

ABSTRACT

HISTORY OF DEATH IN MIZORAM: COLONIAL TO
CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

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Introduction

There are many competing answers to the related questions: What is death? What does death mean? Two of the attributes that all humans share are the experiences of being born and the fact that everyone would eventually die. Even though we may use the same words to describe death, the actual meaning and conceptualization of death differ widely across cultures. The tendency for vast differences to occur in conceptions about issues or events that, on the surface, seem very obvious is a major reason why a cultural examination and analysis of every behavioral phenomenon should almost be mandated.

The most fundamental philosophical problem regarding death is how to define it. Death may refer either to the process of dying, the event of death, or the state of being dead. Rigorous philosophical work distinguishes in just what sense or senses the term is used. When philosophers speak of death, they are primarily denoting the event, the state, or both. For instance, the definition varies from anthropological perspective to clinical perspective to humanist perspectives like that of essentialism, existentialism, and culturalism, there is enormous variation in the ways in which philosophers and others view death and mortality. Therefore, we can have a better and a more vivid definition of death only by investigating into the dying process in a given society as each culture and society have a different meaning on death and dying. Thus, death cannot be completely defined in isolation without the dying process, practices, traditions and rituals and beliefs in a given society or culture.

Death foregrounds the most important social and cultural values that the human species live their lives by, including those values that human acknowledge and express, but also those that are neither ordinarily recognized nor explicit. Regardless of the ways in which death is managed, marked and memorialized across cultures, fundamental values are revealed through death and its remembrance. Spaces for the dead and dying are a reflection of the changing conditions of the living, as well as shifting meanings and discourses about life, for these spaces have cultural

and symbolic meaning invested by the living, representing microcosms of the society within which they are established. Understanding death and dying, and particularly their related practices, rituals and spaces, thus offers insights into life and the living.

The study of death and dying in the past, and the search for the reason behind changes in attitudes and practices, provides an ideal vehicle to investigate belief system, cultural values, and differences, trends in mortality, the influence of demographic patterns and the now conventional triad of race, gender and social class. An investigation of the reciprocal relationship between death and culture of the past helps us to introspecting, and evaluating the contemporary culture and society. The thesis is an attempt to answer the underlying question of what death & dying meant to the 'Mizos' throughout their history. To explore the meaning of death in the past and the present, the thesis addressed the Mizo death ways from pre-colonial tradition as a background and gazed through the colonial period till the contemporary period.

Review of Literature

From its inception as an academic discipline, works concerning the history of death were generally engage with the idea of modernity and use death to show how in the modern era, culture has changed or stay the same. The cultural history of death originated in France, where historians of *Annales* school adopted death as a core subject as a history of mentalities, because of its capacity to express unconscious beliefs. Pierre Chaunu, Francois Lebrun, along with Michelle Vovelle founded a 'new history of death' in the early 1970s. '*Historie Quantitative Historie Serielle*' by Pierre Chaunu, contains a sample of twenty two out of more than 130 articles published by Chaunu between 1960 and 1977. These essays, many historiographical, treat subject as diverse as attitudes towards death in Paris during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the role of Brazil in special economic systems of the early modern period, the current crisis in western civilization and the status of historical geography, historical demography, economic history and quantitative historical research.

Michelle Vovelle's substantive works include '*Baroque Piety and Dechristianization: Attitudes to Death in Eighteenth-Century Provence*', '*Religion and Revolution: The Dechristianization of the Year II in the South-East*', and '*Death in the West from 1300 to the Present*' (1982). Vovelle's work described a process of dechristianization whereby sacred beliefs gave way to secular attitudes to death, which he attributed to a Marxist definition of the rise of class consciousness. A markedly different approach was adopted by Philippe Ariès, first in a collection of essays of 1974 and later in a lengthy survey translated into English as '*The Hour of Our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes Towards Death Over The Last One Thousand Years*'. As an autodidact, Ariès was unencumbered by the chronological and geographical limitations adopted by professional historians, and addressed the history of death in the Western world over two millennia. He divided this period into four successive stages on the basis of dominant attitudes to death. For Ariès, the 'tamed death' of the Middle Ages gave way in the early modern period to an increased fear of dying or to a consciousness of 'the death of the self'. In turn, the nineteenth century was the golden age of mourning or of the 'death of the other'. In contrast, the twentieth century is taken to be a period of 'death denied' in which death went from being an intimate experience within the bosom of the family to a secular and medical event. The two French pioneers of the field, the conservative Ariès and the Marxist Vovelle, engaged in a lengthy *Historikerstreit* in which Ariès defended the 'denial of death' thesis, while Vovelle argued for a more complex relationship between death and modernity. Crucially, although Vovelle viewed secularization in a positive light, and Ariès saw it as a disastrous loss of tradition, they agreed on the modern decline of religion. Their lasting legacy, however, lies in the broad nature of their approaches, rather than in the content of their theories. Confronted with the impossibility of looking directly at the experience of dying, both took the history of death to mean the history of attitudes to death. They adopted micro-functions rather than large historical events as their main areas of enquiry, and tackled wide chronological spans and geographical areas – parameters which were to shape much of the subsequent literature.

The two pioneers, neither Ariès nor Vovelle devoted much attention to war, on the basis that the normal conditions of peacetime were more useful in showing long-term change. Although Ariès adopted Gorer's view of the First World War as the beginning of the era of 'death denied', he did not develop that idea in a way that might have contributed to a greater understanding of the relationship between war and death. He was influenced by a seminal essay of by the British anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer entitled *'The pornography of death'*, which drew on Sigmund Freud's theory of repression to argue that the trauma of the Great War led to a denial of death. Hence, in Gorer's view, death replaced sex as the ultimate taboo. Another key influence on Ariès was Michel Foucault's *'The Birth of the Clinic'*, which linked the removal of the dead from the spaces of the living to the scientific mindset of the Enlightenment.

The cultural history of the First World War has boomed since the publication of Paul Fussell's *'The Great War and Modern Memory'*, which characterized the war as the beginning of modern consciousness. The field has engendered a wealth of writing on death, grief, and commemoration in Britain and other European countries, much of it written in English. This Anglophone literature has followed a different course from that adopted in French histories of death, which has had equal, if not greater, impact on the literature in English. David Cannadine published an influential essay *'War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain'*, which sought to disprove the simplistic narrative of progression. Far from disappearing during the First World War, the significance of death, Cannadine argues, was magnified by mass slaughter. As Sigmund Freud observed, wartime losses meant that death could no longer be denied, nor could repressive attitudes be sustained. Modernization brought longer life expectancy, but also mechanized warfare, which interrupted the gradual decline of death rates since the eighteenth century. Thus, Cannadine exposes the paradox of death in the modern period; that is, in peacetime the dead faded from view, but in wartime they dominated the public imagination. In fact, given these opposing trends, the histories of death tend to run along two parallel lines that focus on times of war or peace.

Thus, the two historiographical currents with its origins in the mid 1970s shaped the cultural history of death as it exists today. The French histories of mentalities explored peaceful time attitudes to death across the *longue duree* (long duration) while the English literature on history of death looked at the impact of death during the First World War in terms of continuity and change. Over the last forty years, the field has expanded from the history of mentalities to encompass religious, urban, emotional, military, and medical history, among other areas. Whereas the French tradition was influential in terms of approach, scholars working in English-language on the First World War anticipated key questions in recent literature around individual beliefs, the impact of modernization, and the treatment of death as an independent cultural phenomenon.

Carl Watkins's *The Undiscovered Country* (2014) examines death in the British Isles from the Middle Ages to the Great War. In nutshell, Watkins investigates personal perceptions of death in order to challenge a narrative of secularization. He explores a past, stretching from the advent of Christianity until perhaps the late Victorian era, in which the people living in the British Isle shared a vision of their own end. While Watkins accepts a modern narrative of de-Christianization, he argues that supernatural beliefs and the fear of oblivion endured. Death is described as a point of contact between the ancient and modern worlds' because remains of older visions are still there in the way people speak and structure their thoughts about the dead. His book exemplifies current historiographical tendencies to downplay secularization and to highlight continuities between pre-modern and modern history.

Published shortly after Watkins's book, Thomas Laqueur's *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (2015) presents a comparable challenge to the idea of secularization. The parallel evolution of these two analogous, but independent, studies is indicative of wider trends in the history of death. In *The work of the dead*, Laqueur explores the culture of death in Western Europe and North America across a *longue durée* that stretches back to antiquity. Within this broad framework, he focuses on England in the period between 1680 and 2000. The work

of the dead represents the culmination of a long career dedicated to the cultural history of issues relating to the body, medicine, and sex. It amalgamates the author's previous contributions on death, which addressed modernity, capitalism, and war. He traces a thread through the evolution of mortuary practices in relation to churchyards, cemeteries, cremation, the First World War, and the Holocaust. Like Watkins, Laqueur draws on recent studies to show how the idea of the sacred survived into the modern era and how the dead were granted renewed powers through the reinvention of enchantment.

Claudio Lomnitz *'Dead and the Idea of Mexico'* (2005), is an important work which diverges the study of death from European and North America to suit other geographical areas. It represents a study of political and cultural history of death from the sixteenth century to the twenty first centuries. Lomnitz by highlighting the centrality of death in Mexican culture, he refutes the theory of modern denial of death. Finding the sources of the 'mentalities school' to be inadequate, he overcomes distinctions between popular and elite culture, while covering a variety of media in the form of novels, lithographs, television series, radio programmes, funeral sermons, and comic books. Lomnitz's work has depicted that European narratives are an inadequate framework for non-European context.

Another category with a narrower timeframe developed; among them is Julie-Marie Strange's *'Death, grief and poverty in Britain', 1870-1914*(2005) stands out as a conscious effort to overcome biases in the earlier literature. It is the first book to address working-class rituals as an alternative language of loss that ran counter to elite traditions. Thus, as with Lomnitz, Strange looks to a popular culture of death. To some extent, she also draws on David Cannadine's argument that the simplification of funerary customs after the First World War did not mean that the dead disappeared from the thoughts of the living. Strange goes further in that she questions the identification of the Great War as the end of Victorian funerary culture, arguing that the war had less impact on working-class customs than on the ostentatious rituals of the elite. Strange also seeks to improve on earlier studies by relating cultural changes to wider social, economic, and political processes. By using

death as a window onto class, she sets funerary rites against a socio-economic backdrop of rising living standards, improved access to medical provision, and shifting views on poverty. She then balances that socio-economic narrative with an awareness of cultural continuities. Strange also seeks to improve on earlier studies by relating cultural changes to wider social, economic, and political processes. Her work demonstrates three innovations in recent literature, in that it combines elements of cultural and social history, abandons canonical periodization in favour of historical continuities, and addresses individual experiences and neglected social groups.

Another ground breaking study in Drew Gilpin Faust's *'This republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War'* (2008) The work addresses the political functions of commemoration. The war transformed relationships between citizens and the state, as federal bureaucracy expanded to provide national cemeteries, records of the dead, and pensions for their families. Thus, 'the nation's value and importance were both derived from and proved by the human price paid for its survival'. As a leading expert in Civil War history, Faust argues that the war created the modern American Union, not only by guaranteeing its survival, but also by forging an imagined national community centered on death.

On a civic rather than a national scale, Monica Black's *'Death in Berlin'* (2010) addresses the relationship between a city and its dead, by examining rituals, practices, and perceptions surrounding death from the establishment of the Weimar Republic in 1919 to Germany's division in 1961. Essentially, the purpose of this book is to demonstrate how death can illuminate the continual process of cultural change in Berlin over successive waves of historical transformation.

In sum, historical analysis on the subject of death and its narratives was originated in the 1970s, established by a core group of the French and the English speaking intellectuals. The pioneering works of these intellectuals focusing on *longue duree*, linear narrative of modernization, which relied on the theory of secularization, and the idea of a modern denial of death. The French, mainly the Annales School focused on dying in peacetime while the English speaking historians

focused on the impact of First World War on perception and practices of death. Although the focused of the English historians differed from the French historians, the French model was very influential among the English speaking historians. Recent publication and studies on the subject provides evidence of a resurgence of history of death by incorporating innovative technique and methods in historical enquiry into the subject. Recent literature rejects the pioneer's view of discontinuity, and seeks to establish continuity in the face of modernity. It incorporates innovative analytical techniques by a broader view into historical enquiry where an attempt has been made to study death as an integral part of political, social and economic structures and exploring the roles of funerary rituals in shaping nations and communities. Recent literature widens the social spectrum beyond a concern with elites and focused on the lives of the ordinary people. The pioneering works of the French and the English Historians of death could be described as characteristically a European concern. While recent literature widened geographical arena beyond Europe that bring about histories that counter Eurocentric narratives. Thus, we can come to the conclusion that the development of literature in the history of death validate the fact that historians and their literary approach to the study of death brings new response to the established historical paradigms.

In addition to the literature from social history, death related behavior is of crucial importance to many of the theoretical developments in anthropology since its beginning. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Taylor and Frazer known as the 'intellectualist' focused attention on beliefs about death and the afterlife and asserted that early humans' contemplation of death was the origin of religion. In opposition to Taylor and Frazer, The French Sociology School under Durkheim and his students produced a remarkable series of essays on the sociology of religion, which took up the topic of sacrifice, symbolic classification, magic, sin and expiation and body symbolism. They reformulated Durkheim's work in these essays, *'A contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death'* 1907 which was translated in English and compiled along with other Robert Hertz's work published in 1960 entitled *'Death and The Right Hand'*, this work provide primary point of reference for analysis of death rituals. In 1909 another Parisian scholar, Arnold Van

Genep published *'The Rites of Passage'* which dealt with funerals as one of a large class of rituals. This work also appeared in English translation in 1960.

Two important works of the British Functionalist school are Bronislaw Malinowski *'Magic Science and Religion and Other Essays'* (1948) which viewed that the most significant function of religion is to ease the anxiety accompanying the numerous crises of a life span, particularly the issue of death, and A.R Radcliffe Brown *'The Andaman Islander'* (1922) the fear of black magic or of spirits, fear of God, of the devil, of Hell give men fears and anxieties, from which they would otherwise be free certain rites are employed.

There has been continual interest in the anthropological study of death, marked by the series of books and collections of studies published. Among these works, Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry *'Death and the regeneration of Life'* (1982) have made important contributions to the study of death, especially on the way death rites often include processes of regeneration or the reaffirmation of life and the ongoing nature of society after a death. Here the very idea of fertility complements or even opposes mortality within the framework of cultural vitality. Bloch's own ethnographic work on death in Madagascar (1971) and Parry's on traditional Indian cremation (1994) have fostered anthropological analyses of death to a great degree in terms of the extensive dynamics of power, kinship, history, and environment, including the very late-twentieth-century innovation of what has, variously, been described as natural, woodland, green, or ecological burial.

Hungtington and Metcalf *'Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual'* (1979) is another work from contemporary anthropologists notable for their use of Hertz and for their own descriptive and analytical studies of some later twentieth-century funerary rites in the United States, especially in terms of the preparation and viewing of the corpse and general accounts of burial and cremation. This work relies extensively on the authors' field experience, discusses the most important questions of death culture research such as emotional reaction to death;

symbolic associations of death, etc. by presenting both the corresponding established theories and their critiques.

In the context of the Mizos, most of the early information of the tribe was the records of the colonial administrators, the Christian missionaries and monographs written by the colonizer. Thus, the subject of death was not an important area and lack professionalism, since references were made to these death practices in the course of their endeavor to record and study the tribe they had conquered.

Among the colonial ethnography, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* written by Lt. Colonel J. Shakespeare deals with the domestic life, laws, customs and religion, folklore and language of the Lushai and the non- Lushai clans. This book provided us a glimpse of Mizo culture and practices in the pre-colonial times; in chapter four the author had elaborated in brief the funeral ceremonies and the disposal of dead. *Lushai Customs: A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* by N.E Perry focusing on the customs and ceremonies of the Lushai, in chapter four titled 'Funeral Ceremony' he gave a thorough description of the *Lushai* funeral ceremonies and some methods of disposal of the dead. *Five Years in Unknown Jungles* by Reginald A. Lorrain discussed in detail the religious beliefs of the Lakhers, their ideas on death, religious and secular ceremonies and sacrifices. In a separate chapter entitled From 'Cradle to Grave' he clearly highlighted the funeral tradition of the Lakhers, their conception of death and burial practices. This book is part a broad elaboration of the culture of the Lakhers where all the cultural traditions were closely linked and almost the same with other Mizo clans especially the Lusei. J.M Llyod *History of the Church in Mizoram: Harvest in the Hills* narrate the historical transformation of the tribe under the civilizing mission of the administrators and the Christian missionaries, a small portion of the narrative was spared in a paragraph where some of the death attitudes and customs and the changes brought about by modernity and Christianity. *Wild Races of The Eastern Frontier of India* written by T.H Lewin highlighted the customs of the hill tribes. Part II discussed the religion, festivals, dresses, social habits etc. along with funeral ceremonies of the *Khyoungtha* and the *Chukmas*. In part he describe the customs of the *Kookies* or *Lusei* and the *Shendus*,

here we find a brief description of Funeral ceremonies among the *Kookies*, *Lushei* and *Shendus*. This book clearly highlighted the close connection between the tribe in the North East Frontier in Culture and society.

