

**HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF MIZO SOCIETY THROUGH THE STUDY
OF COLOURS**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIRMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN
HISTORY**

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**HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF MIZO SOCIETY THROUGH THE
STUDY OF COLOURS**

BY

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SUBMITTED

**In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Master of
Philosophy in History of Mizoram University, Aizawl.**



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This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “*Historical Analysis of Mizo Society through the Study of Colours*” submitted by *Laura L Pulamate* for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy is a research work, done under my supervision and guidance. The dissertation submitted by her has not formed the basis for the award to the scholar for any degree or any other similar title and it has not yet been submitted as a dissertation or thesis in any university. I also certify that the dissertation represents objective study and independent work of the scholar

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DECLARATION

I, **Laura L Pulamate**, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation entitled “*Historical Analysis of Mizo Society through the Study of Colours*” is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form basis of award of any previous degree to me or to do the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University or Institute.

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It is hereby certified that the M.Phil dissertation entitled, “*Historical Analysis of Mizo Society through the Study of Colours*” is the result of Master of Philosophy research programme and have not taken recourse to any form of Plagiarism in any of the chapters of the dissertation, except for quotations, from published and unpublished sources which are clearly indicated and acknowledged as such. The source material from works such as books, articles, essays, interviews and internet sources are properly acknowledged and quotations and paraphrases are clearly indicated. This dissertation or any version of it has not been previously submitted to any university and the same has not yet been published.











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ABBREVIATIONS

APHLC	:	All Party Hill Leaders Conference
EITU	:	East India Tribal Union
Fig.	:	Figure
GNC	:	Garro National Council
MCUP	:	Mizo Common People Union
MNF	:	Mizo National Front
MNFF	:	Mizo National Famine Front
MU	:	Mizo Union
SRC	:	State Reorganisation Commision
UMFO	:	United Mizo Freedom Organisation
UT	:	Union Territory
YMA	:	Yong Mizo Association

GLOSSARY

<i>Aieng</i>	-	turmeric
<i>Archal</i>	-	a cock
<i>Arkharthiangdawh ruaini</i>	-	the name of Sacrifice conducted seven days after in which, a white cock is killed outside platform of the house.
<i>Bawngpui</i>	-	a cow
<i>Belmang</i>	-	a sooth or coal dust
<i>Beraw</i>	-	name of a large tree yielding a species of frankincense
<i>Buang</i>	-	to be fair, to be buff coloured, to be light coloured
<i>Bulpui</i>	-	cause, origin, reason, source, chief root
<i>Chal</i>	-	the forehead, the brow
<i>Chamai</i>	-	a poisonous creeper plant with a yellow flower
<i>Cheulopang</i>	-	cloth of Lakhers worn by men or women belonging to the chief's family
<i>Dawlrem</i>	-	the name of a cloth worn by the Lushais
<i>Da</i>	-	to lose colour, pale, washed-out
<i>Dang</i>	-	to prevent, to be speechless, to be or feel exhausted
<i>Dawi</i>	-	to bewitch, to cast a spell upon, to practice magic and witchcraft

<i>Diartial</i>	-	a cloth which is wrapped around the head or a turban worn by <i>thangchhuah-pa</i>
<i>Duk</i>	-	dark colour, bruised
<i>Dum</i>	-	black
<i>Eng</i>	-	yellow
<i>Fano dawi</i>	-	an annual sacrifice which is made to protect the young growing rice crop on the village <i>jhooms</i> from disease
<i>Feren an</i>	-	French mustard
<i>Fungki</i>	-	mithun horn used for holding gun powder
<i>Ha/ a ha</i>	-	to wear or put on clothes
<i>Hmanna</i>	-	use
<i>Hmaram</i>	-	the name of a women's skirt or kilt originally belonging to the Hmar tribe
<i>Hmel</i>	-	face, looks, appearance, shape, form
<i>Hnim</i>	-	a weed, a plant, grass
<i>Hrilh</i>	-	to solemnize
<i>Hring</i>	-	green, to bear, to give birth, to be green, to be fresh
<i>Hrui-khau</i>	-	the bark or fibre of the vaiza and <i>khaupui</i> trees used for tying purposes and also for making rope
<i>Hrilh</i>	-	to warn or to inform
<i>Huns</i>	-	one of the earliest Turkic tribes
<i>Inleng</i>	-	suitors

<i>Jhum/jhooms</i>	-	agricultural land
<i>Kawkpuizikzial</i>	-	the name of a pattern woven on cloth, supposed to resemble the curled-up fronds of the fern tree
<i>Kawr</i>	-	clothes
<i>Khaw-var</i>	-	dawn, morning
<i>Kei-fang</i>	-	the name of a shrub and its edible fruit, which is used for dyeing
<i>Kel</i>	-	a goat
<i>Kelkhal</i>	-	sacrifices of a goat performed by ordinary Lushais (Mizos) before they embraced Christianity
<i>Khuang</i>	-	Mizo drum
<i>Khuangchawi</i>	-	the name of a public feast given by Mizo chiefs and the well to do (rich) people
<i>Leh</i>	-	fold, again, in that case, consequence
<i>Lei</i>	-	to buy
<i>Mau tâm</i>	-	the name given to the periodic dying down of bamboos after flowering and fruiting about every fifty years and to the subsequent famine caused by a plague of rats which devour the rice crops.
<i>Meithui</i>	-	the name of a tree and also of its juice which is used as a jet-black Japan or Japan varnish
<i>Mi</i>	-	a person, a thing, people
<i>Mi dum</i>	-	a person of dark skin tone

<i>Mihring</i>	-	a human being
<i>Mi ngo</i>	-	fair person, a person of light skin tone
<i>Mithi</i>	-	a dead person
<i>Nalh</i>	-	agile, active, graceful, sleek, well-groomed, neat, nice in appearance
<i>Nei</i>	-	to have, to get, to obtain, to possess, to acquire, to procure, to accept
<i>Ngo</i>	-	white, fair, of light colour
<i>Pasaltha</i>	-	a brave person, manly, heroic, valiant, stout-hearted, courageous, a hero, a notable warrior
<i>Paw</i>	-	to be dusty, to have a cloudy, or misty, or milky appearance; to have an opaque appearance; to be light or blue
<i>Pawl</i>	-	to be blue, to associate with, to keep company with, a group, to companion with, to have fellowship with
<i>Puan</i>	-	cloth, a garment, apparel (a wrap around cloth)
<i>Puan chei</i>	-	a white cloth decorated with coloured stripes, worn by the chief and his family
<i>Puandum</i>	-	A cloth with thick stripes of black and red stripes worn during funerals or special occasions it is also a dark blue cloth worn by Lushais according to Lorrain
<i>Puanngo</i>	-	cloth made with raw cotton without dye
<i>Puanrin</i>	-	a <i>puan</i> or cloth worn by women which is dyed with colour at the hem

<i>Puantlangdum</i>	-	cloth which has black or blue dye at the hem
<i>Puithiam</i>	-	a priest
<i>Rap</i>	-	the shelf over the fire place in a Mizo house
<i>Rawng</i>	-	colour, paint
<i>Ruaini</i>	-	the third day of <i>Sedawi-chhun</i> is known as <i>Ruaini</i>
<i>Sadawt</i>	-	a private priest, especially such as are employed by ruling chiefs
<i>Sakapthei</i>	-	person good at hunting game
<i>Sakeiziangzia</i>	-	the name of a motif in <i>puan</i>
<i>Sen</i>	-	red
<i>Sendang</i>	-	pink
<i>Senduk</i>	-	maroon, deep red, crimson
<i>Sentezel</i>	-	a name of a plant used for colouring
<i>Selulaichna</i>	-	Then at the end of the three months they kill a male pig. This is called <i>Selulaichna</i> or the bringing down of the <i>mythun's</i> head
<i>Sepeng</i>	-	a gourd bottle for holding beer used when a gayal is being sacrificed
<i>Sethlako/sethlakhung</i>	-	the calling of the spirit of the <i>mythun</i>
<i>Sipasuap</i>	-	a cloth made of the bark of a tree
<i>Tawlhlopuan</i>	-	the name of cloth worn by warriors and brave men

<i>Thangchhuah</i>	-	the title given to a man who has distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase or by giving a certain number of public feasts, the wife of such a man also shares his title, and they and their children are allowed to wear the <i>thangchhuah puan</i> , the possession of this title is regarded by the Lushaia as a passport to <i>Pialeal</i> or paradise
<i>Thi</i>	-	to bleed or to die
<i>Thianglo</i>	-	or unlucky
<i>Thirdeng</i>	-	blacksmith
<i>Thisen</i>	-	blood
<i>Ṭing</i>	-	indigo plant or ashes collected in <i>rap</i>
<i>Tlangau</i>	-	village crier
<i>Uk</i>	-	to be dirty, to be discoloured, to be khaki coloured
<i>Upa</i>	-	elder
<i>Vai</i>	-	foreigner or non-Mizo
<i>Vai La</i>	-	foreign loom
<i>Vai Puan</i>	-	foreign cloth
<i>Vaiza</i>	-	the name of a flowering tree, the bark or fibre which is called <i>heuikhau</i> and also <i>vaiza</i> is used for tying purposes, and also making into rope
<i>Val upa</i>	-	head of <i>zawlbuk</i>
<i>Var</i>	-	white

<i>Vawk</i>	-	pig
<i>Vawkpa</i>	-	boar
<i>Vawkpui</i>	-	sow
<i>Vawkte</i>	-	piglet
<i>Zalen</i>	-	a village elder whose privilege it is to be among the first to choose land for jhooming purposes, a freeman
<i>Zawlbuk</i>	-	a bachelors'' dormitory
<i>Zawlpuan</i>	-	the name given to a cloth generally blue which a bride brings to her husband upon marriage
<i>Zu</i>	-	rice beer of Mizo or alcohol
<i>Zupuini</i>	-	the name of a feast where rice beer is served

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“There is a history in all men’s lives”

- William Shakespeare

Every person has historical information stored as a memory to which they might be unconscious. For a layman, these might be just a fiction of their memory but for a historian, it can be a clue for the larger picture which is yet to be revealed about the past. As William Shakespeare, one of the greatest writers in English has quoted “There is a history in all men’s lives”.¹ Every person has a story to tell about their past experiences or information which has been passed on from the past generations. In history, it is called oral tradition. These memories that are in bits and pieces could be a building block in the process of reconstructing history for a historian. Mizo history is not a distant history. Therefore, historians must collect and assemble this information to make sense of it.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation titled, “Historical analysis of Mizo society through the study of colours”, studies the least enquired context in history, the study of colours and how colours played a vital role in shaping the identity of a Mizo society at different stages of a cultural phenomenon.

¹ William Shakespeare, ‘ Henry IV, Part 2: Act 3, scene 1’, *The Folger Shakespeare Library*, [website], 1996-2020, p. 113 <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/shakespeares-works/henry-iv-part-2/act-3-scene-1/>, (accessed on 30 May 2021)

The study is located in Mizoram, one of the North-East states of India. Physiographically categorized into the Eastern Himalayas, the north-south longitudinal lofty ranges with a sub-tropical climate and dense jungle, for a long time did not entertain outsiders until the advent of the British in 1890.

In the colonial period, the region was known as Lushai Hills by the British. But the tribal people residing in these hills were not only Lushai but belonged to various sub-tribes and clans. However, the British commonly used the term Lushai for addressing all the sub-tribes as the term was derived from the dominant ones. This generalisation of tribes under Lushai was not accommodating enough and was not inclusive of various cognate groups; it did not represent the distinctiveness of various sub-tribes because of which there was a problem of oneness among the tribes. The Mizo Union was quick to realise this loophole. Therefore, politically the term Mizo was activated in 1945 for describing the tribes residing in the Lushai hills so that it is more inclusive. In the course of this dissertation, Lushai may be used interchangeably with Mizo for convenience. However, the term Mizo includes various ethnic groups as given below:

The Mizo people are the ethnic groups native to the state of Mizoram. They also reside in Assam, Tripura and Manipur; they also spread across the international borders of India in Myanmar and eastern Bangladesh. This term covers several ethnic people who speak various Mizo languages. The term Mizo is derived from the two words *Mi* and *Zo*. 'Mi' in Mizo means 'person'. The term Mizo is often used to name an overall ethnicity, it is an umbrella term to denote the various clans, such as Lusei (Lushai), Kuki, Lai, Paite, Mara, Ralte, Hmar people etc.²

After the Indian Independence, the Lushai Hills were given the status of Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule by the Act of Parliament under the district of Assam in 1954. On 17th July 1971, Lushai Hills was given the status of Union Territory but soon the Mizo District was uplifted to the status of Union Territory with the name of Mizoram, vide section 6 of the North-Eastern Area Reorganisation

² Lalngurliana Sailo, 'Mizo Polity and Chieftainship in the 18th Century', in Tejimala Gurung (ed.), *The Falling Politics: Crisis and Decline of States in North-East India in the Eighteenth Century*, Guwahati and New Delhi, DVS Publishers, 2018, p.274.

Act, 1971, (Act No. 18 of 1971) on January 21, 1972.³ In 1987 Mizoram became the 23rd state of India.

The earliest detailed records of the Mizos were written by the British ethnographers and administrators for the convenience of their administration. These records were mostly meant for official purposes and not really for the sake of ethnography or for the sake of recording the historical information of the people and the land.

Before the encounter of the Mizos with the British, there were no written records as the residents of Lushai hills had no indigenous written script of their own, historical events and knowledge would be passed on to the next generation via oral traditions such as folktales, folklore, songs, and legends, etc. The home was the first institution for the deliverance of such information. *Zawlbuk* (bachelors' dormitory) among its various functions also acted as a vital institution where historical knowledge and information were passed on to the new generation of young men. This was the case, until James Herbert Lorrain (Pu Buanga) and Rev. Frederick William Savage, the two Christian missionaries, reduced the language which had no script into writing using the simple Roman script.

As Rev. F. J. Sandy in his 'Element of Lushai Grammar' in 1920 referring to the work of Rev. F. W Savage and J. H Lorrain, has put it:

“...the Lushais did not have written language. When, for instance, they desired to commemorate the prowess of the dead they resorted to symbols... From symbols such as these, as in the ancient civilizations, an alphabet might have developed, but in the meantime, the language was reduced to writing by European and the system adopted was so simple that thousands of Lushais have already learnt to read and write”⁴

The dependence on oral tradition and the absence of written language must have posed limitations in the expression of the Lushais and problem in the recording of

³ Lalrimawia, *Mizoram: History and Cultural Identity (1890-1947)*, Guwahati, Spectrum Publications, 1995, p. 137

⁴ J.H. Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, Kolkata, The Asiatic Society, 1940, p.vii - viii.

history which is evident in the eagerness that the Lushais showed in learning new ways of expression in the form of reading and writing Romanized script as reflected by Rev. F. J. Sandy.

It would be worthwhile to note that even before Lorrain and Savage came in contact with the Lushais and start working on their language. Works on Lushai dialect and grammar had already been commenced by Capt. Thomas Herbert Lewin and Assistant Surgeon, Brojo Nath Saha. These existing works set off to become stepping stones for Lorrain and Savage, which is evident from below:

“Years before 1874, Capt. Thomas Herbert Lewin, Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong Hill Tracts, had published his ‘Progressive Colloquial Exercise in the Lushai Dialect’ and in 1884 Assistant Surgeon Brojo Nath Saha, Civil Medical Officer of the same district had published ‘Grammar of the Lushai Language’, both of which we found extremely useful in our earliest efforts to learn words and phrases.”⁵

However, Lorrain and Savage could accomplish the task of reducing the language to writing. One should admit, for a historian writing on Mizo history, the introduction of the Hunterian system of orthography⁶ is truly a boon as Lorrain has remarked:

“...a new day dawned upon the Lushai Hills, giving the hardy inhabitants just the opportunity they needed to develop their latent powers of heart and mind... We have had the privilege of watching from the beginning the wonderful change...”⁷

It would not be erroneous to agree with Lorrain that indeed a new day had dawned not only for the Mizo society but for historians as well. After the 1920s many folk songs, folk tales, and folk traditions were written down. The Mizos that became literate could maintain a diary and some even wrote books, newsletters and articles

⁵ Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, p. v

⁶ B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin: A Short Account of Mizo History*, Aizawl, B. Lalthangliana, 2009, p. 211

⁷ Lorrain, p. v

published in the local language. All these provided primary sources for historians which otherwise would have been difficult, as depending on orientalist and British ethnographers alone the sources of historical study could be subjected to western prejudice.

To write a comprehensive, holistic, and more inclusive history, the historical analysis of Mizo society should be reinvigorated. The British records, available local writings/records, and oral traditions should be employed. All these sources can be complemented with the study of colours, to analyse Mizo society and to uncover social processes such as social hierarchy, inequality, and gender roles in Mizo society. However, it would be good to have a brief overview of Mizo society in different epochs of history.

1.2 PRE-COLONIAL MIZO SOCIETY

In the pre-colonial time, the Mizo society was simple and they had a direct relationship with the environment. They predominantly depended on the forest and its produce to acquire the necessities of their life. The technology that they had for production was unsophisticated. Livelihood was based on shifting or *jhum* cultivation. This practice of *jhum* cultivation required shifting to a new location every year and the fallow period ordinarily varies from five to twenty years, depending on the availability and fertility of the land and forest.⁸ Mizos were very much preoccupied with their subsistence. They constantly negotiated with nature which influenced the process of their migration and resettlement and even their security. These aspects finally emerged into a specific pattern of administration i.e. chieftainship at the village level. Frequent disputes and wars occurred among different villages due to the insufficiency of land and food.

⁸ Robert Lalrentluanga Ralte, 'Colonialism in Northeast India: An Environmental History of Forest Conflict in the Frontier of Lushai Hills 1850-1900', *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, Volume 4, Issue 1, January 2015, p. 67, 68

The Mizo chiefs were in charge of the distribution of land to the people for *jhuming* as they owned the land according to the colonialist. “Each village was an independent entity, ruled over by its chief or *Lal*.”⁹ The role of the chief in the affairs of villages was exalted in such a way that he took care of the economic and social affairs of the village and became the commander.¹⁰ A brief assessment of the village officials may be useful to have a better understanding of the Mizo society. After the *Lal*, foremost among the officials was the *Upas* or the council of leaders who assisted the chief in village administration.¹¹ The chief also had an assistant known as *Zalen* to help him with social and agricultural affairs. The chief also appointed *Ramhual*, who was an agriculture expert. *Tlangau* were present in all the villages. They would cry out the message of the chief or spread the news in the village. The villages also had *Thirdeng* (blacksmith). Every Mizo village had *Puithiam* and *Sadawt*, to perform rituals and ceremonies for the people and the chief respectively. The above-mentioned different categories can be considered as the traditional elite, whereas the rest are the traditional masses.

In the pre-colonial Mizo society, Next to the chief or *Lal*, the most revered was the *Thangchhuahpa*, who had privilege and high status in the social structure. *Thangchhuah* was a title honoured to someone who had and fulfilled certain ceremonies to the communities. This prestigious status of *Thangchhuah* could be earned with agricultural wealth and by showing bravery and hunting skills. From childhood days, parents wished the male child to be active as *Pasaltha* (quality of being a brave and valiant person) and they uttered the words *sa kap thei* which means brave and good hunting skills.¹²

Andrew Stuart pointed out that colour can be a powerful instrument. “Colours can also influence the way we perceive other people – propelling us to see others as accomplished, efficient, friendly or trustworthy. Colour can make people seem more

⁹ Sailo, *The Falling Politics*, p. 276

¹⁰ Ralte, *International Journal of Humanities*, p. 68

¹¹ Sailo, p. 280

¹² Ralte, p. 68

charismatic, more authoritative or reputable.”¹³ The same case can be witnessed in Mizo society. As colour played a vital role in displaying a person to seem more commanding or worthy of respect, therefore we can witness such examples in Mizo society. While the common people usually wore white plain natural coloured cotton cloth called *puanngo* some specific designs and coloured *puan* could be worn by only certain people of the society. This coloured *puan* gave the identity of reverence and respect and also gave distinction to the people of higher strata of the society.

Some examples of such coloured *puan* and the people associated with it are as follows: only the chief and his family could wear *Puanchei* the cloth displays stripes of different dimensions with a preponderance of red stripes of different shades which are combined tastefully with other stripes of deep colours like green, yellow, blue, light red and black standing against broad white stripes.¹⁴ Similarly only the *Thangchhuah pa* could wear *Diartial* (*Thangchhuah-diartial*) and *Thangchhuah puan* and people would look at them with admiration. The *puan* is handwoven black cloth with red, yellow, and white checks.¹⁵

People who had greater physical strength were likely to be the chief and also people who were courageous, stronger, good at hunting, and rendered service to the community were higher in the social strata. “Colours can stimulate emotional or aesthetic responses, these symbolic meaning transmit ideas and organise social codes. It could be used for basic tasks of classifying and establishing hierarchies, which are functions of colour in all societies.”¹⁶

1.3 COLONIAL MIZO SOCIETY

The inhabitants of Lushai Hills experienced a drastic change socially and culturally after the advent of the British. Within less than a century, change was visible in all

¹³ Andrew Stuart, ‘Tribal Colours’, *The Week*, 2 October 2014, p. 1

<https://www.theweek.co.uk/innovation-at-work/63355/tribal-colours>, (accessed 25 November 2019)

¹⁴ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo*, Calcutta, Firma KLM Private Limited, 1998, p. 80

¹⁵ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture*, p. 71

¹⁶ Michael Pastoureau, *Blue: the History of Color*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1947, p.14

aspects of the society; there was a change in the administration, religion, education, health, customs, and even ideology. The Mizos who were so hostile to outsiders started to look upon the British with admiration and adulation. Although there was strong resistance initially by some Mizo chiefs, as resistance was overpowered, the Mizos became quite cooperative with the new administrators.

The process of consolidating British rule in the hills was carried out by pioneer missionaries. The process of consolidation was a huge success in the Lushai Hills. As mentioned earlier, the two Christian missionaries Rev. F.W. Savidge and Rev. J.H. Lorrain reduced the language to writing. This was one of the greatest contributions made by the British to the people of Lushai Hills. Not only was it a huge leap for the Mizos, but the outcome was also tremendous for the British as well. As a result, the British were able to introduce western education to the hills. Formal education was introduced at a lower level and the first school was established in 1894.¹⁷

“The first Mizo book ‘*Mizo Zir Tir Bu*’ (A Lushai Primer) was published on 2nd October 1895.”¹⁸ “The missionaries established the first middle school in 1906 and the first high school was set up in 1944 in the Lushai Hills.”¹⁹

The effort of the missionary had a positive outcome. The progress that western education produced is one of the indicators of the success of the British consolidation in the Lushai hills which is evident from below:

“The progress (education) made has been due chiefly to the mission and their funds, a progress that has placed Lushai very high up in the standard of literacy as being high as 12.9 per hundred, an incident further increased to 19.3 in the 1941 census.”²⁰

¹⁷ T. Lalremruata, ‘Impact of Colonialism on the Traditional Beliefs and Practices of the Mizo’, *Mizoram University Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, vol. V, Issue 1, June 2019, p. 143

¹⁸ Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, p. 215

¹⁹ Lalthangliana, p. 215

²⁰ A.G McCall, ‘*Lushai Chrysalis*’, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, Department of Art and Culture, Govt. of Mizoram, 1949, p. 203

The eagerness that the Mizos showed in assimilating western education and the progress they made is evidence of the fact that they were adapting to the new system that was being introduced in the Lushai hills. One of the reasons for this could also be the reverence that education and Christianity brought with them. In pre-colonial times, only the chief and his kinsmen or people who had some achievements in the society such as the *Thangchhuah*, *Pasaltha*, and the people who assisted the chief had reverence in the society. However, the British created an alternative source of income for educated Christian Mizos whose stability in income created security which in turn resulted in reverence in the society. Perhaps, this was the reason western education and Christianity were a huge success as is evident from the following:

“It was believed that Christianity and education was a doorway for ‘salaried jobs’, a solace from the wearisome toils of cultivation of a hard land.”²¹

Christianity brought with it a lot of changes in the society of the Mizos. The Bible was translated into the local language which made the process of evangelism easier for the British.

Zu was an essential element in all the socio-cultural and religious ceremonies in the pre-colonial Mizo society.²² Many of the Mizo festivals and ceremonies included *Zu*, as it was a Mizo tradition and it occupied a crucial position. In pre-colonial times *Zu* was used during the time of festivals, celebrations such as harvest festivals, to celebrate success in hunting, marriages, and birth. It was also used for sacrifices in religious ceremonies as well as during mourning in case of death. However, the prohibition of *Zu* in Mizo society was no doubt the impact of British colonialism and the efforts of the missionaries.²³

²¹ McCall, ‘*Lushai Chrysalis*’, p. 205

²² Lalremruata, *Mizoram University Journal*, p. 145

²³ Lalremruata, p. 146

“The condemnation of *Zu* drinking by Lushai Church has had definite results on society.”²⁴

Christianity not only put an end to the long-term practice of drinking *Zu* in society. It was replaced by drinking tea, the practice of which continued even in post-colonial Mizo society.

Zawlbuk was the most important social institution for Mizo society usually located at the centre of the village and near the chief’s house. It was a place of learning for young Mizo boys under a *Val Upa*, who was responsible for training the young Mizo men. He was appointed based on his courage, service for the community and hunting skills. *Zawlbuk* acted as an information centre and a clubhouse but mainly it functioned as an educational centre. The inmates were taught discipline, obedience, hunting, wrestling, singing and dancing, art and handicrafts, digging graves, collecting firewoods and other social responsibilities.²⁵ Apart from an institute of learning, *Zawlbuk* functioned as the defence department of the village. Young men sleep together so that in times of village emergency they could be vigilant and ready for action against village raids. However, *Zawlbuk* like other institutions could not stand the test of time as Christianity and western education became more popular among the masses.

“Naturally, some of the practices (of the *Zawlbuk*) could hardly expect the sanction of strict Church ideas, and this fact has provided the opportunity for Lushai religious leaders to condemn *Zawlbuks*, in pursuance of the prevalent tendency aiming the Lushais to destroy and eliminate all that dates from a period before the Christian era. The Lushai aptitude for imitation and a general sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the European combined to accelerate this tendency.”²⁶

²⁴ McCall, p. 209

²⁵ Samuel V.L. Thanga, ‘Zawlbuk’, in Malsawmdawngliana and Rohmingmawii (ed.), *Mizo Narratives: accounts from Mizoram*, Guwahati, C. Sasi Kumar for Scientific Book Centre, 2015, p. 60-63

²⁶ McCall, p.211

The significance and applicability of *Zawlbuk* declined and by the late 1930s to the early 1940s only few *Zawlbuks* were left in most of the Mizo villages.²⁷ The main reason for this decline was the Mizos themselves; the Lushai Church leaders and the Mizo parents preferred western education.²⁸ The British administrators tried to revive *Zawlbuk* but they were not successful in it. Though the British did not play a direct role in the abolition of *Zawlbuk*, westernization was the root cause of it. Many other changes brought about by western culture.

