in the revival and re – construction of folktales, wrote in the introduction of their book, *Kinder und Hausmärchen*,

“In our translation of these ‘Household Stories’ ... we have omitted about a dozen short pieces to which English mothers might object, and for good and satisfactory reasons have altered, in a slight way, four other stories. The mixture of sacred subjects with profane, though frequent in Germany, would not meet with favour in an English book.” (Household Stories, 1853. Pg. iv).

Suddenly profanity, violence and gore no longer had a place in history, even though “Folk material involves personal and societal anxieties that are repressed or avoided and, when expressed, typically disguised.” (Dundes. 2007. Pg 4). It somehow restricts such words and phrases that had been so freely used before and there was inherent control over its use. “Control its free use,” (Foucault. 1999. Pg 107) as Foucault said not only in speech but in print as well. Censorship is not foreign to the world of literature. One must recognize that censorship and the ideology supporting it go back to ancient times, and that every society has had customs, taboos, or laws by which speech, dress, religious observance, and sexual expression were regulated. In Athens, where democracy first emerged, censorship was well known as a means of enforcing the prevailing orthodoxy. Indeed, Plato was the first recorded thinker to formulate a rationale for intellectual, religious, and artistic censorship (“Republic” Pg. 71).

Likewise, in the realm of folkloristic studies, censorship also played an important part. The Mizos never had any written narratives to mark the changes. However, with the Mizo folktales, it is not so much about changing narratives and words because of artistic rights. When the Synod<sup>6</sup> changed such things as names, all story books must conform. In alliance with this, Foucault had clarified:

Calling sex by its name thereafter (the 17th century) became more difficult and more costly. As if in order to gain mastery of it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish the words that rendered it too visibly present. (Foucault. 1990. Pg 87).

So Christianity has more or less left a mark on the folklore of the people. When reading or hearing of these stories now, as of today, they seemed a world away; a time when people believed in things as they perceived them to be and also a time when afterlives were not just spent in heaven or hell. It signified a time when vulgarity as we know them now, were not considered so; when a man's worth was decided by the amount of heads he collected, animals he killed or the women he slept with. Or in other words, a time when Christianity, played no part in these folktales and people were at liberty to render them as much as they pleased.

As long as the Church was the dominant force, it exercised supreme control over all the major activities and significant events in the daily life of the folk. For Foucault, the concept of enforcing the Church was a struggle for power and domination. Faith, which is the basic tool for religion is unfounded and pointless when it comes to controlling or changing a culture. What was more important was the dominant power, which the Church was gradually reaching for. "Historically, what exists is the Church. Faith, what is that? Religion is a political force," (Foucault. 1999. Pg 107), announces Foucault. This argument certainly holds true in the Mizo context as the power dynamics within the governmental system changed slowly, but it shifted gradually from the rule of the Mizo chiefs to the rule of the Church. The conversions of the chiefs signified the end of one domination to the other. Foucault's theory recognizes Christianity as the ultimate power structure which imposes its rules and obligations on its followers to accept its dogma, its sacred text and, most importantly, its

authority as truth through confession and the pastoral power. People willingly submit to this aspect, much in the same way as they submit to governmental and medical authority. Foucault doesn't seek to understand why this phenomenon occurs but he simply knows that it does. From his decided conclusion of the Church as a mere political tool, it can be understood, while observing some of the changes and differences or rather similarities in folklore and Christian practices that perhaps the early Christians were manipulating the customs and beliefs of the earlier Mizos.

The colonizers did not change the culture "en masse," (Foucault, 1991. Pg. 136-147) but it was moreover a "subtle coercion." It was not so much that the pagan festivals and beliefs were Christianized since the Church took a very definite stand against the old rites and customs. What it did was to create its own myth and ritual – using different terms in their technical anthropological meaning – the living reality, that had been believed once to have happened and forever after to have influenced the world and human destinies. (James., 1947. Pg 366 ). The Mizo festival of 'Pawl Kut'<sup>7</sup> for example, which was a celebration held at the end of the year, all through the year of December and beginning of January, for giving thanks to their year's prosperity and to ask for blessings for the coming year seems particularly similar to the celebration of the Christian festival of Christmas. Other ways of exercising force can only coerce or destroy their target discipline and training can reconstruct it to, in order to produce new gestures, actions, habits and skills, and ultimately new kinds of people.