Another literature on the subject of death comes from the early native writers and local historians; the literature generally documented a simple record on the pre-colonial practices and beliefs surrounding death. Rev. Liangkhaia in his book *Mizo Awmdan Hlui & Mizo Mi Leh Thil Hmingthangte Leh Mizo Sakhua* briefly describes Mizo death ritual, grave and burial system, he also emphasized the practice of 'Thlaichhiah' ceremony. Apart from this he had a clear description of the 'Kuangur' tradition and ceremony practiced by chiefs and high social standings. Other chapters plainly elaborated the Mizo religion, sacrifices, and taboos & inter war between clans which gives us a glimpse of Mizo culture and society in the pre-colonial period. *Mizo Pi Pute Leh An Thlahte Chanchin* by K.Zawla is one of the finest works on Mizo history, which describe different Mizo tradition, customs, and ceremonies. In a separate chapter we find the elaboration of the Mizo concept of God, evil spirit, death and soul. Next to this chapter the author highlighted the different kinds of grave and its uses, he also describe in length the ceremony and methods of disposing a deceased enemy killed in war. Apart from this, his works contains a brief description of Mizo religion and its attributed sacrifices where we can have a glimpse of Mizo conception of death and its connection with funerary tradition.

Thus, literature concerning the subject of death in the context of the Mizos is scanty and no systematic study has achieved. The literature can be generally divided into the colonial administrator's and missionary's records on the customs of the tribe and the early local chronicler's account on the history of the tribe. The colonial ethnography and missionary records often narrate beliefs and practices concerning death as 'primitive', 'savage', 'animistic' and contrasted against the discourse made by them with the western notion as being superior in order to construct an established paradigm. In some cases the practices and beliefs documented by colonial ethnography and the local historians do not always concur, since the discourse and narration made by the colonizer had an enormous impact on the early local historians. Thus, there were no systematic study on the subject of death and the two

trends of documenting history were the only reflection of the subject till the contemporary period.

Recently an important breakthrough in the subject of death has been achieved with the publication of *Being Mizo* in 2014, by Joy Pachuau and a doctoral thesis '*Khawhar Zai: Voices of Hope in the Bereavement Singing of Mizo Christians in North East India*' in 2016 by Joanna Heath. Joy Pachuau, examines issues of ethnicity and identity with specific reference to the Mizos. In seeking to understand the emergence of Mizo identity, the book makes a general contribution to how identities are formed and constructed. In one of her chapter 'Death and locality in the creation of Mizo Identity', the community's engagements with Christianity, which is "localised", and its practices surrounding death are seen as prime organizers. "Praxis", especially in the context of Christianity and death, are thus seen not only as chief organizers of Mizo identity, but also as the boundary markers around which notions of belonging and exclusion are invoked. Joanna Heath from her musicological stance analyzed the Mizo traditional singing which has been developed in the 1920s during the Colonial period which become the most performative community death ritual sung at the deceased house. The thesis studied the *khawhar zai* repertoire and its significance for grieving communities both at the time of its composition and in the modern Mizo context. It explored anthropological approaches to hope in the light of eschatology and evangelicalism. Expression of hope through *khawhar zai* funeral singing has been the crux of the thesis.

Statement of the Problem

The meaning and attitudes towards death and the act of dying differed from culture to culture and region to region and from time to time. The basic research problem is to determine what types of social system and what kinds of dynamics engender the thought system in a particular society. Classic historical works on the subject and majority of the academic literature on death based their studies on the western culture. Recent literature focuses different historical trend on how death and dying has been localized or culturally structured and transformed by the forces of modernity, colonialism, medicalisation, urbanization and global capitalism in the

non-western cultures and societies, like the Latin America, Africa, Asia etc, Though classic historical works on death based their studies on European society and derived many theories and established paradigms, the difference in culture is an area which needs to be carefully dealt with while looking at the transformation and changes in the death ethos of the Mizos.

The subject death is pertinent to academics in the fields of anthropology, art, classics, history, literature, medicine, music, socio-legal studies, social policy, sociology, philosophy, psychology and religious studies etc. Studies of mortality remain a small but significant trend in early modern scholarship on death, and the sub-discipline has evolved in recent years to take account of developments in gender history, the history of medicine, and broader interdisciplinary approaches. It is also particularly relevant to those professionally or voluntarily engaged in the health and caring professions, in bereavement counseling, and the funeral industries. Therefore, literature of many disciplinary sub-fields increased. As the subject of death is multidisciplinary and requires a variety of specialty interest, the literature in this sub-discipline developed and proliferated in near exponential fashion. Therefore, the study of death in the field of social and cultural history also requires extensive lists of literature from the different constituent specialty areas. The collection of research and theoretical information available has become almost intellectually unmanageable and make it complicate the approach to which direction research has to be carried out. What is needed at this time is an attempt to aggregate, integrate, classify, organize, and to mark out and articulate the details of the information needed for the specific research context contained in the expansive body of literature. Research in the subject perhaps, can best be accomplished in the form of a concise but comprehensive integration of the current state of knowledge by employing a careful implementation of relevant historical research methodology.

In the context of the Mizos, groundwork for academic and professional studies in the field has not yet been established. Most of the information about the Mizos comes from the official correspondences of colonial administrators and

missionaries, monographs written by them, and also their private letters. The subject of death for most of these writers was not a very important subject of investigation. Only scattered information about death practices were highlighted as part of an attempt to document the tribes they administered. Other sources of information for the Mizo notion of death comes from early Mizo writers, the colonial attempt and the indigenous writings do not always concur, as a result of unattested works and lack of professionalism in the field, only a broad understanding of them can be attempted. Existing literature on the tribes lacked specialization in the field and no formal academic writings about the subject are found.

With regards to the quest for the social and cultural history of death among the Mizos, there seems to be no adequate research to date. Therefore, this research comprehends the scattered information, analyzed, and reinterpreted existing materials, archival sources supplemented by oral sources with a new dimension.

Objectives of the Study

1. To introduce the concept and meaning of death and dying and the function of its surrounding rituals in pre-the colonial period.
2. To examine the characteristic of changes and continuity surrounding death; pattern and trends in mortality, and causes of death in the Colonial Period.
3. To re-examine the nature of death and the act of dying during the *Rambuai* period.
4. To study the changes in epidemiological transition, changes in the attitude towards death and dying; and its surrounding ritual practices in the contemporary period.

Area of the Study

The study focused on the social and cultural history of death and dying in Mizoram since Colonial-Period.

Methodology

The present work basically followed the new social historical method by making effort to make sense of the past through researching and organizing whatever historical traces have been left behind. The traces range from different materials from printed sources to visual images to archaeological sites or historical sites. The most widely consulted materials are primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources helped in organizing facts and interpretations. The approach is to move beyond simple narrative to critical evaluation of the historical event using both primary and secondary sources.

Due to insufficient sources the research work requires an extensive hunt for historical sources. There is no systematic study of the subject in the context of the Mizos, only a little or scanty of historical sources. The work is designed to construct a long historical narrative by making use of relevant historical sources and information; collection of historical information, examining relevant references of the available historical information. This was followed by examining and highlighting the process that lead to historical transition and carrying out an analysis on the available sources.

The study is primarily based on qualitative analysis, and in some cases quantifiable government's data are interpreted statistically. Unstructured interviews, fieldwork and photographs are employed to enrich and supplement qualitative analysis. As far as archival sources in the form of colonial account are concerned, colonial government in the then *Lushai* Hills did not give much attention on the subject of death and its related activities. They did not much interfere in the customs and practices regarding death. Therefore, only a small portion of colonial accounts in the form of documents of administrative reports, letters, diaries, correspondences and accounts of the British administrators, from the State Archives of Mizoram can be employed. Fortunately, scattered reports on vital statistics prepared by the Assam government in the form of Annual Sanitary Report and Administrative Reports of Assam, during the colonial period have been utilized to give a detail record on vital statistics during the colonial period. *Laisuih & Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu* the monthly

magazine published by the Colonial government despite its biases, recorded relevant historical account. It became quite useful in reconstructing the narration on attitude towards people's perception of death, as well as the condition of health, diseases of the masses during the period under study. Through Missionaries reports, like the Welsh Presbyterian Mission and London Baptist Mission Society, diaries of the pioneer missionaries and Christian magazine like *Kristian Tlangau*, the impact of the Christian mission towards the changing perception and practices surrounding death can be observed and analyzed. The ethnographic records of the British administrators and missionaries along with the early Church records and journals are also quite enriching.

Ethnography including phenomenological study has been employed by using interviews, mainly unstructured interviews by drawing out their experiences (lived experiences) through the descriptions provided by witnessed or the people involved. Apart from this, the researcher's own observation as being a member of the culture in which the study is conducted is also made use of in order to maintain historical accuracy and perhaps contribute alternative historical sources. Thus, some chapters also make use of ethnographic approach where the current culture or society is examined by using interviews of knowledgeable person about the culture and society. Secondary sources in the form of books, journals, articles, essays, unpublished seminar papers, daily newspapers and internet sources etc provide an analytical lens and give conceptual framework to which the sources are analyzed and interpreted.

Structure of the Study

The thesis is divided into the following chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first Chapter is a general introduction for the thesis and it is divided into different sections or parts. The first part presents the general profile and historical background of the 'Mizos' and Mizoram. The second part deals with the meaning of

death, scope and approach to the study of death in history. The third part deals with the anthropology of death and the fourth part consists of literature review, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, area of the study, methodology and structure of the study.

Chapter 2: Pre-Colonial Mizo Deathways

This chapter presents an introductory or it provides a backdrop for the main chapters. It highlighted the Mizo traditional belief system, the concept of death and the afterlife. Traditional belief system, burials, and ritual practices surrounding death have been analyzed in this chapter.

Chapter 3: Death and Dying in the Colonial Period

Chapter 3 explores the impact of Colonialism and Christianity in the transformation of Mizo attitude towards death, dying and rituals surrounding death in the Colonial Period. It also explores the trend in mortality, epidemiological transition and causes of death in the colonial period.

Chapter 4: Death and Dying During the *Rambuai* (Troubled Years)

This Chapter analyzed the twenty years of *rambuai* (troubled years) from the perspective of death and dying, which brings out new dimension of looking at the history of *rambuai*. It explores how death was employed to legitimize the nationalist agenda of revolutionary nationalism. It highlighted the political lives of the dead body, re-burial and the construction of martyr cemetery and discourse on martyrdom and it brings light on how all these narratives overshadowed the magnitude of civilian's death during the *rambuai* years.

Chapter 5: Death and Dying in Contemporary Times.

The Chapter addressed the number of changes how people come to think about death, dying and its surrounding rituals with the changes in health infrastructure, medical progress, a shift in the type of diseases and the condition that have caused death, improved mortality rate and life expectancy, changes in political,

socio-economy, new communicative technology, urbanization and changing lifestyle and cultural conditions in a globalized world. It addressed a gradual shift of emphasis in cultural and religious tradition towards medical science and modernity that has been undergoing gradual changes in contemporary Mizo society.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The Final Chapter of the thesis presents the major findings of the thesis.

Findings of the Research Work

An analysis of traditional Mizo belief system suggested that the body soul duality concept vastly directed their worldviews. The Mizos seek for answers beyond any dimensions, even transcending their mundane realm of existence to the sphere outside of their sense perception. To the Mizos, their daily life was central for which they endeavored to negotiate any force that was able to suspend the tranquility of their existence. In order to cope and heal the disruption caused by death, society has a complex set of rituals where the dead and the living were reorganized using certain set of rituals.

The traditional Mizo belief system viewed from the perspective of ritual performance at death functioned to reaffirm societal bonds and the social structure itself. From an analysis of the traditional Mizo death rituals, it can be ascertained that rituals functioned as a means to promote the solidarity of the families, clans and member of the village.

Sakhua, the core in the Mizo belief system and its instantaneous connection with death and the afterlife clearly reflected the Mizo perception of death and dying. The ritual performances, burials and the erection of memorials clarify that death was not seen as an abrupt end for a person, but a process of continuity, where death rituals exhibit a state of separation, transition and incorporation. Funeral and death rituals have become tools in reconstructing the social order and identity.

Apart from the concept of *Pialral* and *Mitthi Khua* that reflected the ordinary facts of life in terms of people being born, maturing, and then dying, a kind of 'rebirth' was also found in the traditional Mizo eschatology. In the Mizo tradition perception of death and the afterlife, Jonathan Parry's scheme of rebounding conquest can be applied to death rites when physical death is said to be the basis for a new and spiritual life either in future transmigration of the soul or in some form of resurrection.

It is ascertain that the pivot in Mizo belief system lies in the worship of *sakhua*, where the climax was to achieve in the afterlife in *pialral* by excelling in the worship of *sakhua* which involves sumptuous sacrifice and feasting, and success in hunting and have feasted the community. This act involves the implication of traditional moral ethics, public feasting, uplifting the downtrodden, these entire acts regulate and sustain the social life of the community, benefiting the societal needs and those excelled individuals were given special status in the ritual performance at death and were believed to attain the coveted *pialral* (abode of the dead) in the traditional belief system. Due to this belief, death rituals also act a tool for the glorification of the deceased. The display of wealth, social and political status of the deceased in death and funeral ceremonies along with the varieties of burials and memorials symbolized status, and reflected that the social stratum of the pre-colonial Mizo society.

Study has found that the colonization of the then Lushai Hill and the entry of Christian missionaries had a profound impact on the perception of death among the Mizos. The subject of death, grief, bereavement, and the afterlife played a central part in the dialogue between the missionaries and their converts. Many of the early converts were lured by the new interpretation of *Pialral* (Christian heaven) as the messages of the missionaries were assembled for the Mizo responding to their 'religious' aspirations and goals. Therefore, the notion of Christian good death in the early colonial period was also heavily influenced by British evangelical theology which required piety and life-long preparation, as well fortitude in the face of physical suffering. Death takes place in a Christian home, surrounded by a loving

family and the dying person making explicit farewells to the family members, comforted by the assurance of a future family reunion in heaven.

Mizo attitude toward death and their perception of dying were to a great extent shaped by the prevailing social-economic condition and lives of the early Mizo Christians. In the early stages of colonialism resistance to Christianity from the Mizo Chiefs led to the persecution of the converts, in such conditions of fear, and physical torture, and had faced even expulsion from the village. Colonial India during this period was the home of famine and epidemic; the Mizo also faced several recurring famines and epidemics often swept the Hills. Apart from prevailing diseases, *Mautam* in 1911-1912, the 1918 Influenza epidemic severely struck the Mizos and took many lives, the *Thingtam* Famine in 1929 followed by extensive rain causing heavy landslides destroyed many rice and barns. For the early Mizo converts life in this world was harsh and this compelled them to look forward to the evangelical hope located in the Evangelical Christian eschatology. Thus, the social-economic and health conditions of the Mizos in the colonial period were unfavorable. But whenever they faced adversity and misfortune, the subsequent result was the rekindling of *harhna* (revival movement) with a theological theme that led many people to adopt a negative attitude towards the present life and things of the world and focus their hope on the Christian afterlife. The life of the people was at stake, physical hunger, poor health condition, and their vulnerability to death made the Mizos attuned to the gospel.

Since traditional beliefs are abandoned and replaced by Christianity, many of the traditional death rituals, ceremonies, and customs were incorporated into the practice of the new religion. The *harhna* (revival movements) were an important cultural movement as they made use of Mizo culture for the expression of the *harhna* (revival movement). As a result, a new genre '*Lengkhawm Zai*' became popular in 1919; a large portion of the theme is associated with themes of death and is predominantly used at the *khawhar in* (house of the bereavement) known as *khawhar zai*. Most of the *khawhar zai* song sung at the *khawhar in* till today was composed between 1919 and the 1940s. Local expression of Christian practice could not die out in the process of the Mizos engagement with the new religion. This paved way for

the re-invention of ritual practice *khawhar zai/hla* into a Christian theme which survived till today.

For the Christian missionaries and their congregations, traditional Mizo funerals and burial represented the most visible sign of heathenism which they sought to combat by enforcing an austere culture of death among their fellow converts. Finally, in 1930s the government had ordered every village chief to introduce separate burials. The intervention of the colonial administration soon resulted in the crumbling of the traditional regime of the dead. This transformation in the regime of burial is made legitimate through the supreme power of the Superintendent. Apart from the Church's intention of establishing a new Christian moral code, alternative explanation emphasizes the growing scientific evidence for the danger posed to public health by improper burials. Thus, in the early period of colonization, funerals especially burials has become the locus of tension and controversy between adherents of traditional belief systems and the converted Christians. The choice to bury one's kin in a newly erected cemetery under the Christina rites represented the final commitment and tension often arose in which Christians often met with much opposition.