“There were also changes in the music culture of the Mizo. The music culture of the Mizo was formerly dominated by *Khuang* (Mizo Drum) but the introduction of the western musical instrument replaced other cultural musical instruments.”²⁹

Formal shirts and pants were hardly worn by the Mizo. Before the advent of the missionaries, the dress culture of the Mizo represents a typical Mizo dress code. The missionaries in the Lushai Hills encouraged a formal dress code among the Mizo which has a huge impact till today.

1.4 POST-COLONIAL MIZO SOCIETY

On 15th August 1947 India got independence. The Lushai hill administration was left in the hands of the Indian union. However, the Mizos already had political awakening before the British left. In 1946 Mizo Common People Union (MCPU) was formed which was renamed as Mizo Union.³⁰ The Bordoloi Sub-committee which visited the hills on the insistence of the District Councils advised that Mizo Hills be put under the Sixth Schedule and District Council should be provided to the Lushais. The Mizo Union submitted a resolution to the committee for including all the Mizo inhabited areas which were adjacent to Lushai Hills. Meanwhile, a new

²⁷ V.S, Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos: Changes and Challenges*, Aizawl, Mizoram Publication Board, 2005, p.167

²⁸ Thanga, *Mizo Narratives*, p. 65

²⁹ Lalremruata, p. 146

³⁰ Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, ‘About Mizoram: History’, *Mizoram*, [website], para.5, <https://mizoram.nic.in/about/history.htm>, (accessed on 30 May 2022)

party United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO) demanded for Lushai hills to join Burma after independence.³¹ The demand of both Mizo Union and UMF remained unfulfilled. However, with certain amount of autonomy in 1952, the Lushai Hills District Council was established under Assam state.

The hill tribes of Assam state had no cultural affinity with the Assamese and Bengali residents of the plain. Resentment against the Assam government began when the policy of what was seen to be Assamisation by the tribals began³² such as the policy of making Assamese the official language of the state. As a result, the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) was formed, which demanded the bifurcation of Assam.³³ Many other organizations such as the Hill's Union, Highlanders' Union, the Garo National Council (GNC), and the UMFO submitted a memorandum to the State Reorganisation Commission (SRC) demanding a separate Hill State.³⁴

On 17 November 1955, there was a debate regarding the demand of state in the Assam legislative assembly. Although the idea of a separate state was supported by most members from the hills areas, some members did not support the proposal.³⁵

In place of a separate Hill State, J. J. M. Nichols-Roy (member of Assam constituent assembly)³⁶ instead suggested an alternative to the hill state by proposing a Plan for a Hill Ministry. The East India Tribal Union (EITU), a political party that was formed in 1955 in Aizawl to raise a demand of a separate state under the influence of Nehru and G. B. Pant joined the Chaliha Ministry in 1958.³⁷ After joining the ministry the demand for a separate hill state was kept suspended. Resentment was

³¹ Ministry of Communication, 'About Mizoram', para.5

³² 'Political Union of North-Eastern India', *Indian Saga*, [website], 2000, para.1, http://indiansaga.com/history/postindependence/north_east_second.html, (accessed on 30 May 2022)

³³ S. R. Bodhi, 'Khasi Political Reality and the Struggle for Statehood: History, Context and Political Processes', in Jagannath Ambagudia and Virginius Xaxa (ed.), *Handbook of Tribal Politics in India*, New Delhi, Sage, 2021, p.395

³⁴ Bodhi, 'Khasi Political Reality', p.397

³⁵ Bodhi, P.398

³⁶ 'J.J.M. Nichols Roy', *constitution of India*, [website], 2017-2022, para.4, https://www.constitutionofindia.net/constituent_assembly_members/j_j_m_nichols_roy, (accessed on 30 May 2022)

³⁷ Ministry of Communication, para.8

created among the people and it seemed that the EITU leaders had surrendered their demand.³⁸

The real impetus for the statehood movement came during the year 1959 when Mizoram was affected by *Mautam* of famine and the Assam Official Language Act of 1961.³⁹ The Assam Government was given a warning about the famine but they failed to act on time. The Mizos felt a sense of betrayal when the Government did not seriously react to their problem⁴⁰ led to the formation of the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF), a civil society organization in the backdrop of the deplorable economic condition of Mizoram in the 1960s, the MNFF was converted into a political party known as the Mizo National Front (MNF) in 1961.⁴¹

The period of 1960s witnessed a series of insurgencies. MNF declared independence in 1966.⁴² The government of Assam rushed in the military to control the situation in the Mizo hills and helped the return of normalcy. The Mizo National Front was outlawed in 1967. The demand for statehood was gained fresh momentum.⁴³ It was indeed a dark spot for Indian democracy when it had to bomb certain parts of its territory in the Mizo hills to curb the situation. The underground movement subsided to a great extent and facilitated the return of peace in the hills.⁴⁴

In 1967 the MNF was outlawed and the demand for statehood was gained fresh momentum.⁴⁵ In May 1971 a delegation Mizo District Council met Indira Gandhi and demanded a full fledged state for the Mizos but the government only offered the status of Union Territory (U.T). The Mizo leaders were ready to accept the offer on condition into a Union Territory in July 1971 on condition that the status of U.T

³⁸ Bodhi, P.398

³⁹ 'Political Union', para.8

⁴⁰ 'Political Union', para.8

⁴¹ P. Lalpekhlui, 'Tribal Politics and Non-state Actors in Mizoram', in Jagannath Ambagudia and Virginius Xaxa (ed.), *Handbook of Tribal Politics in India*, New Delhi, Sage, 2021, p.428

⁴² Deryck O. Lodrick, 'Mizoram', *Encyclopedia Britannica*, [website], 28 Nov. 2019, para.8 <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mizoram>, (accessed 30 May 2022)

⁴³ Ministry of Communication, para.22

⁴⁴ Rinchen Norbu Wangchuk, 'Mizo Peace Accord: The Intriguing Story Behind India's Most Enduring Peace Initiative!', in Gayatri Mishra (ed.), *The Better India*, [website], 2 July 2018, para.16-21, <https://www.thebetterindia.com/148387/mizo-peace-accord-laldenga-rajiv-gandhi/>, (accessed on 30 May 2022)

⁴⁵ Ministry of Communication, para.21

would be upgraded to statehood sooner rather than later. On 21st January, 1972 Mizoram became a Union Territory.⁴⁶ After the death of Indra Gandhi, on 15th February 1985 Laldenga met the new Prime Minister Rajib Gandhi regarding statehood.⁴⁷ On 30 June 1986, the Government of India and MNF led by Laldenga signed the Mizo Accord and on 20 Feb 1987 Mizoram became a full-fledged State.⁴⁸

Homi Bhabha's concept of the hybrid theory is the most employed post-colonial theory. It refers to the new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonisation.⁴⁹ This contact zone is the colonial country or province. Bhabha contends that all cultures and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the 'third space of enunciation'.⁵⁰ After influencing the third space or the colonial country when the British left the impact they had on the culture and society remains forever. Contemporary culture and society are the hybrids of both pre-colonial and colonial culture and society.

“It is important that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial origin. For a willingness to descend into that a new place unknown to them... may unlock the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but the union of culture's hybridity.”⁵¹

The same situation can be witnessed in Mizo society. The socio-cultural impact of the British was so strong that even after the British left Mizo society was never the same. It became a hybrid of pre-colonial and colonial society.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Communcation, para.22

⁴⁷ Ministry of Communcation, para.23

⁴⁸ 'Political Union', para.8

⁴⁹ Nasullah Mambrol, 'Homi Bhabha's concept of Hybrid Theory', *Literary theory and Criticism*, [website], 2016, <https://literariness.org/2016/04/08/homi-bhabhas-concept-of-hybridity/>, (accessed 20 June 2021)

⁵⁰ Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 37

⁵¹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p.38

1.5 HISTORY OF COLOURS

History is an inquiry into the past. But the choice of inquiry can be influenced by various factors. These factors could be the kind of information that the historian wants to pursue, an ideology, or a trend that exists contemporary to the historian. History is not just a “collection of facts about the past.” History consists of making arguments about what happened in the past based on what people recorded (in written documents, cultural artefacts, or oral traditions) at the time.⁵²

Historical writing has always been an interdisciplinary pursuit. Therefore, various methodologies and historiography are adopted to write history throughout the writing of the past. Different epochs in history produce a different type of theme from the narrative style of writing on the great personalities to the history of the common people through a different lens of approaches but rarely the topic of colours or its theme in history writing is mentioned in historical writing through different time and phases.

The study of colour in other disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, natural science, sociology, art and marketing is quite prevalent whereas the study of colour in historical writing does not seem to be in the best interest of historians. This is the reason that dedicated works on colour is rare especially when the study of colours is in historical context.⁵³ The reasons for historians to avoid the writing on colours may be due to various reasons such as the problem of documentation, as information on colour is not the most celebrated topic for documentation; the problem of preservation, as it is very difficult to preserve colours as the coloured materials may get distorted with time and even if preserved it might not be the same as the original.

The epistemology of society on colours and its role in history requires a deep understanding of the evolution of colour theory. The theory of colour has always

⁵² ‘Writing History: An Introductory Guide to How History Is Produced’, *American History Association*, [website], 2018, <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-historians/teaching-and-learning-in-the-digital-age/the-history-of-the-americas/the-conquest-of-mexico/for-students/writing-history-an-introductory-guide-to-how-history-is-produced> (accessed 24 February 2020)

⁵³ Pastoreau, *Blue*, p.7

been there since ancient times. “Colours are both cultural and natural phenomenon and were always part of human life. In the context of archaeology the first pigments appeared in the Early Palaeolithic.”⁵⁴ The earliest use of colour pigment can be traced back to the Early Paleolithic times when red and other colours, such as black, yellow, brown and purple, were the only chromatic colours, which appeared in early rock art.⁵⁵ These were probably used because of their easy accessibility. Colours were not merely present, inaccessible and the surroundings of the early people. The rock art of the Early Paleolithic is evidence that the people at that time were very much involved with the use of colours.

However, colour as a theory was first inquired about only around 500BC by the Greek philosophers. Before them, there were no works on the colour theory. One of the Greek pioneers Parmenides paved a way for his successors by making illusion and study of visual perception an important theme. Parmenides did not write about colours but opined that colours and shapes are not more than an appearance and that they are only guise.⁵⁶ The contrast between reality and illusion helped in the colour and vision theory which was elaborated by his successors.

The first Greek philosopher to write on colour was Empedocles (490-435 BC). Empedocles believes in both extra mission and intromission.⁵⁷ He believed that the eye is like a lantern that emits a beam that enables man to see and simultaneously he also believes there is something that comes in the direction of eyes that enters the pores of eyes and enables sight.

“It appears that all colours seem are produced by the encounter our eyes and something which moves in the direction of the eyes. And that any specific colour that we see is neither the object which comes towards the

⁵⁴ Simona Petru, *The Power of colour*, IFRAO Congress L’art pléistocène dans le monde, Tarascon-sur-Ariège, 2010, p.1713
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274952568_The_power_of_colour(accessed 24 February 2020)

⁵⁵ Petru, *The Power of colour*, p.1714

⁵⁶ Robert A Crone, *History of Color: The Evolution of Theories of Light and Color*, The Netherlands, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999, p. 4

⁵⁷ Crone, *History of Color*, p.4

eye nor the eye which is met, but rather something which is produced between them.”⁵⁸

Empedocles had also formulated a doctrine that to the four elements: air, water, fire and earth which represents the four basic colour white, black, red and yellowish-green and four sorts of pores that enters the eye.⁵⁹ Only four colours have been mentioned by Empedocles. This was questioned by Gladstone. According to Gladstone, there seems to be a paucity of colour words in Homeric Greek. Was the colour vision of the ancient Greeks underdeveloped? ⁶⁰ Others believe that the colour vision of humans has developed in historic times. However, the colour vision of ancient Greeks was not underdeveloped they were only deficient in the term for colour.⁶¹ This seems to be a case not only for the Greeks but throughout different civilisations.

Therefore, Empedocles’ choice of four colours was not arbitrary but reflected the developmental level of the Greek language at that time. There was a world of colours to be seen before the language had words for them.⁶²

The development of colour theory during the renaissance period can be credited to Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519). According to him, each colour held a direct relationship to the natural world. In his colour set, white related to light, yellow stood for the earth, green for water, blue for air, red for fire, and black for night or darkness.⁶³

A huge leap regarding the colour theory occurred when Isaac Newton (1642-1727) discovered the seven hues of a spectrum broke out of a prism when white light is

⁵⁸ Ronchi V. Storia Della Luce, *Transi: The nature of light, a historical survey*. London, Heinemann, 1970, p. 3

⁵⁹ Crone, p. 5

⁶⁰ WE Gladstone, *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age*, London, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 102

⁶¹ Dor H. De l'evolution historique du sens des couleurs, Refutation des theories de Gladstone et de Magnus. Mem Acad Sei & Beiles Lettr et arts Lyon, 1879

⁶² Crone, p. 5,6

⁶³ Steven Bleicher, *Contemporary Color Theory and Use*, New York, Delmar Cengage Learning, 2012, p. 23

passed through it. Based on the light he also made a colour wheel which became the foundation for colour wheels and colour mixing till the present time.

A few years later, J. C. Le Blon would adopt much of Newton's research in creating his colour ideology. He developed the theory of the primary colour system of three hues of yellow, red, and blue which could not be reduced or broken down any further and therefore were the primary or basic hues. He also stated that these hues could be mixed or blended in varying combinations to make up all of the other colours.⁶⁴

Isaac Newton discovered the colour spectrum from white light the colour theory has taken a huge leap in history. Many scholars and scientists have proposed scientific theories on colours. However, not only in the discipline of science but the study of colour in the discipline of social science in recent years has witnessed great progress. The reason for the brief introduction of colour theory and trend is because similar colour perception can collaborate with the Mizo perception of colour in history. As per the theory of Empedocles, the ancient Greeks were probably acquainted with only four colours similarly the pre-colonial Mizo had named six colours. However, this does not mean they did not see the colour or it did not exist but it only means that they had named only for these particular colours at that point in history. Also, attempts have been made in the course of history to associate or symbolize colours with the surrounding elements, emotions, matter etc.

1.6 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

History of Color: The Evolution of Theories of Light and Color (1999) by Robert A. Crone has given detailed information on the evolution of colour theory from ancient times till the 20th century. The origin of colour theory can be traced to Greek philosophers. Any theory to develop requires a long period which Crone had wonderfully depicted in his writing. This book provides significant events in history about the development of colour theory. Initially, the theories were about vision

⁶⁴ Bleicher, *Contemporary Color*, p. 23

theory however after Newton's discovered the colour spectrum the vision and theory have taken a different turn to become more oriented to colour. The theme of this book is natural science and the theories are aided by formulas and scientific diagrams which are hard to understand and trivial for the study in a historical context. The book however has also given useful information on the understanding of colour theory in a historical context such as the development of colour words in ancient societies and the association of colour with natural elements which is quite relevant to the tribal societies around the world as well as for the study of colour in Mizo context.

Blue: The History of Colour (1947) by Michael Pastoureau is a very detailed work on the history of blue colour from the time of prehistory till the twentieth century. In this book, Pastoureau has also highlighted the problem of the lack of historical study on colours and the problem of the interdisciplinary approach that is involved in the study of colour which according to him poses a major setback for historians for the study of colours in historical context. His work on the history of blue colour is admirable as he has done a comprehensive investigation on the colour like no historian has done before. However, his work is not without limitation as Pastoureau has based his study only on western Europe because of which it is difficult to relate his findings to the context of other cultures of the world, especially with that of a tribal society in the Lushai hills as the significance, understanding and the source for the procurement of natural pigment for these colours are quite dissimilar. Also, this book is limited to the study of blue colour only and does not highlight other colours.

Contemporary Color: Theory and Uses (2012) by Steven Bleicher has been developed and designed to teach the effective use of colour across the areas of art and design. The text covers historical perspective along with studio section to give the reader a deeper insight and understanding. The book also contains comprehensive information on colour psychology to understand the intrinsic power of colour and its relationship with all of the other design elements. The limitation of this book is that it is not a history book but rather a guide to understanding colour for art and design because of which the information provided is mostly unessential for historical

context. However, some of the detailed colour information has helped for a better understanding of colour in the historical context such as the naming of colour and the understanding of colour and its relationship with nature could be very much related to the tribal understanding of colour.

The Story of Colour: an Exploration of the hidden message of the Spectrum. (2017)

In this book Gevin Evans had given very detailed information on various colours such as red, orange, brown, yellow, green, blue, purple, pink, white, black and gold. He has not only written about the history and origin of these colours but has also highlighted their significance in the course of history throughout the world. Evans has also depicted the significance that these colours had played in some of the society, cultures, politics and religions.

Tribal Colours (2019) by Andrew Stuart is an excellent work in which he has highlighted the psychological importance and effect that colour has on framing group mentality, hierarchy, and identity in the tribal societies. Stuart through this article tries to convey that tribal thinking has never disappeared in modern societies when it comes to the association of colours and identity. The work of Stuart on 'Tribal Colours' is too brief and provides a great scope for further and detailed study of colours and tribes.

The Power of colour (2010) by Simona Petru studies the role and symbolic meaning of colours in the Early Paleolithic through the study of cave paintings. According to Petru it is easier to establish an emotional and subconscious connection with prehistoric artists than to create a rational explanation of the meaning and the symbolism they held in early societies. Colour symbolism highly depended on the spiritual and physical environment. These could include emotions, the trichromatic vision of humans, light and the availability of colour pigment. Petru has given insight into colour symbolism but she has concentrated her studies mainly on the Early Paleolithic. Though she has made a passing reference to tribes like the Blombos and the Himbians, there is a scope for the study of the power of colour in other tribal societies.

Material Culture of the Mizo (1998) by Lianhmingthanga gives lucid information on the material objects of the Mizo which is important for the understanding of Mizo society and culture. The information provided in this book deals with the material culture that has survived the different stages of socio-cultural life. The objects that Lianhmingthanga has studied vary from agricultural implements to implements used in hunting, clothing and ornament and weapon. In the tenth chapter of his book named Dyes and Paints, the author has given the process of dye extraction from natural substances. He has also mentioned six colours that the Mizos were acquainted with. Information on the shift of dyeing from natural extract to synthetic dyes has also been mentioned in this book. Lianhmingthanga has provided information on Mizo *puan* along with diagrams and pictures, which can be a great source of information for the study of colours in the context of textile. However, he has failed to include much more traditional Mizo *puan* which are of great importance for a detailed study and also there is a limitation in the information given on the process of dye extraction.

Mizo Ramchhuah Dan (1993) published by the Tribal Research Institute of Mizoram is a book on the art of forestry and hunting by the men of the Mizo society. The focus of this book is the roles of men and their hunting skills, technique and experiences. It does not talk about colours or any related topic. However, there is a reference to the contrast in the responsibility of men and women in Mizo society and states that the art of weaving and dyeing was associated with the women-only and hence the production of colours was the work of women only.

Pi Pute Hla (1995) is a great collection of Lushai folk songs by D. Sailo. The folk song provides ample information about the early Mizo. However, evidence of colours being mentioned in folk songs is disappointing. A passing reference to colour has been mentioned only twice in the entire book which also is very vague. The scope of the study of colours is quite limited in the context of Mizo literature.

The Lakhers (1932) by N. E. Parry is a very detailed monograph on the Lakhers. In the introductory chapter Perry has described in detail the dress of men and women which gave some insight into colours that the Lakhers were familiar with. In the

chapter-Domestic Life, Parry has written a detailed account of the daily activities of the Lakhers. In their society gender role were assigned to dyeing. Only the women were involved in the dyeing process and for men to touch any dye was seen as a taboo. Perry has also mentioned that the Lakhers were acquainted with only blue and yellow dye.

A Brief Account of Riangs in Mizoram (1986) published by the Tribal Research Institute of Education Mizoram. As the name of the book suggest this book contains a very brief account of the Riangs from their origin to their culture, religion, society, customs and way of life. The first chapter of this book listed some of the Riang words in which there is mention of five colours which are *Kphuih* (white), *Kawrmaw* (yellow), *Kchauh* (red), *Khrang* (green) and *Srawn* (blue) however no further information on the knowledge of green and blue colour is given in the book. The fifth chapter of this book is about the dresses of the Riangs. This chapter gives us information of the use of white, black, red and yellow colours in their clothes. The men's cloth was mostly whitish or it may be striped with cross or parallel lines by using dyeing material obtained from the herbal plants.⁶⁵ The process of dyeing or the colour used in making these striped or parallel lines in men's clothes by the Riangs has not been mentioned in the book. There is mention of black, red and yellow colours in the traditional dress of the women. The cloth called *rinai* is woven by the Riangs with a black surface and a broad red and yellow border on the two edges and sometimes vertical red and yellow borders on the two edges.⁶⁶

“Colonialism in Northeast India: an Environmental History of Forest Conflict in the Frontier of Lushai Hills 1850-1900”. This article by Robert Lalremtlunga Ralte studies the Mizo knowledge and attitude towards the environment in the pre-colonial times and the result of the intervention of colonial power. He also wrote about Mizo society but has focused mainly on the land policy and frontier conflict between the Mizo and the British. However, his work has also provided an insight into the pre-

⁶⁵ *A brief account of Riangs in Mizoram*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute Department of Education, 1986, p. 43

⁶⁶ *A brief account of Riangs*, p.44

colonial society, the role of the chief and the social stratification that existed in the society.

The above mention works of literatures related to colours and their theory has provided ample information. Although the themes of some of these literatures are not from the discipline of history however, they had given an insight into the study of colours from a deeper perspective and how it can be a tool for examining society of the past. When looking at the existing work on Mizo works of literatures, no significant work has been done on colours. It has been mentioned only in the passing references although colours have always been part and parcel of the society. This however shows the scope and need for research in this field.

1.7 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The only reliable written sources to which we have access are the British monographs, official records, and ethnographic documentation, which at the earliest dates no further than the advent of the British on Mizoram. But what is the guarantee that these records are the best sources to represent the local community? These works were merely for official records to help the British for better administration. They observed Mizo society in detail, from physical structures to intangible customs and traditions. Having no understanding of the tribal society how accurate would the observations of these foreigners be from a western lens?

The historical understanding of Mizo society can be complemented by the study of colour in Mizo society as colours have always played an intrinsic role in society. However, the study of colour in history is a rare phenomenon and poses many challenges to the historian as the study of colour involves an interdisciplinary approach. It involves natural science, linguistics, psychology and sociology. There is also a problem with documentation and preservation as the materials from the past over time could be discoloured and may not be the same as they appear in the present time. Another set of problem is that of epistemology. There is a high risk of anachronism in the study of colour. The colour as we know it today or its associated

symbolism at present time should not be the basis for the judgment of the past knowledge.

This research proposal attempts to revisit the history of the Mizo society by studying their colour conception, the symbolism attached to them, and the cultural significance of colours.

1.8 AREA OF STUDY

This research proposal covers the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Mizo society.

1.9 OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the evolution of epistemology of colours in the Mizo society.
2. To study colour hierarchy and its associated symbolism in Mizo society.
3. To understand gender relations and colours in Mizo society.

1.10 METHODOLOGY

The study of colours in this research peruse the historical importance of colours in Mizo society and the evolution of colour as reflected in the history, material culture, folklore and literature of the Mizo. From the approach of social history, this desertation attempts to uncover the relationship between colours and social processes such as social hierarchy, inequality, and gender roles in Mizo society. An analytical approach to social history will be used to study how colour is understood in the everyday life of the Mizo. “The power of colour has always had a direct effect on human emotions and the subconscious.”⁶⁷ Therefore, it is easier to understand and

⁶⁷ Petru, p.1721

connect with the meaning and the symbolism the Mizo held in their society. As the study of colour deals with various factors such as the cultural, physical, chemical, ideological and psychological perspective of an individual or a society, this dissertation attempts to study the history of colours in the context of the Mizo perspective and its historical importance by examining the folk literature, ethnographic writings of the colonizers, and oral testimonies. A multidisciplinary approach may also be included as required.

Information is collected from libraries such as Mizoram State Library, Central Library, Aizawl Theological College (ATC) library, and Archives such as Mizoram State Archives, ATC Archives, Assam State Archives, etc. Information is also collected from an unstructured interview with people who are well acquainted with the traditional dyeing process and people who know Mizo literature. The sources collected are corroborated with the official documents and ethnographic works of the colonizers to bring out the role that colour has played in Mizo society in the course of history.

1.11 CHAPTERISATION

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the history of colour from a wider perspective such as the origin of the study of colour and the theories associated with it to provide the basis for a coherent understanding of colours in Mizo history.

CHAPTER 2: EPISTEMOLOGY OF COLOURS IN MIZO SOCIETY

The chapter deals with the knowledge of colour in Mizo society in the pre-colonial times, the primary colours they were acquainted with and it will also deal with the change in the epistemology of colour as a result of colonial intervention followed by the post-colonial period.

CHAPTER 3: COLOUR SYMBOLISMS

This chapter deals with the social phenomenon of colour, and the symbolism associated with colours.

CHAPTER 4: ROLE OF COLOUR IN SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND GENDER

This chapter examines the role that colours played as a tool of social stratification among Mizo ethnic groups and whether there were gender-specific colours assigned in the Mizo society. It will also deal with the gender-based social role in dyeing and textile production.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter summarises the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 2

EPISTEMOLOGY OF COLOURS IN MIZO SOCIETY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter approaches understanding the historical process of how the Mizo society enhanced their lexicon on colours. From the perspective of a historical epistemology of the pre-colonial Mizo society to the post-colonial Mizo society, the transition in the lexicon will be studied in this chapter. Before digging up the approaches it is crucial to understand, what epistemology is.

The term “epistemology” comes from the Greek words “episteme” and “logos”. “Episteme” is “knowledge” or “understanding” or “familiarity”, whereas “logos” can mean “word” or “reason”.⁶⁸ Jan Wonenski in ‘History of Epistemology’ informs that the term “epistemology” is no more than a couple of centuries-old; the field of epistemology is at least as old as any in philosophy.⁶⁹

The term epistemology in this chapter is used in the literary sense. However, epistemology as theory plays a vital role in research methodology therefore it would be good to have a glance at the theoretical concept of epistemology.

2.2 EPISTEMOLOGY

Michael Crotty in *The Foundation of Research* talks about epistemology as one of the four basic elements of any research process.