For years to come these beliefs changed and evolved so much so that what had once been accepted as truths during their time have been regarded to be mere stories that were once told to them as children. Vladimir Propp, believes that although folktales have proved that they have no authors, there must have been an originator, someone who had once told these stories first. But as all things do, "it arises everywhere and changes in a regular way,

independently of people's will once there are appropriate conditions for it in the historical developments of the peoples." (Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*. 1997. Pg. 7). The changes and evolution of a people's way of life as depicted by these stories encompass the lives of everyone till today. The younger Mizo generation have been known to know more about Bible stories than they do about folklore because to them, folktale is regarded to be illogical, farcical and improbable against the spiritual logic of religion and these were aspects which had been taught to them since childhood.

However, as much as the dynamics of belief on folklore and cultural rites and rituals might have changed, it does not necessarily mean that they have changed for the worse. As Propp suggested, change, in any form is inevitable and the younger generation now do not necessarily have to reject one for the other. The religion of Christianity and the influence of the white man might have changed a lot of things for the Mizos, but it could also be said that things have not changed so drastically in order to completely isolate a Mizo from his roots. The Synod Press, as denoted in the previous chapters had changed or censored (as did the Grimm Brothers), certain words and phrases, and perhaps the printed tales from various writers differ in many ways. Yet the fact remains that they have not been tampered with so much that stories once told before could no longer be recognized today. There are still a number of treasured stories that denote how the older generation had lived their lives. While Dundes finds answers to the question of how these changes evolved through the study of psychology and its relation to folklore (Dundes, 2007. Pg. 3), Propp however, believes that the compositional unity of the wondertale or folklore lies neither in the specific features of the human psyche nor in the peculiarities of artistic creation, but is inherently located in the 'reality of the past.' He goes on to state that:

What is now recounted as a story was once enacted or represented, and what was not enacted was imagined. Of the two sequences, the first (the initiation rite) was lost

earlier than the second. The ritual was no longer performed, but old ideas about death survived, developed and changed, even divorced from ritual. The disappearance of the ritual went hand in hand with the disappearance of hunting as the only, or main, source of livelihood. (Propp. *Theory and History of Folklore*. 1997. Pg. 117).

By Propp's logic, some part of a culture were always lost somewhere as were some of the Mizo culture and this seems to imply that cultures change by whatever forces happen to change it. So just as the coming of the missionaries and the religion of Christianity changed the culture of the Mizos, certain other forces could have changed the Mizo culture, and the people might have ignored their folktales by other forces and that force does not necessarily have to be religion. No culture can ever hold on to their heritage as everything and everyone is subjected to change. However, what this study has traced is the factor of the influence of the religion of Christianity and the immense amount of part that it had taken in changing the ethos of the people, especially while losing some part of their culture. Religion did change a lot of things for the Mizo especially in terms of their attitudes towards their own indigenous culture, even if they have not entirely lost it; especially for the younger generation. There can sometimes exist an attitude whereby people want to lose that heritage and completely embrace another culture, like that of the culture of the white man. Folktales might sound archaic and unexciting as compared to the many distractions in terms of social media and technological standards. Parents are more interested in sending their children to schools where they are taught 'perfect' English accents rather than their cultural heritage, and even today the desire to have a child who speaks 'perfect' English still continues in the Mizo cultural ethos.