Therefore the increased socio-cultural changes due to colonialism affecting the ideas and practices of death, which include increased ideological and physical control by the colonial government and its right hand i.e. the Christian church over the local ritual practice. Studies have reflected the broad influence of the missionaries and the colonial government on the way people negotiate their indigenous funerals and burials for the self-proclaimed 'civilized' and 'sanitized' mortuary rites. With the growth of codified formal religious tradition, the authority of the church was becoming strong and with the missionaries' recommendation a new institution; Christian-based institution, the YMA had taken up the task of regulating customs regarding death in the society. Thus, the Church and the YMA became the two institutions that have the authority and a legitimate body for creating a broad cosmological canvas underlying funerals and burials.

From the analysis of historical records, a certain aspect of the disease, pattern of morbidity, and fatality in the colonial period is discernible. Challenged by the alien environment and the certain new diseases, colonial authorities and the Christian mission in the then Lushai Hills faced them by introducing western medical health care. Medical intervention was sporadic and highlighted the limitations of the concept of limited interest in healthcare. The study reveals that the mortality rate was severely high which was primarily owing to the burgeoning disease mortality, and epidemics, supplemental to recurring famine. It has been observed that infant mortality was also severely high throughout the colonial period. Communicable diseases such as cholera, smallpox, dysentery, and diarrhea were the chief cause of mortality. Deaths from malaria and fever were also very common during the colonial period.

Taking inference from epidemiological transition theory, focusing on the shift in disease patterns and cause of deaths, studies have shown that the early colonial period reflected the first two stages of transition; ‘the age of pestilence and famine’ and ‘the age of receding pandemics’. The unpredictable and uncontrollable major causes of death in the context of the Mizos include epidemics, famine, etc. Other causes of death include parasitic and contagious diseases and malnutrition effects on children and tuberculosis, perpetual infection. Infant mortality and child mortality is very high; females are more vulnerable to infectious diseases and also die due to complication associated with childbirth. Life expectancy at birth is variable and ranges from 20 to 40 years. The colonial period also exhibit the characteristics of the age of receding pandemic, witnessing fewer peaks and fluctuations in death rates, although mortality continued to be high, infant and child mortality remains elevated. As this stage progresses, improvements are first gained in the maternal and adolescent mortality for females. Later, infant and child mortality rates fall, in part due to increased health of females of childbearing ages. Life expectancy steadily increased from 20 to 55 years. The early colonial period was the ‘age of famine and pestilence’ till the 1930s, and from the 1930s gradual improvements can be seen and exhibited more like that of the ‘receding pandemics’.

An analysis of statistical data suggested that, the post-independence period witnessed a gradual decline in the death rate, in 1949 it dropped to 10.27 which was the lowest ever recorded since the colonial period. Again in 1951, it declined to a single digit at the rate of 8.23 per 1000 population. Compared with other districts, public health in the Lushai Hills district as per the 1951 census has been very good. Medical facilities provided by the government and partly by the Christian missions are more adequate than in other districts. Jeepable road constructed due to the Second World War connected Aizawl was considerably improved and literacy has also been improved. The number of widows fell dramatically in 1951 as compared to 1941; this somehow points to a rapid decline in mortality rate during the decade of 1941-1951. All these factors, socio-economic, medical, educational, the thin density of population and the improvements in the overall health of the population associated with the decline in mortality rate, a gradual shift in the causes of death and diseases are gradually taking place in the post-independence period.

Due to the changes brought by colonialism and Christianity in every sphere of the life of the Mizos, a sense of political activism slowly began to take root in the 1920s but was soon suppressed, but after two decades has passed a political party was established in 1946. During this period they soon started to express and gave voice to the different demands and seek their involvement in the administration. After independence, the idea of separation from the Indian Union in the Mizo District under the Assam government loomed largely. This was materialized in the form of an armed revolutionary movement led by the Mizo Nationalist Army against the Indian government from 1966 till the attainment of peace in 1986 commonly known as *Rambuai Lai* (Troubled Years). This movement led to chaos in the Mizo Hills, followed by groundless law and order and confusion in the society. The church cannot serve its purport, human lives lost their dignity, many people lost their lives unattended and uncared, and had died unnoticed.

A comprehensive analysis of death from the perspective of death and dying has brought new meaning and perception of death and dying during the *rambuai* as well it gives us a new dimension of looking at the *rambuai* history. The nationalist has employed death as a means of legitimizing revolutionary nationalism by

developing 'martyr' discourse and ritual discursive practices. This was reinforced by injecting religion as the base for their cause or action. Therefore the idea and emotion that surrounded the death of MNA into martyrdom were expressed in popular discourse and the sacrifice of one's own life for an 'imagined nation' confers a kind of abstract immortality. The rituals and mourning culture practiced by the MNA during the *rambuai* reframed death in elevated terms. The care, recovery, and reburial of the Army's fallen bodies have become the most important Nationalists' political agenda and convey a deep political symbol during the *rambuai* and the post-*rambuai* politics. The commemoration has also become an important subject of an investigation when it comes to 'death' which was highly influenced by the process of reconstructing the past, in the form of collective memory which was often shaped by present needs and contexts. Here, *Remna Ni* (A Day of Peace Settlement), *Martar te Ni* (Martyr's Day), the construction of *Martar te Thlanmual* (Martyr's Cemetery), has become an institution that disciplined the culture of mourning and imposed the image of heroic death and validate the construction of 'Martyrdom'. The kind of institutionalization and celebration and all the regulated rites reconstructed the memory of *rambuai* is an action that is political in itself and a means of seeking political legitimacy.

It was because of the martyr narration, peace narration, and political repression, that the death of civilians has often not been expressed or produced in the *rambuai* narration. The greatest numbers of victims in the *rambuai* were civilians who had faced military repression, human rights abuses, population displacement or grouping, fear, and mistrust. In such conditions, all civilians were vulnerable to death. It has been reported that between 1966 and 1970, around 400 lives were taken by the Indian army; out of this around 100 were the MNA. It has been recorded that 2166 innocent people perished during the *rambuai*, an accurate number would have been more than this number as political repression has silenced the voices of many civilians. Apart from the violent deaths of civilians inflicted by both the party, the grouping of villages severely impacted the lives of the civilians from 1967 to 1970. Due to severe poverty, the condition of the masses was worsened in the grouping centers, unemployment rose, agricultural activities cannot be continued, and

inadequate government supply of food resulted in malnutrition which leads to the death of numerous children and old age groups. A further investigation of the cases suggests that among the cause of death Beriberi was common in the grouping centers. Even though many had survived the grouping centers, starvation and malnutrition in the grouping centers were affecting the health condition of the masses in the preceding years which in turn added to morbidity and soon caused fatality after several years. During these years, 13000 people were served by 1 doctor; the medical facility during the period of study was well defined by the number of people served by one doctor. The population growth rate suffered a serious setback during the decade 1961-71; the growth rate fell by 9.3 percent. The decadal growth rate during 1961-71 was only 24.93 percent which showed a declining trend in terms of percentage. Among the different factors pointed out *rambuai* had seemed to affect population growth to a great extent. The *rambuai* involved horrific violence and terrible bloodshed and killing, many civilians perished on an unprecedented scale due to famine, malnutrition, and hunger far beyond anything that the Mizos had experienced before the outbreak.

With the end of *rambuai*, Mizoram became a fully fledged state in 1987, this status offered a new era of peace and development. The growth of the modernization of health services took a new turn under the state government in the form of infrastructural and human resource development. It gradually underwent improvement of health care facilities and community health services which remained highly neglected due to the *rambuai* disturbances for a long two decades. Several policy initiatives and development schemes have been started by the government, state domestic product and per capita income increased significantly over the years, and the economy is being transformed from agricultural to the service sector. The state soon topped the rank of human development index and literacy rate in the country. Urban centers increased in the 2001 census, infant mortality rate also declined dramatically as compared to the pre-statehood era and the all-Indian average. Rapid progress in infrastructure facilities particularly roads, education, telecommunication, information technology, and health during the three decades of the post-statehood period had a profound effect on the lives of the Mizos.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a broad increase in world income and a poverty reduction. The link between income and health in poor countries is thought to be strong. The analysis of the trend in National State Domestic Product (NSDP), Per-Capita Income, Life expectancy rate, and Infant Mortality Rate in Mizoram in the post-liberalization period from 1991 shows that the growth in NSDP and Life Expectancy was more significant after the liberalization period. Since an increase in life expectancy in the post-liberalization period can be felt, this result has a direct correlation with the overall socio-economic and health improvements in post-1991.

This period witnessed a shift in the type of diseases, causes of death and patterns of death, mortality rate, and life expectancy. The major causes of death have changed from infectious and parasitic diseases to chronic conditions such as heart diseases and stroke. Numerous factors have influenced the changing causes of death; including nutrition and diet, personal hygiene, changing lifestyle, habits, etc. A transition from the earlier pattern of the cause of death was witnessed in the contemporary period. A shift from communicable disease to Chronic was taking place in the contemporary period. In the previous decade, around between 2005 and 2006 malaria was the leading cause of death in Mizoram which was now gradually controlled due to government policy toward the eradication of malaria. A shift to Chronic was witnessed in 2012 when cancer ousted malaria to be the leading cause of death in Mizoram. During the last ten years (2010-2019), 43% of the total deaths were medically certified, and out of this certain Infectious and Parasitic Diseases were the leading cause of death, followed by Diseases of the Digestive System, Diseases of the Respiratory System, Disease of the Circulatory System and Neoplasm (Cancer). Over the last 10 years, cancer and disease of the digestive system were the two fast-growing major causes of death. The disease of the digestive system has increased at a fast rate and has become the highest and cancer becomes the second major cause of death and the fastest cause of death during the last 10 years.

Studies have shown that a substantial increase in the incidence of non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and cancer, accidents, and alcohol and drug abuse increased from 2001 to 2002. The reason for this appears to

be changed in lifestyle and growing modern social life. It can be assumed that a continuous decline of communicable diseases can be attributed to the pattern in advanced societies, as morbidity seems to have been dominated by diseases other than communicable diseases. This trend in India was also witnessed in the report of Burden of Disease India 2005 that non-communicable accounts for the second-largest share after communicable health conditions of the disease burden in India. A significant demographic change from receding pandemic was taking place in the contemporary period and a move to degenerative man-made diseases. Infectious and Parasitic illnesses which claimed many lives from the colonial period as dysentery, influenza, cholera, tuberculosis, typhoid, malaria, etc were replaced by heart diseases, cancer, and other non-communicable diseases in the contemporary period.

Like the west, the dominance of the medico-scientific framework of monitoring, interpreting, and responding to signs of death in contemporary Mizoram has been transforming how Mizos perceived the dying process, as most of the death and dying for instance has now usually been taking place in hospitals, with professionals that dependent on composure, rationality and detach commitment to saving the life of the patient. Medical advances allow increasing control over death; medical professional has been taking much of this control. The recent introduction of registration and certification of death through institutionalized bureaucracy has gradually impacted society's perception and attitude towards death. The advancement in medical science has been creating discourses resulting in knowledge production and occupies institutions and specific professional spaces. Apart from the existing institution the Church and the YMA, hospitals and medical institutions along with physicians, nurses, patients, the dying person, deceased, kin, a certain condition ritualized activity now formed a new perception and spaces of death.

HISTORY OF DEATH IN MIZORAM: COLONIAL TO
CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

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HISTORY OF DEATH IN MIZORAM: COLONIAL TO
CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

BY

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Submitted

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “History of Death in Mizoram: Colonial to Contemporary Period” submitted by Mr. Lalchhanhima in fulfillment of Ph.D. degree of this University is an original research work and has not been submitted elsewhere for other degree. It is recommended that this thesis be placed before the examiners for the award of degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dated: 9th December 2022

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DECLARATION

I Lalchhanhima, hereby declare that the subject matter of this thesis is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this thesis did not form basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other University/Institute.

This is being submitted to the Mizoram University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History & Ethnography

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Statement on Anti-Plagiarism

It is hereby certified that the Ph.D thesis entitled “History of Death in Mizoram: Colonial to Contemporary Period” is the result of the Doctor of Philosophy programme and have not taken recourse to any form of Plagiarism in any of the chapters of the thesis, except for quotations, from published and unpublished sources which are clearly indicated and acknowledged as such.

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Glossary

Ai: To sacrifice a domestic animal and perform a ceremony over or for a wild creature killed in hunting or a foe in fighting.

Arkeziak: A Mizo traditional bracelet.

Awmlai: To die a natural death.

Awzia: Commonly referred to the non-Lusei speaking clans.

Bawlpu: Bawlpu is a person who has specialized in curing illness or sickness. He was consulted on every illness; he often used domesticated animals as a sacrifice for curing illness.

Biangboh: Mumps

Chhinlung: The name of the mythical rock from which the progenitors of the Mizo tribes are said to have come out.

Coolie: refer to some native who were forced by the British administrator for labour, employed especially as porter.

Darbu: A set of Mizo traditional gongs, three different size gongs.

Fungki: A small vessel made of horn for carrying a gun powder.

Harhna: a series of spiritual revival which took place during the colonial period.

Hlamzuih: When a new born infant dies soon/immediately after birth, it is called hlamzuih.

Hnamchawm: Generally in Mizo society other divisions who do not belong to the Chief's clan were usually termed as "hnamchawm" or commoners.

Hrawkna: Pharyngitis

Inthian: a ritual performed by a deceased families by sacrificing a fowl, performed after two to three months after burial which symbolized the end of their mourning and free to do anything as others.

Kawl Phai: a very old settlement in present day Myanmar, a large stretch of plain bordering the Chin state, it is believe that a Mizo ancestor once settled in this region during their migratory period. The northern plains covering the Tamu region known as 'Kawbaw valley', southern plain covered the Kaleymo region known as 'Kale valley'

Khaltu: Good spirit in traditional Mizo belief system.

Khawhar Zai: The name of a solemn dirge, requiem, or lament sung by old people in a house of mourning any time after burial.

Khawsik: to have fever, fever usually caused by malaria, cold and other viruses.

Khuangchawi: The name of a public feast given by Chiefs and other well-to-do family in the Mizo society. It is the last in order to be performed in the Mizo Sakhua.

Khuavang: A guardian spirit in Mizo belief system

Khuihip: Whooping-cough

Kuang: A traditional coffin. (Today the term has been commonly in use)

Kut: A traditional feast or festival.

Lungdawh: platform build or erected in memory of a deceased, a rough platform of logs placed beside the road just outside the village, in cases of chiefs and of men who have killed in war, the platform is build of stones.

Lungphun: erected stone, in honor of the chief or a wealthy man or who is success in hunting.

Manghauva: A mythical figure who is believed to cause the death of a person died of prolonged sickness.

Mautam: Rat famine, a recurring famine, a cyclical bamboo flowering caused rat population explosion, heavily destroying crops.

Michhia: A person not belonging to the ruling clan; an ordinary person of no influence; a person of no social standing; the common people.

Minpui kum: a year of heavy landslide, caused by heavy rain in the Lushai Hills which took place in 1929, due to its severe consequences the year is memorized in Mizo history.

Mitha: A well-to-do family or prosperous person; an important or prominent person; noble; a great man or person in the Mizo society.

Mitthi khua: A dead man's village.

Muallam: A sort of Mizo dance performed against the head of an enemy hunted at war on the ralah ceremony.

Naupang hri: In olden days, due to the poor health condition, infants were extremely vulnerable to several infectious diseases, and other diseases caused by malnutrition. These diseases infected at infancy or childhood period are called naupang hri.

Pan: skin diseases, cutaneous abscesses usually caused by bacterium (*Staphylococcus Aureus*).

Pathian: God the giver and preserver of life. Pathian, is supposed to be the creator of everything and is a beneficent being, but has, however little concern with them.

Phung: evil spirit

Pialral: The abode of the dead; the Mizo Paradise. It can be accessed by completing all the sacrificial stages in Mizo Sakhua or by success in the chase of certain prescribed wild games. It was believed that those in pialral will be fed with husked rice inferring that there will be no more toil and hard labor.

Pu Vana: Lushai God

Pu: A wife's male relation; the male relative of a girl's mother who received a share of her marriage price, or anyone whom she adopts in his stead.

Puandum: A cotton cloth, the '*Puan*' may have a dark black background but it has invariably multi coloured bands along the length. The various colours used here are black, Green, Yellow, Red, White etc.

Puandum: A traditional dark blue cloth generally worn by the Luseis.

Pupawla: The name of a mythical personage who lives at the junction of the roads leading to mitthi khua (or dead man's village) and shoot with his pellet-bow at the souls of the departed as they pass on their way thither.

Raicheh : To die in giving birth to an offspring; to die in childbirth; a woman who dies in childbirth.

Ral: A ritual act of gift giving which symbolize sympathy, or to extend condolences to the deceased family or relatives.