⁶⁸ Matthias Steup and Ram Neta, ‘Epistemology’ in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2020 Edition, Stanford University, Metaphysics Research Lab, 2020, p.1 <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/epistemology/>. (accessed 19 June 2021)

⁶⁹ Jan Woleński, ‘History of Epistemology’, in I. Niiniluoto, M. Sintonen, and J. Wolenski (eds.), *Handbook of Epistemology*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2004, p. 3–54

Epistemology is a philosophical assumption that is used in research and is one of the primary components of research methodology. According to Richards, epistemology, in general, is the assumptions we make about the kind or the nature of knowledge⁷⁰ or how it is possible to find out about the world.⁷¹ For Crotty, epistemology is an overview of the world and how to discern it.⁷²

How do we know what we know? The understanding of this question and the way of explaining it is known as an epistemology.⁷³ The theoretical perspective of epistemology helps in examining the world and being coherent about it. It entails knowledge and incorporates a certain aspect of what is involved in knowing, that is, how we know what we know. Epistemology deals with “the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis.”⁷⁴ How do we know the different possibilities and kinds of knowledge? How do we guarantee that the knowledge is legitimate and sufficient? The answer according to Maynard lies in a philosophical grounding which is provided by “epistemology”.⁷⁵

There are various types of Epistemology Michael Crotty in *the Foundations of Social Research* had given three types of epistemology, which are as follows:

2.2.1 Objectivist epistemology:

“Objectivist epistemology holds that meaning, and therefore meaningful reality, exists as such apart from the operation of any consciousness.”⁷⁶ For instance, a waterfall in the mountains will remain a waterfall even if no one knows of its existence or a rare species of plant that exists in nature that no one has noticed

⁷⁰ K. Richards, ‘The Nature of Qualitative Inquiry’, *Qualitative Inquiry in TESOL*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003

⁷¹ D. Snape, & L. Spencer, ‘the Foundations of Qualitative research’ in J. Richie & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice*, Los Angeles, Sage, 2003, p. 1-23

⁷² M. Crotty, *the Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. London, Sage publication, 1998,

⁷³ Crotty, *The Foundations of Social Research*, p. 3

⁷⁴ D. W. Hamlyn, ‘History of epistemology’ in T. Honderich (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 242-245

⁷⁵ M. Maynard, ‘Methods, practice, and epistemology: The debate about feminism and research’ in M. Maynard and J. Purvis (Eds.), *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*, London, Taylor and Francis, 1994, p. 10

⁷⁶ Crotty, p. 8

remains a plant although it is not recorded or is not assigned any scientific name. As an object of that kind, it has an intrinsic meaning that does not change whether humans are aware of the existence of that waterfall or that rare species of plant.

When that object is being recognized by human beings as a waterfall or a new species of plant, they are not discovering the object but simply discovering a meaning that has always existed but humans were unaware about its existence.⁷⁷ According to Crotty's ethnographic research should be approached in the same spirit. "In this objectivist view of 'what it means to know', values and apprehensions are contemplated to be objectified in the people we are studying and, if we go about it in the correct path, objective truth can be discovered."⁷⁸

2.2.2 Constructive epistemology:

Constructionism rejects the view of objective epistemology. It rejects the existence of objective truth that waits for its discovery.

"Truth, or meaning, comes into actuality as we get involved with this world and experience it in reality. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even about the same phenomenon. Taking this into consideration, both object and subject appear as partners in bringing about of meaning."⁷⁹

For instance, an abstract painting for a layman who has nothing to do with art can be rubbish or of no importance, it can mean nothing but for an artist or art enthusiast, it can hold a very valuable position. The object or the abstract painting, to have value or meaning, requires the subject or the person and the object or the abstract painting to produce meaning together, that the abstract painting is a piece of art.

⁷⁷ Crotty, p. 8

⁷⁸ Crotty, p. 8

⁷⁹ Crotty, p. 8

2.2.3 Subjective epistemology.

The third type of epistemology is subjective epistemology; subjectivism comes in the form of thoughts such as structuralist, post-structuralist, and postmodernist. In subjectivism, subject and object do not play a role together to create meaning for the object. The meaning is imposed by the subject on the object which means that the object has no contribution to the creation of meaning.

“The difference in constructionism and subjectivism is that an explanation or connotation is made out of an object (something) in constructionism whereas in subjectivism out of nothing a meaning or an explanation is created. Even in subjectivism, we make meaning out of something. We import meaning from somewhere else. The meaning we ascribe to the object may come from our dreams, from primordial archetypes we locate within our collective unconscious, or from the conjunction and aspects of the planets, or religious beliefs. In other words, meaning or explanation arises from anything but what is important is the connection between the object and the subject.”⁸⁰

Apart from the three types of epistemology more can be opined about the possible epistemological stance. However, objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism can help us to understand and recognize the importance of epistemology in research. It can help us identify objective truth as far as possible.

For this chapter, it can be opined that if epistemology of colours is to be studied as in objective epistemology it can help us understand the objective meaning that lies in hues. Different hues exist in nature before names were being assigned to them by human beings; as if, it was waiting to be discovered. These hues were already present in nature and they had meaning. However, it was just a matter of awareness or consciousness.

⁸⁰ Crotty, p. 8

If epistemology of colours is to be studied as constructive epistemology then hues are not discovered by human beings they are being constructed. Perhaps, this can be the reason that hues in different societies do not always fall under the same category. Different cultures can talk about colours differently. Anthropologist, Alexander Surretles, in his study of the Candoshi tribes who live on the upper banks of the Amazon River does not have a word or concept of colour.⁸¹ It does not mean that the Candoshi children never saw a rainbow it's just that their community does not have a word for them. In the same way, the Mizo term colour *rawng* does not seem to be an original Mizo word rather it has its roots in *rang* which means colour in Hindi or *rana* in Bengali or *aarung* in Burmese.

If epistemology of colours is to be studied as subjective epistemology then the meaning of colours is being imposed by humans. For instance, Blue is blue because human beings named it blue.

2.2.4 Philosophers on Epistemology.

Various aspects of epistemology have attracted the attention of philosophers in the course of history. The work of these philosophers has helped in the establishment of formal epistemology.

“Plato in his study of epistemology tries to recognise knowledge and how it is righteous for the person having the knowledge and his experience of knowing it. Locke’s epistemology was an attempt to understand the operations of human understanding, Kant’s epistemology was an attempt to understand the conditions of the possibility of human understanding, and Russell tries to acknowledge how sensory experience and modern science could work together so that knowledge could be justified. Much recent work in formal epistemology is an attempt to understand how our degrees of confidence are rationally constrained by our evidence, and much recent work in feminist epistemology is an attempt to understand

⁸¹ Nicola Jones, ‘Do you see what I see?’ *Sapiens*, [website], 2017, para 1, <https://www.sapiens.org/language/color-perception/> (accessed on 16 February 2020)

how interests affect our evidence and affect our rational constraints more generally. In all these cases, epistemology seeks to understand one or another kind of cognitive success.”⁸²

Epistemology in this chapter leans towards John Locke’s facet of epistemology and it attempts to understand the operation of Mizo understanding of colour.

Locke argued that experience is the source and basis of knowledge. According to him, experience gives rise to various kinds of ideas. Based on sense experience, he tried to construct an account of knowledge. For Locke knowledge is ideas, ideas that are generated from experience and an idea is that object about which the understanding is concerned while thinking.⁸³

Locke asserts that experience is the source and basis of knowledge. The epistemology of colours in Mizo society also developed with experience. In Pre-colonial society, the Mizos did not have much lexicon of colours. Ideas come from internal sense or reflection which is derived from sensation and discernment of the mind. Since we can only use ideas, and since all ideas come from experience, it is evident that none of our knowledge can antedate experience.⁸⁴ We have five primary senses through which the external world is known to us. They are the senses of sight, hearing, smelling, feeling or touching, and taste. Each of these media communicates the external object in terms of the idea of colour, sound, odour, hardness, and sweetness.”⁸⁵ The epistemology of colours for the pre-colonial Mizo people were very much influenced by the environment they lived in, that is the nature. All the colours that are easily visible in the type of environment they lived in, like the lush green forest, blue sky, brown trunks and soil, and the red blood and flowers were there in their lexicon.

⁸² ‘Epistemology’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2005, p. 1, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology/> (accessed on 19 June 2021)

⁸³ Jones M Jaja & Paul B Badey, ‘John Locke’s Epistemology and Teachings’, *African Research Review*, Vol.7(1), Sl. No. 28, 2013, p. 3

⁸⁴ B. Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1979, p.289

⁸⁵ ‘Epistemology’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p. 1

However, the interaction of the Mizos with the British and other societies increased their experience which gave rise to various ideas. As a result of which the lexicon of colours in post-colonial Mizo society had increased as compared to the pre-colonial Mizo society.

2.3 EPISTEMOLOGY OF COLOUR IN MIZO SOCIETY PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD:

Colours that the Mizo were acquainted with in the pre-colonial times were *dum* (black or shades of dark), *ngo/var* (white or shades of white), *sen* (red), *hring* (green), *eng* (yellow) and *pawl* (blue). Despite the existence of other colours, the vocabulary to describe the different hues or the symbolism that colours represent was limited in pre-colonial times.

Table 2.1: Colours that the Mizos were acquainted with in Pre-colonial Mizo Society:^{86 87}

English	Mizo (Duhlian)	Hmâr	Paitê	Lai (Halkha)	Mara	Pâng	Bawm
White	Var	Var	kang	râng/var	râng/ngyuh	ngo	ngo
Black	Dum	dum	vawm	nak/fum	vyh d	bawm	dum
Red	Sen	sen	san	sen	saih d	sen	sen
Blue	Pawl	pawl	dumpawl	pawl	hroh d	pâwl	-
Green	Hring	hring	eng	hring	noh d	ring	ring
Yellow	Eng	eng	nâi pâi	eng	maih	eng	eng
Brown	Buang	boung	puang	buang	-	buang	buang

⁸⁶ Rosaline Varsangzuali, 'Evolution of Mizo Dress: A Historical Study', PhD Thesis, Mizoram University, 2018, p.193;

Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture*, p.27-90

⁸⁷ C. Chhuanvawra, *Mizo Tawng Chhuina*, Aizawl, C. Chhuanvawra, 2012, p.90

2.3.2 Epistemology of colours from cloths and dyes.

When, studying colours in pre-colonial Mizo society clothes or *puan* give us the richest source. Like many other tribal societies of the world, colour played an intrinsic role among the Mizos too. Michael Pastoureau who has done an extensive and detailed study on the history of colours has also mentioned the importance of clothes and dyes in the study of colours.

“...clothes and fabrics provides the most abundant and varieties of information. Such artefacts also weave the various material, technical, economic, social, ideological, aesthetic, and symbolic aspects of colour production into one coherent field of study. All the questions concerning colour's role in society can be examined through the cloth. The chemistry and techniques of dyeing, colour's impact on the economy, trade in the colour producing substances, and the financial constraints of colour production, as well as social categories, ideological constructs, and aesthetic preoccupations.”⁸⁸ Dyed fabrics and clothing, offer physical documentation of colour that is often more solid, extensive, and relevant.⁸⁹

Though it is difficult to collect *puan* of pre-colonial times as they tend to fade or the colour may get distorted over time. Colonial ethnographers and administrators have documented *puan* and their colour in their writings about their encounters with the tribes of Lushai Hills. Local Mizo authors and scholars have also documented colours in their writings on the Mizo dress.

In pre-colonial times the earliest clothes known were *siapsuap*. It was made of twisted stripes of a tree called *vaiza* which is known to Mizos as *Hruikhau*.⁹⁰ It was worn by the women around their waist. N.E Perry though did not personally witness the tribes of Lushai hills wearing *siapsuap* but in his book *The Lakers*, he wrote about one of the informants of British on Lakher village, Longtha of Kaisi who

⁸⁸ Pastoureau, p. 14

⁸⁹ Pastoureau, p. 11

⁹⁰ Lianhmingthanga p. 70

informed that women wearing covering of a bark tree by 1901 and men wearing a piece of clothes to hide their private parts.⁹¹ *Siapsuap* seemed to be the earliest recorded clothing.

Siapsuap was replaced by cotton cloth known as *puan*. According to B. Lalthangliana after 1600 clothes made of *la* (cotton) known as *puan* was worn by affluent Mizos. This early *puan* had no colour as the Mizos did not know the art of dying by this time. They would just use the natural colour of the cotton which was whitish and was known as *puanngo*.

*“An siapsuap aiah pawnfen, khup chin meuh lo chi chu tlema awmthei deu te chuan an feng ve ang a, rawng an la hmuh chhuah loh avangin a ngo (var) ngot hi an ching hmasa aga a, chu chu ‘Puan ngo’ an tih chi a ni a rinawm. A tam ber erawh chuan laa siam leh hruikhaua siam siapsuap tho kha an la inbel mai thei e.”*⁹²

“It can be assumed that the elite wore a skirt which is about the length of their knee in place of their '*siapsuap*', since they were not familiar to colour in those times, the colour of their fabric tend to be white which they referred to as '*Puan ngo*'. The commoners are more likely to wear '*siapsuap*' made out of thread and '*hruikhau*' instead of a skirt.”

The above abstract from B. Lalthangliana's writing shows that the use of *Siapsuap* and *puanngo* might have co-existed in pre-colonial Mizo society. While affluent people who could manage to have leisure time to make cotton cloth wore *puanngo*, whereas common people wore *siapsuap*. N.E. Perry in *The Lakers* also mentioned that *siapsuap* was common among the common people who were poor in society. Quoting his word, Perry has written “...these primitive clothes (*siapsuap*) were in vogue among the poorer classes.”⁹³

⁹¹ N.E. Perry, *The Lakers*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute Mizoram, 1979, p. 32

⁹² B. Lalthangliana, *Pi Pu Zûnlêng*, Aizawl, B. Lalthangliana, 2007, p. 94

⁹³ Perry, *The Lakers*, p. 32

The Pangs and Bawms use *ngo* to describe white colour whereas Mizo (*duhlian*) and Hmar use *var* to describe white colour according to C. Chawhuanvawra in *Mizo Tawng Chhuina*.⁹⁴ However white cotton cloth is described as *puanngo* by Mizo (*duhlian*) and Hmars. Lorrain in his dictionary has put the meaning of *ngo* when used as an adjective as white, fair, of light colour and when *ngo* is used as a verb it can mean, to be white, to be fair, to be of light colour.⁹⁵ It can be deduced that white colour was one of the primary colours that the Mizos were acquainted with in pre-colonial Mizo society and to describe whitish colour the Mizos widely used the term *ngo* first and in course of time, the word *var* was commonly used to describe white as a colour and *ngo* was widely used to denote something fair rather than white as a colour.

As the Mizos learned the art of dyeing cotton fabrics they started to dye their *puan*. Dyeing *puan* led the Mizos to explore a new range of colours and it would not be wrong to say that the art of dyeing enhanced their epistemology of colours. The Mizos learned that certain barks, roots, herbs, and leaves could yield different colours like black, red, yellow, and blue.”⁹⁶

Black was the first colour that was used for dyeing clothes. According to Lalthanpuui *Hmaram* was the first *puan* which was dyed in black colour.⁹⁷ Rosaline in her thesis opines that *Puantlangdum* or *Puantlangtial* was the first *puan* in which black dye was used and it was a developed version of *Puangno* whereas, in *Hmaram*, the use of both motifs and colour appeared for the first time.⁹⁸ Whether black dye was first used in *Puantlangdum* or *Hmaram* to colour the *puan*, certainly, black colour was first used for dying *puans*.

⁹⁴ Chhuanvawra, *Mizo Tawng Chhuina*, , p. 90

⁹⁵ Lorrain, p. 340

⁹⁶ Lianhmingthanga, p. 87

⁹⁷ Lalthanpuui, interviewed by Laura L Pulamate, 12 August 2021, Tlangnuam, Aizawl.

⁹⁸ Varsangzuali, ‘Evolution of Mizo Dress’, p. 45

From Neolithic times and for most of the ancient societies, the oldest colour known to be used is red.⁹⁹ The reason why Black and White did not appear as the first colour to be used in ancient times is probably that the early scientific study on colours did not include black and white as colours. This is because scientifically colours are the range of light visible to human eyes in the spectrum. “The human eye is capable of seeing only light with wavelengths between 380 and 750 nanometers.”¹⁰⁰ Colours such as white, black and pink do not fall under this wavelength and therefore are not visible in the spectrum of light because of which some scientist does not include black and white as colours whereas others include them as colours.

The incorporation of black and white as colours depends on its definition. If colour is defined based on its visibility in the spectrum of light waves, in such case black and white do not fall under true physical colours. However, if colour is defined as the way human eyes process light, in such case black, white and pink can be included as colours.¹⁰¹ This thesis, defines colour based on the latter definition, therefore black and white are also included in the study of colours.

Black was the first colour that emerged in the *puan* of Mizos as they learned the art of dyeing. Indigo or *ting* botanical name *Strobilanthes Flaccidifolius*, *meithui* botanical name *Toxicodendron Vernicifluum*, *azeu* tree botanical name *Duabanga Soneratioides*, *khei* and *awngbin* were used to obtain black or blue colour for dyeing.¹⁰² Lianhmingthanga in *Material Culture of the Mizo* had given detailed information regarding the process of dyeing which is as follows:

“The leaves of *ting* plant were boiled along with the cotton threads. Ashes are added. The threads are then taken out of the dye. It is left in the sun to soak. After this, it is wrung out and hung up in the sun to dry. The process is repeated three times; unless the cloth is dipped three times the

⁹⁹ Kate Carter, ‘Why red is the oldest colour’, *The Guardian*, 1 September 2015, para.1, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/sep/01/why-red-is-the-oldest-colour> (accessed 15 October 2021)

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Hogeback, ‘Are Black and White Colors’?, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Invalid Date, Para.1, <https://www.britannica.com/story/are-black-and-white-colors> (accessed 20 October 2021)

¹⁰¹ Hogeback, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, para.3

¹⁰² Varsangzuali, p.192-193

dye will not be fast and lasting. For black colour, other plants like *meithui* plant and *khei* plant are also used by taking out the juice. *Meithui* is a Japan-varnish tree.”¹⁰³

Lianhingthanga in *Material Culture* has written that *ting* was planted along with other cultivation such as cotton and that *ting* is the Assam indigo plant.¹⁰⁴ J.H Lorrain defined *ting* as a yarn-dyed with blue from the indigo (hill or Assam indigo).¹⁰⁵ Rosaline Varsangzuali while reflecting on organic dying practised by Mizos has also called *ting* an indigo plant.¹⁰⁶ However, there is also another *ting* known as *in-ting* which is the dust or ashes collected in the *rap* or the shelf over the fireplace. Lianhimngthanga also mentioned that ashes were added when dyeing yarn which was confirmed by Chawngthapuii.¹⁰⁷ According to her, *ting* is the ashes that get collected in *rap* and it was used to obtain black colour. Therefore, ‘*In*’ (as in *in-ting*) might not be necessarily mentioned however one should infer that *ting* is sometimes used interchangeably to describe indigo (*in-ting*) or ashes collected in the *rap* (*in-ting*).

It would be worthwhile to note that, naturally obtained indigo dye produces dark blue or blue-black colour rather than black. “The art of producing blue dye from indigo (*Indigofera Tinctoria L*) is about 2,000 years old. Its blue color is distinctly attractive and impressive for those who touch.”¹⁰⁸ “The creation of natural indigo dye is incredibly complex. The leaves of indigo plant are fermented to obtain blue dye.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Lianhmingthanga, p.88

¹⁰⁴ Lianhmingthanga, p.88

¹⁰⁵ Lorrain, p.503

¹⁰⁶ Varsangzuali, p.189

¹⁰⁷ Chawngthapuii, interviewed by Laura L Pulamate, 29 August 2020, Khatla, Aizawl, She is a homemaker and a self-employed Mizo puan weaver who hails from Taithu village

¹⁰⁸ A. Teangluma, S. Teangluma & A. Saithongb, ‘Selection of Indigo Plant Varieties and Other Plants that Yield Indigo Dye’, *Procedia Engineering*, Vol. 32, 2012, p. 184 – 190, <https://pdf.sciencedirectassets.com>, (accessed on 4 November 2021)

¹⁰⁹ ‘Indigo: History and Present Days of the Magical Blue’ *Amberoot*, [website], 2021, <https://amberoot.com/blogs/blog/indigo-history-present-days-magical-blue-dye>, (accessed on 4 November 2021)

Lewin has written about the clothes of women “the women wear a strip of thick blue cloth around the loins, about eight inches around its breadth.”¹¹⁰ Varsangzuali¹¹¹ opines that *Hmaram* seems to be the dark blue skirt mentioned by Lewin in his book¹¹² However, most of Mizo when they describe *puan* of early times had always referred to them as having black colour, whether its *puantlangdum*, *Hmaram*, *Puandum* or *Ngothekher*. Lianhmingthanga in *Material Culture of the Mizos* in describing several *puans* has also mentioned black colour.

And the fact that pre-colonial Mizos used indigo for obtaining black colour but indigo produces a blue colour. Could this mean that the Mizos did not differentiate between black and blue?

“According to Dr Rivers some people cannot differentiate the darker shades of colour, but that it does not necessarily follow when we find in a particular language one word for green and blue that those who speak that language have colour sense in a state of low development.”¹¹³

Therefore, Even if Dark Blue and Black were interchangeably being used in pre-colonial society, it does not mean that their colour sense was in a state of low development. Also even if, the colour produced by indigo dye (dark blue) and black as colour were both termed as *dum* (black) for the colour blue the Mizos had terms such as *pawl*.

The Mizos also extracted red colour (*sen*) and yellow colour (*eng*) naturally which were used to die in *puan* such *pawndum*, *puanchei*, *tawlhlopuan*, etc. The processes of obtaining these colours as given by Lianhmingthanga are as follows:

“*Keifang pil* (bayberry) (*Myrica Esculenta*), *thilpil* (*Quercus Polyanthum*) and *sentezel hui pil* (*Calophyllum Polyanthum*), etc., are used to produce red colour. To dye thread yellow they crush the roots of the turmeric

¹¹⁰ T.H. Lewin, *Wild Races of South-Eastern India*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 1978 (reprint), p.135

¹¹¹ Varsangzuali, p.43

¹¹² Lewin, *Wild Races*, p.135

¹¹³ Donald A. Mackenzie, ‘Colour Symbolism’, *Folklore*, Vol.33, No.2, 1922, p.137

plant, *aieng* botanical name *Curcuma longa* is boiled with the thread to be dyed.¹¹⁴ All threads used in the weaving are first dyed according to the need for colour combinations to be used. As stated earlier, in their earlier days, they used to prepare dyes from various roots and herbs. But now, with the availability of excellent synthetic dyes, the use of natural products has been completely stopped. At present, however, they purchase coloured yarn to meet their needs.”¹¹⁵

According to Lianhmingthanga “brown is considered as natural, as they can get it from the brown cotton plant, without the use of dyeing.”¹¹⁶ Other than White, Black, Blue, Red and Yellow, Brown colour was present in the *puan* of pre-colonial Mizos but it was naturally obtained from the cotton whereas the rest were used in *puan* by colouring the looms from naturally obtained dyes. The lexicons of colours that can be obtained from pre-colonial Mizo society were White, Black, Blue, Red, Yellow and Brown. So far, no data has been collected for the process of obtaining green colour dyes naturally. Although, it does exist in the lexicon of pre-colonial epistemology of colours as *hring* the use of green in *puan* seems to be a colonial edition.

2.3.3 Epistemology of colours from linguistics.

B. Lalthangliana in *Zoꠤawng Bulpui leh a Hmanna* has written a collection of Mizo words which are of one syllable. And he believes that these one-syllable words are the root of other words¹¹⁷ and therefore probably the words that were used in pre-colonial times. He has mentioned some colours that Mizos were acquainted with which are as follows:

*Buang – Bawngpui buang an nei.*¹¹⁸

– They have a buffed-coloured or brownish cow.

¹¹⁴ Varsangzuali, p. 193-194

¹¹⁵ Lianhmingthanga, p.88

¹¹⁶ Lianhmingthanga, p.88

¹¹⁷ B. Lalthangliana, *Zoꠤawng Bulpui leh a Hmanna*, Aizawl, MCI Publication, 2002, p.iii

¹¹⁸ Lalthangliana, *Zoꠤawng Bulpui leh a Hmanna*, p.14

Buang: v. to be fair (as hair), to have a tinge of brown in it (as hair which should be black); to be buff-coloured, to be light coloured. *adj.* Fair, having a shade of brown; burnish-coloured, light-coloured.¹¹⁹

*Da – A puan rawng a da.*¹²⁰

– His/her clothes had faded.

Da (dâk): v. to lose, colour, to feel or look pale, exhausted, spent, faint, washed-out, etc; to fade (as colour); to be exhausted. *adj.* having lost, colour, goodness, etc; faded, deteriorated.¹²¹

*Dang – A hmel a dang bei mai.*¹²²

– His/her face is pale.

Dang: v. to be pale, pallid, colourless, pale-faced, blanched. *adj.* pale, pallid, colourless, pale-faced, blanched.¹²³

*Duk – A chal a duk.*¹²⁴

– His/her forehead is bruised.

Duk: *adj.* dark or dull in colour, having dark blotches (on the face especially on the cheeks); bruised, blackened. v. to be or get dark or dull; to be black and threatening; to be black and ominous-looking; to be bruised or blackened. *adv.* to bruise, or blacken, or make dark in colour.¹²⁵

*Dum – A kawr dum a ha.*¹²⁶

– He/she wore a black dress.

¹¹⁹ Lorrain, p.46

¹²⁰ Lalthangliana, p.39

¹²¹ Lorrain, *Dictionary*, p.98,99

¹²² Lalthangliana, p.39

¹²³ Lorrain, p.103

¹²⁴ Lalthangliana, p.50

¹²⁵ Lorrain, p.119

¹²⁶ Lalthangliana, p.50

Dum: *adj.* black, blue (as sky, sea), purple (as distant mountains), dark (in colour). *v.* to be black, etc. *v. tr.* to dye blue (as yarn, cloth, etc). *Ting an dum*.¹²⁷

Eng – Rawng eng a ngaina.¹²⁸

– He/she likes yellow colour.

Eng: *adj.* yellow¹²⁹

Hring – Hnim a hring dup.¹³⁰

– The grass is green.

Hring: *v.* to be green (in colour; not withered, not dry, not seasoned), to be fresh (not dried or smoked, as flesh; not withered, as leaves; not tinned. *adj.* green or fresh. *n.* green (a colour).¹³¹

Ngo – A ngo a nia.¹³²

– He/she is fair.

Ngo: *adj.* white, fair, of a light colour. *v.* to be white, to be fair, to be of a light colour.¹³³

Paw – A paw nalh mange.¹³⁴

– It is wonderfully mikley.