Every once in a while, in the name of resurrecting a culture, some aspects would present itself in Mizo society. However, nothing could really render or arise the feeling of melancholy or celebration that these festivals would provide because the romance and the

suspension of disbelief that these stories could provide for the people's entertainment and attention have no longer remained. This was because of the pressure of science and evolution, and of the need to find logic to every aspect of life which education has imparted and the teachings of the Bible, which are so opposed to the pre – colonial religion. E.O James has denoted that the romances of the previous lives and customs have lost their sense of their true importance in the world because of the attitude and the treatment which it used to have earlier, had been lost somewhere in the transition from pre – colonial religion to the religion of Christianity. He is of the view that survivals of the past, which have lost their original functions could cause for a considerable amount of embarrassment for a people and this can sometimes be harmful. This aspect is used in different contexts. He further goes on to state that:

All efforts to perpetuate or resuscitate the culture of the folk by artificial sophisticated devices, whether as pastimes or picturesque adjuncts to modern mechanized civilization, are doomed to failure because it is only when traditional ways of life are embodied in a 'living' culture that they retain their vitality. They must be – socially accepted like all other cultural traits and determined by cultural conditioning. They must express the attitudes to life of the group in which they occur as an integral part of its social, economic or religious tradition. . (James, 1947. Pg 366).

So, his solution seems to be then that one needs to find a way in which 'traditional ways of life' are embodied in a 'living' culture. As has been denoted earlier, these tales which are still available to the people, which are now in written form hold enormous amounts of potential for research by which one could understand one's heritage all the more. If all these pasts which are still as rich and varied as they had been, could have been given space and acceptance to be read and studied as a science, and yet be considered aspect of contemporary culture, perhaps a way could be found to resuscitate one's past. However, the task would not

be easy and perhaps could never be done and maybe it is a prerequisite that every culture has to accept, namely to let go of something which has altered so much that one could not possibly relate to it anymore. Whatever the case, it is important that one does not forget the past and what it is worth.

Moreover, there is still the ideal that folklore can be a way to bring different groups of people together from all over the world. The relevance of applying folk ideas to comparative studies and applied folklore which no other sciences could propose to do, is also as challenging as it is idealistic. It is Dundes' opinion that:

It is perfectly conceivable that the identification of sets of folk ideas from different cultures will facilitate valuable comparative analyses. No doubt when two cultures come into contact, it is the conflict of folk ideas which causes the most difficulty... If folklorists can aid in the task of identifying folk ideas, they may be able to assume a key role in improving communications between peoples (and subcultures) and reducing the number of misunderstandings which might otherwise arise. This would permit the study of folklore to take its proper place among the 'applied' social sciences. (Dundes, 2007. Pg. 191).

Therefore, folklore, as a discipline holds an important task in bringing people of all cultures together. Folklore and its studies need not only be about collecting and preserving heirlooms of the past so as to produce a permanent, antiquarian study, but folklore should be used as raw material for the study of human thought and to better understand aspects of contemporary culture wherein religion plays a major part. Numerous wars had been fought in the name of religious disagreements, and it still continues to this day, but people who share the same ideas about folklore, share a sense of solidarity which cannot be fought nor tainted. Culture and religion are always part and parcel of each other and a culture cannot understand itself without first understanding its implicit connection and development within the

constructs of religious belief and practice. The study concludes in the light of this observation that contemporary culture is born out of religious traditions and the conditions of our knowledge, in particular that of the Mizo community are therefore embedded in religious discourse. Thus, the dynamics of Christianity, have been well etched in the discourse of Mizo folklore in and the underlying Mizo narratives that are pertinent towards the same.

Notes.

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<sup>1</sup> The equivalent of Lushai paradise – (*Lit.* the further side of the Pial River).

<sup>2</sup> Religion, religious rites and ceremonies

<sup>3</sup> An exorcist; a priest.

<sup>4</sup> In translation from the original text in Mizo.

<sup>5</sup> Suakthuama was a friend of Dahrawka who served as a soldier to the Burma Regiment. He passed away before the two could complete their book, *Mizo Thawnthu* (1964), and Dahrawka even dedicated the book to his memory.

<sup>6</sup> It is the head of the organization of the Presbytery of Mizoram. It rules over the various other congregational organizations that are settled around the region. Their headquarters are located in Mission Veng, Aizawl, Mizoram.

<sup>7</sup> The name of a Lushai feast after harvest; the Lushai harvest feast or festival.

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