Ramhuai: An evil spirit, demons believe to cause sickness.

Ranpui: All the big- four legged domesticated animals.

Ruh na: A bone pain, in olden days Mizos often experienced bone pain in the past due to deficiency of vitamin D.

Rulhut: Intestinal round worm.

Sadawt: Sadawt was considered as a priest who supervises sacrifices on behalf of the person to perform Sakhua.

Sakhua: Sakhua is a combination of two words 'Sa' and 'Khua'. Sa was related to the clan- identity to which one is born, khua referred to the immanent protector of cosmic goddess khuanu . It is the core practice of worship in Mizo traditional religion, where the climax in Mizo traditional religion can be reached or attained by completing all the sacrifice in sakhua.

Santen: Dysentery

Sanu: In the Pawi tradition Sanu was synonymous with Pupawla in the Lusei tradition.

Sarhi: To die an unnatural death.

Thangchhuah: The title given to a man who has distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase, or by a certain number of public feasts through the worship of sakhua. The wife of such a man also shares his title. The possession of this title is regarded as a passport to Pialral or Paradise.

Thichhia: unnatural death.

Thihthiap: The name of an animal regarded by the Mizos as king of tigers.

Thingtam: The name given to the periodic dying of thing (a specific bamboo specie) followed by plague of rats which devour the rice crops and cause a famine.

Thlaichhiah: A sacrifice for the dead in order that the spirit of the slain animal may accompany the departed soul performed by the relatives or family of a deceased or sometimes the spirit of the deceased would eat the foods that was offered as a sacrifice.

Thlan: A grave.

Thlanmual: A burial ground.

Thlarau: a human soul.

Tlawmngaihna: To be self-sacrificing, unselfish, and self- denying, to be loth to lose one's good reputation, prestige etc. which among the Mizo was esteemed to retain in life.

Tuihri: Cholera

Tuirual: Traditional ornament made of bamboo strings and cotton thread, wear on the head by some distinguish person at the time of ceremonies.

Tulum: An evil spirit believed can be possessed human, which often animate them after death.

Tumphit: A Mizo musical instrument made of bamboo; a woodwind instrument.

Uire: Adultery; an adulteress; (used only in the case of women)

Vai: Non-Mizos

Veng: A locality

Zalh: To lay out the dead body and place it in a sitting posture on a bamboo structure.

Zawlbuk: a young men's dormitory.

Zawlpuan: The name of a cloth-generally brought by a bride during her marriage.

Zawngchal: The name of a cord resembling chenille made of dyed goat's hair, worn round the head in the form of a turban.

Zawngghri: Small-Pox

Zu: A Mizo traditional rice beer.

1.1 Mizoram State Profile

The state of Mizoram is situated in the North-Eastern most frontier of the north eastern region of India. It lies between 21.58°N to 24.35° N Latitude and 92.15° E to 93.29°E longitude. The geographical area of the Mizoram is 21,081 square kilometers.¹ It shares 404 kilometers and 308 kilometers long international borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh respectively and it shares state borders with Assam, Tripura and Manipur. According to the 2011 census the population of Mizoram is 10,97,206, with 976 females per 1000 males. According to the 2011 census the whole state is divided into eight districts, namely Aizawl, Champhai, Kolasib, Lawngtlai, Lunglei, Mamit, Siahla and Serchhip.²

The terrain of Mizoram is hilly and there are a number of valleys, rivers and lakes in the state. It has the most variegated hilly terrain in the northeastern part of India. There are many as 21 hill ranges in the state with peaks ranging different heights. The hill ranges are rugged and runs in ridges from north to south. The hills have an average height of around 900 meters, the highest point being the Phawngpui (Blue Mountain) at an altitude of 2157 meters above sea level.³ The average height of the hills in the west is about 1000 meters and that on the east are 1300 meters. Mizoram is a land of wilderness filled with lakes and rivers and hills and forests. The hills and mountain ranges in Mizoram state are Phawngpui Tlang also famously known as the Blue Mountain, Hmuifang with an elevation of 1619 meters and Reiek at a height of 1548 meters. Rivers in Mizoram are Chhimtuipui River, Tlawng, Tutis, Tuirial and Tuivawl and lakes are Palak Dil, Tam Dil and Rih Dil.⁴

There are a number of rivers which flow through the state. The biggest river in Mizoram is Chhimtuipui, which is also known as Kaladan (or Koldoyn). It originates in Myanmar and flows through the southern districts of Siahla and Lawngtlai of Mizoram. Other rivers like the Tlawng, Tut, Tuirial; Tuivawl flows through the northern part and join the Barak in Cachar. The state of Mizoram is also

¹ Statistical Handbook of Mizoram, 2012, Aizawl, Directorate of Economic and Statistics, p. xix.

² Statistical Handbook of Mizoram, 2018, Aizawl, Directorate of Economic and Statistics, pp. xii-xiii.

³ Statistical Handbook of Mizoram 2018, Aizawl, Directorate of Economic and Statistics p.x.

⁴ Profile of Mizoram, <https://www.mizoramonline.in/about/profile>, accessed 23 November 2018.

dotted with lakes in different parts. The Palak Lake is the biggest lake in Mizoram with an area of 30 hectares. It is situated in Siaha district and is believed that it was formed as a result of an earthquake. Another lake, the Tamdil Lake is a natural lake situated 85 kms from state capital Aizawl. Mizoram is located in the highest zone 5 for earthquakes. The folded structure of the Mizoram ranges is located at the junction of two moving tectonic plates.

Forest covers 19,240 sq.km. which is 91.27% of the State's geographical area. In terms of forest canopy density classes, the State has 134.00 sq.km. very dense forest, 6251 sq.km. moderately dense forest and 12,855 sq.km. open forest. The recorded forest area of the State is 16,717. sq.km. Reserve Forest constitute 47.31%, Protected Forests constitute 21.34% and unclassed forests constitute 31.35% of the total Forest Area. There are mainly three types of forests in Mizoram. They are Sub tropical forest, Semi-evergreen forests and Sub-montane tropical forests. Different flora and fauna can be found in Mizoram. Around 22 species of Bamboo have been found out to exist in Mizoram and above 400 medicinal plants.⁵

The climate of Mizoram is very pleasant and moderate. The winters and summers are both tolerable. The winters are devoid of snow even in the highest of the hills, though drops of dew and frost appear here and there. The minimum temperature in the winters is 9 degree to 20 degree whereas the maximum not increasing above 30 degree. The temperature varies between 20°C and 30°C during summers and between 11°C and 21°C in winters. Winters start from November onwards and end only in around February. Mizoram receives rain from June to August. Rainy season starts from June and continues till the end of August. The rainfall is evenly distributed throughout the state. Mizoram state gets an annual average rainfall of about 3,000 mm.⁶

The economy of Mizoram is totally agriculture based. Mizoram is famous for its fibreless ginger. Crops which have abundant production here are maize, mustard, sugarcane, potatoes and sesame. Apart from the agriculture, art and craft also has a

⁵ Economic Survey Mizoram, 2010-11, Planning & Programme Implementation Department Government of Mizoram, p.i-ii.

⁶ Profile of Mizoram, <https://www.mizoramonline.in/about/profile>), accessed 23 November 2018.

major hand in the economy. Basketry, printing press, sericulture, brick making and saw mills are other fields of the state that helps in the economy of the state.⁷

1.1.1 Nomenclature

It may be an intricate task to present an accurate picture or the ethno genesis of the scattered tribes dwelling in the land covering the mountainous region of the present day Indian states of Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Chittagong Hill tracts and Burma before the British colonization. Also defining the ‘Mizos’ as one uniting tribe from time long past would not do justice to historical veracity. Most of the knowledge about the tribes before the British colonization as well the nomenclature comes from both the British officials and missionaries for their administrative.

In pre-colonial time the area known as ‘Lushai Hills’ and its surrounding areas today Mizoram comprised of a number of tribes: “Lusei, Hmar, Poi/Lai, Lakher/Mara, Chakma, Thadou, Ralte, Gangte, Sukte, Pangkhua, Zahau, Fanau, Molbem, Darlong, Khuangli, and Falam etc. They were known as ‘Kuki’, ‘Chin’, ‘ZO’ and ‘Lushai’. They are scattered in the present Mizoram, Chin and State of Myanmar, Bangladesh, Indian states of Manipur, Assam and Tripura. The Colonial administrators often used the term Kukis, Chins and the Lushais as the same stock and also sometime used Lhooshai and Kookies as overlapping categories. It was only after the 1950s that the term ‘Lushai’ has been superseded by the generic term ‘Mizo’. The term ‘Mizo’ have been used to includes Lusei (formerly called Lushais), Mara, Lai, Hmar, Paite, Ralte and other many sub-groups.⁸

1.1.2 The Advent of the British in the Hills

The British in Northeast India first became aware of the Lushai people and the earliest mention of the tribe was found in 1777 when they started to attack the Chittagong Hills.⁹ The first raids from the hill tribes occurred in 1826 by the ‘Kookies’. And in 1843 Lalsuthlaha raided Kochabari a Manipur village on sylhet

⁷ Profile of Mizoram, <https://www.mizoramonline.in/about/profile>), accessed 23 November 2018.

⁸ Jadish Lal Dawar, *Food in the Lives of the Mizo: From Pre- Colonial Times to the Present*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, 2019, p.1

⁹ T.H Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein*, New Delhi, Tribal Research Institute Government of Mizoram, Reprint, 2004, p.31.

border on 16th April 1844.¹⁰ Thus, the British administrator in the Cachar began to feel the presence of the tribes in their southern frontier beginning in the early 1940s. The British government attention was drawn by the Mizo only in 1847 when they raided the district south of Manipur. In the British government's record, the Mizo' raids on the British territories were relatively frequent between 1849 and 1871. Between 1872 and 1890, the raids occurred less frequently. Having failed to yield any effect with some scale punitive measures the British authority sent the first major pre-planned punitive expedition to the Mizo Hills in 1868. The expedition suffered a severe defeat at the hands of the Mizos and failed in its mission to punish the 'savages'. The situation became worse from the Alexandrapur raids when Mr. Winchester was killed and his five years old daughter Mary Winchester was abducted by the Mizos followed in 1780-1781. In response to this a major punitive expedition was launched in 1871-72 and recovered the abducted Mary Winchester from the then Lushai Hills and conducted the first topographical survey. Soon raids became more frequent again in the 1880s, two successive expeditions were dispatched in 1888-1889, 1889-1890. The second expedition Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1889-90 became the last punitive expedition and marked the final colonization of the then Lushai Hills.¹¹ The new acquired territory was divided into two administrative districts North Lushai Hill and South Lushai Hills, the North became part of Chief Commissionership of Assam, while the Southern district was attached to Bengal. The final resistance of by a Mizo Chief was completely subdued in 1895, formally declared part of the British India. The two districts were amalgamated in 1898 and named Lushai Hills Districts, where the British employed the colonial system of indirect rule in the districts. And the Lakher district in the extreme south was annexed in 1931 and formed part of the Lushai Hills.

1.1.3. Christian Mission

Colonization of the Hills was soon followed by the entry of Christian mission as did in the adjoining areas of the then Lushai Hills Districts. A Welsh missionary in

¹⁰Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of North East Frontier of Bengal*, Calcutta, Calcutta Home Department Press, 1884, p.279.

¹¹ Lalsangkima Pachuau, *Ethnic Identity and Christianity*, Germany, Peter Lang AG, 2002, pp.69-68.

Khasi Hills, William Williams, visited the district in March, 1891 to explore the mission work. After his return he persuaded the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist's General Assembly of 1892 to adopt the district as its mission field. But he was died in 1892 without any further progress.¹² In the meantime, two missionaries of the Arthington Aborigines Mission, James Herbert Lorrain and F.W Savidge entered the district in January, 1894 to pioneer the Christian mission works among the Mizo tribes. But they soon left the field as Mr. Arthington had the policy of moving missionaries every two to three years. The Calvinistic Methodist later sends missionaries to the Lushai Districts; David Evan Jones in 1897 and Edwind Rowlands in 1898.¹³

After Lorrain and Savidge left Mizoram in 1897 the Baptist Mission Society favored to assume the responsibility to work in the southern part of the Lushai Hills and arrived in Lunglei on 13th March, 1903. They selected a asite at Serkawn for the mission station which continues till today the centre of the Baptist Church of Mizroam. With the establishment of the Welsh Mission in the North centred at Aizawl and the Baptist Mission in the South centred at Serkawn, missionaries had assumed responsibility for the whole area then encompassed by the Lushai Hills district.

There was however an area to the extreme south in which the Mara (Lakher) lived. A. Lorrain and his wife decided to undertake the area and founded the Lakher Pioneer Mission in 1905. After a long journey arrived at Serkawr in the Mara area on 26th September 1907 with the accompaniment of J.H Lorrain and his wife helped started their mission at Serkawr.¹⁴ In the first decade of the mission endeavor, conversion to Christianity remained slow and in the 1901 census only 45 Christians were recorded. The 1904 spiritual revival in Welsh was brought to the Khasi Hills and soon spread to the Lushai Hills in 1906. Subsequent spiritual revival occurred periodically in successive waves which took place on 1913-14, 1919-23, 30-37;

¹² Lalsangkima Pachuau, *Ethnic Identity and Christianity*, p.71.

¹³ J.M Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram*, Calcutta, The Synod Publication Board, 1991, p.39.

¹⁴ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, Jorhat-1, Assam, The Mizo Theological Conference, 1996, pp.203-205

which foster the growth of Christianity in Mizoram and by the 1951 census 80.3% of the population were Christians.

The church under the local leadership is extremely influential in society, with nearly all people belonging to a congregation in their locality. The Presbyterian formed the largest denomination and dominates the heavily populated north, while the Baptist church dominates the south. The Salvation Army entered the region in 1917, the Catholic Church in 1925, the Seventh Day Adventist in 1946 and the United Pentecostal Church in 1949-50.¹⁵

The Mizos experienced tremendous change through education, medical mission and evangelization which formed the three pillars of mission work in Mizoram, along with colonial modernity. Thus colonialism soon changed the entire culture and world views of the Mizos. To the newly converted Mizos becoming a Christian meant adopting a new mode of life, which involved spiritual and physical transformation. Many of the traditional beliefs and culture were abandoned as it was found incompatible with the new faith. Thus, from 1910 to 1950, Christian practices became a way of life for majority of the converted Mizos. Traditional practices were either proscribed or were given new meaning and contained with the Christian world view.¹⁶

1.1.4 Into the Indian Union and Statehood

It appears that the Mizo were politically motivated since the passage of the government of India Act 1919 and 1935 because these two Acts had given political aspiration by giving special status to the people.¹⁷ This has resulted in the rising political consciousness and subsequent progress and change of political status of the region marked by the founding of the first regional political party by the educated youth of Lushai Hills called the Mizo Union on 9th April 1946 followed by the United Mizo Freedom Organization (UMFO) on 5th July 1947.

¹⁵ Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, pp. 173-213.

¹⁶ P.Thirumal, Laldinpuii and C. Lalrozami, *Modern Mizoram: History, Culture, Poetics*, Oxon U.K, Routledge, 2019, p.14.

¹⁷ Sangkima, 'Political Consciousness Leading to the Formation of Mizo Union Party in Mizoram', *Historical Journal of Mizoram*, vol.v, no.1, 2004, p.5.

Even in the post-Independence period, the idea of independence or political self-determination or separation from the Indian Union was possessed by the political leaders of the Mizo Hills.¹⁸ Mizos felt alienated by Assamese ethnic domination; in response to this the Eastern Indian Tribal Union was formed in 1957 and sought separation from ethnically defined Assam state. Mizo politics had initially focused equally on the question of internal changes such as the abolition of chieftainship and possible union with Burma or independence for Mizo spread across neighboring countries. In the midst of this development the Mizo Hills was stricken by a severe famine '*Mautam*' in the early 1960s.

The people's anger was directed at Assam government and soon the Mizo National Famine Front began mobilizing Mizos and after the famine relief was addressed the Famine Front turned into Mizo National Front (MNF) in on 21st October 1961. The establishment of Mizo National Front with its emphasis on political self determination, as political party had witnessed a turning point in the politics of the hills as well it changes the course of Mizo history from the 1966 outbreak known as '*Rambuai*' a secessionist movement which lasted for 20 years till 1986 when peace was restored and Mizoram was granted full statehood on 20th February 1987 to become the 23rd State of the Indian Union. The restoration of peace after the twenty years of *rambuai* (troubled years) and the attainment of statehood left a remarkable progress on the socio-economic transformation of the Mizos which was witnessed in the post-statehood period.