Paw (pâwt): *v.* to be dusty, or covered with dust; to be covered with dry mud; to have a cloudy, or misty, or milky appearance; to have an opaque appearance; to have an

¹²⁷ Lorrain, p.120

¹²⁸ Lalthangliana, p.51

¹²⁹ Lorrain, p.125

¹³⁰ Lalthangliana, p.108

¹³¹ Lorrain, p.184

¹³² Lalthangliana, p.72

¹³³ Lorrain, p.340

¹³⁴ Lalthangliana, p.170

opacity; to be light or blue (as an eye). *adj.* dusty; covered with dust or dry mud: dirty; misty, cloudy, opaque; light coloured or blue (as eyes). *n.* bloom; dust, etc).¹³⁵

*Pawl – I kawr chu a pawl nalh hle.*¹³⁶

Your cloth is beautifully blue.

Pawl: *v.* to be blue, to be covered with bloom (as fruit, etc); to be covered with dust, *adj.* blue, etc.¹³⁷

*Sen – Rawng a sen lei.*¹³⁸

– He bought red colour.

Sen: *adj.* red, crimson, scarlet; reddish-brown, *v.* to be red, etc.¹³⁹

*Uk – A kawr a uk.*¹⁴⁰

– His clothing is beige.

Uk: *v.* to be dirty, to be discoloured (as by smoke, etc), to be khaki coloured. *adj.* dirty, discoloured, khaki coloured.¹⁴¹

*Ung – A kawr a ung hle.*¹⁴²

– His/her clothing is discoloured or dirty.

Ung (un): *v.* 1. to be dirty, discoloured, khaki coloured. 2. to be blackened with smoke (as a house, etc). *adj.* dirty, etc.¹⁴³

*Var – He puan rawng hi a var.*¹⁴⁴

¹³⁵ Lorrain, p.353

¹³⁶ Lalthangliana, p.175

¹³⁷ Lorrain, p.354

¹³⁸ Lalthangliana, p.208

¹³⁹ Lorrain, p.414

¹⁴⁰ Lalthangliana, p.230

¹⁴¹ Lorrain, p.536

¹⁴² Lalthanglianap.230

¹⁴³ Lorrain, p.537

– This cloth is white colour.

Var: v. 1. to be white. 2. to be light (not dark), 3. to be keen or quick (of sight, hearing, etc). *adj*. white, keen, quick.¹⁴⁵

Not all the above mention words fall under colours. Words such as *Da*, *Dang*, *Duk*, *Paw* and *Ung* are not colours but rather widely used as shades of colours. *Buang*, *Ngo*, *Pawl*, *Uk* can be interchangeably used as colours or shades of colours. Whereas *Dum*, *Eng*, *Hring*, *Pawl*, *Sen*, *Var* are the primary colours that are present in the Mizo vocabulary since pre-colonial times. It is also to be noted that most of the traditional *puan* also fall under these primary colours. So, any other colour that falls outside the category of these above-mentioned colours can be considered as a later edition. However, this does not mean that other hues of colours that do not fall under the basic primary colours of Mizo do not exist. For instance, colours such as different shades of pink or orange or blue or purple will surely exist in the form of colours of flowers or different shades of green in the forest in the form of leaves of different species of plants or different shades of brown in the form of different shades of animal fur.

“According to Benjamin Whorf’s Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis, a person’s language determines and limits what the person experiences. Not all concepts can be expressed in some languages. This language barrier can affect one’s perception of colour.”¹⁴⁶

Benjamin Whorf has rightly stated that the perception of colour can be affected by language barriers. The Mizo did come across different hues in the form of colours of flowers, shades of leaves, shades of fur, shades of sky, etc. but since these hues were not in abundance and neither did these different hues played a significant role the daily life of Mizo society which was already pre-occupied with cultivation and

¹⁴⁴ Lalthangliana, p.266

¹⁴⁵ Lorrain, p.545

¹⁴⁶ De Mario Bortoli, and Jesús Maroto, *Colours Across Cultures: Translating Colours in Interactive Marketing Communications*, Scotland, University of Paisley, 2001, p.4

hunting for their sustenance nor were they able to produce different range of coloured dyes naturally in pre-colonial society.

Mizo society was no exception there are also other cultures and societies across the world that had such limitations in colour perception such as “the Shona language in Zimbabwe and the Boas language in Liberia have no words which distinguish red from orange. Therefore, people fail to perceive different colours because of language limitations.”¹⁴⁷

Therefore, it can be concluded that different hues except for the primary colours in the nomenclature of colours, never made their way into the lexicons of the Mizo language and this language barrier to some extent did limit the Mizo perception of colours in pre-colonial society.

2.4 EPISTEMOLOGY OF COLOUR IN MIZO SOCIETY DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD:

2.4.1 Epistemology of colours from economic transactions.

The Mizos did not have much contact with outsiders except for some petty trade during the pre-colonial times. The advent of the British did not only result in the opening up of Mizo space with the outsiders but also resulted in the venture of Mizos out of the Lushai hills.

Before the English ventured into the Lushai hills they had already surrounded the hills. This contact eventually led to the opening up of markets in the Lushai hills. The relationship between the British and the Mizos was always tainted by raids on the frontiers and counter military attacks by the British. Therefore, to ameliorate the relations with the Lushai chiefs, the British used bazaars as a medium. The Proceedings of the General Administration Report of November 1875 unveils the statement which is stated as below:

¹⁴⁷ Bortoli, and Maroto, *Colours Across Cultures*, p.4

“The history of our dealings with the Lushai Chiefs is to a great extent interwoven with that of the markets which our traders keep up in Lushai land, and it will perhaps be best to begin the subject of our relations with the Lushais by a brief narrative of the events connected with each of the three bazaars. These are the Tipaimukh Bazar on the Barak, where the Tipai falls into it; the Sonai Bazar on the Sonai River; and the Changsil Bazar on the Dhaleshwar.”¹⁴⁸

The precise date for the establishment of these Bazars is unknown, but Sonai Bazar on the Sonai River and Changsil Bazar on the Dhaleshwar were spoken of before the expedition of 1974-75. The British records do not show any transaction of goods regarding fabrics, loom, or dyes in the early times when these Bazaars were established. But there sure was a transaction of looms in the later period of the British.

It is evident from the name of *puan* such as *Tual tah kawr* and *Tualtah Puan* that the transaction of clothes must have occurred in the colonial period. “*Tualtah* refers to the place of manufacturers. *Tual* means local, *tah* is to weave and *kawr* is a blouse, hence *Tual tah kawr* denotes any locally woven blouse. Any *puan* which was locally produced was *Tualtah Puan*. These types of terminology were used for the *puan* that were locally produced.”¹⁴⁹

The existence of different terminology for clothes being produced locally proves that there were *puan* that were imported from outside of the Lushai hills. Rosaline opines that “Perhaps it came to be used once they were infiltrated with cloth produced elsewhere and therefore came up with the term *Tualtah* to differentiate the clothes and fabrics which were manufactured by them from the yarn to its colour and designs till it is completed and turned into something wearable.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Proceedings, November 1875 as recorded in *The Lushais 1878-1889*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 2008, p. 41.

¹⁴⁹ Varsangzuali, p.46

¹⁵⁰ Varsangzuali, p.46

Rosaline again confirms that transactions on cloth and loom occurred during colonial times. “The yarns and clothes imported from Burma or other Indian states were reduced to as *Vai La* and *Vai puan* respectively as *Vai* denotes any foreigner other than Mizo.”¹⁵¹

N.E. Perry recorded that “the Lakers did not have red dye and hence, the plumes of scarlet hair for headdress of manslayer and the tail used for ornamenting *dao* and shield are bought ready-made from Chins. Red dyes bought in Lungleh bazaar are used in all villages.”¹⁵²

Lt. Colonel J. Shakespear also mentioned that “several red and yellow dyes are known, but they are little used, and most of the threads, excepting the blue and white, were obtained from the bazaars.”¹⁵³

Looms and dyes that were imported must have been of various colours and therefore in course of time, they influenced the Mizo clothing and also the nomenclature of colours. The introduction of the English language via western education by the British must have also added to the nomenclature of colours for the Mizos.

2.4.2 Epistemology of colours from military information.

Every civilization has its way of using natural pigments for dying which was not only difficult to obtain but mass production was difficult. As Plato has said “necessity is the mother of invention”, the need to produce dyes in abundance and at a cheaper rate forced people to find an alternative for natural dyes.

Cornelius Drebbel, a Dutch inventor is credited for producing the scarlet dye or cochineal red from an insect which was classified under synthetic dye in 1630.¹⁵⁴ Deishbach, a German paint manufacturer is credited for producing modern synthetic

¹⁵¹ Varsangzuali, p.46

¹⁵² Perry, p.106

¹⁵³ J. Shakespear, *the Lushai Kuki Clans*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute Department of Art and Culture, 2008, p.31

¹⁵⁴ D. Becker, *Color Trends and Selection for Product Design: Every Color Sells A Story*, Elsevier Science, Amsterdam, 2016. p.172

dyes like cochineal red lake, pale pink, purple and deep blue.¹⁵⁵ Carl Scheele accidentally discovered synthetic dye for green colour known as Scheele green or the poisonous green. This synthetic green was easy to produce and cheap and it soon replaced another green pigment in the market but due to the presence of copper arsenate which was poisonous, the production was banned after 1960.¹⁵⁶ Henry Perkin, a British chemist was the first person to have a patent for producing new synthetic dyes in 1856. He discovered Mauve colour, tyrian, and aniline purple from coal tar.¹⁵⁷ Henry Perkin solved the problem of synthetic dye manufacturing and initiated the production of synthetic dyes for other producers.¹⁵⁸

By 1869 many natural dyes were replaced by synthetic dyes in Europe.¹⁵⁹ Synthetic dyes were cheaper to produce, mass production was possible and most importantly, the colour it produced was diversified. As a result, many shades of colour were invented and nomenclature for the colours increased.

Production of dyes was concentrated in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century.¹⁶⁰ It was from Europe that the process of the production of synthetic dyes spread to the rest of the world. It was from Europe that the Mizos had also learned the art of producing synthetic dyes.

As the British consolidated their power among the Mizos and the British administration assimilated with the Mizo way of life, some Mizo youth began to enrol themselves in response to the call of the British Government.¹⁶¹ Enrollment in the Army created a platform for Mizo youth. These youths, who previously had no means to travel outside of the Lushai hills or beyond the areas that were inhabited by the hill people, were now travelling across the seas.

¹⁵⁵ St.Clair Kassia, *The Secret Lives of Colour*, London, John Murray, 2016, p.193

¹⁵⁶ 'Poisonous Pigments: Scheele Green', *Los Angeles Academy of Free Art*, 2018, para.3 & 4 <https://laafa.edu/poisonous-pigments-scheeles-green/> (accessed on 21 October 2021)

¹⁵⁷ Britannica, the Editors of Encyclopedia, 'Sir William Henry Perkin'. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 10 Jul. 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Henry-Perkin> (Accessed 27 October 2021).

¹⁵⁸ L.D. Ardila Leal, et al., 'A Brief History of Colour, the Environmental Impact of Synthetic Dyes and Removal by Using Laccases', *Molecules*, Vol.26 (13), 2021, p.4 <https://doi.org/10.3390/molecules26133813> (accessed on 20 October 2021)

¹⁵⁹ Leal, et al., *Molecules*, p.4

¹⁶⁰ Leal, et al., p.4

¹⁶¹ Lianhmingthanga, p.88

The exposure of the Mizo youth to the army brought a transitional stage in society. They came to know and learn a lot of useful things unknown to them earlier. Lianhmingthanga has recorded Jamedar Bawichhunga as the first amongst the Mizo to become an army. Since then enrollment in the army increased. In the year 1911, about 900 Mizo youths were taken by the British Government to invade the Abor people and later some 800 youths again went.¹⁶²

The service of young Mizo men also continued during the First World War. It was required for the colonial people to fight for Britain in the First World War under the British army. Lianhmingthanga has recorded that more than 2100 men went to France, the ally of the British in the war, to help the British Government in their war against Germany, one of the allies of the central power.¹⁶³

For the Mizo youths, the War brought an opportunity to venture into new experiences. It was not merely a travel to some distant foreign land for them this was an important event in history. When these young Mizo soldiers returned to the Lushai hills, they brought with them many things that were not available in the hills, among them were French Mustard seeds popularly known as *Fren an* by the Mizos to date and most importantly they brought different colours of powdered dyes.¹⁶⁴

The powdered dyes which made their way from Europe were used extensively by the people in the Lushai hills. It was the first time that synthetic dyes were introduced. The process of dyeing cotton yarn became much simple compared to the process of naturally dyeing cotton yarns. The price of these powders was Rs 1.75p for one tin.¹⁶⁵ A tin of powdered dye could produce much dye compared to natural dyes. As a result, coloured *puan* that used to be privileged for people of status in the society started to change gradually. It was easier to produce *puan* of various colours with the help of synthetic dyes.

¹⁶² Lianhmingthanga, p.88

¹⁶³ Lianhmingthanga, p.88

¹⁶⁴ Lianhmingthanga, p.88

¹⁶⁵ Lianhmingthanga, p.88

The young Mizo British soldiers were again sent to Europe in 1939 to fight the Second World War for the British. Lianhingthanga says that more than 2000 Mizo youths participated in the war. When these men returned to the Lushai hills, they brought dyeing soaps with them. Dyeing soaps were much more convenient than powdered dyes and gradually they replaced the powdered colour for dyeing clothes. The process was much simple, it required cold water in which the colour of soaps was mixed with a loom which was boiled, and the dyed looms were dried in the sun.

The introduction of synthetic dyes by the young Mizos who served the British army resulted in the introduction of synthetic dyes to the Mizo people. Moreover, it was Europe that first produced synthetic dyes, and the production concentrated in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, the introduction of synthetic dyes by the Mizo youth who served the British during the two World Wars seems quite true.

It is also worthwhile to note that Mizo's way of producing dyes naturally did not include the production of pink colour. Also, the fact that pink known as *sen dang* in Mizo is taken from two separate words *sen* (red) and *dang* (light) and there is no originality in the nomenclature. Alice Bucknell in *a brief history of the colour pink* says that "the colour pink only entered the English language as a noun at the end of the 17th century and in other languages, the shade remains difficult to pin down."¹⁶⁷ Though, Bauhaus opines that "In Japan, at least seven different terms are used for pink shades,"¹⁶⁸ for the Mizos there is no original term for pink. The pink colour was not naturally produced which confirms the fact that it was produced using synthetic dyes and was introduced in the colonial period, most likely by the Young Mizo British army.

¹⁶⁶ Leal, et al., p.4

¹⁶⁷ Alice Bucknell, 'A Brief History of Colour Pink', *Artsy*, para.3 <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-history-pink>, (accessed 27 October 2021)

¹⁶⁸ Barbara Nemitz, *Pink: The Exposed Color in Contemporary Art and Culture*, Hatje Cantz Publishers, New York, 2006

2.5 EPISTEMOLOGY OF COLOUR IN MIZO SOCIETY POST-COLONIAL PERIOD:

The advent of the British brought lots of change in the society and tradition of the Mizos which was reflected even in the post-colonial period after the British left Mizoram. The colonial influence had left a deep mark even in the epistemology of colours of the Mizos.

2.5.1 Epistemology of colours from visual materials.

For generations, most historians have treated images as lesser sources of evidence about the past than words and figures. However, today visual material is accepted as an important evidence for historical arguments.¹⁶⁹ Historians seek to find the best ways to analyse how visual material enriches our understanding of historical processes and how this material relates to textual and oral items from the same period; the focus is on comprehending the past.¹⁷⁰

“Photographs act as a memory tool; they are created as an aid to human memory. Historians insist on the necessity to engage with visual content to understand the historical processes of which these photographs were part and on which they throw light. For historians of the nineteenth century and onwards, photographs are hugely valuable primary sources. The value of primary sources is that they provide first-hand testimony or direct evidence about certain events or conditions because witnesses created them.”¹⁷¹

The earliest visual recordings of the hill people were done by the British adventurers and soldiers via drawings and watercolours during the 1860s. After photography

¹⁶⁹ Katy Layton Jones, ‘Visual Quotations: Referencing Visual Sources as Historical Evidence’, *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation*, Vol.24, No.2, p.189

¹⁷⁰ Joy L.K. Pachuau & Willem van Schendel, *The Camera as Witness: A Social History of Mizoram, Northeast India*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 17

¹⁷¹ Pachuau & Schendel, p.17

was introduced, it became a new visual form but with other visual materials it continued to struggle for historical authority.¹⁷²



Fig2.1: A Sabu girl from the Lakhers by N.E. Parry¹⁷³

Fig2.2: Tington, the headmen of Cheipui by R.G. Woodthorpe, 1872¹⁷⁴

The above paintings show the Lakher women wearing traditional attire, Lushai women wearing blue *puan*, and Tington headmen of Cheipui wearing a red shawl.



Fig2.3: Inhabitants of Chelam and Durpang village by R.G. Woodthorpe, 1872¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Pachuau & Schendel, p.24

¹⁷³ Perry, p. 2-3

¹⁷⁴ Pachuau & Schendel, p.29

¹⁷⁵ Pachuau & Schendel, p.46

Mrs Lal̄tanpuii opines that though other colours such as red, white, and black were present, the original colour in the hem of *puanchei* was not red but pink and the red coloured hem of *puanchei* is a later edition.¹⁷⁶ The picture *puanchei* retrieved from ATC Archive falls under the description that Lal̄tanpuii gave on *puanchei* with a pink hem.



Fig.2.4: Girls wearing *puanchei* whit pink hem¹⁷⁷

Puanchei as described by N. Chatterji and B. Lianhmingthanga are as follows:

“The multicoloured diamonds with green, pink, blue, red and yellow colours run across the whole length. The space in between the diamonds is decorated with small diamonds of blue and yellow. In between the two black bands thus decorated by diamonds the deep red band is decorated with a pair of zigzag patterns running through the whole length. These patterns are made with a series of differently coloured threads-pink, yellow, navy blue, green etc. Each zigzag pattern is made of two thin lines running parallel to each other.”¹⁷⁸

“The plain striped cloth of *Puanchei* has been given a special name of *Puancheite*. The surface of the cloth displays stripes of different dimensions with a preponderance of red stripes of different shades which

¹⁷⁶ Lal̄tanpuii interview, 2021

¹⁷⁷ Acc No.7255, Call No.001.0954, A526, Aizawl Theological College Archive, Durtlang.

¹⁷⁸ N. Chatterji, *Puan: The Pride of Mizoram*, Calcutta, Firma KLM Private Limited on behalf of Tribal Research Institute Aizawl, 1979, p.40

are combined tastefully with other stripes of deep colours like green, yellow, blue, light red and black standing against broad white stripes.”¹⁷⁹

The description above matched with the *puanchei* worn by women of the Mizo Gospel team who went to Wales, Great Britain in 1884.



Fig. 2.5: Women of Mizo Gospel team wearing *puanchei* with red hem in 1984.¹⁸⁰

However, the original *puanchei* which was worn only by the chief in pre-colonial Mizo society consisted of white, black, red, yellow, and blue colours as these were the only colours that they produced using natural dyes. Colours like pink could be a later edition when the Mizos were introduced to synthetic dyes with different motives as the *puanchei* in early times was rather simple.



Fig.2.6: Daughter of a Mizo chief in *puanchei* ¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Lianhmingthanga, p.80

¹⁸⁰ Acc No.7255, Call No.001.0954, A526, Aizawl Theological College Archive, Durtlang



Fig 2.7: Nehru in Mizo hmui¹⁸²

Fig2.8: Mizo women exhibiting Mizo puan and process of making puan to Nehru¹⁸³



Fig 2.9: Granddaughter of Rev. Thanga in her shop¹⁸⁴



Fig 2.10: People rendering service for the construction of a hospital at Sawleng, 1955¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Acc No.7255, Call No.001.0954, A526, Aizawl Theological College Archive, Durtlang

¹⁸² Acc No.7255, Call No.001.0954, A526, Aizawl Theological College Archive, Durtlang.

¹⁸³ Acc No.7255, Call No.001.0954, A526, Aizawl Theological College Archive, Durtlang.

¹⁸⁴ Acc No.7255, Call No.001.0954, A526, Aizawl Theological College Archive, Durtlang.

2.5.2 Epistemology of colours from art.

Art has always played an important part in the different epochs of history. Human beings have used art as a form of expression from time immemorial. There is evidence of visual art from prehistoric times in the form of Paleolithic cave paintings. The first Paleolithic cave painting to be acknowledged was in Altamira in Spain and it is known to be the work of Homo sapiens.¹⁸⁶ And the oldest cave painting to be recorded recently is “a life-sized picture of a wild pig that was made at least 45,500 years ago in Indonesia.”¹⁸⁷

“Most cave art consists of paintings made with either red or black pigment. The reds were made with iron oxides (hematite), whereas manganese dioxide and charcoal were used for the blacks.”¹⁸⁸ India also has cave paintings such as Ajanta cave painting, Ellora, Bhimbetka, etc.

The Mizo painting did not become popular until modern times. The Mizos use symbols on pillars or on monoliths to express themselves in pre-colonial times.¹⁸⁹ The only record that we have on painting is the use of natural dyes on materials such as *fungki*, and a gun powder container made of the horn of *mithun*. *Fungki* is painted beautifully with the juice of *beraw*¹⁹⁰ (name of a large tree yielding a species of frankincense). Also at some folk dances such as *Khuallam*, the Mizos paint their faces with *belmang* which is a sooth or coal dust. Other than these uses of painting was not known much among the Mizos in earlier society.¹⁹¹

However, the advent of Mizos to others parts of the world and the introduction of synthetic dyes and paints did have a huge impact on Mizo painters. Initially, the painters during colonial times were merely employed for painting signboards.

¹⁸⁵ Acc No.7255, Call No.001.0954, A526, Aizawl Theological College Archive, Durtlang.

¹⁸⁶ Jean Clottes, "cave art", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 22 May 2020, para. 1, 2
<https://www.britannica.com/art/cave-painting> (accessed 25 October 2021)

¹⁸⁷ ‘World oldest known cave painting found in Indonesia’, *The Guardian*, 13 January 2021, para.1
<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/jan/13/worlds-oldest-known-cave-painting-found-in-indonesia> (accessed 25 October 2021)

¹⁸⁸ Clottes, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, para.2

¹⁸⁹ Lorrain, p.vii

¹⁹⁰ Lianhingthanga, p.87

¹⁹¹ Lianhingthanga, p.87

Painting as an art or profession was rarely celebrated until the post-colonial time when India got independence and Mizoram became a separate state.

On 13th August 1947 for the first time, Mizoram Painters Association was formed which was later changed to Mizoram Artist Society on 30th May 1987. By this time there was already a huge advancement in the field of art. Another organization called Mizoram Academy of Fine Arts was established on 5th September by Art & Culture Department whose aim was to promote fine arts and painting in the modern world.¹⁹² Lianhmingthanga has recorded:

“Oil painting was rarely known before the year 1986. At the Art Exhibition of 1988, 326 paintings were displayed, out of which 70% were of enamel and poster colours. Although painting was known to India more than 2000 years ago, this field of art was not popular among the people of Mizoram before the later part of the 20th Century.”¹⁹³

From the above excerpt, it is clear that the knowledge of colour reached another height in the post-colonial period. It was not only for clothing that Mizo used dyes but the colour was introduced in the form of paint.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Mario Bortoli and Jesús Maroto in *Colours across Cultures* has shown that in their study of different cultures and society they found that there is a common sequence that follows in the nomenclature of colours which is as follows:

“When colour terminology in different cultures is compared, certain patterns are observed consistently. All languages have designations for black and white. If a third hue is distinguished, it is red; next comes yellow or green, and then both yellow and green. Blue is the sixth colour

¹⁹² Lianhmingtanga, p.89

¹⁹³ Lianhmingtanga, p.90

named, and brown is the seventh. Finally, in no particular sequence, the colours grey, orange, pink, and purple are designated.”¹⁹⁴

The same kind of pattern can be found in the order of nomenclature of colours in the pre-colonial Mizo society, especially from our study of *Puans*, fabrics and dyes. After white, which was a natural/neutral colour in cotton fabrics, black dye was the first colour that was produced using natural dyes and black was sometimes interchangeably used with dark blue colour. Therefore, for the Mizos blue does not fall under the sixth colour to be distinguished, unlike other societies, it can rather be included in the second hue to be distinguished with black. In Mizo society for colours like red, yellow and green, can be included in the third hue that was distinguished from other societies of the world.

As a result of colonialism, the Mizos were introduced with a new range of colours such as orange, pink etc; these colonial additions could find a place in the nomenclature of colours in the Mizo language. However, in the post-colonial Mizo society more colours were added however many colours could no more secure their place in the Mizo language and with the increased influence of foreign languages such as English, the various hue of colours that were introduced in the post-colonial Mizo society were called in English. The English term became common and sometimes not only new hues colours were called in English but the primary colours such as *var/ngo*, *dum*, *pawl*, *sen*, *eng* and *hring* were also called White, black, blue, red, yellow and green.

¹⁹⁴ Bortoli, and Maroto, p.4

CHAPTER 3

COLOUR SYMBOLISM

3.1 WHAT IS SYMBOLISM?

When we think of symbolism, signs or symbols must be the first thought or image that comes to our mind. However, it is not the study of signs or symbols. “A symbol is something that stands for, represents, or denotes something else.”¹⁹⁵ Symbolism, or the use of symbols, involves using an object, an attitude, a belief, or a value to depict or an abstract or conceptual idea; it takes something basic and enhance it more than what it is in reality.¹⁹⁶ To define it according to Mark V. Redmond “A symbol is a stimulus that is abstract and arbitrary to which meaning is applied. Symbols are things that are used to represent other things.”¹⁹⁷

3.2 SYMBOLISM AND SOCIETY

Symbolism gives us a pattern of society. It can be a handy tool that can help in the interpretation of society, culture, and the study of history. According to Dr K R Ram Mohan “There is a particular symbol in a particular culture. Everybody has the same meaning towards that symbol. It is not that all members share a common meaning towards that symbol and this symbol perhaps might have come from historical and cultural context.”¹⁹⁸ Symbolism helps society to be organised. It is needed for making associations and to bridge the gap between people. Symbolism creates

¹⁹⁵ J. I Hall, *Illustrated Dictionary of Symbols in Eastern and Western Art*, Colorado, West view Press, 1994.

¹⁹⁶ E. Fadaee, ‘Symbols Metaphors and Simile in Literature’. *Journal of English and Literature*, vol. 2, No.2, 2011

¹⁹⁷ Mark V. Redmond, ‘Symbolic Interactionism’, *English Technical Reports and White Papers*, No.4, 2015, https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/engl_reports/4/ (accessed on 11 January 2021)

¹⁹⁸ ‘Symbolic and Interpretative Anthropology’ [Youtube] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPYMp5P_108&t=846s (accessed on February 20, 2021)

common ideas to form group identity and this group identity is one of the bases to form a tribal society.

“The importance of symbols to the development of humans both as individuals and collectives is at the heart of symbolic interaction theory. Symbolic interactionism is basically about how the presence of symbols is fundamental to the existence of societies, our self-concepts, and our minds.”¹⁹⁹

3.3 INTERACTION WITH COLOUR

Human beings have always used colours and interacted with colours since the beginning of time from pre-history till date. Colour has played an intrinsic role in our understanding of not only the physical and tangible things around us but also colour carries the ability to play with emotional, psychological and cognitive capabilities. This is one of the reasons why scholars around the world are so keen on the study of colours in different disciplines except for history. One of the pioneers of the historical study of colours is Michael Pastoureau who has highlighted this crisis:

“The study of colour in history is a rare phenomenon and poses many challenges to the historian as the study of colour involves an interdisciplinary approach. There is also a problem with documentation and preservation as the materials from the past throughout time could be discoloured and may not be the same as they appear in the present time. There is a high risk of anachronism in the study of colour. The colour as we know it today or their associated symbolism at present time should not be the basis for the judgment of the past knowledge.”²⁰⁰

Therefore, the study of colours with the knowledge of symbolic interpretation can help in the historical understanding of Mizo society which can be complemented by the study of colours, as colours have always played an intrinsic role in society. This

¹⁹⁹ Redmond. ‘Symbolic Interactionism’, para.4

²⁰⁰ Pastoureau, p.7

chapter revisits the history of the Mizo society by studying the colour symbolism attached to them.

The sources for colours have been acquired mostly from the knowledge of cloth and dyes and partly from other sources. Dyed fabrics and clothing offer physical documentation of colour that is often more solid, extensive, and relevant.²⁰¹

Colours that the Mizo were acquainted with in the pre-colonial society were *dum* (black or shades of dark), *ngo/var* (white or shades of white), *sen* (red), *hring* (green), *eng* (yellow) and *pawl* (blue). Despite the existence of other colours, the vocabulary to describe the different hues or the symbolism that colours represent was limited.

3.4 COLOUR SYMBOLISM

Colour can have two main factors; Firstly, optical factor as in when we see things we see them in colours which we may classify under different hues. Secondly, the psychological factory in the colour that we see in the things, we tend to associate these colours with different emotions. Colours can play with emotions and throughout the history of various cultures; we see that colour symbolism always had a role to play. “Emotional stability and efficiency depend to a great extent on the environment, of which colour is a most important element.”²⁰²

Learning the nature of colour can help harness its power which might, in turn, help us to understand how it influenced people throughout time. To make use of colour in understanding symbolism and stratification in history, historians need to understand emotions and also the need to recognise that each colour can trigger from past

²⁰¹ Pastoureaux, p.11

²⁰² Milad Babolhavaeji, Mahnaz Asefpour Vakilian and Alireza Slambolchi, ‘Color Preferences Based On Gender As a New Approach In Marketing’, *Advanced Social Humanities and Management*, Vol 2, No. 1) 2015, p. 37

societies. “The meanings associated with colours vary from culture to culture; there are no universal meanings applied for any colour.”²⁰³

3.4.1 The Symbolism of White Colour

In Mizo, the word *ngo/var* can be used interchangeably to describe white colour or shades of light. It represents different meanings according to different circumstances, such as to describe a fair skin tone the term used was *mi ngo*. Ngo here represents light rather than white. In the case of *khaw-var*, the word in Mizo represents dawn as the literal meaning of *var* here denotes brightness or light that the dawn brings rather than the colour white. When Mizo describe white/off white colour in *puan*, they use *ngo/var* to describe white as a colour.

Across ages white always had a symbolic significance in religion, in terms of spirituality, goodness, purity, sacredness and godliness. “Ancient Egyptian gods, Greek gods, Roman goddesses were all depicted as clad in white to symbolize their deity.”²⁰⁴ According to Bahaeddin Ogel, white represents purity, goodness, and reverence in Turkic folk literature.²⁰⁵ Paul S. Breidenbach in his research of Colour symbolism among the Ghanaian had remarked that “white is taken as the colour of the sacred. It is the colour worn by priests and priestesses during the performance of rituals. Related meanings of this colour, indicated in previous literature on these peoples, involve such attributes as purity, health, life and general well-being.”²⁰⁶ The role of colour in the religious consciousness of human beings cannot be overestimated and it is inseparable from religion.²⁰⁷ White, especially with its symbolic interpretation plays an important role in religion across cultures.

²⁰³ Babolhavaeji, Vakilian & Slambolchi *Advanced Social Humanities and Management*, p.37

²⁰⁴ ‘Basic Colour theory: The history and psychology of colours’ *the history of colours and what they mean*, Canva, [website] 2020, p.55 <https://www.canva.com/learn/color-meanings-symbolism/> (accessed on 9 February 2020)

²⁰⁵ Bahaeddin Ogel, ‘Introduction to the History of Turkish Culture, *Ankara: Kultur ve Turizm*, vol. 6. No. 9, p.377

²⁰⁶ Paul S. Breidenbach, ‘Colour Symbolism and Ideology in a Ghanaian Healing Movement’, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Cambridge University Press on behalf of the International African Institute, 1976, Vol. 46, No. 2, p.138

²⁰⁷ Olga V. Galustyan & Elena V. Papchenko, ‘Understanding Colour in the Human Culture with Special Emphasis on the Indian Subcontinent’ *The Chitrolekha Journal on Art and Design*, Vol. 5, No.1, p.3, <https://chitrolekha.com/understanding-colour/>, (accessed on 4 November 2021)

In the pre-colonial Mizo society white colour does not seem to have much importance when it comes to clothing, white known as *ngo/var* was obtained from the natural cotton yarn and it was possessed by all members of the society. But when it comes to religion and sacrifice white seems to have some significance and symbolic meaning. N.E. Perry in *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* has mentioned several sacrifices performed by the Lushais in which white were specifically mentioned for the sacrifice, which is evident from the following excerpt.

According to N.E. Perry, “*Kelkhal* is one of the most important sacrifices performed by ordinary Lushais. The animal sacrificed is a goat and it must be clean and healthy and it should have a whitetail. The *puithiam* kills the goat and as soon as the meat is cooked takes the tip of the animal’s tail about one inch long and ties it around the neck of the man for whom the sacrifice is being performed. After this sacrifice, the man for whom the sacrifice is performed and who wears the goat’s tail around his neck is *hrulh* for three days and must not do any work nor meet any strangers nor enter the blacksmith’s forge.”²⁰⁸

One of the most celebrated feasts performed by the Lushai is *Khuangchawi*. Organising such a feast requires a great deal of wealth because of which it is only performed by the chief and few well-to-do people as the commoners could not afford it. The feast consists of several parts and it takes many years to complete the whole process. The second step is known as *Sedawi-chhun*. It requires three or more days to perform *Sedawi-chhun*. On the second day known as *zupui ni*. Before the *puithiam* perform the sacrifice of mithun a ritual is held which requires the use of a white cock’s feather.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ N. E. Perry, *A monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, Firma KLM private limited on behalf of Tribal Research Institute Aizawl, Calcutta, p.92

²⁰⁹ Perry, *A monograph on Lushai Customs*, p.99

“In the morning *puithiam* and the sacrifice go outside the village. They take with them some white cock's feathers, millet, Job's tears, a spear, and a fairly large gourd used for holding *Zu* called *Sepeng*.”²¹⁰

The third day of *Sedawi-chhun* is known as *Ruaini*. Seven days after *Ruaini* another sacrifice is performed which requires the sacrifice of a white cock.

“Seven days after the end of the feast a white cock is killed on the outside platform of the house. This is called *arkharthiangdawh*. The period between the day on which the mythun was killed and the day on which the white cock is killed is *hrilh* the sacrificer may not meet any strangers and the strangers may not enter his house.”²¹¹

In the pre-colonial Mizo society various kinds of sacrifices were performed on different occasions the sacrificial animals include *Vawk* (pig) *vawkpa* (boar), *vawkpui* (sow) *vawkte* (piglet), *kel* (goat), *archal* (cock), mithun, etc. But as it is reflected in the excerpts from above, sacrifices such as *kelkhal* and *arkharthiangdawh* require a goat having a white tail and a white cock; and the ritual being performed on *zupui ni* requires the use of a feather of white cock. It is to be noted that sacrifices were performed by the Mizos to ward off ill-luck and misfortune and white as already mentioned is symbolic of peace, spirituality, and sacredness in religion.

Other cultures that give importance to white coloured animals such as the Huns, one of the earliest Turkic tribes, associated white with power and justice. Thus the Hun warriors wore white before going into battle. It was said that even Chengiz Khan wore white garments and mounted a white horse in preparation for battle.²¹²

In Western cultures, white is the classic colour of wedding dresses, symbolizing innocence and purity, whereas in many Asian cultures white is the colour of

²¹⁰ Perry, p.99

²¹¹ Perry, p.101

²¹² Seyfi Agirel, ‘Colour Symbolism in Turkish and Azeri Folk Literature’, *Folklore*, Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of Folklore Enterprises, Ltd., April 2009, Vol. 120, No. 1. p.4

mourning, grief, and loss. The Hindus in India also wear white for mourning and it symbolises grieving, sadness, and loss.

The impact of colonialism was great in the Mizo community, especially after the spread of Christianity, white became symbolic of purity. In Christian marriages in Mizo society, white gowns or white tops with *puanchei* became part and parcel of marriage customs. Where, white in marriage symbolises goodness, purity, innocence, and virginity.

According to Rev. T.E. Bridgett in *Symbolic colours*, “To a certain extent, the symbolism of colour is founded on the nature of the impressions universally produced, and is, therefore, of all times and countries. What is white or brilliant must always have betokened joy or gladness”²¹³ Not only the bride but the guest also prefer wearing white or light colours in marriages and celebrations.



Fig 3.1: Marriage of Lalnghinglovi and Sangaia, 1977²¹⁴

Fig 3.2: Marriage of Chawngthapuii (bride) and Rohmingthanga (groom) where the bride is wearing a white top and *puanchei*, 1987²¹⁵

3.4.2 The Symbolism of Black Colour

In Mizo the word *dum* represent dark shades rather than just a black colour. For instance, *mi dum* means a person of dark skin tone, *dum* here represents dark shade rather than black as a colour. It is also to be noted that in pre-colonial times when

²¹³ T. E. Bridgett, ‘Symbolic Colours’, *The Irish Monthly*, Irish Jesuit Province, Oct. 1883, Vol. 11, No. 124, p.537

²¹⁴ Photograph of Marriage of Lalnghinglovi and Sangaia in 1977, Author’s collection

²¹⁵ Photograph of Marriage of Chawngthapuii and Rohmingthanga in 1987, Author’s collection

describing the colour of cloth or *puan* what the Mizo consider to be black is many times regarded as blue by the early British ethnographers.

Like white, black is a colour without a hue and is considered an achromatic colour. Because black absorbs light it is considered the darkest colour. In Palaeolithic times black pigment was created using burnt bones, charcoal, or various crushed minerals.²¹⁶ Throughout much of history, black has been a symbol of evil, mourning, sadness, and darkness.²¹⁷ It is objectified in dark or black funeral clothes and charcoal and stands for darkness, loss, hidden and impure things and forces, witchcraft, bad luck and death.²¹⁸ In pre-colonial Mizo society, the significance of black colour in ritual and sacrifice is recorded by N.E. Perry.

“To ensure good crops and to prevent too many mosquitoes a sacrifice was performed in June by the Mizos known as *Fano daw*i. It is *thianglo* or unlucky to go to the fields or to husk rice on the *Fano daw*i day. A black Cock is sacrificed which is provided in alternate years by the *ramhual upa* and the chief.”²¹⁹

According to J.H Lorrain, *Fano daw*i is to offer the annual sacrifice which is made to protect the young growing rice crop on the village *jhooms* from disease. The sacrifice is offered generally in the evening, in the house of the village chief, and the following day no one is allowed to leave the village.²²⁰ *Fa* translates as an offspring; in the old Lushai word (*tawngpua*) *fa* signifies rice,²²¹ *no* means young, soft or tender,²²² and *daw*i is to bewitch, to cast a spell upon, to practice magic and witchcraft.²²³ The use of black cock in the *fano daw*i is related to magic, spell and therefore black has a negative connotation here. According to Paul S. Breidenbach, black or dark colour has a predominant negative association in traditional meaning

²¹⁶ ‘Basic Colour theory’, p.60

²¹⁷ ‘Basic Colour theory’, p.60

²¹⁸ Breidenbach, *Journal of the International African Institute*, p.138-139

²¹⁹ Perry, p.91

²²⁰ Lorrain, p.133

²²¹ Lorrain, p.131

²²² Lorrain, p.344

²²³ Lorrain, p.106

and ritual usage.²²⁴ Or it can also have a positive connotation like Ancient Egypt, for whom black colour had positive connotations of protection and fertility²²⁵ black cock can also symbolise fertility and protection for the harvest.

The symbolism that most cultures have in common for black is death, mourning and sadness. Seyfi Agirel in describing Turkish folk culture has also said that “the colour black is one of the most dominant colours in the folk literature of the Turkic peoples, it is strongly associated with death, mourning, bad luck, and evil. The colour black dominates in funerary and mourning scenes.”²²⁶

In most Western countries and a few Asian countries, black is a symbol of death, mourning, sadness, and loss, whereas, in many Asian countries, white colour is associated with mourning, death, and sadness. Mario De Bortoli and Jesús Maroto in *Colours across Cultures* have done in-depth research on colour symbolism per country.

Table 3.1: Findings of Mario De Bortoli and Jesús Maroto on colours that symbolise death, and mourning as follows:²²⁷

Region/Country	Colour	Symbolism/Significance
North America	Black	Death, evil, sin, nothingness, business, adult, formal
Latin America and Mexico	Black	Mourning, religion, respect, death
Brazil	Black	Sophistication, authority, mourning, religion, formality
Western Europe	Black	Mourning, formality, death, evil, elegance, sophistication
Spain and Portugal	Black	Power, death, piety
England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland	Black	Mourning, death, dignity

²²⁴ Breidenbach, p.139-140

²²⁵ ‘Basic Colour theory’, p.60

²²⁶ Agirel, *Folklore*, p.92

²²⁷ Bortoli & Maroto, p.15-26

Singapore and Malaysia	Black	Mourning
South Korea	Black	Darkness, mystery, mourning, water
Africa	Red	Death, bloodshed;
Asia Pacific China, Hong Kong, Taiwan	White	Death, mourning, pure, neutral, west, autumn
Japan	White	Death, mourning
India	Orange	Death, rebellion
	White	Death, mourning

The table clearly shows that for most countries, mainly the western countries black symbolise death, and mourning. Most of these countries that associate black with death and mourning are dominated by the Christian population. Some Asian countries do not associate death and mourning with black but rather with other colours such as white, red, and orange. And these countries are not Christian-dominated countries.

The colour black symbolises suffering and death in the Bible. It's used to represent mourning in Job 30:30, Jeremiah 14:2 and Job 10:21-22.

³⁰ *My skin grows black and peels;
my body burns with fever.* ²²⁸

² *Judah mourneth and the gates thereof languish;
they are black unto the ground
and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up.* ²²⁹

²¹ *before I go to the place of no return,
to the land of gloom and utter darkness,*

²² *to the land of deepest night, of utter darkness and disorder,
where even the light is like darkness.* ²³⁰

²²⁸ Job 30:28 and 30, *Holy Bible: New International Version*, Great Britain, Hodder and Stoughton, 1979, p.513

²²⁹ Jeremiah 14:2, *Holy Bible: King James Version*, Chennai, Indian Bible Literature, 1982, p.487

²³⁰ Job 10:21-22, *Holy Bible: New International Version*, Great Britain, Hodder and Stoughton, 1979, p.513

In the KJV Bible, the word ‘black’ occurs eighteen times, three of which are in the New Testament. The words translated as this colour and its very similar references such as “dark,” “darkness,” etc. come from a variety of original language sources.²³¹

In Mizo society also black colour symbolises death and mourning. The Mizos prefer to wear black or dark colours such as dark blue, brown, dark green, grey, etc. in the funeral to symbolise mourning, death and grief. This recent trend of wearing black or a darker shade of colour at funerals seems to be the influence of Christianity and western culture.



Fig 3.3: A Funeral gathering of Ex Naik Rohmingthanga, Khatla, Aizawl in 2018.²³²



Fig 3.4: Relatives posing with the coffin, probably Champhai, in 1955.²³³

²³¹ Susan Nelson, ‘The Fascinating Symbolism of Black in the Bible’, *Women of Noble Character*, [website], 2021, para.3 <https://www.womanofnoblecharacter.com/black-in-the-bible/> (accessed on 9 October 2021)

²³² Photograph of the funeral of Ex Nk Rohmingthanga, Khatla, Aizawl, 4th January 2018, Author’s collection

²³³ Pachuau & Schendel, p.216

During pre-colonial times, wearing black at a funeral was out of the question, as owning dyed clothes was a privilege and was reserved for special occasions like festivals, dances, and feasts only. For the funeral, it can be estimated that the Mizos did not give much importance to wearing black when it comes to clothing. Fig 3.4 testifies that even in the 1950s the Mizos did not give much importance to wearing black at funerals. But this does not mean that black was not symbolic of death. Black as a symbol of death and mourning can be traced back to the pre-colonial times in which *puandum* and *puanrin* play a significant role.

‘*Puan*’ means cloth, a garment, clothing, apparel,²³⁴ ‘*dum*’ means black, dark,²³⁵ and ‘*rin*’ means a line.²³⁶ Therefore, *puandum* means a black cloth or dark cloth and *puanrin* means a cloth with a line or a strapped cloth. According to N.E. Perry *puandum* is a cloth used by the man and it is woven out of red, blue, and yellow thread and is one of the better kinds of cloths made by Lushais.²³⁷ According to Lianhmingthanga, *puandum* means black cloth and young men usually used this *puan* as a night cover during their stay in *Zawlbuk*.²³⁸ He further described it saying “*puandum* is one of the Mizo cloth of red and black cotton threads striped used to wear by both men and women.”²³⁹ N.E. Perry describes *pawnrin* as a cloth made out of blue and white thread and is used by the women.²⁴⁰ Rosaline in her thesis describes *puanrin* as “a thick *puan* with black as its base and a white transverse strip of about two and a half inches are at regular interval and the centre band in the middle is closely bracketed by small lines.”²⁴¹ She further describes that *puanrin* was worn by men.

The description of *puandum* and *pawnrin/puanrin* as given by N.E. Perry, Lianhmingthanga, and Rosaline are quite dissimilar. Regarding the colour, it has already been described in Chapter 2 that what the Mizos described as black is usually

²³⁴ Lorrain, p.368

²³⁵ Lorrain, p.120

²³⁶ Lorrain, p.388

²³⁷ Perry, p.30

²³⁸ Lianhmingthanga, p.69

²³⁹ Lianhmingthanga, p.71

²⁴⁰ Perry, p.30

²⁴¹ Varsangzuali, p.63

described as blue by colonial ethnographers because the black colour used by Mizo in their *puan* fastens easily and due to the use of *ting* appears bluish-black.

Puandum, *pawnrin*, and *zawlpuan* have a symbolic role to play in funerals. These *puan* has black is one of its main colours. The symbolic role that this *puan* have on funeral is given by N.E. Perry:

“When a man dies his body is wrapped in *puandum* and he is buried in it and the wrapping of the body in the *puandum* is regarded as a mark of respect to the deceased. A woman's body should similarly be in a *pawnrin*.²⁴²



Fig 3.5: *Puanrin* owned by Vuta (a Sailo chief)²⁴³

Fig 3.6: *Puandum*²⁴⁴

Black did symbolise death and mourning in the pre-colonial Mizo society. Though the people mourning for the deceased do not wear black cloth during the funeral they do use *puandum* for wrapping their dead. Simona Petru has also opined that “Black is frequently linked with death, decay and disaster, and physically with excrement.”²⁴⁵

Wrapping the dead with *puandum* was so important in an early Mizo society that when a woman gets married she has to take *zawlpuan*, another name for *puandum* with her as a bride's possession in case untoward befalls her husband and he dies. N.E Perry had written about this custom of the Lushais in the following words.

²⁴² Perry, p.30

²⁴³ Varsangzuali, p.64

²⁴⁴ Varsangzuali, p.73

²⁴⁵ Petru, p.1718

“*Puandum* is included in a woman’s possessions when she gets married, this cloth is known as a *zawlpuan*. The *zawlpuan* is intended to be kept for wrapping the body of the woman's husband in when he dies and it is held to be very disgraceful for a woman if she fails to wrap her husband's body in a *zawlpuan*. It is very rare to find a woman who does not possess a *zawlpuan*. If a woman does not possess a *puandum* when she gets married, two ordinary clothes can be taken instead of the *puandum* to act as *zawlpuan*.”²⁴⁶

The association of black with death is not unique to Mizo society. Seyfi Agirel in describing Turkish tradition has also said that “the colour black is one of the most dominant colours in the folk literature of the Turkic peoples, and it has both negative and positive qualities depending on the situation. It is strongly associated with death, mourning and bad luck.”²⁴⁷ The colour black dominates in funerary and mourning scenes.”²⁴⁸ The importance of *puandum* as a symbol of death and mourning can also be witnessed in the case of hurt is inflicted on human beings by animals. In such a case the owner of the animal had to wrap the victim’s body with *puandum*. N.E Perry maintains that:

“The Lushai custom in such cases of unnatural death caused by domestic animals is as follows: If a mythun or bull kills a man and it is clear that the man did not bring his fate on himself by teasing the animal, the owner of the animal must kill either the offending animal or one exactly similar as *Thlaichhiah* for the man who has been killed and must provide a *Puandum* for burying the corpse in. If the man killed had been teasing the animal before it killed him, the owner of the animal need only kill a pig for the *Thlaichhiah* and provide and *Puandum* for the burial. If during a dog fight a small child gets mixed up in it and bitten to death, the owner

²⁴⁶ Perry, p.30

²⁴⁷ Agirel, p.92

²⁴⁸ Agirel, p.92

of the dogs must kill a mythun for the *Thlaichhiah* and provide *Puandum* for the burial.”²⁴⁹

Seyfi Agirel has quoted that “Each tribe has invented its way of using the symbolism of the colour black to indicate the event of death.”²⁵⁰ To bestow *Puandum* to the victim by the owner of the animal does not symbolise only mourning and grief but also remorse and reverence to the dead. Coloured *puan* such as *Puandum* being valued in the society, providing it to the deceased was probably the last substantial thing they could do to show penitence.

When it comes to the symbolism attached to a black, negative connotations such as death, mourning, sadness, grieve seem to be the most common association across many cultures. But it does not mean black does not have a positive connotation. It is also to be noted that wrapping the dead with such *puan* is considered to be praiseworthy which also symbolises that black has a positive connotation also which is respect and reverence. Quoting N.E Perry:

“If a person who is no close relation of the deceased gives a *puandum* or a *pawnrin* to wrap the body in it is considered a very praiseworthy act.”²⁵¹

The meaning, perception and association of black went through many changes throughout different epochs in history and from culture to culture. Eventually, the black was revolutionized and given a prominent standing. Black is also perceived as a sharp colour that can promote multitudes of ideas ranging from confidence, sophistication, thrill and passion to grief and misery.²⁵² Black can promote ideas of power, energy, elitism, strength and status.²⁵³

In Mizo society also, there is more to black than just a symbol of mourning and death. It symbolises elegance, luxury, status, power, and elitism. The use of black colour also occurs in *puan* such as *puanchei/puanlaisen*, *thangchhuah puan*, *tawlhlo puan*,

²⁴⁹ Perry, p.72

²⁵⁰ Agirel, p.93

²⁵¹ Perry, p.30

²⁵² ‘Basic Colour theory’, p.61

²⁵³ ‘Basic Colour theory’, p.55

cheulopang etc. This *puan* was worn by prominent people of society. Black in this *puan* symbolises luxury, power and elitism which was a privilege enjoyed by only a few in the society.

3.4.3 The Symbolism of Red Colour

In Mizo, the word *Sen* represent red colour. Other colours such as *sendang* (pink) and *senduk* (maroon, deep red) are derived from the word *sen*.

According to Paul S. Breidenbach, “red is a colour full of ambiguities. This ambiguity is derived from the image of blood that is used as the primal model for the colour.”²⁵⁴ This is true for Mizo word for red (*sen*). The word *thisen*, blood, when broken into its parts means literally the *thi* (to bleed or to die)²⁵⁵ and *sen* (red).

Antubam notes that in a traditional context “all kinds of red are used to symbolize ... an act of war, national anger, sudden calamity, boisterousness, violence, and a show of dissatisfaction and all as for (warriors) generally dress in red.”²⁵⁶

The Mizos used *Tawlhloh Puan* to symbolise bravery, war, persistence, valour etc. This *puan* has red, white and yellow colour running vertically on black background. *Tawlhloh* means to stand firm or not move backwards. It symbolises the attitude that a brave warrior must possess in times of war, which is, to be tough, sturdy, strong, adamant and unshakable. It is indicative of never turning back. To quote N. Chatterjee:

“It was indeed a cloth which could not be put on except by a very courageous warrior who had established for himself a reputation for such bravery. This traditional significance of the *Tawlhloh puan* was held high in esteem while the Mizos in their olden days found some of their compatriots venturing to put on this particular type of *puan* before going to fight. If a person putting on this cloth was found running back from fighting he was very much looked down upon by the people at large. It

²⁵⁴ Breidenbach, p.104

²⁵⁵ Lorrain, p.458

²⁵⁶ Kofi Antubam, *Ghana's Heritage of Culture*, Koehler & Amelang, Leipzig, 1963, p.82

used to be put on by the group leaders engaged on their part to fight the enemy till the enemy was overpowered or boldly faced death in their efforts to do so without turning back at any moment. Even when guns were in use against them after the British entered these areas, the warriors putting on *Tawlhloh-puan* continued to maintain the traditional dignity of this cloth.”²⁵⁷ Lianhmingtha further adds that “*Tawlhloh puan* means the cloth of never turning back or retreating. Its name occupies a very important place in the heart of the Mizo people. Leaders and brave men wore this Puan.”²⁵⁸

From the above statement, it is clear that this *puan* was worn during the time of war and fighting. Paul S. Breidenbach opines that “Blood which is spilt can also be associated with loss of life, struggle, and danger.”²⁵⁹ Red in this *puan* can symbolise blood which can be associated with the possibility of a loss of life, struggle and danger that one has to go through during the war.

According to Kate Smith “red speeds up our heart rate, blood flow, and body temperature. It stimulates our senses, making us more sensitive to our environments. Red also stimulates the adrenal gland, making us more prone to take action and giving us more energy. It is a physical stimulant.”²⁶⁰ Perhaps, the ability of red to stimulate such sense and energy can also be the reason it has been symbolised with war, power, bravery, and dignity. It was also worn during the time of games and sports such as wrestling²⁶¹ and hence, symbolises sportsmanship such as sincerity, fairness, strength, and persistency.