1.2 Defining Death

There are many competing answers to the related questions: What is death? What does death mean? Two of the attributes that all humans share are the experiences of being born and the fact that everyone would eventually die. Although we are excited about discussions concerning birth, people in all cultures discuss death with extreme reluctance. However, even though we may use the same words to describe death, the actual meaning and conceptualization of death differs widely

¹⁸ Malsawmliana, 'Political Consciousness and Separatist Movement in Mizoram', in Malsawmdawngliana and Rohmingmawii, (eds.), *Mizo Narratives: Accounts from Mizoram*, R.K Pillai, Guwahati, Reprint, 2014, p.264.

across cultures. The tendency for vast differences to occur in conceptions about issues or events that, on the surface, seem very obvious is a major reason why a cultural examination and analysis of every behavioral phenomenon should almost be mandated.¹⁹ Medicine and law have various definitions having many controversies over ethical concern in the definition of death. The most rigorous approach is that death is primarily a biological phenomenon but that religion, culture, and societies have evolved traditions and laws surrounding death. Similarly, physicians have developed medical tests to determine death, and these too may vary among countries and societies. With the growth of rapid advancement in medical sciences the medical definition of brain death criterion has become accepted throughout the developed world and in a growing sector of the developing world. But, despite this widespread medical, legal, and societal acceptance, academic debates persist over the conceptual and biological validity of brain death.²⁰

The most fundamental philosophical problem regarding death is how to define it. A common starting place is to warn against the ambiguity of the term. Death may refer either to the process of dying, the event of death, or the state of being dead. Rigorous philosophical work distinguishes in just what sense or senses the term is used. When philosophers speak of death, they are primarily denoting the event, the state, or both. For instance, definition varies from anthropological perspective to clinical perspective to humanist perspective like that of the essentialism, existentialism and culturalism, there is enormous variation in the ways which philosophers and others view death and mortality.²¹

French post-structuralist philosopher Derrida in his deconstruction of popular and scholarly ideas has questioned the existence of a tight and clear delineation and border between life and death. Instead, he draws attention to how mutable and fluid ideas of death are bound into different cultures and are variable and changing across

¹⁹James Gire, 'How Death Imitates Life: Cultural Influences on Conceptions of Death and Dying', *Online Reading in Psychology and Culture*, 6 (2), 2014,p.3 <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1120> (accessed 23 February 2020)

²⁰ Bernat L. James, 'Defining Death' in Christopher M. Moreman, (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Death & Dying*, (ed.), Oxon, United Kingdom, Routledge, 2018, p. 401.

²¹ Randy Cagle, 'Death Philosophical Perspective' in Clifton D. Bryant and Dennis L. Peck (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Death and the Human Experience*, California USA, Sage Publication, 2009, pp.282-286.

time and history. Death is also, he notes, a state of being that is neither fully social nor fully biological but exists in the fusion and interrelationship of the two. This highlighting of issues relating to defining and conceptualizing death and dying is highly useful as it guides us to thinking of death not just as a simple state of ‘non-life’ or the non-functioning of core bodily processes and no brain activity, but rather as a process which exists in the midst of other processes, bound into culture, society, history and biology.²² Therefore, one can have a better and a more vivid definition of death only by investigating into the dying process in a given society as each culture and society have a different meaning on death and dying. Thus, death cannot be completely defined in isolation without the dying process, practices, traditions and rituals and beliefs in a given society or culture.

1.3 Locating Death in History & Scope

Death foregrounds the most important social and cultural values that we live our lives by, including those values that we acknowledge and express, but also those that are neither ordinarily recognized nor explicit. Regardless of the ways in which death is managed, marked and memorialized across cultures, fundamental values are revealed through death and its remembrance. Spaces for the dead and dying are a reflection of the changing conditions of the living, as well as shifting meanings and discourses about life, for these spaces have cultural and symbolic meaning invested by the living, representing microcosms of the society within which they are established. Understanding death and dying, and particularly their related practices, rituals and spaces, thus offers insights into life and the living.

Long a concern of theological, philosophical and, from the nineteenth century, sociological and anthropological inquiry, death was not given sustained historical treatment until the 1960s, when French scholars of the *Annales* school began to consider how attitudes to mortality might serve as indicators of broader social change in early modern Europe.²³ Death and bereavement are universal and

²² Anne-Marie Barry and Chris Yuill, *Understanding the Sociology of Health*. 4th ed, California, Sage Publications, 2016, p.307. Available from E-Book Library: (accessed, 21 September, 2021).

²³ John Parker, ‘ In My Time of Dying: A History of Dead and the Dead in West Africa’, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2021, p.3

inevitable facts of life for human beings in all societies. A study of dying and responses to death takes one to the heart of the history of any culture and sharpens understanding of one's own experience. The French historian Michel Vovelle has observed that 'death emerges as a reflection of society' because the way people died also affects the way of life.²⁴ Dying has a history, although death is universal and timeless, the way in which it is thought of, and dealt with, varies in time and place. Being by their nature bound to tradition, the rites of death evolve at a relatively slow pace and can be easy to grasp. They are also tied to morality, memory, religion, and kinship, and to issues of origin and destiny that lie at the root of our definitions of civilization. Thus, the history of death presents an opportunity to explore what it means to be human, an opportunity that historians have approached from different viewpoints. In particular, cultural historians have used death to illustrate the historical transformation of culture in the modern period.²⁵

In short, it might be said that two historiographical currents, the French history of mentalities which explored peacetime attitudes to death across the *longuedurée*; and the Anglophone literature which looked at the impact of the First World War in terms of continuity and change with origins in the mid 1970s, shaped the cultural history of death as it exists today: on one hand. Over the last forty years, the field has expanded from the history of mentalities to encompass religious, urban, emotional, military, and medical history, among other areas. Whereas the French tradition was influential in terms of approach, English-language works on the First World War anticipated key questions in recent literature around individual beliefs, the impact of modernization, and the treatment of death as an independent cultural phenomenon.²⁶ Historical approaches to trace changing attitudes towards death and in a very obvious sense present various 'histories of death'.²⁷ Thus, classic historical work concerning death in the 1960 to 70s covers a wide range of topic from

²⁴ Pat Jalland, 'Australian Ways of Death: A Social and Cultural History, 1840-1918', South Melbourne, Australia, Oxford University Press, 2002, p.1.

²⁵ Hannah Malone, 'New Life in the Modern Cultural History of Death', *The Historical Journal*, vol.62, 2018, p.1, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/historical-journal/article/abs/new-life-in-the-modern-cultural-history-of-death/80CA850F9B300E724E12F982DF294C59> (accessed 18 July, 2020).

²⁶ Malone, *New Life in the Modern Cultural History of Death*, p.19.

²⁷ Douglas Davies, 'A Brief History of Death' United Kingdom, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p.17.

European attitude towards death through the long historical span from the middle ages to the modern age. How death and funeral of famous soldiers, politicians and royalty affected the nation and helped frame the experience of ordinary individuals and their own domestic grief.²⁸

The study of death and dying in the past, and the search for the reason behind changes in attitudes and practices, provides an ideal vehicle to investigate belief system, cultural values, geographical differences, and the contrast between urban and rural settings, the influence of demographic patterns and the now conventional triad of race, gender and social class. An investigation of the reciprocal relationship between death and culture of the past helps us to introspecting, and evaluating the contemporary culture and society. The study of death and dying enables us to figure out changes in the past, in what directions and what forces were responsible for the changes.

The historiography of death appears to have followed a pattern common to other fields. It has turned away from grand narratives, embraced individuation, and adopted interdisciplinary and global perspectives. However, the literature also addresses concerns that are specific to the nature of death as a universal experience. Death is also an ideal subject with which to demolish a narrative of progress and modernization driven by urban elites; largely, because attitudes and rituals are relatively irrational, common to all social classes, and resistant to change. It is only by asking new questions that historians have arrived at new answers and upset established paradigms. In that respect, the history of death is alive and well, albeit that it is as messy, confusing, and complex as the history of life.

1.4 The Anthropology of Death

In academia, more disciplines than ever are taking these themes of mortality into their own competence and modes of analysis. Archaeologists describe the prehistory of death rites, historians compare and contrast the mortuary rites of more recent eras, while anthropologists and sociologists describe and, sometimes,

²⁸ Davies, *A Brief History of Death*, p.17.

prescribe contemporary patterns of dealing with the dead. Meanwhile increasing numbers of bereaved people tell of their experience and seek to help others in growing volumes of biographies, booklets and pamphlets, detailing how they have suffered and sought to cope with their loss. Medical professionals join in with psychologists and social scientists to fine-tune theories of grief.²⁹ Thomas Browne, a prolific scholar, medical doctor and renowned polymath, pursued medical studies at Leiden and Padua and was a member of Pembroke College Oxford. He later became a famous resident of Norwich, and when King Charles II visited that city in 1671 he knighted Dr Browne, making him Sir Thomas. Not only would his life as a doctor guarantee familiarity with death but both Leiden and Padua were famed for their medical studies, including their dissection theatres. Though his knowledge and interests were enormous it is enough to mention two of his publications, first and foremost his *Hydriotaphia* of 1658, and secondarily his *Religio Medici* of 1642.³⁰

The anthropology of death explores how human societies around the world respond to death (end of life, cessation of all biological functions.) and the funerals (the disposition of death, burying or burning). It is concerned with both conceptual and organizational aspects, that is, what people believe about death and the afterlife, as well as they actually do when faced with crisis of death. Two main methodological approaches used in anthropology are: ethnographic and the comparative. The ethnographic approach examines how each of these cultures cope with the demise of their family members and close associates, while comparative approaches tries to make sense of the enormous cultural variations in issues such as the disposing of the corpse, the expected behavior of the bereaved, and the ongoing relations between the living and their dead. Many comparative ethnographic studies have revealed that death rituals which are seen as defining aspect of human culture are not always universal in practices. Thus, the anthropology of death takes us to the

²⁹ Douglas Davies, 'Death, Ritual and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites', 3rd edn, United Kingdom, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, p.1.

³⁰ Davies, *Death Ritual and Belief*, p.14.

conclusion that all humans die but in their own way with different meanings and concept in different cultures.³¹

In anthropology the study of death ranges from classic texts to contemporary ethnographies. It ranges from the exotic mortuary cannibalism in the Amazon, head hunting in the Philippines and death by cop in the United States to more familiar and contemporary concerns with nursing homes, funeral parlors, undertaking and forensic anthropology. Major works in anthropology on death ranges from the classic writings on death, loss, mourning and remembrance by Bronislaw Malinowski, Earnest Becker, Robert J. Lifton, Johannes Fabian, Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, Van Gennep, Robert Hertz, Clifford Geertz and others. Anthropology of death primarily explores the inventions and reinventions of death over time and space, the conceptualizations of death (friendly death, death as taboo, death sorcery, and pollution), ritual and celebration of death (wakes, wake games and amusement, death meals), common deaths (the good deaths, sudden death), uncommon death (suicide, homicide, genocide, voodoo death, death by sorcery), traumatic deaths and death before their time. It looks at the historical transformation of the meaning of death from middle ages to the late modern period.³²

Anthropologist started paying attention to the study of death mostly from the late nineteenth century. During this early period of study special attention was paid to the study of belief in spiritual beings associated with life after death and attitudes to the corpse. Following that from the 1960s, anthropologist started giving emphasis on the study of socially restorative functions of funeral rites and the significance of the symbolism of death-related behavior as a cultural expression of the value system.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the emphasis was changed, the classical phase known as the evolutionary school namely Tylor, Frazer, Bachofen deals with the origin of religion, theories of animism, meaning of soul, notion of spirit and supreme being. It also deals with the universality of the fear of corpse, the

³¹ Saifur Rashid, 'Meaning and Rituals of Death: An Insight into Selected Ethnic and Religious Communities of Bangladesh', *Vietnam Social Sciences*, No.5, 2019, p.77. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340698796_Meaning_and_Rituals_of_Death_An_Insight_in_to_Selected_Ethnic_and_Religious_Communities_of_Bangladesh (accessed 10 July, 2020).

³² Rashid, *Vietnam Social Sciences*, p.

belief in the soul and the afterlife, relation between sexuality and death in mortuary rituals. This approach is often labeled 'intellectualist' because it tried to reconstruct the solution devised by early humans to question presented by natural phenomena.³³ The work of the great French Sociologist from the Sociological School, Emile Durkheim, directly opposed the 'intellectualist' emphasis of the English tradition of anthropology. He emphasized that the moral cohesion of the society and its expression in religion could be explained largely in relation to sociological factors and not as a result of fears and imagination of individual personalities. His work primarily focused on collectively held beliefs and concepts and exploring how such collective representation unite individuals. Durkheim and his students produced a remarkable series of essays on the sociology of religion. They reformulated classical theological issues within the sociological framework established by Durkheim's work. Among them was Robert Hertz's 1907 study of secondary burial provides primary point of reference for our analysis of death ritual.³⁴

The Functionalist School such as Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown deals with mortality rite and ceremonies of death. Death as partial destruction of social cohesion, rituals expression of sentiments and emotions. Rite de Passage school propounded by Arnold Van Gennep and Goody deals with the entire life-cycle of an individual, from birth to childhood to old age to death itself and conceptual and organizational aspects of death. In the modern or contemporary phase and the late modern period Bloch & Parry deals with death and the regeneration of life, horror of the pollution of decomposition of the body. Woodburn deals with conceptualizing and ritualizing death by simple societies, treatment and disposal of the body. Huntington & Metcalf's *Celebration of Death* deals with renewed attention to the symbolic importance of the corpse and revalidation of key cultural values throughout the funeral process. Clifford Geertz developed a social scientific approach for studying religion. Discussed about symbol, world view and ethos of religion associated with the death and funerals. Geertz tried to show the intricacy and depth

³³ Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1979, p.6.

³⁴ Huntington and Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death*, pp.6-7.

of Javanese spiritual life and the problems of political and social integration reflected in the religion. It also deals with the beliefs and attitudes concerning death.³⁵

1.5 Review of Literature

From its inception as an academic discipline, works concerning the history of death were generally engaged with the idea of modernity and use death to show how in the modern era, culture has changed or stay the same. The cultural history of death originated in France, where historians of *Annales* school adopted death as a core subject as a history of mentalities, because of its capacity to express unconscious beliefs. Pierre Chaunu, Francois Lebrun, along with Michelle Vovelle founded a 'new history of death' in the early 1970s. '*Historie Quantitative Historie Serielle*' by Pierre Chaunu, contains a sample of twenty two out of more than 130 articles published by Chaunu between 1960 and 1977. These essays, many historiographical, treat subject as diverse as attitudes towards death in Paris during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the role of Brazil in special economic systems of the early modern period, the current crisis in western civilization and the status of historical geography, historical demography, economic history and quantitative historical research.

Michelle Vovelle's substantive works include '*Baroque Piety and Dechristianization: Attitudes to Death in Eighteenth-Century Provence*', '*Religion and Revolution: The Dechristianization of the Year II in the South-East*', and '*Death in the West from 1300 to the Present*' (1982). Vovelle's work described a process of dechristianization whereby sacred beliefs gave way to secular attitudes to death, which he attributed to a Marxist definition of the rise of class consciousness. A markedly different approach was adopted by Philippe Ariès, first in a collection of essays of 1974 and later in a lengthy survey translated into English as '*The Hour of Our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes Towards Death Over The Last One Thousand Years*'. As an autodidact, Ariès was unencumbered by the

³⁵ Rashid, pp. 78-80.

chronological and geographical limitations adopted by professional historians, and addressed the history of death in the Western world over two millennia. He divided this period into four successive stages on the basis of dominant attitudes to death. For Ariès, the ‘tamed death’ of the Middle Ages gave way in the early modern period to an increased fear of dying or to a consciousness of ‘the death of the self’. In turn, the nineteenth century was the golden age of mourning or of the ‘death of the other’. In contrast, the twentieth century is taken to be a period of ‘death denied’ in which death went from being an intimate experience within the bosom of the family to a secular and medical event. The two French pioneers of the field, the conservative Ariès and the Marxist Vovelle, engaged in a lengthy *Historikerstreit* in which Ariès defended the ‘denial of death’ thesis, while Vovelle argued for a more complex relationship between death and modernity. Crucially, although Vovelle viewed secularization in a positive light, and Ariès saw it as a disastrous loss of tradition, they agreed on the modern decline of religion. Their lasting legacy, however, lies in the broad nature of their approaches, rather than in the content of their theories. Confronted with the impossibility of looking directly at the experience of dying, both took the history of death to mean the history of attitudes to death. They adopted micro-functions rather than large historical events as their main areas of enquiry, and tackled wide chronological spans and geographical areas – parameters which were to shape much of the subsequent literature.

The two pioneers, neither Ariès nor Vovelle devoted much attention to war, on the basis that the normal conditions of peacetime were more useful in showing long-term change. Although Ariès adopted Gorer’s view of the First World War as the beginning of the era of ‘death denied’, he did not develop that idea in a way that might have contributed to a greater understanding of the relationship between war and death. He was influenced by a seminal essay of by the British anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer entitled ‘*The pornography of death*’, which drew on Sigmund Freud’s theory of repression to argue that the trauma of the Great War led to a denial of death. Hence, in Gorer’s view, death replaced sex as the ultimate taboo. Another key influence on Ariès was Michel Foucault’s ‘*The Birth of the Clinic*’, which linked

the removal of the dead from the spaces of the living to the scientific mindset of the Enlightenment.