According to Rosaline, around 1740 *Tawlhloh puan* was worn by women and rich people in times of festive occasions like marriage, etc. and the original significance

²⁵⁷ Chatterjee, *Puan the Pride of Mizoram*, p.34

²⁵⁸ Lianhmingthanga, p.69

²⁵⁹ Breidenbach, P.139

²⁶⁰ Kate Smith, ‘Colour symbolism and meaning of Red’, *Sensational Colour*, 2015, [website] <https://www.sensationalcolor.com/meaning-of-red/> (accessed on 17 October 2021)

²⁶¹ Varsangzuali, p.60

attached to this cloth started to wither out, giving place to a new significance of status value.”²⁶²

In course of time, the colour and design of *Tawlhlo puan* have altered. Colours such as green and yellow are added to the original colour which consists of black, red and white only; with motifs such as *sakeiziangzia*. It became commonly worn by women in modern times rather than men. The use of this *puan* also changed as “they are used as a welcome gift to special guests and important people who deserve social felicitation, and also as a souvenir to specific persons on certain functions, to dignitaries and other visitors who visit the state or as personal presents.”²⁶³

Though the use of *Tawlhlo puan* has altered with time, the symbolism associated with it remains the same among the Mizos. Rosaline in her thesis has also written about the use and significance of *Tawlhlo puan*, which is as follows:

“In 1975, when Brigadier Thenphunga Sailo started the Peoples Conference Party, this *puan* became the symbol of the Party. He started to wear this *puan* as a gesture of no retreat as it is symbolized by this cloth in the traditional society. It became synonymous with his political image and appearances. Similarly, those who worked closely with him had also started to imitate this and *Tawlhloh Puan* was given”²⁶⁴

The symbolism associated with *puan* still thrives today and is the inspiration behind the red, white and black colours of the Young Mizo Association (YMA). Quoting Rosaline:

“In 1974 this tri-colour was officially declared as the colour of the Central YMA. R. Zobela of Mualvum, a YMA leader, was the first to move the idea of using these three colours as the symbol of YMA as they are the colour of the *Tawlhloh Puan*, hence signifying no retreat. Another reason why these colours were favoured was that they represented the traditional Mizo society. C. Vulluaia agrees with this and said as a

²⁶² Chatterjee, p.34

²⁶³ Varsangzuali, p.60

²⁶⁴ Varsangzuali p.61

general secretary he liked to believe and also propagated that the three colours are also representative of the three mottos of YMA”²⁶⁵

Red colour has a rich history. The use of the pigment can be traced way back to Ancient Egypt where it was considered both a colour of vitality and celebration, as well as evil and destruction. Among ancient Grecian murals, the clothing of Byzantine red symbolises status and wealth.”²⁶⁶

Among the Mizos the use of red colour in *puanchei* was also a symbol of status, wealth and luxury. *Puanchei* was worn only by the chief and his family in early Mizo society. In the course of history, the use of this *puan* broadened in occasions such as marriages and celebrations in dance, symbolizing a range of emotions such as passion, love, sensuality, celebration and happiness. According to the basic colour theory “red is considered to be a colour of intense emotions, ranging from anger, sacrifice, danger, love, passion and sexuality. In many Asian countries such as India and China, red is regarded as the colour of happiness, wellbeing, and good fortune.”²⁶⁷

3.4.4 The Symbolism of Green Colour

Colour such as *hring* (green) does not signify green only as a colour. It has a deeper meaning to it. *Hring* symbolises life. The literal meaning of *hring* is life. For instance, *hnah hring* is a green coloured leaf or we can say a leaf that has “life it in”. where as *hnah ro* means dried or lifeless leaf. *Ro* here does not translate as colour. Similarly, *mihring* signifies a living human being and *mithi* is translated as a dead person. So, we can say that *hring* for Mizos is not just a hue, it symbolises life.

B. Lalthangliana in his book ‘*Zotawng Bulpui leh a Hmanna*’ (the origin/root of Zo language and its use)²⁶⁸ had highlighted the origin of the word *Hring* and its various uses:²⁶⁹

*No a **hring** tha hle* ²⁷⁰

²⁶⁵ Varsangzuali, p.62

²⁶⁶ ‘Basic Colour theory’, p.84

²⁶⁷ ‘Basic Colour theory’, p.81

²⁶⁸ Lorrain, p. 52

²⁶⁹ Lalthangliana, p.108

She/it has **given birth** to a young one well

*Hnim a **hring** dup*²⁷¹

The grass/ weed/plant is quite **green**

***Hring** nun hi a hlu*²⁷²

Life is precious.

*A **hring** a hrangin a kai*²⁷³

In all of the above sentences, it can be concluded that *hring* word has the same origin and the meaning has to do with either life or green as a colour. It depicts that green symbolises life among the Mizos.

According to Heather, “green colour seems naturally suggestive of healthy growth when applied to grass, herbs or trees.”²⁷⁴

3.4.5 The Symbolism of Yellow Colour

“Ancient Egyptians creative users of the colour because of its close association with gold, the colour was considered eternal and indestructible. Amongst these associations, Yellow is a colour that embodies many ideas depending on the shade and application. As previously mentioned it can symbolise happiness, sunshine, good energy, and joy.”²⁷⁵ Among many Indian societies, yellow symbolises beauty and celebration because of which before marriage the bride and groom are applied with turmeric just not because turmeric has medicinal property but also because yellow or pale skin is considered to be beautiful.

²⁷⁰ Lalthangliana, p.108

²⁷¹ Lalthangliana, p.108

²⁷² Lalthangliana, p.108

²⁷³ Lalthangliana, p.108

²⁷⁴ P. J. Heather, ‘Colour Symbolism: Part I’, *Folklore*, Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of Folklore Enterprises, Ltd., 1948, Vol. 59, No. 4 p.172-173

²⁷⁵ ‘Basic Colour theory, p.55

Yellow turmeric has a healing property and is associated with health and healing and because turmeric is extensively used as a spice and natural food colouring, yellow is associated with food and delicacy.

Most cultures in the world associate yellow with sunshine, summer, happiness, and joy. However, though yellow has made the appearances in different *puan* of the Mizos, the size is usually minimal; the reason for this could be two: either it was not a celebrated colour or it was difficult to obtain the colour for dyes.

Yellow also has negative connotations such as cowardice, betrayal, terror, toxicity, and illness. Yellow occurs in the Bible as a test for discerning leprosy, a yellow thin hair is mentioned in Leviticus 13: 30, 32 and 36.²⁷⁶

*³⁰ the priest is to examine the sore,
and if it appears to be more than skin deep and the hair in it is yellow and thin,
the priest shall pronounce them unclean;
my, it is a defiling skin disease on the head or chin.*²⁷⁷

*³² On the seventh day the priest is to examine the sore,
and if it has not spread and there is no yellow hair in it
and it does not appear to be more than skin deep.*²⁷⁸

*³⁶ the priest is to examine them,
if he finds that the sore has spread in the skin,
he does not need to look for yellow hair;
they are unclean,*²⁷⁹

In Mizo, society yellow is sometimes associated with illness especially jaundice because the skin and eyes turn yellow due to a high level of bilirubin.²⁸⁰ Sometimes

²⁷⁶ Heather, *Folklore*, p.14

²⁷⁷ Leviticus 13: 30, *Holy Bible: New International Version*, Great Britain, Hodder and Stoughton, 1979, p.511

²⁷⁸ Leviticus 13: 32, *Holy Bible: King James Version*, Chennai, Indian Bible Literature, 1982, p.512

²⁷⁹ Leviticus 13: 36, *Holy Bible: New International Version*, p.513

²⁸⁰ 'adult jaundice', *cleveland clinic* [website], 2018, <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/15367-adult-jaundice#> (accessed on 2 November 2021)

it is suggested that a newborn baby should not be clothed with yellow due to the fear of jaundice.²⁸¹

According to the colour theory, “the association of yellow with toxic and illness is thought to be because yellow pigments are often found in toxic materials.”²⁸² Among the Lakers in pre-colonial Mizo society, yellow symbolises danger and poison due to the poisonous nature of a plant called *chamai*. As recorded by N.E. Perry in *the Lakers*:

“The only poison known to the Lakhers is a plant called *chamai* (*Gelsemium Elegans*, Benth). This plant is a creeper with a yellow flower, and the most poisonous parts are the roots and leaves, a decoction of either being said to cause certain death. The Lakhers say that the flower also is poisonous and that bees never go near it, as if they sip from it they die. Lakhers are very afraid of *chamai*, and never go near if they can help it.”²⁸³



Fig 3.6: *Chamai*²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Chawngthapuii interview, 2020

²⁸² ‘Basic Colour theory’, p.55

²⁸³ Perry, *The Lakhers*, p.172

²⁸⁴ ‘Gelsemium elegans’, Hospital Authority Toxicology Reference Laboratory, [web page], 2018, https://www3.ha.org.hk/toxicplant/en/gelsemium_elegans.html (accessed on 9 November 2021)

3.5 CONCLUSION

Symbolism is a useful tool for understanding society, its culture and history as it gives the pattern of society. Colour symbolism also becomes a very handy tool to understand Mizo society as it is not just the study of colour or hue but it reveals the deeper concept and common ideas shared by the people.

The word *ngo/var* was interchangeably used to describe white colour or shades of light. White for the Mizos symbolises brightness or light, it had significance in religion and sacrifice, in terms of spirituality, goodness, sacredness, godliness, life and general well-being. As a result of colonialism and the impact of Christianity, white became symbolic of purity; joy or gladness and its use in a celebration such as marriages became common.

Dum represent dark shades rather than just a black colour. Black in pre-colonial Mizo sacrifices symbolises magic, spell and witchcraft. It was also a symbol of death, mourning, sadness, and reverence for the dead as *puandum*, *puanrin*, and *zawlpuan* were associated with death. But wearing black cloth at funerals has colonial influence because the Mizos did not necessarily wear black cloth in funerals.

Red had an image of blood, and the word itself has a close link with the word blood in Mizo. It symbolises bravery, war, persistence, and valour, sportsmanship such as sincerity, fairness, strength and persistency when worn in *puan*.

Green symbolises life for the Mizos, the word itself is interchangeably used for life and colour. Yellow had a negative connotation for the Mizos, it symbolised illness and though it was produced naturally and appeared in many *puan*, yellow is not very much favoured by the Mizos as its appearance itself is minimal.

CHAPTER 4

ROLE OF COLOURS IN SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND GENDER

4.1 STRATIFICATION

Stratification is a key element of social life. Every society defines a means of categorizing each person into a particular social group. The placement of each individual in turn determines his value, as defined by the larger society; hence, the greater role of society in defining every person's value. Differences in the values and statuses of individuals engender stratification in society.²⁸⁵

Inequality is inherent in every society. Hence human society is unequal everywhere. All societies arrange their members concerning superiority, inferiority, and equality the placement of individuals in strata or layers is called stratification. People on the top stratum have more power, prestige, and privileges in comparison with those who are placed lower therein.

Social stratification is omnipresent. Every society is divided into groups. No society is un-stratified. Stratification involves the distribution of unequal rights and privileges among the members of society.

Stratification is a process of ranking statuses that are found in all societies. This inequality of status is a remarkable feature of social stratification. Where there is social stratification there is social inequality. Stratification restricts interaction. It may be observed in the matters of marriage alliance, friendship, selection of professions, etc. All these are expressions of differentiation in varying degrees.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Isaac Akintoyese Oyekola, Eyitayo Joseph Oyeyipo, *Introduction to sociology*, Olakunle Abiona Ogunbameru, Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria, 2020, p. 125

²⁸⁶ Oyekola & Oyeyipo, *Introduction to Sociology*, p.126

4.2 STRATIFICATION IN MIZO SOCIETY

Mizo society is many times portrayed as an egalitarian society where there is group consensus as if the private property did not have significance. H. Thangmawizuala opines that from time immemorial land belonged to the community in Mizoram.²⁸⁷ Lianzela also maintains that land was collectively owned by the community and the chief acted as mere distributors of land.²⁸⁸ Though, B.K Roy Burman and P.S. Sharma acknowledge that landholding was temporary but they generalized that shifting cultivation is associated with communal ownership.²⁸⁹ It is true when compared to the complex social structure and casteism that dominates most of the societies in India, the level of social stratification in pre-colonial Mizo society was much better. However, this does not mean Mizo society was egalitarian.

According to Vanlaldika “Such a depiction of traditional Mizo society by different writers whether colonial or Mizo is a clear indication of their lack of understanding the true picture of social structure then prevalent in traditional Mizo society... such a fallacious view about the homogeneity of the Mizo and the absence of conflicts, schisms, cleavages, segments and differentiation about the traditional Mizo society requires to be repudiated.”²⁹⁰

Thus, a meticulous study of Mizo society reveals that social inequality and stratification did exist in the society. Considering the empirical data observed from the documents of colonial ethnographers and Mizo historians, it is evident that colours in the form of *puan* acted as a tool for stratification.

Andrew H. Vanlaldika classified pre-colonial Mizo society into three strata: the upper strata consist of *Lal* (village chief), *Thangchhuahpa*, *Upas* (elders), *Puithiam* (village priest), *Ramhual*, *Zalen* and *Pasaltha*; middle strata compose of

²⁸⁷ H. Thangmawizuala, ‘Land Reforms in Mizoram’, in Majuli Bose (ed.) *Land Reforms in Eastern India*, Jadavpur, 1981, p.28-30

²⁸⁸ Lianzela, *Economic Development of Mizoram*, Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, 1994, p.12

²⁸⁹ Sailo, p.278

²⁹⁰ Andrew H. Vanlaldika, *Social Stratification in Mizo Society*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 2014, p.107

Hnamchawm, Thirdeng, Tlangau, and lower strata which include *Bawi, Sal*, widow, and orphans.

Andrew Stuart pointed out that “colour can be a powerful instrument. Different tones and hues can have a distinct effect on the psychology of a person; colours can affect behaviour and feelings of a person. It can also influence the way we perceive other people – propelling us to see others as accomplished, efficient, friendly or trustworthy. Colour can make people seem more charismatic, more authoritative or reputable.”²⁹¹

As colour played a vital role in displaying a person to seem more commanding or worthy of respect, the same pattern can be witnessed in Mizo society. Coloured *puan* gave identity of reverence and respect and also gave distinction to the people of higher strata of the society from the rest of the population. It acted as a tool for stratification. Therefore, in Mizo society colour did act as a tool for stratification as colours in the form of clothing or jewellery were commonly used by the people belonging to the upper strata of the society. The use of colour reduces with the strata of the society where people in the lowest strata use minimal or no colour.

4.2.1 Upper Strata:

(i.) Chief

The chief or *Lal* was the highest legal authority, a supreme administrative head whose words and orders were laws within the jurisdiction of his territory. The chief was the centre of authority and power. The chief had a father figure in the village and helps his people in their time of distress.²⁹² His image in the village was of a benevolent one who worked for the welfare and well-being of his people. He was everything to his people and was all-powerful and supreme. The chief was the source of all legal authority and the village was highly centralised and personalised.

Everything in the village belongs to the chief. He could seize and confiscate properties belonging to any of his subjects. He could call for his subjects to provide

²⁹¹ Stuart, *The Week*, para.1

²⁹² Perry, p.9

and supply him with anything that he required. All disputes and discords in the village were settled and adjudicated by the chief per the customary laws and usage. The judgement of the chief was final and nobody can question its validity. However, the village chief ordinarily does not neglect the welfare or good of his people- the villagers. The position of the village chief, therefore, can aptly be described as paternalistic.²⁹³

The traditional political system roughly centres round the institution of chieftainship. All the politico-legal authority was completely concentrated in the hand of the chief. Each village was ruled by its sovereign and independent chief with the help of certain officials selected and appointed by the chief himself according to his discretion and preference. Nevertheless, the chief generally ruled and administered his village according to customary laws, mores and norms of the tradition and not according to his whims and fancies.

People who had greater physical strength were likely to be the chief and also people who were courageous, stronger, who were good at hunting and who rendered service to the community were higher in the social strata.

“Colours have symbolic meaning which can evoke emotional and aesthetic responses; they can transmit ideas and can also have a role in organizing social codes.²⁹⁴ It could be used for even the basic tasks of classifying and establishing hierarchies, which are functions of colour in all societies.”²⁹⁵

Only the chief and his family could wear *Puanchei* the cloth displays stripes of different dimensions with a preponderance of red stripes of different shades which are combined tastefully with other stripes of deep colours like green, yellow, blue, light red and black standing against broad white stripes.²⁹⁶

²⁹³ Vanlaldika, *Social Stratification*, p.108

²⁹⁴ ‘Basic Colour theory’, p.1

²⁹⁵ Pastoureau, p.14

²⁹⁶ Lianhmingthanga, p.80

N.E Perry has also recorded that among the Lakers *puan* such as *cheulopang* was worn by both men and women of the chief's family and *cheunapanga* ground red and yellow *puan* was worn by chiefs and well to do family only.²⁹⁷ Among women belonging to royal houses a special cloth was worn made of cowries, ornaments and different kind of beads.²⁹⁸

(ii.) Thangchhuahpa

Next to the chief, a *Thangchhuahpa* is the most privileged and respected person in the traditional social structure of the Mizo. As a giver of a series of feasts to the whole community, he acquired an enormous high status and prestige in society. He was the most privileged person next only to the chief in the traditional Mizo society. He was highly esteemed and revered by the people. Because of their high status and privilege, the village chief normally appointed them as *Upas*. Thanga comments thus:

"In the administration of the affairs of his village, the chief was assisted by a council of elders, those elders were indeed selected or nominated by the chiefs themselves; but as they were usually chosen from those who were *thangchhuah*, that is one who had done *khuangchawi* and was thus above petty jealousies."²⁹⁹

Thangchhuahpa is a title of honour given to a person who had accomplished certain prescribed ceremonies including a large series of community feasts, which is known as *inlama thangchhuah* and, or those people who had hunted and killed a specified number of wild animals according to the traditional customs and practices, known as *ramlama thangchhuah*. The most prestigious status in Mizo society could have been earned with their agricultural wealth at one level or their hunting skills and bravery at another level.

They are esteemed and honoured persons and occupied a high status, privilege and prestige in the traditional Mizo society. They are entitled to a certain pattern of

²⁹⁷ Perry, p.31

²⁹⁸ Perry, p.38

²⁹⁹ L.B. Thanga, *The Mizos*, Guwahati, United Publishers, 1979, p.10

striped cloths known as *thangchhuah puan*. They were economically, politically and socially distinct from other villagers. According to Lorain:

“*Thangchhuahpa* is the title given to a man who distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase, or by giving a certain number of public feasts. The wife of such a man also shares his title, and they and their children are allowed to wear the *thangchhuah puan* (a specific shawl). The possession of this title is regarded by the Lushais (Mizos) as a passport to *Pialral* or Paradise.”³⁰⁰

Thangchhuah was important not only for obtaining status but the Mizos believed that *Thangchhuahpa* could directly enter paradise.

Nevertheless, to become a *Thangchhuahpa* was not easy as it involved spending a large amount of material wealth. Those individuals who have enough economic wealth and a surplus supply of commodities alone are in a position to attain the *thangchhuah* title in reality. This indicates that only wealthy people like the village chief, and *Upas* were able to perform various prescribed ceremonies and to give several community feasts to obtain the *thangchhuah* title. Hence, to acquire the title of *thangchhuah* for the *hnamchawm* was not possible in actuality, in the traditional Mizo society. We can thus argue that practically to accomplish *thangchhuah* was the exclusive domain of the higher level in the society.

Only the *Thangchhuahpa* could wear *Diartial* (*thangchhuah-diartial*) and *thangchhuah puan* and people would look at them with admiration. The *Thangchhuahpa*, next to the chief was one of the most privileged and he was respected in the social structure. The *puan* is handwoven black cloth with red, yellow and white checks.³⁰¹ But the Hmars have their own version of *thangchhuah puan* which is not in checks but vertical stripes.³⁰² Although *Thangchhuah* is no more relevant in the post-colonial period, among the Hmars *thangchhuah puan* still plays a

³⁰⁰ Lorain, p.47

³⁰¹ Lianhmingthanga, p.71

³⁰² H. Thangluaia, interviewed by Laura L Pulamate on 20th March 2022 at Mission Veng Tlang, Aizawl. He is a retired All India Radio director and a public historian, he wrote three volumes on the history of hmars under the title ‘Mizo kan ni’

vital role. When a person of valour passes away or close relatives or an elderly person, the Hmars would cover the dead person with their *thangchhuah puan*.³⁰³ The women also pay respect to the dead by wearing the *thangchhuah puan* at the funeral ceremony.

(iii.) Upas (Village Elders)

The most influential persons in the Mizo traditional village next to the chief were the village Elders called *Upas*. They were selected and appointed by the chief to aid and advise him in the discharge of multifarious duties and functions. The chief had the power to elect and dismiss the *Upas* as he liked. To quote Parry:

“All matters of internal village government are decided by the chief assisted by his council of elders or *Upas*. Although all are theoretically in the hands of the chief, practically speaking he will never try a case without consulting his *Upas* and as a rule, three or four *Upas* try cases with the chief. *Upas* are appointed by the chief and can be dismissed by him... A strong chief will control practically everything while a weak chief will be almost entirely guided by his *Upas*”³⁰⁴

Though the village chief had the prerogative of choosing the *Upas*, nevertheless he usually chose them from different sections of the people. Mangkhosat comments:

“The chief was free to appoint whomever he deemed fit, but usually they were chosen from among the *thangchhuah*, who were reputed public figures and representative of the different clans found in the village.”³⁰⁵

All the important decisions: executive, legislative and judicial matters in the village, was adjudicated by the chief with the help of the village *Upas*. Thus, it can be inferred that without the valuable assistants of the *Upas* the chief was not in a

³⁰³ Rohringa interviewed by Laura L Pulamate on 19th April 2022 at Khatla, Aizawl. He is a senior citizen and president of Hmar Peoples Council, Sakawrdai

³⁰⁴ Parry, *Monograph*, p.1

³⁰⁵ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, Aizawl, Mizo theological Conference, 1997, p.59

position to carry out village administration effectively. Accordingly, a strong and influential chief usually had wise and farsighted *Upas*.

(iv.) Pasaltha

Pasaltha played an important role in the inter-village war. These were the brave men that guarded and protected the village from enemy invasion. The strength and power of the village depended on the number of *Pasaltha* in the village. They were highly revered and given good status in the village because of their contribution to the village. "During certain occasions like festivals and public gatherings, *Pasaltha* were greatly honoured. As a token of recognition and acknowledgement of their services to the community, they had the privilege to drink *zu* (beer or any fermented liquor) first, offered by the chief. Thus, *Pasaltha* occupied comparatively high status and position in the social structure of Mizo society."³⁰⁶ From childhood days, parents wished the male child to be active as *Pasaltha* and they uttered the words *sakapthei* to kids, which means a brave and good hunting skill.³⁰⁷

From the valour they possess and their association with bravery. *Tawlhlopuan* were worn by them which is a symbol of bravery and not giving up. *Tawlhloh* in Mizo language means to stand firm and not retreat. Therefore, *Tawlhlopuan* was indicative of a warrior. According to Chatterji, it was around 1740 when women and rich people started to wear this *puan* in festive occasion and the orininal importance attached to the *puan* wither out, giving a new value to it.³⁰⁸

(v.) Puithiam

The *Puithiam* were the priest and they played a significant role in the traditional life of the Mizo religion. Sacrifices and ceremonies could not be carried out without them. Because religion, economy and political life, were interconnected, the functions and roles of the *Puithiam* were very crucial for the proper functioning of the village. Accordingly, the *Puithiam* was accorded high status and prestige in the traditional social structure of the Mizo.

³⁰⁶ Vanlaldika, p.127

³⁰⁷ Ralte, p.68

³⁰⁸ Chatterji, p.34

The main functions and duties of the *Puithiam* were to administer ceremonies and perform sacrifices for the community per traditional rites. At the direction of the village chief, the *Puithiam* could be called upon to perform ceremonies and rituals that involved the whole Village. However, in the individual cases, each family was responsible to request the *Puithiam* to perform offerings and sacrifices.

Puithiam occupies high status in the society there is no mention of them wearing special kinds of clothes. However, they do associate with colours during sacrifices but there is no specific colour or *puan* assigned to them.

Sadawt: Sadawt is a priest who performs sacrificial rites and rituals exclusively for the chiefs and their families. He was appointed by the village chief and was apart of village officials. The sacrifice of distinct clan requires *Puithiam* of the concerned clan. Where as sacrifices involving the whole village was conducted only by the chief's *Sadawt*.³⁰⁹

(vi.) Ramhuals

Ramhuals are experts in *jhum* cultivations, they are selected and appointed by the chief from those families who are economically better off and have large labour forces. The *Ramhuals* act as the advisor of the chief concerning land to be cultivated each year. To cite Parry:

"The *Ramhuals* are the people who advise where *jhums* should be cut each year and are allowed the first choice of fields to cultivate. For getting the first choice of *jhum*, they have to pay heavier *Fathang* to the chief than the villagers. *Ramhuals* were usually good cultivators and their number can vary in different villages. A man who is a *Ramhual* is considered to be a man of position in the village."³¹⁰

Therefore, to be *Ramhuals* a man and his family should be well off and economically self-sufficient. They were expected to help the chief whenever he was running short of commodities. As they were considered a man of possessions in the village, the

³⁰⁹ Vanlaldika, p. 128-129

³¹⁰ Perry, p.78-79

chief often appealed to them to stand by the poor and needy by distributing their surplus production of paddy. Accordingly, the *Ramhuals* had a superior social status in the traditional society of the Mizo.

(vii.) Zalens

Zalen means free and one who obtained the title of *Zalen* was known as a free man. As the term implies, *Zalens* were exempted from payment of *fathang* to the chief. Parry stated that:

“The *Zalen* is a person who is exempted from paying *fathang* to the chief in consideration of his helping the chief if he runs short of paddy or falls into any kind of difficulty. When all these people have had their choice of *jhums* the common people are allowed to choose theirs.”³¹¹

It was, therefore, evident that the *Zalens* like the *Ramhuals* were the rich and economically well-off families in the village. *Zalens* were selected from the wealthy and well-to-do *Upas* who usually enjoyed the special favour of the chief. They constituted special strata of people under the patronage of the chief.

(viii.) Hautla

The *Hautla* are those people who enjoyed the privilege of selecting *jhuming* sites next to *Ramhuals* and *Zalens* before the *hnamchawm*. This indicated that status wise they are lower than the former yet higher than the latter. Economically, they are better off than the *hnamchawm*. The institution of *hautla* is purely a local arrangement and it might not be found in many of the Mizo traditional villages.³¹²

Ramhuals, *Ramhuals* and *Hautla* were known for their wealth. There were the wealthy groups in the village because of which there is a high probability that they had access to coloured *puans*.

³¹¹ McCall, p.96

³¹² Vanlaldika, p.132

4.2.2 Middle Strata

(i.) Hnamchawm

The commoners are known as *hnamchawm* and they comprised the bulk of the society in the traditional village of the Mizo. The *hnamchawm* were composed of various people belonging to different clans. Lorrain defined *hnamchawm* as the common people, all save those belonging to the ruling clan.³¹³ Practically without the *hnamchawm* traditional Mizo village could not exist as they were the people who greatly contribute to the smooth functioning of the village.

(ii.) Tlangau

The *tlangau* (or village crier) occupied the lowest position in the hierarchical order of the village officials under the chief. However, he could be put in the middle strata. His main duty was to proclaim the chief's decisions and orders which was often at night, regarding the works to be done the next day by the villagers.

For his labour, he was entitled to a basket of paddy as remuneration from each household in the village every year. Though they have been a part and parcel of the village administration since time immemorial, the occupation of *tlangau* is never regarded as a respected profession. Rather it was considered as a low occupation.³¹⁴

Hnamchawm and *tlangau* occupied the middle strata of the society. These people were very much occupied with their daily labour in *jhums*. These were the groups who were associated with *puan* such as *puanog* and *puawnmawl*. They usually wore un-dyed colours. However, on special occasions, they also associate with coloured *puans* such as *puantlangdum*, *puantlangtial*, *hmaram*, *ngotekher*, *puandum*, *zawlpuan*, *tualtahpuan* etc.

³¹³ Lorrain, p.169

³¹⁴ Perry, p.7

4.2.3. Lower Strata

(i.) Bawis:

According to Lorrain, *bawi* is a slave, a bondman, a vassal, a serf. It could also mean a pauper, a servant and a refugee.³¹⁵ McCall stated that the term *Bawi* slave or retainer. A *Bawi* was an individual who was dependent upon a Lushai chief.³¹⁶

Bawi system existed amongst the Mizo since the very beginning of the development of their society. Sangkima argued thus:

“Bawiship was one of the oldest institutions of the Mizo society, which appears to have existed from time immemorial. A person who surrendered himself to a Mizo chief for any reason was commonly called a *bawi*.”³¹⁷

No one in the village could own *bawi*, not even the *Upas*, except for the chief.³¹⁸ Owning *bawi* was prestigious for the chief and it sometimes was a symbol of power. The fate of a *bawi* depended on the character of the chief “when a chief was cruel or malicious a serf (*bawis*) life could be very miserable, and there were great evils in the system despite its advantage.”³¹⁹

In terms of clothing, no record has been found on their clothing and colour, but because coloured cloths were a privilege, the last people to enjoy this privilege were the *bawis*. Therefore, their clothing could not be more than the simple plain raw cotton clothes called *puanngo* or *puanmawl*. N.E Perry also mentioned that *siapsuap* were worn by the lower class. The lower class that he was talking about could be the *bawis*.

“I have never myself seen any Lakher man or woman wearing such a costume, whether in Khihlong or any other villages, but is quite possible that in 1901, when they were still absolutely untouched by outside

³¹⁵ Lorrain, p.31

³¹⁶ McCall, p.121

³¹⁷ Sangkima, *Mizo: Society and Social Change*, Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, 1992, p.40

³¹⁸ Thanga, p.25

³¹⁹ J.M. Loyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram*, Aizawl, Synod Publication Board, 1991, p.3

influences, these primitive clothes were in vogue among the poorer classes.”³²⁰

While common people usually wore white plain natural coloured cotton cloth called *puanngo*, coloured *puan* with a specific design was a privilege that could be worn by only certain people of the society. Coloured *puan* gave identity of reverence and respect and also gave distinction to the people of higher strata of the society from the rest of the population.

But the role of colour as a tool for stratification degraded in colonial times and ended in post-colonial times. With the introduction of western education, a new class of people known as the educated elite came into the picture. These new elite classes, having access to education held government offices and received salaries because of which their status rose in the society.

Christianity also ended the role of colours as a tool for stratification because firstly, the *bawi* system came to an end. Secondly, Church elders rose to prominence in the society as they were revered along with other members of the church who played important roles in the ministry such as evangelists, pastors, missionaries etc. During the colonial period, the British were another class of elite.

When it comes to colour and clothes, the introduction of second-hand clothes by the British ended the gap of stratification based on colours as coloured clothes were not scarce anymore.

McCall has recorded: “Modern Lushai men’s workday dress is, however, never very free from the exotic influence of the textile mills of Japan or elsewhere or from the enterprise of second-hand clothes dealers.”³²¹

³²⁰ Perry, *the Lakher*, p.32

³²¹ Mc Call, *Lushai Chrysalis*, p.27

4.3 WHAT IS MEANT BY GENDER?

As per UNESCO's Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework, "Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in our families, our societies and our cultures. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). Gender roles and expectations are learned. They can change over time and they vary within and between cultures. The concept of gender is vital because applied to social analysis; it reveals how women's subordination (or men's domination) is socially constructed."³²²

Gender as a concept became prevalent only in the 1970s to differentiate sex from characteristics, roles, behaviours and responsibilities which are assigned by society as being masculine or feminine. Before the 1970s the concept of gender and sex was interchangeably used. One of the pioneers of this concept is Simone de Beauvoir, in her text *The Second Sex* she made a statement that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.'³²³ With this statement she highlighted the gender difference that prevails in a society where masculinity always has an upper hand than femininity. Ann Oakley in who is a pioneer in gender studies in her text, *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972), laid the foundation for the exploration of the construction of gender.

The concept of gender enables us to state that sex is one thing and gender is another.³²⁴ Sex is natural and biological whereas gender is socio-cultural and manmade and refers to qualities such as masculine and feminine.

³²² 'Gender definition', UNESCO's *Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework*, April 2003, para.1, <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/BSP/GENDER/PDF/1> (accessed on 24 June 2021)

³²³ Jane Pilcher & Imelda Whelehan, *50 Key Concepts of Gender*, Sage publication, London, 2004, p.56

³²⁴ Kamla Bhasin, *Understanding Gender*, Women Unlimited, New Delhi, 2003, p.2

4.4 COLOUR AND GENDER

Every person has different physical and psychological characteristics. Physical characteristics including the body shape, voice, and walking pattern vary from person to person, depending on gender and age.³²⁵ Emotional and psychological characteristics including concentration, memory, and visual and spatial recognition abilities also differ.³²⁶

Colour psychology affects human lives in many ways. The colour has a powerful impact on all the life aspects on the subconscious level.³²⁷ In our daily life, there are plenty of things that we have taken for granted in the sense that we do not notice, acknowledge, or enjoy them fully or sometimes even complain about. Among those precious gifts existing in our life, there are the ability to see things in colours and the colour itself. Colour is a part of our everyday life.³²⁸ Colours impact our emotions and perceptions.

People define objects, spaces and also their emotions with colours. Colour which has the effect to lead and affect our judgments and perceptions is studied extensively in the literature. Colour preferences of individuals are regarded as linked with subjectivity³²⁹ so that subjective criteria of individuals such as cultural and individual differences lead to their judgments on colour preferences.³³⁰ In addition to culture, demographic variables of individuals such as age and gender could have an impact on their responses to colour.³³¹

³²⁵ D. B. Chaffin, J. J. Faraway, X. Zhang, and C. Woolley, 'Stature, age, and gender effects on reach motion postures', *Human Factors*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2000, p. 408–420

³²⁶ I. Knez and C. Kers, 'Effects of indoor lighting, gender, and age on mood and cognitive performance,' *Environment and Behavior*, vol. 32, no. 6, 2000, p. 817–831

³²⁷ M. Babolhavaeji, Vakilian and Slambolchi, 'Color Preferences Based on Gender as a New Approach in Marketing', *Advanced Social Humanities and Management*, vol.2, no.1, 2015, p.35

³²⁸ Babolhavaeji, Vakilian & Slambolchi, *Advanced Social Humanities and Management*, p.36

³²⁹ E. S. Ekici, C. Yener, & N. Camgz, 'Colour naming', *Optics & Laser Technology*, vol.38, no.4-6, 2006, p.466-485

³³⁰ Li-Chen Ou, M. Ronnier Luo, A. Woodcock and Angela Wright, 'A Study of Colour Emotion and Colour Preference Part I: Colour Emotions for Single Colours' *Color: Research and Application*, vol.29, no.3, p.232-240

³³¹ Banu Manav, 'Color-Emotion Associations and Color Preferences: A Case Study for Residences', *Color: research and application*, vol.32, no.2, 2007, p144-150

Colour is an optical and psychological factor everywhere. Colours affect our emotions at work and play. Emotional stability and efficiency depend to a great extent on the environment, of which colour is the most important element.³³² The meanings associated with colours vary from culture to culture; there are no universal meanings applied for any colour.³³³

Gender differences based on colour choice and perception is not the same across different culture. However, a close inspection shows that there is a specific character in each society. According to the findings of Radeloff, “women were more likely than men to have a favourite colour. In expressing the preferences for light versus dark colours, there was no significant difference between men and women; however, in expressing the preference for bright and soft colours, there was a difference, with women preferring soft colours and men preferring bright ones.”³³⁴

In pre-colonial Mizo society when it comes to the colour of clothes, the common people usually wore plain un-dyed clothes known as *puanngo* or *puanmawl*. Coloured *puan* were a luxury enjoyed only by well to do family.

4.5 DOMESTIC DIVISION OF LABOUR

Domestic division of labour refers to the responsibilities assigned to members of the family and the distribution of work among the same member. The work and responsibilities assigned between men and women are quite different in most of the societies of the world because of which concept such as gendered division of labour is so important in the study of social sciences.

According to Pilcher and Whelehan, “something is ‘gendered’ when its character is either masculine or feminine or when it exhibits patterns of difference by gender.”³³⁵ Domestic Division of Labour exactly does the same; it divides work to be either

³³² Babolhavaeji, p.37

³³³ Babolhavaeji, p.37

³³⁴ Bortoli & Maroto, p.5

³³⁵ Pilcher & Whelehan, *50 Key Concepts of Gender*, p.59

masculine or feminine. Domestic division of labour was also a common phenomenon in Mizo society. To quote Sangkima:

“From her childhood, the position of a female was quite different. As soon as she was capable of helping her mother, she helped her in carrying water, and other domestic work. After attaining puberty, she had to entertain *inleng* (suitors) till late at night. It was the duty of women to get ready before sunrise. It was her duty to fill up every bamboo container with water and husk rice by pounding. It was no surprise to learn that a husband sitting near the fire and seeing the pot boil over, could call in the wife to look after the cooking even while she was busy pounding rice outside.”³³⁶

N.E Perry also recorded that “...the household labours, whether in the field or at home are very fairly divided between men and women.”³³⁷

Unlike western society in which traditional domestic division of labour is that in which men have primary responsibility for the necessary financial provision of their family household by working and earning wages, in early Mizo society it was not so. The system of earning wages did not exist and most of the economic transaction was done in barter. However, men did have primary responsibility in hunting, making gunpowder for hunting, making baskets and working in *jhum* (though women also participated equally in *jhum*), also smelting iron was exclusively the occupation of men who were known as *thirdeng*. Women’s labour was associated with household chores and rearing children.

According to Pilcher and Whelehan, “to say something is ‘gendered’, is a way of describing it. ‘Gendered’, though, is also used as a verb and therefore gives expression to action, or the doing of gender. Something is gendered when it is actively engaged in social processes that produce and reproduce distinctions between women and men. ‘Gendering’ and ‘gendered’ are concepts which signify outcomes

³³⁶ Sangkima, *Mizo*, p.30

³³⁷ Perry, p.276

that are socially constructed and give males advantages over females.”³³⁸ It refers to the association of roles, behaviours, expressions and identities with a particular sex, male or female. The word gendered mainly indicates an action that had already taken place, in the past. When it comes to domestic division labour many examples describe the gendered character of labour.

Production of clothes and dyeing was also gendered in pre-colonial Mizo society. The works associated with producing colours were done only by women. Though, in early Mizo society, it was the men who extensively make use of coloured clothes to assert their dominance and to show their achievements by wearing coloured *puan* such as *thangchhuahpuan*, *tawlhlopuan*, *magpuan*, *puanchei*, *puandum* etc. However, the production of clothes and dyes relied solely on women. As N.E. Perry has recorded:

“All dyeing is done by women, and it is *ana*, or forbidden, for men to take any part in the operation, as it is believed that any man who touches dye or a cloth that is being dyed will be unable to shoot any game, and will be especially liable to suffer from consumption. The reason why participation in dyeing results in bad luck in the chase is rather complicated, Animals are terrified of blood, and consequently are very afraid of women because of their menstrual flow. The hands of a man who takes part in dyeing are stained with blue dye, and the smell of the dye also hangs about him. The souls of the wild animals scent this at once and when such a man approaches, they associate him in their minds with women, become very frightened, and refuse to allow him to approach them. Hence a man who helps his wife to dye cloth is always unlucky in the chase.”³³⁹

From the above excerpt, it is evident that labour was gendered in early Mizo society. While women were associated with the production of clothes and colours men were associated with hunting. For men hunting was highly valued in the society, men who

³³⁸ Pilcher and Whelehan, p.59

³³⁹ Perry, p.105

were good hunters were revered in the society which is evident from the status given to *thangchhuah* and *pasaltha*, fearing that they would not be able to hunt the game, men did not participate in dyeing clothes at all. However, with colonial influence and Mizo society moving towards modernity in the post-colonial period, such superstition seems to have faded with time and in contemporary society, there are a lot of instances where men had associations with colour.

Many painters who associate themselves with colours and paints for earning their livelihood became a common phenomenon especially, after the establishment of 'Mizoram Painters Association' on 13 August 1974.³⁴⁰ In contemporary times, men are associated with colours in terms of their occupations such as participating in the production of clothes in handloom industries and selling looms used for making *puan* and also selling paints and colours shops in the bazaar.

However, this does not mean that division of labour has ceased to be gendered in Mizo society. But when it comes to colours and dyes, unlike pre-colonial society where any kind of association in the production of dyes and colours was forbidden for men. In modern society gendering, the production of dyes and colours has reduced and fairly been accepted if not ceased.

4.6 CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN IN THE ART OF PRODUCING COLOURS AND DYES

The contribution of women in history many times goes unrecognised despite their important roles. Especially in tribal societies such as the Mizos, where patriarchy prevails, men are always pictured as the protagonist in historical writings especially in the pre-colonial Mizo society, from brave warriors such as *pasaltha* to valour rulers such as *lal*. Under the subtopic of social stratification, it is evident that most of the important position in society was held by male members whereas women remained in the background despite women working equally with men in *jhooms*.

³⁴⁰ Lianhmingthanga, p.89

The contribution of male members in society in works such as hunting and smelting iron which was usually “the only male occupation” in the pre-colonial times is highly recognised to such an extent that they even managed to get recognition and title in the society in the form of *pasaltha* or *thirdeng*. But women still could not manage to get reorganisation for their contribution to society.

Their contribution if recognised is usually limited to household chores such as carrying water, cooking, rearing children and working in *jhooms*, which is rather limited and understated.

Under the topic ‘domestic division of labour’, we already saw how women contributed to producing colours and dyes. But, in most historical writings their contribution does not receive credit. Since men never participated in producing dyes or anything related to it, it is clear that the art and knowledge of making colours for *puans* or producing dyes in pre-colonial Mizo society can solely be credited to the women. However, with the introduction of synthetic dyes and looms in the colonial and post-colonial period, men also started to get involved in the production of colours and hence, the contribution of women in the knowledge of producing colours in the pre-colonial period remained out of the limelight.



Fig: 4.1 Mizo women weaving puan³⁴¹

³⁴¹ Acc No.7255, Call No.001.0954, A526, Aizawl Theological College Archive, Durtlang

4.7 CONCLUSION

A pattern can be witnessed that forms in a society where colour clothes were usually not worn by commoners on regularly unless on festivals, special occasions and ceremonies. Colour symbolised a pattern of hierarchy in society, a tool of social stratification. The hues that Mizos were acquainted with had different symbolism, unlike today where they are seen as a hue only. In the history of Mizos, it can be witnessed that deeper meaning of colours where they were associated with nature.

The women of pre-colonial Mizo society made a huge contribution to the knowledge of producing colours. In the colonial and the post-colonial Mizo society men also got involved with colours.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Colours have always played an important role in the history of mankind. Consciously or unconsciously humans have interacted with colours from time immemorial. Colours were visible as the sky changes its colour with time and seasons, ranging from dark and black at night to deep blue, tangy and sometimes orange, pinkish and purple in the morning to bright light blue on a sunny day to white, grey, dark grey during cloudy days to different shades of blue, from purple to pink, orange and tangy as the sun sets in the horizon. Colours were visible in the flora and fauna, from different shades of green and brown to the verities of beautiful colours of the flowers and hides and skins of the animals and insects. Colours were visible in the hues of the earth, different kinds of soils and rocks possessing verities of colours.

This research has been an attempt to investigate and analyse Mizo society through the study of colours. The lack of research on colours in the discipline of history, particularly in Mizo history and the impact that colour has on society has prompted this research. The present work gathers a variety of the potential sources for the study of colours from Mizo society and adopts colour theories from other disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, sociology, theology, science and marketing to analyse the impact that colour had in shaping Mizo society at different stages of socio-cultural milieu.

The research comprises the study of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Mizo society and studies the historical context in which colour emerged in the pre-colonial Mizo society and the process in which colonialism had impacted the nomenclatures and symbolism that the Mizos associated with colours. It also examines the post-colonial Mizo society where colour symbolism and its associated connections with gender also witnessed radical changes.

The epistemology of colours in Mizo society has developed with experiences. Just as John Locke, asserts that knowledge comes from experiences. For people of Mizo society, the nomenclature of colours also developed with experience. This experience can be classified into pre-colonial experience, colonial experience, and post-colonial experience.

In pre-colonial times, Mizo society has had sustained and extensive or intimate experience with nature. They lived in close proximity to nature. Their livelihood depended on the environment. Food, shelter, and clothing were obtained from forests and agriculture, which depended on the mercy of nature in terms of the fertility of the soil and weather as their hillside cultivation called *slash and burn* depended solely on adequate precipitation.

In such a case, the knowledge of colour was driven by nature and the environment on which they were dependent. The nomenclature for colours such as *ngo/var* (white), *dum* (dark/black), *pawl* (blue), *hring* (green), *sen* (red), *eng* (yellow) and *uk* (brown/grey) developed with their experiences with nature and the environment they lived in. The colour lexicon of the Mizos was inspired by the lush green trees and forest around them, the deep blue sky and crimson dusk and dawn, the brown colour of soil and woods and the red blood and flowers.

Clothes are hard to preserve and their colour tends to fade away with time but they provide a vital source of information when it comes to colour. The process and technique of producing coloured *puan* by the Mizos reveal a lot about their nomenclature for colours. Black or dark blue was the first dye that was produced using *ting* (Indigo) and *in-ting* (sooth).

It is fascinating that the coloured *puan* that was produced using *ting* or *in-ting* was known as *dum* which translates as black. However, colonial ethnographer like Lewin describes the same *puan* to be blue but this does not mean that the Mizos could not differentiate between dark blue and black. For the Mizos the lexicon for *dum* is not just limited to black colour but it extends to the shades of dark blue in the colour spectrum. Other dyes that were produced naturally in pre-colonial times were red dye from *Keifang pil*, *thilpil* and *sentezel* and yellow from turmeric. Brown was also

produced naturally but there is no proper nomenclature for the word brown in the Mizo language. *Uk* or *buang* can be interchangeably used for describing brown. However, *uk* or *buang* is used more as a shade or a hue rather than a solid colour.

The use of linguistics semantics was resourceful to find other nomenclature for describing shades and hues such as *da* or *dang* which is used to describe light shade, pale or dull; *Duk* to describe dark shade; *paw* for milkey or dusty shade; *buang* to describe the shade of brown; *uk* for smokey, brownish and grayish shade and *ung* to describe dull, blackened, smokey shade. Therefore, *da*, *dang*, *duk*, *uk*, *paw*, and *ung* can be classified as shades or hues and do not fall under the primary colours known to the Mizos in pre-colonial times.

As the British arrived in the Lushai Hills (Mizoram), a lot of changes occurred in the Mizo society. The opening of markets by the British resulted in the transaction of goods, better relationships, and languages. Red, yellow and other coloured dyes were obtained from the bazaars. A term such as *Vai la* and *Vai puan* also shows that loom and clothers from other places were imported to the Lushai Hills (Mizoram) via bazaars during the colonial period as *Vai* denotes non-Mizo or foreigner and *la* denotes loom or thread and *puan* denotes cloth.

Before the arrival of the British, the Mizos were devoid of written language until Frederick William Savage and James Herbert Lorrain, the two British missionaries to the Lushai Hills (Mizoram) introduce of Hunterian system of orthography to them. This was an important event in history as it became a tool for the promotion of western education and missionizing. The nomenclature of colours also witnessed change among the Mizos as a result of colonialism and the influence of the English colonizers.

Dum which was previously used to refer to colours that fall under the shade from 'black to dark blue' in the colour spectrum was limited to referring to black colour as known by the English. For instance, in the pre-colonial period, black colour was referred to as *dum* and dark blue or indigo colour (as produced by indigo) was also referred to as *dum* but with the English (British) influence *dum* was limited to refer to black colour only.

Nomenclature of shades or hues such as *da*, *dang*, *duk*, *uk*, *ung*, *paw* and *buang* with the nomenclature of primary colours known to the Mizo in the pre-colonial period such as *ngo* or *var*, *dum*, *sen*, *pawl*, *hring* and *eng* were collated together to enunciate wider shades of colour. For instance, *dum* which was previously used to describe colours such as black, dark blue or indigo colour has been limited to referring to black colour only. Hue or shade such as *duk* (dark) was collated with *pawl* (blue) to refer to dark blue or indigo colour as '*pawl-duk*' (dark blue or indigo colour).

There is also no nomenclature for colours such as maroon/burgundy/crimson in the Mizo language. Therefore, *sen* (red) is collated with *duk* (dark) to refer to the maroon /burgundy/crimson colour as *sen-duk*. Pink was also termed *sen-dang* where *sen* is red and *dang* is light. Similarly, other nomenclatures for colours were added to the colour lexicon of the Mizos.

As the Mizos became literate their experience widened not only with their environment but with the other cultures of the world. Western education also added to their understanding of colours, they were introduced to a new range of colours such as orange, purple, mauve, maroon, pink etc. these colonial editions could find a place in the nomenclature of colours in the Mizo language. Also, the venture of young Mizo men to foreign countries widened their understanding of colours as they brought synthetic dyes.

Europe was the hub for the production of synthetic dyes during the early 20th century and this was a time when many young Mizo men enrolled in the British army and ventured into European countries during the First World War (1914-1918) and the Second World War (1939-1945). When they returned home they brought with them synthetic dye powders and soaps from Europe. Although there is no record of what colours of synthetic dyes were brought by the Mizo men serving in the army. It can be inferred that they would surely not bring colours that were produced locally such as black, blue, red, yellow or brown but rather colours that were not available in their home (the Lushai Hills). However, it is for sure that the introduction of synthetic dyes did affect the traditional and natural way of producing dyes which were rather

difficult, time-consuming, and did not even produce a wide range of colours as synthetic dyes do.

From time immemorial, art has always been a vital form of expression which is reflected in cave paintings. These paintings had become a source for the study of human interaction with colours from the earliest times. But for the Mizos paintings became popular only in the modern times. The only recorded painting is that of painting *fungki* (gun powder container made of horn) and painting faces with sooth during *khualam*. But during the colonial period as paints became available painters were employed to paint signboards. The Mizos witnessed a huge leap of advancement in the field of painting in the post-colonial period as associations and organizations along with the government worked together for the promotion of art and paintings. The achievements of Art societies and academies in Mizoram today are a token of the complex understanding of colours and a milestone in the epistemology of colours for the Mizos.

Symbolism is a useful tool for studying a society, its culture and history as it gives a patterns of a society. Colour symbolism also becomes a very handy tool to understand Mizo society as it is not just the study of colour or hue but it reveals the deeper concept and common ideas shared by the people.

Colour such as *ngo/var* (white), seems to come from *khaw-var*, the word in Mizo represents dawn as the literal meaning of *var* here denotes brightness or light that the dawn brings rather than the colour white and as to describe a fair skin tone the term used was *mi ngo*. *Ngo* here represents light rather than white. White for the Mizos symbolises brightness or light, it had significance in religion and sacrifices such as *kelkhal* and *arkharthiangdawh* require a goat having a white tail and a white cock; and the ritual being performed on *zupui ni* requires the use of a feather of white cock. As these rituals were performed to ward off ill luck and misfortune, white was symbolic of peace, spirituality and sacredness in the pre-colonial times. However, with the impact of colonialism and Christianity, white became symbolic of purity; virginity, joy or gladness, and its use in a celebration such as marriages became common.

In the Mizo language, the word *dum* represents dark shades rather than black just as a colour. For instance, *mi dum* means a person of dark skin tone, *dum* here represents dark shade rather than black as a colour. In pre-colonial Mizo society, the use of black cock in sacrifice such as the *fano daw* is related to magic, and spell and therefore black has a negative connotation. *Puandum*, *pawnrin*, and *zawlpuan* which have black as its main colour have a symbolic role in funerals. Therefore, it can be inferred that black was associated with death and mourning in the pre-colonial Mizo society. However, common people did not wear black or dark clothes in funeral. The trend of wearing dark colours or black at the funerals as a symbol of mourning and sadness is a post-colonial addition. Black also symbolized luxury, power and elitism as it was one of the main colours in the *puans* owned by the privileged people.

Mizo word for red colour (*sen*) seems to have come from the word *thisen* which is blood when broken into parts means the *thi* means to bleed or to die and *sen* means red. Red in the pre-colonial times symbolises bravery, war, valour and sportsmanship such as sincerity, fairness, strength, and persistency. It also symbolises power and elitism due to its presence in *puanchei*.

Colour such as *hring* (green) seems to originate from the environment too. The literal meaning of *hring* is life. For instance, *hnah hring* is a green coloured leaf or we can say a leaf that has life in it whereas *hnah ro* means dried or lifeless leaf. *Ro* here does not translate as colour. Similarly, *mihring* signifies a living human being and *mithi* is translated as a dead person. Therefore, green symbolizes life, health and growth for the Mizos.

The nomenclature for *eng* (yellow) colour seems to get inspiration from turmeric known as *aieng* from which the colour is obtained. Yellow had a negative connotation and it symbolised illness and though it was produced naturally and appeared in many *puan*, yellow is not very much favoured by the Mizos as its appearance itself is minimal.