The cultural history of the First World War has boomed since the publication of Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory*, which characterized the war as the beginning of modern consciousness. The field has engendered a wealth of writing on death, grief, and commemoration in Britain and other European countries, much of it written in English. This Anglophone literature has followed a different course from that adopted in French histories of death, which has had equal, if not greater, impact on the literature in English. David Cannadine published an influential essay *War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain*, which sought to disprove the simplistic narrative of progression. Far from disappearing during the First World War, the significance of death, Cannadine argues, was magnified by mass slaughter. As Sigmund Freud observed, wartime losses meant that death could no longer be denied, nor could repressive attitudes be sustained. Modernization brought longer life expectancy, but also mechanized warfare, which interrupted the gradual decline of death rates since the eighteenth century. Thus, Cannadine exposes the paradox of death in the modern period; that is, in peacetime the dead faded from view, but in wartime they dominated the public imagination. In fact, given these opposing trends, the histories of death tend to run along two parallel lines that focus on times of war or peace.

Thus, the two historiographical currents with its origins in the mid 1970s shaped the cultural history of death as it exists today. The French histories of mentalities explored peaceful time attitudes to death across the *longue duree* (long duration) while the English literature on history of death looked at the impact of death during the First World War in terms of continuity and change. Over the last forty years, the field has expanded from the history of mentalities to encompass religious, urban, emotional, military, and medical history, among other areas. Whereas the French tradition was influential in terms of approach, scholars working in English-language on the First World War anticipated key questions in recent literature around individual beliefs, the impact of modernization, and the treatment of death as an independent cultural phenomenon.

Carl Watkins's *The Undiscovered Country* (2014) examines death in the British Isles from the Middle Ages to the Great War. In nutshell, Watkins investigates personal perceptions of death in order to challenge a narrative of secularization. He explores a past, stretching from the advent of Christianity until perhaps the late Victorian era, in which the people living in the British Isle shared a vision of their own end. While Watkins accepts a modern narrative of de-Christianization, he argues that supernatural beliefs and the fear of oblivion endured. Death is described as a point of contact between the ancient and modern worlds' because remains of older visions are still there in the way people speak and structure their thoughts about the dead. His book exemplifies current historiographical tendencies to downplay secularization and to highlight continuities between pre-modern and modern history.

Published shortly after Watkins's book, Thomas Laqueur's *The Work of the Dead: A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (2015) presents a comparable challenge to the idea of secularization. The parallel evolution of these two analogous, but independent, studies is indicative of wider trends in the history of death. In *The Work of the Dead*, Laqueur explores the culture of death in Western Europe and North America across a *longue durée* that stretches back to antiquity. Within this broad framework, he focuses on England in the period between 1680 and 2000. *The Work of the Dead* represents the culmination of a long career dedicated to the cultural history of issues relating to the body, medicine, and sex. It amalgamates the author's previous contributions on death, which addressed modernity, capitalism, and war. He traces a thread through the evolution of mortuary practices in relation to churchyards, cemeteries, cremation, the First World War, and the Holocaust. Like Watkins, Laqueur draws on recent studies to show how the idea of the sacred survived into the modern era and how the dead were granted renewed powers through the reinvention of enchantment.

Claudio Lomnitz *Dead and the Idea of Mexico* (2005), is an important work which diverges the study of death from European and North America to suit other geographical areas. It represents a study of political and cultural history of death from the sixteenth century to the twenty first centuries. Lomnitz by

highlighting the centrality of death in Mexican culture, he refutes the theory of modern denial of death. Finding the sources of the 'mentalities school' to be inadequate, he overcomes distinctions between popular and elite culture, while covering a variety of media in the form of novels, lithographs, television series, radio programmes, funeral sermons, and comic books. Lomnitz's work has depicted that European narratives are an inadequate framework for non-European context.

Another category with a narrower timeframe developed; among them is Julie-Marie Strange's *Death, grief and poverty in Britain, 1870-1914* (2005) stands out as a conscious effort to overcome biases in the earlier literature. It is the first book to address working-class rituals as an alternative language of loss that ran counter to elite traditions. Thus, as with Lomnitz, Strange looks to a popular culture of death. To some extent, she also draws on David Cannadine's argument that the simplification of funerary customs after the First World War did not mean that the dead disappeared from the thoughts of the living. Strange goes further in that she questions the identification of the Great War as the end of Victorian funerary culture, arguing that the war had less impact on working-class customs than on the ostentatious rituals of the elite. Strange also seeks to improve on earlier studies by relating cultural changes to wider social, economic, and political processes. By using death as a window onto class, she sets funerary rites against a socio-economic backdrop of rising living standards, improved access to medical provision, and shifting views on poverty. She then balances that socio-economic narrative with an awareness of cultural continuities. Strange also seeks to improve on earlier studies by relating cultural changes to wider social, economic, and political processes. Her work demonstrates three innovations in recent literature, in that it combines elements of cultural and social history, abandons canonical periodization in favour of historical continuities, and addresses individual experiences and neglected social groups.

Another ground breaking study in Drew Gilpin Faust's *This republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (2008) The work addresses the political functions of commemoration. The war transformed relationships between citizens and the state, as federal bureaucracy expanded to provide national cemeteries, records of the dead, and pensions for their families. Thus, 'the nation's

value and importance were both derived from and proved by the human price paid for its survival'. As a leading expert in Civil War history, Faust argues that the war created the modern American Union, not only by guaranteeing its survival, but also by forging an imagined national community centred on death.

On a civic rather than a national scale, Monica Black's *'Death in Berlin'* (2010) addresses the relationship between a city and its dead, by examining rituals, practices, and perceptions surrounding death from the establishment of the Weimar Republic in 1919 to Germany's division in 1961. Essentially, the purpose of this book is to demonstrate how death can illuminate the continual process of cultural change in Berlin over successive waves of historical transformation.

In sum, historical analysis on the subject of death and its narratives was originated in the 1970s, established by a core group of the French and the English speaking intellectuals. The pioneering works of these intellectuals focusing on *longue duree*, linear narrative of modernization, which relied on the theory of secularization, and the idea of a modern denial of death. The French, mainly the Annales School focused on dying in peacetime while the English speaking historians focused on the impact of First World War on perception and practices of death. Although the focused of the English historians differed from the French historians, the French model was very influential among the English speaking historians. Recent publication and studies on the subject provides evidence of a resurgence of history of death by incorporating innovative technique and methods in historical enquiry into the subject. Recent literature rejects the pioneer's view of discontinuity, and seeks to establish continuity in the face of modernity. It incorporates innovative analytical techniques by a broader view into historical enquiry where an attempt has been made to study death as an integral part of political, social and economic structures and exploring the roles of funerary rituals in shaping nations and communities. Recent literature widens the social spectrum beyond a concern with elites and focused on the lives of the ordinary people. The pioneering works of the French and the English Historians of death could be described as characteristically a European concern. While recent literature widened geographical arena beyond Europe that bring about histories that counter Eurocentric narratives. Thus, we can come to the conclusion

that the development of literature in the history of death validate the fact that historians and their literary approach to the study of death brings new response to the established historical paradigms.

In addition to the literature from social history, death related behavior is of crucial importance to many of the theoretical developments in anthropology since its beginning. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Taylor and Frazer known as the 'intellectualist' focused attention on beliefs about death and the afterlife and asserted that early humans' contemplation of death was the origin of religion. In opposition to Taylor and Frazer, The French Sociology School under Durkheim and his students produced a remarkable series of essays on the sociology of religion, which took up the topic of sacrifice, symbolic classification, magic, sin and expiation and body symbolism. They reformulated Durkheim's work in these essays, '*A contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death*' 1907 which was translated in English and compiled along with other Robert Hertz's work published in 1960 entitled '*Death and The Right Hand*', this work provide primary point of reference for analysis of death rituals. In 1909 another Parisian scholar, Arnold Van Gennep published '*The Rites of Passage*' which dealt with funerals as one of a large class of rituals. This work also appeared in English translation in 1960.

Two important works of the British Functionalist school are Bronislaw Malinowski '*Magic Science and Religion and Other Essays*' (1948) which viewed that the most significant function of religion is to ease the anxiety accompanying the numerous crises of a life span, particularly the issue of death, and A.R Radcliffe Brown '*The Andaman Islander*' (1922) the fear of black magic or of spirits, fear of God, of the devil, of Hell give men fears and anxieties, from which they would otherwise be free certain rites are employed.

There has been continual interest in the anthropological study of death, marked by the series of books and collections of studies published. Among these works, Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry '*Death and the regeneration of Life*' (1982) have made important contributions to the study of death, especially on the way death rites often include processes of regeneration or the reaffirmation of life

and the ongoing nature of society after a death. Here the very idea of fertility complements or even opposes mortality within the framework of cultural vitality. Bloch's own ethnographic work on death in Madagascar (1971) and Parry's on traditional Indian cremation (1994) have fostered anthropological analyses of death to a great degree in terms of the extensive dynamics of power, kinship, history, and environment, including the very late-twentieth-century innovation of what has, variously, been described as natural, woodland, green, or ecological burial.

Hungtington and Metcalf *'Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual'* (1979) is another work from contemporary anthropologists notable for their use of Hertz and for their own descriptive and analytical studies of some later twentieth-century funerary rites in the United States, especially in terms of the preparation and viewing of the corpse and general accounts of burial and cremation. This work relies extensively on the authors' field experience, discusses the most important questions of death culture research such as emotional reaction to death; symbolic associations of death, etc. by presenting both the corresponding established theories and their critiques.

In the context of the Mizos, most of the early information of the tribe was the records of the colonial administrators, the Christian missionaries and monographs written by the colonizer. Thus, the subject of death was not an important area and lack professionalism, since references were made to these death practices in the course of their endeavor to record and study the tribe they had conquered.

Among the colonial ethnography, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* written by Lt. Colonel J. Shakespeare deals with the domestic life, laws, customs and religion, folklore and language of the Lushai and the non-Lushai clans. This book provided us a glimpse of Mizo culture and practices in the pre-colonial times; in chapter four the author had elaborated in brief the funeral ceremonies and the disposal of dead. *Lushai Customs: A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* by N.E Perry focusing on the customs and ceremonies of the Lushai, in chapter four titled 'Funeral Ceremony' he gave a thorough description of the *Lushai* funeral ceremonies and some methods of disposal of the dead. *Five Years in Unknown Jungles* by Reginald

A. Lorrain discussed in detail the religious beliefs of the Lakhers, their ideas on death, religious and secular ceremonies and sacrifices. In a separate chapter entitled From 'Cradle to Grave' he clearly highlighted the funeral tradition of the Lakhers, their conception of death and burial practices. This book is part a broad elaboration of the culture of the Lakhers where all the cultural traditions were closely linked and almost the same with other Mizo clans especially the Lusei. J.M Llyod *History of the Church in Mizoram: Harvest in the Hills* narrate the historical transformation of the tribe under the civilizing mission of the administrators and the Christian missionaries, a small portion of the narrative was spared in a paragraph where some of the death attitudes and customs and the changes brought about by modernity and Christianity. *Wild Races of The Eastern Frontier of India* written by T.H Lewin highlighted the customs of the hill tribes. Part II discussed the religion, festivals, dresses, social habits etc. along with funeral ceremonies of the *Khyoungtha* and the *Chukmas*. In part he describe the customs of the *Kookies* or *Lusei* and the *Shendus*, here we find a brief description of Funeral ceremonies among the *Kookies*, *Lushei* and *Shendus*. This book clearly highlighted the close connection between the tribe in the North East Frontier in Culture and society.

Another literature on the subject of death comes from the early native writers and local historians; the literature generally documented a simple record on the pre-colonial practices and beliefs surrounding death. Rev. Liangkhaia in his book *Mizo Awmdan Hlui & Mizo Mi Leh Thil Hmingthangte Leh Mizo Sakhua* briefly describes Mizo death ritual, grave and burial system, he also emphasized the practice of 'Thlaichhiah' ceremony. Apart from this he had a clear description of the 'Kuangur' tradition and ceremony practiced by chiefs and high social standings. Other chapters plainly elaborated the Mizo religion, sacrifices, and taboos & inter war between clans which gives us a glimpse of Mizo culture and society in the pre-colonial period. *Mizo Pi Pute Leh An Thlahte Chanchin* by K.Zawla is one of the finest works on Mizo history, which describe different Mizo tradition, customs, and ceremonies. In a separate chapter we find the elaboration of the Mizo concept of God, evil spirit, death and soul. Next to this chapter he highlighted the different kinds of grave and its uses, he also describe in length the ceremony and methods of disposing a deceased

enemy killed in war. Apart from this, his works contains a brief description of Mizo religion and its attributed sacrifices where we can have a glimpse of Mizo conception of death and its connection with funerary tradition.

Thus, literature concerning the subject of death in the context of the Mizos is scanty and no systematic study has achieved. The literature can be generally divided into the colonial administrator's and missionary's records on the customs of the tribe and the early local chronicler's account on the history of the tribe. The colonial ethnography and missionary records often narrate beliefs and practices concerning death as 'primitive', 'savage', 'animistic' and contrasted against the discourse made by them with the western notion as being superior in order to construct an established paradigm. In some cases the practices and beliefs documented by colonial ethnography and the local historians do not always concur, since the discourse and narration made by the colonizer had an enormous impact on the early local historians. Thus, there were no systematic study on the subject of death and the two trends of documenting history were the only reflection of the subject till the contemporary period.

Recently an important breakthrough in the subject of death has been achieved with the publication of *Being Mizo* in 2014, by Joy Pachuau and a doctoral thesis '*Khawhar Zai: Voices of Hope in the Bereavement Singing of Mizo Christians in North East India*' in 2016 by Joanna Heath. Joy Pachuau examines issues of ethnicity and identity with specific reference to the Mizos. In seeking to understand the emergence of Mizo identity, the book makes a general contribution to how identities are formed and constructed. In one of her chapter 'Death and locality in the creation of Mizo Identity', the community's engagements with Christianity, which is "localised", and its practices surrounding death are seen as prime organizers. "Praxis", especially in the context of Christianity and death, are thus seen not only as chief organizers of Mizo identity, but also as the boundary markers around which notions of belonging and exclusion are invoked. Joanna Heath from her musicological stance analyzed the Mizo traditional singing which has been developed in the 1920s during the Colonial period which become the most performative community death ritual sung at the deceased house. The thesis studied

the *khawhar zai* repertoire and its significance for grieving communities both at the time of its composition and in the modern Mizo context. It explored anthropological approaches to hope in the light of eschatology and evangelicalism. Expression of hope through *khawhar zai* funeral singing has been the crux of the thesis.

1.11 Statement of the Problem

The meaning and attitudes towards death and the act of dying differed from culture to culture and region to region and from time to time. The basic research problem is to determine what types of social system and what kinds of dynamics engender the thought system in a particular society. Classic historical works on the subject and majority of the academic literature on death based their studies on the western culture. Recent literature focuses different historical trend on how death and dying has been localized or culturally structured and transformed by the forces of modernity, colonialism, medicalisation, urbanization and global capitalism in the non-western cultures and societies, like the Latin America, Africa, Asia etc, Though classic historical works on death based their studies on European society and derived many theories and established paradigms, the difference in culture is an area which needs to be carefully dealt with while looking at the transformation and changes in the death ethos of the Mizos.

The subject death is pertinent to academics in the fields of anthropology, art, classics, history, literature, medicine, music, socio-legal studies, social policy, sociology, philosophy, psychology and religious studies etc. Studies of mortality remain a small but significant trend in early modern scholarship on death, and the sub-discipline has evolved in recent years to take account of developments in gender history, the history of medicine, and broader interdisciplinary approaches. It is also particularly relevant to those professionally or voluntarily engaged in the health and caring professions, in bereavement counseling, and the funeral industries. Therefore, literature of many disciplinary sub-fields increased. As the subject of death is multidisciplinary and requires a variety of specialty interest, the literature in this sub-discipline developed and proliferated in near exponential fashion. Therefore, the study of death in the field of social and cultural history also requires extensive lists of

literature from the different constituent specialty areas. The collection of research and theoretical information available has become almost intellectually unmanageable. What is needed at this time is an attempt to aggregate, integrate, classify, organize, and to mark out and articulate the details of the information contained in the expansive body of literature that has been generated in this field. Research in the subject perhaps, can best be accomplished in the form of a concise but comprehensive integration of the current state of knowledge by employing a careful implementation of relevant historical research methodology.