Stratification is present in all types of society while the level of stratification can vary. It involves the unequal distribution of power, rights or status. In Mizo society, colour plays an important role in carrying out such stratification. The people

belonging to the upper strata of Mizo society enjoyed the privileged of wearing coloured *puan* while the people of the middle strata partially enjoyed the same. But for the people of lower strata wearing colour *puan* was a privileged which was hard for them to enjoy.

From the upper strata: the chief or *lal* and his family could wear *puanchei* and *cheulopang* and *cheunapanga* in the case of a Lekhar chief. Only the *thangchhuahpa* and his wife could wear *thangchhuah-puan* and *diarthial*. Since the requirement for becoming *thangchhuah* was not an easy task, not many people could achieve this status. Either they have to be very skilled in hunting or belong to a rich family to fulfill the prescribed amount of feast. The chief himself usually obtains the status of *thangchhuah*. Since, the *upas*, *ramhuals*, *puithiam*, *sadawt*, *zalens*, and *hautla* were usually prominent people or rich people of the village there is a high possibility of them having access to coloured *puans*. *Tawlhlopuan* was associated with bravery and was indicative of a dress meant for warriors or braves. Since *pasaltha* had such attributes of a warrior or *Tawlhlopuan* was only worn by such individuals.

From the middle strata, *hnamchawm* and *thangau* were associated with ordinary *puan* such as *puanmawl* and *puanngo*. But on special occasions like festive seasons they might have access to coloured *puan* like *puanrin*, *puantlangtial*, *puandum* etc. From the lower strata, the bawis who were the least in the social order were the last person to have access to coloured *puans*.

In pre-colonial Mizo society gender division of labour existed in the production of clothes and the process of dyeing. Though men wore coloured *puans* they were never involved in its production. The level of gender division of labour was to the extent that it was taboo for men to touch dyes. In the pre-colonial period, since men were not at all involved in the production of clothes and dyes, it can be inferred that the knowledge and art of producing colours from natural dyes can be attributed to women.

However, such division of labour eventually disappeared when young Mizo men who participated in the two World Wars were involved in the procurement of synthetic dyes from Europe. Mizo men thus, were steadily associated with dyes in

the colonial period and they also got involved in producing clothes and dyes in the post-colonial period.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Colours known to Mizos in the pre-colonial times were *dum*, *ngo or var*, *sen*, *hring*, *eng*, *pawl*, *uk*, and *buang*. Though, *buang* is used to refer to shades of brown sometimes. *Da*, *dang*, *duk*, *uk*, *ung*, *paw* and *buang* were used to describe shades of hues rather than colours. Therefore, according to the finding of this research, there were six primary colours known to the Mizos during the pre-colonial period which were: *dum*(black or dark blue), *ngo or var* (white), *sen* (red), *hring* (green), *eng* (yellow), and *pawl* (blue).

Most of the traditional *puan* consists of white, black/blue, red and yellow because these are the only colour, they could produce using natural dyes. Natural dyes were used until the intervention of the British.

Market transactions involving colours occurred. Colours such as red, yellow and other colours except of blue and white were imported to the Lushai Hills (Mizoram) via *bazaar* or markets established by the British during the colonial period.

Synthetic dyes were introduced by young Mizo men who who participated in the two World Wars. During the First World War and Second World War and ventured into Europe, which was the hub for the production of synthetic dyes in early the 20th century and they brought home synthetic dyes with them. The introduction of synthetic dyes also resulted in the decline of traditional and natural ways of dyeing which was rather complicated, difficult, and time-consuming compared to synthetic dyes.

Mizo society witnessed significant increase in the nomenclature of colour during and after the British colonial rule and its concomitant colonial modernity. As Western education was introduced, Mizos were acquainted with English words for colours

which also exponentially increased their awareness of varieties and derivatives of colours, while the introduction of dyes also played a crucial role in this effort.

The original *puanchei* did not have pink colour as pink was not produced with natural dyes and the *puan* was rather simple with colour at the center but there was no colour on the border of the *puan*. After the introduction of synthetic dyes, *puanchei* with a pink border was introduced first then followed by red hem as it is popularly known in modern times and it became a symbol of Mizo traditional dress for women.

White for the Mizos symbolises brightness or light, it had significance in religion and sacrifice, in terms of spirituality, goodness, sacredness, godliness, life, and general well-being. As a result of colonialism and the impact of Christianity, white became symbolic of purity; joy, or gladness and its use in a celebration such as marriages became common.

Black had both positive and negative connotations. Black was a symbol of evil, darkness, hidden, impure things, and forces, witchcraft and bad luck in terms of sacrifice. Black was also a symbol of death, mourning, sadness, remorse, and reverence for the dead. It also symbolised power, energy, elegance, luxury, elitism, strength and status.

Red had an image of blood, and the word itself has a close link with the word blood in Mizo. It symbolises bravery, war, persistence, and valour, sportsmanship such as sincerity, fairness, strength and persistency.

Green symbolises life for the Mizos, the word itself is interchangeably used for life and colour.

Yellow symbolised illness and though it was produced naturally and appeared in many *puan*, yellow is not very much favoured by the Mizos as its appearance itself is minimal.

In the pre-colonial Mizo society, colour acted as a tool for stratification as the production of colour was difficult and time consuming, only people belonging to

well to do families who are rich and can afford such leisure time to make coloured *puan*. Also *puans* such as *puanchei*, *cheulopang* and *cheunapang* were worn by the chief and his family only. *Puans* such as *thangchhuah-puan* and *diarthial* and *tawlhlopuan* were of high value and were a symbol of status, achievement, bravery because of which only those people who had achieved such status had access to such *puans*.

Tribal society is considered to not have division based on gender however, in pre-colonial Mizo society there was a certain level of division of labour based on gender. Only women were involved in the production of colours and dyes in the pre-colonial period. However, this changed with time. As synthetic dyes and foreign looms were introduced following colonial rule in the Lushai Hills (Mizoram), men also were involved in the production of colours and dyes. Since only women were involved in the production of colours and dyes in the pre-colonial period. The knowledge of dyeing and extracting colours from nature can be accredited to the pre-colonial Mizo women.

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ABSTRACT

**HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF MIZO SOCIETY THROUGH THE STUDY
OF COLOURS**

BY

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INTRODUCTION

History is an inquiry into the past. But the choice of inquiry can be influenced by various factors. These factors could be the kind of information that the historian wants to pursue, an ideology, or a trend that exists contemporary to the historian. Historical writing has always been an interdisciplinary pursuit. Therefore, various methodologies and historiography are adopted to write history throughout the writing of the past. Different epochs in history produce a different type of theme from the narrative style of writing on the great personalities to the history of the common people through a different lens of approaches but rarely the topic of colours or its theme in history writing is mentioned in historical writing through different time and phases.

The study of colour in other disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, natural science, sociology, art and marketing is quite prevalent whereas the study of colour in historical writing does not seem to be in the best interest of historians. The reasons for historians to avoid the writing on colours may be due to various reasons such as the problem of documentation, as information on colour is not the most celebrated topic for documentation; the problem of preservation, as it is very difficult to preserve colours as the coloured materials may get distorted with time and even if preserved it might not be the same as the original.

This dissertation titled, “Historical analysis of Mizo society through the study of colours”, studies the least enquired context in history, the study of colours and how colours played a vital role in shaping the identity of the Mizo society at different stages of a cultural phenomenon.

The study is located in Mizoram, one of the North-East states of India. Physiographically categorized into the Eastern Himalayas, the north-south longitudinal lofty ranges with a sub-tropical climate and dense jungle, for a long time did not entertain outsiders until the advent of the British in 1890.

Mizoram was known as Lushai Hills by the British. But the tribal people residing in these hills were not only Lushai but belonged to various sub-tribes and clans. However, the British commonly used the term Lushai for addressing all the sub-tribes as the term was derived from the dominant ones. This generalisation of tribes under Lushai was not accommodating enough and was not inclusive of various cognate groups; it did not represent the distinctiveness of various sub-tribes because of which there was a problem of oneness among the tribes. The Mizo Union was quick to realise this loophole. Therefore, politically the term Mizo was activated in 1945 for describing the tribes residing in the Lushai hills so that it is more inclusive. In the course of this dissertation, Lushai may be used interchangeably with Mizo for convenience.

The Mizo people are the ethnic groups native to the state of Mizoram. They also reside in Assam, Tripura, and Manipur; they also spread across the international borders of India in Myanmar and eastern Bangladesh. This term covers several ethnic people who speak various Mizo languages. The term Mizo is derived from the two words *Mi* and *Zo*. 'Mi' in Mizo means 'person' and the term Mizo is often used to name an overall ethnicity; it is an umbrella term to denote the various clans.

After the Indian Independence, the Lushai Hills were given the status of Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule by the Act of Parliament under the district of Assam in 1954. On 17th July 1971, Lushai Hills was given the status of Union Territory but soon the Mizo District was uplifted to the status of Union Territory with the name of Mizoram and it was only in 1987 that Mizoram became the 23rd state of India.

The earliest detailed records of the Mizos were written by the British ethnographers and administrators for the convenience of their administration. These records were mostly meant for official purposes and not really for the sake of ethnography or for the sake of recording the historical information of the people and the land.

Before the encounter of the Mizos with the British, there were no written records as the residents of Lushai hills had no indigenous written script of their own, historical

events and knowledge would be passed on to the next generation via oral traditions such as folktales, folklore, songs, and legends, etc. The home was the first institution for the deliverance of such information. *Zawlbuk* (bachelors' dormitory) among its various functions also acted as a vital institution where historical knowledge and information were passed on to the new generation. This was the case, until James Herbert Lorrain (Pu Buanga) and Rev. Frederick William Savage, the two Christian missionaries, reduced the language which had no script into writing.

The dependence on oral tradition and the absence of written language must have posed limitations in the expression of the Lushais and problems in the recording of history which is evident in the eagerness that the Lushais showed in learning new ways of expression when Lorrain and Savage could accomplish the task of reducing the language to writing. One should admit, for a historian writing on Mizo history, the introduction of the Hunterian system of orthography is truly a boon.

Indeed a new day had dawned not only for the Mizo society but for historians as well. After the 1920s many folk songs, folk tales, and folk traditions were written down. The Mizos that became literate could maintain a diary and some even wrote books, newsletters, and articles published in the local language. All these provided primary sources for historians which otherwise would have been difficult, as depending on orientalist and British ethnographers alone the sources of historical study could be subjected to western prejudice.

This research has been an attempt to investigate and analyse Mizo society through the study of colours. The lack of research on colours in the discipline of history, particularly in Mizo history and the impact that colour has on society has prompted this research. The present work gathers a variety of the potential sources for the study of colours from Mizo society and adopts colour theories from other disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, sociology, theology, science and marketing to analyse the impact that colour had in shaping Mizo society at different stages of socio-cultural milieu.

To write a comprehensive, holistic, and more inclusive history, the historical analysis of Mizo society had to be reinvigorated. The British records, available local writings/records, and oral traditions are employed. All these sources are complemented with the study of colours, to analyse Mizo society and to uncover social processes such as symbolism, social hierarchy, inequality, and gender roles in Mizo society.

The research comprises the study of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Mizo society and studies the historical context in which colour emerged in the pre-colonial Mizo society and the process in which colonialism had impacted the nomenclatures and symbolism that the Mizos associated with colours. It also examines the post-colonial Mizo society where colour symbolism and its associated connections with gender also witnessed radical changes.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The only reliable written sources to which we have access are the British monographs, official records, and ethnographic documentation, which at the earliest dates no further than the advent of the British on Mizoram. But what is the guarantee that these records are the best sources to represent the local community? These works were merely for official records to help the British for better administration. They observed Mizo society in detail, from physical structures to intangible customs and traditions. Having no understanding of the tribal society how accurate would the observations of these foreigners be from a western lens?

The historical understanding of Mizo society can be complemented by the study of colour in Mizo society as colours have always played an intrinsic role in society. However, the study of colour in history is a rare phenomenon and poses many challenges to the historian as the study of colour involves an interdisciplinary approach. It involves natural science, linguistics, psychology and sociology. There is also a problem with documentation and preservation as the materials from the past over time could be discoloured and may not be the same as they appear in the present

time. Another set of problem is that of epistemology. There is a high risk of anachronism in the study of colour. The colour as we know it today or its associated symbolism at present time should not be the basis for the judgment of the past knowledge.

This dissertation revisits the history of the Mizo society by studying their colour conception, the symbolism attached to them, and the cultural significance of colours. It investigates and analyses Mizo society based on colours. The lack of research on colours in the discipline of history, particularly in Mizo history and the impact that colour has on the society has prompted this research to gather all the potential sources for the study of colours from Mizo society and adopt colour theories from other disciplines such as linguistics, psychology, sociology, theology, science and marketing to analyse the impact that colour had in shaping Mizo society at different stage of cultural milieu.

The research comprised the study of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods and studied the historical context in which colour emerged in the pre-colonial Mizo society and the process in which colonialism had impacted the nomenclature and symbolism that the Mizos associated with colours.

AREA OF STUDY

This dissertation covers the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Mizo society.

OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the evolution of epistemology of colours in the Mizo society.
2. To study colour hierarchy and its associated symbolism in Mizo society.
3. To understand gender relations and colours in Mizo society.

METHODOLOGY

The study of colours in this research peruse the historical importance of colours in Mizo society and the evolution of colour as reflected in the history, material culture, folklore and literature of the Mizo. From the approach of social history, this dissertation uncovers the relationship between colours and social processes such as social hierarchy, inequality, and gender roles in Mizo society. An analytical approach to social history is used to study how colour is understood in the everyday life of the Mizo. As the study of colour deals with various factors such as the cultural, physical, chemical, ideological and psychological perspective of an individual or a society, a multidisciplinary approach is also included as required. This dissertation also studies the history of colours in the context of the Mizo perspective and its historical importance by examining the folk literature, ethnographic writings of the colonizers, and oral testimonies.

CHAPTERISATION

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives a brief introduction to the Mizo society during the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods. The relationship of the Mizos with their environment and their social structure in pre-colonial times is elucidated. The social and cultural changes that occurred in the Mizo society as a result of colonial intervention such as Christianity and education till the formation of Mizoram as a separate state is also described in brief. This chapter also inquires about the origin of the study of colour and the theories associated with it to provide the basis for a coherent understanding of colours in Mizo history.

CHAPTER 2: EPISTEMOLOGY OF COLOURS IN MIZO SOCIETY

This chapter approaches understanding the historical process of how the Mizo society enhanced their lexicon on colours. From the perspective of a historical epistemology of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Mizo society, the transition in the lexicon is studied in this chapter. The theoretical concept of epistemology which is vital in research methodology such as the objective, constructive and subjective epistemologies is discussed in detail. John Locke's facet of epistemology is employed in this chapter i.e. experience is the source and basis of knowledge.

This chapter inquires the primary colours that the Mizos were acquainted with and investigate the change in the epistemology of colour as a result of colonial intervention followed by the post-colonial period. Various sources such as clothes and dyes, linguistics, economic transactions in the form of markets, military information, visual materials such as paintings and photographs and art have been employed for the study of the epistemology of colours in Mizo society.

CHAPTER 3: COLOUR SYMBOLISMS

This chapter revisits the history of the Mizo society by studying the colour symbolism attached to them. Symbolism gives us a pattern of society and it can be a handy tool for the interpretation of society, culture, and the study of history. The study of colours with the knowledge of symbolic interpretation can help in the historical understanding of Mizo society which can be complemented by the study of colours, as colours have always played an intrinsic role in our understanding of not only the physical and tangible things around us but also carries the ability to play with emotional, psychological and cognitive capabilities. This chapter deals with the social phenomenon of colour, and the symbolism associated with various colours such as white, black, red, green and yellow in the pre-colonial period and studies the modification that occurred in colour symbolism as a result of colonial intervention.

CHAPTER 4: ROLE OF COLOUR IN SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND GENDER

Inequality is inherent in every society and stratification is a process of ranking statuses that are found in all societies. This inequality of status is a remarkable feature of social stratification. This chapter examines the role that colours played as a tool of social stratification among the various strata of the society and how various Mizo *puans* (cloth) influenced the way people were perceived in the Mizo society.

Tribal society is considered to not have division based on gender however; this chapter also investigates in detail the presence of gender division of labour in the process of colour production in pre-colonial Mizo society and how this changed as a result of colonial influence and the result of synthetic dye and foreign looms. The contribution of women in the art of producing colours is also discussed.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study which are as follows:

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The epistemology and nomenclature of colours in Mizo society have developed with experiences. In pre-colonial times, Mizo society had sustained an extensive or intimate experience with nature. They lived in close proximity to nature. Their livelihood depended on the environment. Food, shelter, and clothing were obtained from forests and agriculture, which depended on the mercy of nature in terms of the fertility of the soil and weather as their hillside cultivation called *slash and burn* depended solely on adequate precipitation.

In such a case, the knowledge of colour was driven by nature and the environment on which they were dependent. The colour lexicon of the Mizos was inspired by the lush green trees and forest around them, the deep blue sky and crimson dusk and dawn, the brown colour of soil and woods and the red blood and flowers.

According to the finding of this research, there were six primary colours known to the Mizos during the pre-colonial period which were: *dum*(black or dark blue), *ngo or var* (white), *sen* (red), *hring* (green), *eng* (yellow), and *pawl* (blue).

The use of linguistics semantics was resourceful to find other nomenclature for describing shades and hues such as *da* or *dang* which is used to describe light shade, pale or dull; *Duk* to describe dark shade; *paw* for milkey or dusty shade; *buang* to describe the shade of brown; *uk* for smokey, brownish and grayish shade and *ung* to describe dull, blackened, smokey shade. Therefore, *da*, *dang*, *duk*, *uk*, *paw*, and *ung* can be classified as shades or hues and do not fall under the primary colours known to the Mizos in pre-colonial times.

Clothes are hard to preserve and their colour tends to fade away with time but they provide a vital source of information when it comes to colour. The process and technique of producing coloured *puan* by the Mizos reveal a lot about their nomenclature for colours. Black or dark blue was the first dye that was produced using *ting* (Indigo) and *in-ting* (sooth).

It is fascinating that the coloured *puan* that was produced using *ting* or *in-ting* was known as *dum* which translates as black. However, colonial ethnographer like Lewin describes the same *puan* to be blue but this does not mean that the Mizos could not differentiate between dark blue and black. For the Mizos the lexicon for *dum* is not just limited to black colour but it extends to the shades of dark blue in the colour spectrum. Other dyes that were produced naturally in pre-colonial times were red dye from *Keifang pil*, *thilpil* and *sentezel* and yellow from turmeric. Brown was also produced naturally but there is no proper nomenclature for the word brown in the Mizo language. *Uk* or *buang* can be interchangeably used for describing brown. However, *uk* or *buang* is used more as a shade or a hue rather than a solid colour.

Market transactions involving colours occurred. Colours such as red, yellow and other colours except of blue and white were imported to the Lushai Hills (Mizoram) via *bazaar* or markets established by the British during the colonial period. Terms such as *Vai la* and *Vai puan* also show that loom and clothes from other places were imported to the Lushai Hills (Mizoram) via bazaars during the colonial period as *Vai* denotes non-Mizo or foreigner and *la* denotes loom or thread and *puan* denotes cloth.

Before the arrival of the British, the Mizos were devoid of written language until Frederick William Savage and James Herbert Lorrain, the two British missionaries to the Lushai Hills (Mizoram) introduce of Hunterian system of orthography to them. This was an important event in history as it became a tool for the promotion of western education and missionising. The nomenclature of colours also witnessed change among the Mizos as a result of colonialism and the influence of the English colonisers.

Dum which was previously used to refer to colours that fall under the shade from ‘black to dark blue’ in the colour spectrum was limited to referring to black colour as known by the English. For instance, in the pre-colonial period, black colour was referred to as *dum* and dark blue or indigo colour (as produced by indigo) was also referred to as *dum* but with the English (British) influence *dum* was limited to refer to black colour only.

Nomenclature of shades or hues such as *da*, *dang*, *duk*, *uk*, *ung*, *paw* and *buang* with the nomenclature of primary colours known to the Mizo in the pre-colonial period such as *ngo* or *var*, *dum*, *sen*, *pawl*, *hring* and *eng* were collated together to enunciate wider shades of colour. For instance, *dum* which was previously used to describe colours such as black, dark blue or indigo colour has been limited to referring to black colour only. Hue or shade such as *duk* (dark) was collated with *pawl* (blue) to refer to dark blue or indigo colour as ‘*pawl-duk*’ (dark blue or indigo colour).

There is also no nomenclature for colours such as maroon/burgundy/crimson in the Mizo language. Therefore, *sen* (red) is collated with *duk* (dark) to refer to the maroon /burgundy/crimson colour as *sen-duk*. Pink was also termed *sen-dang* where *sen* is

red and *dang* is light. Similarly, other nomenclatures for colours were added to the colour lexicon of the Mizos.

As the Mizos became literate their experience widened not only with their environment but with the other cultures of the world. Western education also added to their understanding of colours, they were introduced to a new range of colours such as orange, purple, mauve, maroon, pink etc. these colonial editions could find a place in the nomenclature of colours in the Mizo language. Also, the venture of young Mizo men to foreign countries widened their understanding of colours as they brought synthetic dyes.

Synthetic dyes were introduced by young Mizo men who participated in the two World Wars. During the First World War (1914-1918) and Second World War (1939-1945) the Mizos ventured into Europe, which was the hub for the production of synthetic dyes in early the 20th century and they brought home synthetic dyes with them. The introduction of synthetic dyes also resulted in the decline of traditional and natural ways of dyeing which was rather complicated, difficult, and time-consuming compared to synthetic dyes.

The original *puanchei* did not have pink colour as pink was not produced with natural dyes and the *puan* was rather simple with colour at the center but there was no colour on the border of the *puan*. After the introduction of synthetic dyes, *puanchei* with a pink border was introduced first then followed by red hem as it is popularly known in modern times and it became a symbol of Mizo traditional dress for women.

For the Mizos, paintings became popular only in the modern times. The only recorded painting is that of painting *fungki* (gun powder container made of horn) and painting faces with sooth during *khual lam*. But during the colonial period as paints became available painters were employed to paint signboards. The Mizos witnessed a huge leap of advancement in the field of painting in the post-colonial period as associations and organizations along with the government worked together for the promotion of art and paintings. The achievements of Art societies and academies in

Mizoram today are a token of the complex understanding of colours and a milestone in the epistemology of colours for the Mizos.

Colour symbolism is a useful tool for studying Mizo society as it is not just the study of colour or hue but it reveals the deeper concept and common ideas shared by the people. Colour such as *ngo/var* (white), seems to come from *khaw-var*, the word in Mizo represents dawn as the literal meaning of *var* here denotes brightness or light that the dawn brings rather than the colour white and as to describe a fair skin tone the term used was *mi ngo*. *Ngo* here represents light rather than white.

White for the Mizos symbolises brightness or light, it had significance in religion, and sacrifices such as *kelkhal* and *arkharthiangdawh* require a goat having a white tail and a white cock; and the ritual being performed on *zupui ni* requires the use of a feather of white cock. As these rituals were performed to ward off ill luck and misfortune, white was symbolic of peace, spirituality, and sacredness in pre-colonial times. However, with the impact of colonialism and Christianity, white became symbolic of purity; virginity, joy, or gladness, and its use in a celebration such as marriages became common.

In the Mizo language, the word *dum* represents dark shades rather than black just as a colour. For instance, *mi dum* means a person of dark skin tone, *dum* here represents dark shade rather than black as a colour. In pre-colonial Mizo society, the use of a black cock in sacrifice such as the *fano daw* is related to magic, and spell and therefore black has a negative connotation. *Puandum*, *pawnrin*, and *zawlpuan* which have black as their main colour have a symbolic role in funerals. Therefore, it can be inferred that black was associated with death and mourning in the pre-colonial Mizo society. However, common people did not wear black or dark clothes at funerals. The trend of wearing dark colours or black at the funerals as a symbol of mourning and sadness is a post-colonial addition. Black also symbolized luxury, power and elitism as it was one of the main colours in the *puans* owned by the privileged people.

Mizo word for red colour (*sen*) seems to have come from the word *thisen* which is blood when broken into parts means the *thi* means to bleed or to die and *sen* means

red. Red in the pre-colonial times symbolises bravery, war, valor and sportsmanship such as sincerity, fairness, strength, and persistency. It also symbolises power and elitism due to its presence in *puanchei*.

Colour such as *hring* (green) seems to originate from the environment too. The literal meaning of *hring* is life. For instance, *hnah hring* is a green coloured leaf or we can say a leaf that has life in it whereas *hnah ro* means dried or lifeless leaf. *Ro* here does not translate as colour. Similarly, *mihring* signifies a living human being and *mithi* is translated as a dead person. Therefore, green symbolizes life, health and growth for the Mizos.

The nomenclature for *eng* (yellow) colour seems to get inspiration from turmeric known as *aieng* from which the colour is obtained. Among the Mizos yellow had a negative connotation and it symbolised illness though it was produced naturally and appeared in many *puan*, yellow is not very much favoured by the Mizos as its appearance itself is minimal.

Stratification is present in all types of society while the level of stratification can vary. It involves the unequal distribution of power, rights or status. In Mizo society, colour plays an important role in carrying out such stratification. The people belonging to the upper strata of Mizo society enjoyed the privileged of wearing coloured *puan* while the people of the middle strata partially enjoyed the same. But for the people of lower strata wearing colour *puan* was a privileged which was hard for them to enjoy.

In the pre-colonial Mizo society, colour acted as a tool for stratification as the production of colour was difficult and time consuming, only people belonging to the upper strata of the society like the well to do families who are rich and can afford such leisure time to make coloured *puan*. Also *puans* such as *puanchei*, *cheulopang* and *cheunapang* were worn by the chief and his family only. *Puans* such as *thangchhuah-puan* and *diarthial* and *tawlhlopuan* were of high value and were a symbol of status, achievement, and bravery because of which only those people who had achieved such status had access to such *puans*.

From the middle strata, *hnamchawm* and *thangau* were associated with ordinary *puan* such as *puanmawl* and *puanngo*. But on special occasions like festive seasons they might have access to coloured *puan* like *puanrin*, *puantlangtial*, *puandum*, etc. From the lower strata, the bawis who were the least in the social order wear the last person to have access to coloured *puans*.

Tribal society is considered to not have division based on gender however, in pre-colonial Mizo society there was a certain level of division of labour based on gender. Only women were involved in the production of colours and dyes in the pre-colonial period. However, this changed with time. As synthetic dyes and foreign looms were introduced following colonial rule in the Lushai Hills (Mizoram), men also were involved in the production of colours and dyes. Since only women were involved in the production of colours and dyes in the pre-colonial period. The knowledge of dyeing and extracting colours from nature can be accredited to the pre-colonial Mizo women.