In the context of the Mizos, groundwork for academic and professional studies in the field has not yet been established. Most of the information about the Mizos comes from the official correspondences of colonial administrators and missionaries, monographs written by them, and also their private letters. The subject of death for most of these writers was not a very important subject of investigation. Only scattered information about death practices were highlighted as part of an attempt to document the tribes they administered. Other sources of information for the Mizo notion of death comes from early Mizo writers, the colonial attempt and the indigenous writings do not always concur, as a result of unattested works and lack of professionalism in the field, only a broad understanding of them can be attempted. Existing literature on the tribes lacked specialization in the field and no formal academic writings about the subject are found.

With regards to the quest for the social and cultural history of death among the Mizos, there seems to be no adequate research to date. Therefore, this research comprehends the scattered information, analyzed, and reinterpreted existing materials, archival sources supplemented by oral sources with a new dimension.

1.12 Objectives of the Study

1. To introduce the concept and meaning of death and the function of it's surrounding rituals in pre-the colonial period.
2. To examine the characteristic of changes and continuity surrounding death; pattern and trends in mortality, and causes of death in the Colonial Period.

3. To re-examine the nature of death and the act of dying during the *Rambuai* period.
4. To study the changes in epidemiological transition, changes in the attitude towards death and dying; and its surrounding ritual practices in the contemporary period.

1.13 Area of the Study

The study focused on the social and cultural history of death and dying in Mizoram since Colonial-Period.

1.14 Methodology

The present work basically followed the new social historical method by making effort to make sense of the past through researching and organizing whatever historical traces have been left behind. The traces range from different materials from printed sources to visual images to archaeological sites or historical sites. The most widely consulted materials are primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources helped in organizing facts and interpretations. The approach is to move beyond simple narrative to critical evaluation of the historical event using both primary and secondary sources.

There is no systematic study of the subject in the context of the Mizos, only a little or scanty of historical sources. Due to insufficient sources the research work requires an extensive hunt for historical sources. The work is designed to construct historical narrative, by making use of relevant historical sources and information; examining and highlighting the process that lead to historical transition and carrying out an analysis on the available sources.

The study is primarily based on qualitative analysis, and in some cases quantifiable government's data are interpreted statistically. Unstructured interviews, fieldwork and photographs are employed to enrich and supplement qualitative analysis. The research is based on reconstruction through writing of historical narrative, examining relevant references of the available historical information,

collecting historical information, highlighting the process that lead to historical transitions, and carrying out an analysis.

As far as archival sources in the form of colonial account are concerned, colonial government in the then *Lushai* Hills did not give much attention on the subject of death and its related activities. They did not much interfere in the customs and practices regarding death. Therefore, only a small portion of colonial accounts in the form of documents of administrative reports, letters, diaries, correspondences and accounts of the British administrators, from the State Archives of Mizoram can be employed. Fortunately, scattered reports on vital statistics prepared by the Assam government in the form of Annual Sanitary Report and Administrative Reports of Assam, during the colonial period have been utilized to give a detail record on vital statistics during the colonial period. *Laisuih & Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu* the monthly magazine published by the Colonial government despite its biases, recorded relevant historical account. It became quite useful in reconstructing the narration on attitude towards people's perception of death, as well as the condition of health, diseases of the masses during the period under study. Through Missionaries reports, like the Welsh Presbyterian Mission and London Baptist Mission Society, diaries of the pioneer missionaries and Christian magazine like *Kristian Tlangau*, the impact of the Christian mission towards the changing perception and practices surrounding death can be observed and analyzed. The ethnographic records of the British administrators and missionaries along with the early Church records and journals are also quite enriching.

Ethnography including phenomenological study has been employed by using interviews mainly unstructured interviews by drawing out their experiences (lived experiences) through the descriptions provided by witnessed or the people involved. Apart from this, the researcher's own observation as being a member of the culture in which the study is conducted is also made use of in order to maintain historical accuracy and perhaps contribute alternative historical sources. Thus, some chapters also make use of ethnographic approach where the current culture or society is examined by using interviews of the knowledgeable person about the culture and society. Secondary sources in the form of books, journals, articles, essays,

unpublished seminar papers, daily newspapers etc provide an analytical lens and give conceptual framework to which the sources are analyzed and interpreted.

1.14 Structure of the Study

The thesis is divided into the following chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first Chapter is a general introduction for the thesis and it is divided into different sections or parts. The first part presents the general profile and historical background of the 'Mizos' and Mizoram. The second part deals with the meaning of death, scope and approach to the study of death in history. The third part deals with the anthropology of death and the fourth part consists of literature review, objectives of the study, area of the study, methodology and structure of the study.

Chapter 2: Pre-Colonial Mizo Deathways

This chapter presents an introductory or it provides a backdrop for the main chapters. It highlighted the Mizo traditional belief system, the concept of death and the afterlife. Traditional belief system, burials, and ritual practices surrounding death have been analyzed in this chapter.

Chapter 3: Death and Dying in the Colonial Period

Chapter 3 explores the impact of Colonialism and Christianity in the transformation of Mizo attitude towards death, dying and rituals surrounding death in the Colonial Period. It also explores the trend in mortality, epidemiological transition and causes of death in the colonial period.

Chapter 4: Death and Dying During the *Rambuai* (Troubled Years)

This Chapter analyzed the twenty years of *rambuai* (troubled years) from the perspective of death and dying, which brings out new dimension of looking at the history of *rambuai*. It explores how death was employed to legitimize the nationalist agenda of revolutionary nationalism. It highlighted the political lives of the dead body, re-burial and the construction of martyr cemetery and discourse on martyrdom

and it brings light on how all these narratives overshadowed the magnitude of civilian's death during the *rambuai* years.

Chapter 5: Death and Dying in Contemporary Times

The Chapter addressed the number of changes how people come to think about death, dying and its surrounding rituals with the changes in health infrastructure, medical progress, a shift in the type of diseases and the condition that have caused death, improved mortality rate and life expectancy, changes in political, socio-economy, new communicative technology, urbanization and changing lifestyle and cultural conditions in a globalized world. It addressed a gradual shift of emphasis in cultural and religious tradition towards medical science and modernity that has been undergoing gradual changes in contemporary Mizo society.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The Final Chapter of the thesis presents the major findings of the thesis.

2.1 Introduction

In all societies, when a person dies, family, friends, and neighbors respond in structured, patterned ways to the death. Cultural guidelines determine the treatment and disposal of the body and prescribe a period of mourning for close relatives. Death ritual, like much of human behavior, is an expression of a cultural blueprint, of attitudes, values and ideals passed down by parents, and their parents, which an individual learns as a member of society. The analysis of mortuary practices provides rich data on the behavior of kin and community. It leads to people's notions of gods, souls, witches, spirits and afterworlds. It promises access to their belief and value systems, to their conceptions of the social and moral worlds. It informs that ritual has consequences for both the individual and society.

2.2 Traditional Mizo Belief System

The early Mizos perceived human beings as part of the natural order of existence and their consciousness of existence was not human centricism. Negotiation with nature was pertinent. Transcendent subjects and ethereal matters were responded with the intellect they built up from their experiences. Human existence was perceived as body-soul duality, which vastly directed their worldview.³⁶ The cosmos was separated into the corporeal world and the intangible world of spirits. The corporeal world includes human beings and all the animated forms, which they believed as possessing spirits of their own. The unanimated objects including rocks and earth were regarded as dwellings of the animated beings that they considered as not possessing spiritual entities. They conceived that the animated world was created and sustained by the spirits residing in heavens, in the subterranean world, hills and mountains, caves and springs.³⁷

There were close affinities among the different Mizo clans pertaining to their cosmology and worldviews. They firmly believed in the existence of two worlds, the spiritual world and the physical world. The spiritual world was inhabited by those

³⁶ Albert Vanlalruata, 'Rethinking Mizo Belief System', *Historical Journal Mizoram*, p.2, Vol.XVII, November 2016, pp.1-2.

³⁷ Albert Vanlalruata, *Historical Journal Mizoram*, p.2.

supernatural beings, which cannot be seen and touch. Firstly a supernatural being called *Pathian* who was synonymous with God was believed to be the creator being who created and tamed human beings, complement by numerous spirits in numbers. These spirits were supposed to bless and guide human beings in the physical world and were commonly known as good spirit. The Mizos also believed that there were numerous spirits who caused hardship to human known as the bad spirits. Thus, the inhabitants of the spiritual world were divided into that good and bad spirit. The physical world was inhabited by those which can be seen and touch, human beings etc. all other creations that lived in land and water, where all of them possessed a 'soul'.³⁸

According to Saiaithanga, the Mizo vocabulary was limited to a great extent while dealing with *Pathian* (God), *khuavang* (a guardian spirit) , *ramhuai* (demons) and *phung* (a ghost generally regarded as female by the Luseis) and have no word which can include all these within its bounds. Spirits were classified into two, the good spirit and bad spirit.³⁹ Zairema listed out the detail lists of good and bad spirit. Good spirit include, *Pathian*, *Khua*, *Sa*, *Khaltu*, *Pu Vana*, *Khuanu*, *Khuapa*, *Tlang Lal*, *Lasi* and *Pheichham*. Bad spirits were- *Huai*(*huai* takes the name where it dwells), such as *Ramhuai* if it dwells in forest, and *Sihhuai* if it dwells in a small spring which were regarded as being possessed or haunted by evil-spirits, *Phung*, *Chawm* (evil spirit), *Khawhring* (a malignant spirit which so closely approximates to what in English is known as the (evil-eye), *khawimu* (a malignant spirit, said to be in the habit of carrying off people), *Tulum*(an evil spirit said to be in the habit of entering into the bodies of those who fall from trees or over precipices, and animating them after death), *Maimi* (a spirit said to be responsible for a kind of temporary paralysis without loss of consciousness), *Hmuithla* (an apparition, a ghost, a wrath and a spirit), *Dengsur* (a spirit said to throw pebbles and stone on human)⁴⁰ Some spirits, considered as latent and inactive were believed to be benign and were superficially venerated; on the contrary, spirits regarded as active were negotiated to

³⁸ Zairema, *Pipute Biak Hi*, New Delhi, The Author, 2009, p 1.

³⁹ Saiaithanga, '*Mizo Sakhua*', Aizawl, The Author,p.2.

⁴⁰ Zairema, *Pipute Biak Hi*, p.3.

escape their interference on the human life. The active spirits were negotiated through sacrificial appeasement when they sense those spirits interfered on their daily existence. At the same time, spirits regarded as latent or inactive in their everyday existence were obligatory invoked upon to maintain natural order of existence.⁴¹

The worshipped and sacrifice for 'Sa' and 'Khua' had been the core in traditional Mizo belief system. *Sa* was related to the clan- identity to which one is born, *khua* referred to the immanent protector of cosmic goddess *khuanu*.⁴² The equation of Mizo *Sakhua* with European notion of religion was the product of colonial construction of western values and beliefs according to Christian framework of interpretation. It is truly appropriate to consider that the entity as to whom the Mizo practically engaged with was *Sakhua* where obligatory sacrifices were offered. The communal sacrifices centering on *sakhua* were obligatory and were different from the non-obligatory sacrifices performed to the active spirits.⁴³

Mizo 'sakhua' in a briefly ordered manner included *Sakung phun*, *Chawng* (*chawngfang* or *chawngchen*, *dawino chhui* or *dawino kaitheh*, *sedawi* or *sechhun*, *sekhuan* or *mitthirawp lam* and *Khuangchawi*.⁴⁴ *Sakhaw* worship was a costly affair. It consisted of stages of worshipping acts, each involving a sumptuous public feast. The initial less expensive ones were considered to be almost obligatory and the remaining stages in the series of worshipping stages were optional. The higher the stage, the costlier is the act. The completion of all the stages placed one in the most coveted and respectable position in the society called *thangchhuah*, which also carries a promise to paradise or heaven (*pialral*) through the attainment of *thangchhuah*, the immediate aim which also serve as the means to achieve such a position namely public feasting, was to be a blessing to the entire community. Another *thangchhuah* called *ram lama thangchhuah* was set aside for those who

⁴¹ Vanlalruata, Historical Journal of Mizoram, p.2

⁴² Lalsangkima Pachuau, 'Mizo Sakhua in Transition: Change and Continuity from Primal Religion to Christianity' *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXXIV, No1, January, 2006, <http://mis.sagepub.com/> (accessed 1 August, 2018).

⁴³ Vanlalruata, p.6.

⁴⁴ Saiaithanga 'Mizo Sakhua' pp. 21-81.

achieved great hunting *success* and have feasted the community for several times.⁴⁵ The belief in the supreme being(s) or (Spirit/s) , the belief in the existence of multitude of benevolent and malevolent spirits, and the accompanying propitiatory sacrifices, the practice of '*Sakhua*', the belief in life after death and striving to *pialral* (heaven), constitute the core of traditional Mizo belief system.

The pivot in Mizo belief system lies in the worship of *sakhua*, where the climax was to achieve afterlife in *pialral* where the steps for achieving access to *pialral* obliged public feasting. In traditional Mizo belief system what was clearly seen is that it involves the implication of moral ethics, public feasting, uplifting the downtrodden by the well to do families. Also, one alternative to reach *pialral*, i.e. *Ram lama thangchhuah*, which can be achieved by great hunting success, control and sustain social life of the community, benefiting the societal needs.

2.3 Traditional Concept of Death and the After Life

In the traditional Mizo belief system it is noticed that human beings was characterized by, '*taksa*' (flesh) and '*thla*' (soul/spirit). As long as the '*thla*' resides in the flesh it points to the vitality of man, but the temporary departure of the '*thla*' from the flesh signified, sickness, a state of unconsciousness or sometimes trance. The permanent departure of '*thla*' from the flesh or body signified the death of a person, fleshless spirit/soul are called '*Thlarau*' and are obliged to dwell in '*thlarau ram*' which were '*Pialral*' (Paradise) and '*Mitthi Khua*' (a dead man's village).⁴⁶ To die in Mizo is *thi*, and a dead person is *mitthi*. An alternative word for death is also *boral*, implying to disappear completely. *Thlarau* possibly derived from *thla* or shadow, and *rau* spirit described the essence of a person, that which travelled when a person died or when his or her life-cord snapped. Death was regarded with fear, gravity, and seriousness and euphemism were often used to express it, such as *zan khat mitchhin* (one night of closing the eyes) or *hnuk chat*, *hnuk* being an imaginary cord, while *chat*, means snapping or breaking.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Lalsangkima Pachuau, *Missiology*, p.46.

⁴⁶ Zairema, *I Thukhawchang Mi Pek Te Hi*, Zarkawt, Zorun Community, 2009, p.205.

⁴⁷ Joy Pachuau, p.216.

According to K. Zawla, the Mizos generally believed that death was caused by 'Sanu' and 'Manghauva'. (In Pawi tradition *Sanu* was considered synonymous with Pawla in Lusei tradition). When a person died of prolonged sickness, it is believed to be the work of 'Manghauva'. According to oral sources, "Manghauva" was seen in dreams carrying a big basket made of bamboo with full of human heads, despite carrying a basket full of human heads he was seen walking in search of heads to hunt in the village street. He was probably feared with intense psychosis. A person named *Lalthathkupa* was also believed to cause the death of a person dying from Epilepsy. Apart from this the works of *dawi* was also believed to cause death. Victims usually suffered stomach ache and tuberculosis,⁴⁸ in pre-colonial Mizo society, *dawi*⁴⁹(magic/witchcraft)was common among the Mizos and the victims usually suffered from stomach ache and tuberculosis believed to be caused by *dawi* or magic/witchcraft. This is also evidence from folktales and folklore with an elaboration of 'dawithiam' and his *dawi* which caused the death of many lives.

It was also believed that, if anyone saw a black spot in the middle of the moon it was considered to be a bad omen may lead to certain death of the household of the village. They considered seeing a black spot on the moon as dangerous and fearful; therefore they often not dare to gaze at the moon even on a full moon night.⁵⁰When a person died suddenly without any disease or sickness it was called 'Zachhamlak'.⁵¹ According to James Herbert Lorrain *Zachham* is the name of an evil spirit said to be commissioned to seize the spirits of hundred people every day.⁵² Occasionally, when not sufficient sick people have died to reach hundred during twenty-four hours, he is obliged to seize the spirit of a healthy person here and there in order to make up the required number.

In the pre-colonial Mizo society a dead person was mourned with an atmosphere of profound sorrow on the part of the dead family. When a person died it

⁴⁸ Zawla, pp. 53-54.

⁴⁹ Zawla, pp.54.

⁵⁰ C. Lianthanga, *Hmanlai Mizo Nun*, Aizawl, Mizoram Publication Board, 1999. p.72.

⁵¹ *Mizote Khawsak Phung*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 1993, p.30.

⁵² 'Zachham' in James Herbert Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, 4th Reprint, Kolkata. Professor Ramakanta Chakraborty The Asiatic Society, 2008.

had affected and stirred the emotion of the dead family and the society at large. It had aroused a feeling of sorrow to the dead family, and was mourned according to their customary law.⁵³ Among the Mizos death is likely to be seen as particularly disruptive, moreover when it strikes a person who are more relevant for the functional and moral activities of the social order. Normally the death of a husband or wife was regarded as most undesirable and often mourned with intense sorrow. To elaborate this there is a saying “*Koki sah thlak ang a ni*” which means, the loss of a husband or wife is as painful as to cut off one’s shoulder. When death took place, the Mizos often mourned with deep grief and sorrow, they were abstaining from meal, refuse to take bath, and hardly wash their hair and neglected the oiling of hair. They even refused to wash their face, where the bereaved look dull and dirty, as it indicates his or her mourn for the loss. Women at the time of losing her children or husbands they usually cried every morning at least for three months. Thus, physically death implies the end in the physical world.⁵⁴

The impact of death was also directly related to the social status of the deceased and the nature of how a person died. There were several types of death among the Mizos, the most preferable was *Awmlai* or we can say that it is a natural death or sometime from disease but under the communion of a family or death in the premise of one’s own house or due to old age, sickness, illness or infected by any chronic diseases. In contrary to this the most undesirable death was *sarathi* or unnatural death caused by an accident or any unnatural death like drowning, falling from trees and edge of the hills. This type of death was again divided according to the nature of death, such as death from wild beast and from an enemy or foe in times of war were regarded undesirable and caused fear psychosis. In some cases the corpse must not be even brought into the village, it was often not allowed to bring into a house, but deposited in the forge. *Raicheh* is also another type of death, it is the death of woman at a child birth, and this type of death was very much feared by women. If a women dies of *raicheh*, her spirit would find her path to *mitthi khua* with full of obstacles. It is said that an axe would be buried with her so that she might

⁵³ *Mizote Khawsak Phung*, p.24.

⁵⁴ C. Chhuanvawra, *Aw Pialral*, Aizawl, The Author, 2015, p.2.

be able to clean her path to the *mitthi khua*, for this reason death over child birth was look upon with intimidation. When a child dies shortly after birth, it is called *hlamzuih*. The length of lifetime of the child to be called *hlamzuih* differs from area to area, but normally it was three months or 90 days. *Hlamzuih* were exempted from being shot by *Pu Pawla*.⁵⁵ Much heed were paid upon the corpse of the dead bodies, and the most undesirable death is *sarhi* or unnatural death such as drowned, accident from wild beast and enemy or lost in jungle. If such unfortunate event happened they would not leave the corpse and bodies to decay, and left to wild beast, therefore it was an obligation to search for the deceased body until it was found, the search maybe even upto seven days.⁵⁶ This suggests that human life was very much valued and was respected with much admiration.

In the traditional Mizo conception of a human being, the soul (or spirit) continues to live even after a person died. After death, the soul left the body through a crack in the skull. According to K. Zawla the women's soul first visited the *Zawlbuk* (a young men's dormitory) and a men's soul visit a village water point. The hmars believed that the soul proceeded first to *Thlanpial* and then move toward *Rih Dil*.⁵⁷ It was also believed that when a person died the soul rather than proceeding to *mitthi khua*, still resided in their village. Sometimes transformed into *khawimu* (carpenters bee), the wondering *khawimu* (carpenters bee) was believed to be the soul of their departed parent who is wondering in search of food. Thus, they place food for their deceased parent known as "*chhiah*".⁵⁸ After wondering around for about three months, the soul would then proceed toward the place of the dead. *Rih Dil*, a lake, which lies just beyond the eastern border of Mizoram, was believed to be the passage toward *mitthikhua* (literally, the village or abode of the dead). The origin of this belief can be traced from one Mizo folktale which goes like this:

A hunting party stopped nearby Rih Dil and stayed for the night, one of the hunters couldn't sleep while the rest of them were sound asleep. The

⁵⁵ Malsawmliana, 'Traditional Burial System of the Mizos,' *Historical Journal Mizoram*. Vol.XIV, Nov,2013, p.14.

⁵⁶ B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Culture*, Aizawl, The Author, 2014, p.260.

⁵⁷ Zawlap.57.

⁵⁸ *Mizote Khawsak Phung*, p.26.

hunter who was awake heard voices and when the voice became clearer, he came to know that what it was none other than his wife talking about their household affairs. Seemingly talking with the others, she said, "Their father left before I left home, I forgot to tell our children that I kept the dried meat inside the pot on the fire shelf and put the eggs where I kept in the container of the rice husk". When the hunting party reached the village, they realized that his wife had died during their absence. The husband checked their house and found that everything was exactly what his wife said the previous night. So from then on, they believed that every departed soul passes through Rih Dil on their way to Mitthi Khua (village of the Dead) or Pialral (Paradise for the Thangchhuah).⁵⁹

And then the soul proceeded to *thanpial*, they soon reached *hringlang tlang*, from here they were gazing at the physical world, and would turn back weeping with sentimental and longing for their former life and their dear ones. At this place there grows a beautiful flower "*Hawilopar*" which blossom in numbers, the departed soul then plucked those flowers which was worn on the hair, which soothed their longing for physical world, soon they reached a spring or a water place called '*Lunglohtui*' where they drank and lose all their longing to return to earth. The departed soul then proceeded to the entrance of *pialral* and *mitthi khua*, known as *zingvanzawl* where the route appears to have divided, one leading to the village of the dead (*mitthi khua*) and the other to paradise (*pialral*). This gorge or passage to both entrances was also called '*Pu Pawla kawt*'⁶⁰

According to tradition, other than those who attained the *thangchhuah* status, young men who had sexual relations with three or more virgin girls or seven women, virgin women, and infants escaped *Pawla's* pellet. In the *mitthi khua*, the souls of the dead led a shadowy and depressing existence in a miniature form. According to one

⁵⁹ Malsawmdawngliana, 'Rethinking Sacred Geography of The Chins-Lushai in The Historical Context', in K. Robin (ed.), *Chin, History, Culture & Identity*, New Delhi, Dominant Publishers and Distributors on behalf of The Euro Burma Office, Brussels, Belgium in collaboration with the Dept of History & Ethnography, MZU, 2009, p.202.

⁶⁰ Lalthangliana., *Mizo Culture*, p.116.

tradition, the soul later escaped from the village in the form of dew which would evaporate and vanish forever. *Pialral* (or the land beyond the “*Pial*” River) has been translated as Paradise. This is the place for the privileged few. The most popular expression is that those in *pialral* will be fed with husked rice inferring that there will be no more toil and hard labor.⁶¹

One of the most important aspects of Mizo primal religion is the believe in a place called *mitthi khua* (village of the dead) and *Pialral* (paradise). The different Mizo clans had a firm believed that human beings possessed a soul, and the concept of abode of the dead or *mitthi khua* and the *pialral*. Among the different clans the names and places are slightly different from each other but their conceptualization of the human soul and life after death is almost all the same. In fact almost all the Mizo clans believed in life after death. J. Shakespeare stated that “The Lusheis believe in a spirit world beyond the grave, which is known as *mitthi khua* i.e., dead man’s village- but on the far side of *mitthi khua* runs the pial river beyond which lies *Pialral*, an abode of bliss”.⁶² According to James Herbert Lorrain *pialral* “is the Lushei paradise- the further side of the *Pial* River.”⁶³ The concept of *Pialral* was very similar among the Lusei and Pawi, but the *Pawi* had a slight different concept on the human soul. The passge to *pialral* was different between Lusei and Pawi, the lusei have ‘*Rih*’ and ‘*Pawla*’ while the *pawis* having ‘*Buantual*’ and ‘*Sanu*’. *Fanai* have undergone the passage of ‘*Zinghmun tlang*’, among the paites the soul proceeded to *Thlanpial* and then move to *Rih*. The Maras also have the concept of *pialral*; they called it ‘*Peira*’.⁶⁴ The Maras believed in three places of abode, the first was nearest to the dwelling place of *Pathian* or *Khazopa/Khozing*. The other was *mitthi khua* (*Athikhi*) an abode for ordinary people, and the third was *Savawkhi*, an abode for all unnatural and death at childbirth. Lusei, Mara and Lai have had the

⁶¹ Lalsangkima Pachuau, *Missiology*, p.47.

⁶² Shakespeare, p.62

⁶³ ‘Pial’ *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*.

⁶⁴ N.E. Perry, *The Lakhers*, Calcutta, FIRMLA KLM Private Ltd on behalf of Tribal Research Institute Aizwal Mizoram, Reprint 1976, p.396.

abode of *pialral* in common and all the obligations to be fulfilled to enter *pialral* were almost the same.⁶⁵

It is not an easy task to trace the origin of *mitthi khua* and *pialral*; whether or not it was merely a metaphor representing the abode of the dead or a place on earth. Due to the absence of written records, oral source, which was long back handed down from generations had a different versions and interpretation, slightly differing from clan to clan and person to person, diverse explanation arise, pertaining to what really was a *pialral* in Mizo belief system and its origin is almost impossible to reconstruct, and is debatable.

In some of the Mizo poetry and songs we found that the word '*pial*' was used as an 'earth', "*suihlunglenin piallung khar hawng ila,*" Here it stands for stone or a big rock used as a door of a tomb. In general usage *pial* is used as a flat rock or stone. '*Pialtlep*' here it means a wide strip of rock, usually found on the bank of a river. In another usage, '*chhimpial*' exhibits a broader meaning earth, '*pialleia ka nun tham hnu kha mi ngaihtir e*' here it also convey earth. We have found other usage "*Piallung*" here slightly differ from the previous usage, it means a stone, or pebbles mostly smooth, used as a combination of two words *pial* and *lung*, here *pial* means a river, and *lung* means stone, thus *Piallung* means a stone on the bed or banks of a river. But there were different explanation of *pial* which differs from person to person.⁶⁶ Also the foremost migrating Mizo clan believed that the passage of the dead had to pass "*Thlanpial*" which points to a large flat rock at *Khawlek*.⁶⁷ In most of the Mizo traditional songs and poetry *Pailral* was represented as a land beyond the grave where the human soul resides for eternity, it can fairly be concluded that the word *pialral* was used to represent the land of the soul, or the abode of the dead.

It is believed that the concept of *mitthi khua* (village of the dead) and life after death developed among the Mizos as a result of some experience from after a

⁶⁵ John Hamlet Hlychho, *The Maras: Head hunters to Soul Hunters*, New Delhi, Cambridge Press, 2009, pp.100-101.

⁶⁶ Hamlet Hlychho, *The Maras*, pp 154-155.

⁶⁷ Zairema, *Pipute Biak Hi*, p.137.

person fell into trance, visiting the village of the death, since then what was seen in *mitthi khua* was orally handed down and was conceptualized, which is probably believed as the origin of such belief. Also from the story of *Tlingi* and *Ngama* we saw a clearer picture of *mitthi khua*, and the position of ordinary human soul there. These beliefs were then orally handed down and formed the Mizo traditional beliefs on *mitthi khua* and the position of ordinary human soul. Thus, we can say that the Mizos developed the concept of *mitthi khua* and life after death from the story of *Tlingi* and *Ngama* and *Pawngazel* (Pawnga's fallen into trance).

According to C. Lianthanga, Pawnga had fallen into trance visiting *mitthi khua* where he suddenly approached the green meadows, and then he entered the house which was pointed out by his father and mother, where he saw a large pig which was laid in the front verandah and then her mother told him that the pig was meant for sacrifice for his *thla* (soul) to prevent the soul from following the spirit of the deceased or to prevent him from death or evil spirit, who was believed to cause trance. Soon, Pawnga had come back into his normal life where he suddenly fallen sick and died a broken heart.⁶⁸

Most of the livelihood in *Mitthi Khua* was drawn from the story of *Tlingi* and *Ngama*. There was a clear elaboration of *mitthi khua* in the story of *Tlingi* and *Ngama*, one must try to bring out how this *mitthi khua* was known by the Mizos and the story goes like this:

“Tlingi and Ngama were lovers and they often met as lovers did at some hidden places known only to them. One day they agreed to meet near a hillock which both knew. At that time their village was at war with another village and therefore no one should reveal his presence by making a noise when he or she was in the forest. As Tlingi reached the tryst she set quietly at a place where she could not be seen easily by anyone who passed by. Ngama came to the other side of the hillock and he too sat quietly and waited for the

⁶⁸ Lianthanga, *Hmanlai Mizo Nun*, p.86.

arrival of his lover. They sat and waited not knowing that they were so near to each other all the time. They put a few twigs in the ground and from these grew groves of bamboo that she or he had to wait only for a few moments though it lasted days and months. Tlingi died and he visited the grave quite often.

One day Ngama found that the flower plants at Tlingi's grave were very much disturbed and so he himself went near the grave and watched. Early next morning a wild cat came to pick the flowers. He caught it and it revealed the fact that Tlingi who was then a spirit sent this cat to get some flowers from this place where the remains of its former existence were buried. He went with the cat to meet Tlingi in the spiritual world. It was not an easy journey and finally he was able to complete it and both Tlingi and Ngama were happy to meet again. Ngama found that the house where Tlingi lived needed repair and they went into the forest to collect building materials. Trees which Tlingi thought to be big and good were not so big or good in Ngama's eyes. They were too small that he could easily uproot them as they were only grass. They went hunting and fishing together. Big bears of Tlingi were only worms to Ngama. Ngama reasoned that the difference in sight was due to the difference that one was a spiritual being while the other was a human being. Ngama returned to the abode of human beings and committed suicide. He became a spiritual being and went back to Tlingi and they found that there was no more difference in their evaluation of things they saw. They lived together happily ever after".⁶⁹

The origin of *mitthi thlaichhiah* and *mim kut* can be traced back from the above folk tale. The story was estimated to originate during the Mizo settlement in the vicinity of the Run River where all the Mizo clans lived together as one uniting tribe.

⁶⁹ B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram*, Aizawl, The Author, 2006, pp. 362-364.

According to Hrangthiauva it was to the west of Run, at Lunglui about 1350-1400 A.D,⁷⁰ since it was the earliest known story, which elaborated the belief regarding physical death and the existence of the human soul with the afterlife with the two abode. The human soul is believed to exhibit the same physical appearance and character which he possessed during his lifetime. The soul of the deceased was believed to relish the ceremony during performing ritual such as *mitthi thlaichhiah* (a sacrifice for the dead in order that the spirit of the slain animal may accompany the departed to the other world). The story of *Tlingi* and *Ngama* is a clear reflection of traditional Mizo perception of *mitthi khua* (village of the dead), the soul of the dead led a shadowy and depressing existence in a miniature form, where all the activities in their physical world was still continued. All what was possessed in the physical world was believed to be availed in life after death and followed the patterns of their lives on earth.

Like many other tribal cultures of the world, and our neighboring tribes, the Mizos believed in life after death, traditional belief system had impinged on how they perceived and conceptualized death. In traditional belief illness and death was often caused by supernatural beings. Death implies loss in the family and the society as well and was mourned with intense sorrow. Death was also considered an adversity but the degree of which may depends on the nature of how a person died as well as the status of the deceased. Pre-Colonial Mizo society was shrouded with the obscurity of supernatural beings and the natural world. These played an important role in the formation of their belief system especially the beliefs surrounding death, dying and the human soul. The classification and the formation of typology of deaths was also to a great extend affected by their beliefs in the supernatural entity and the human soul.

The Mizos way of life was not disorganized. They were intimately intertwined with nature, where their existence was adhered to the environment. They reflected the mechanism of natural law; continually seeking for answers beyond any dimensions, even transcending their mundane realm of existence to the sphere

⁷⁰ R.L. Thanmawia, *Mizo Hla Hlui*, Ramhlun South Aizawl, Din Din Heaven, 2012. p.69.

outside of their sense perception. To the Mizos, their daily life was central for which they endeavored to negotiate any force that was able to suspend the tranquility of their existence. To the Mizos, death like other tribal cultures of the world had caused disorder in the society, in order to cope and heal this rupture, society has a complex set of rituals where the dead and the living were reorganized using certain set of rituals.

2.4 Death Rituals in the Pre-Colonial Mizo Society

The characteristic and outlook regarding death in pre-colonial Mizo society was far more different from the present day Mizo tradition. The belief surrounding death was greatly impinged by their traditional belief system. Their belief system had significantly shaped the funeral traditions and its attributed rituals. In recent analysis, Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf have stated, "In all societies...the issue of death throws into relief the most important cultural values by which people live their lives and evaluate their experiences".⁷¹ It is to be noted that in traditional Mizo society, death brought physical, spiritual and social rupture. In order to heal these ruptures and ensure the renewal and continuity of life, transition must take place. Here rituals symbolized the transition which can be guided by the living, through the ritual preparation and interment of the body.

2.5 Meaning of Ritual and the Rites of Passage

Victor Witten Turner defined ritual as "prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings and powers." The term 'ritual' refers to a conventionalized set of performances which are believed to "protect, purify or enrich the participants and their group" by mystical means beyond observation and control".⁷² Likewise, a symbol is the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of ritual behavior; it is a "storage unit" filled with a vast amount of information. Symbols can be objects, activities, words, relationships, events, gestures, or spatial units. Ritual,

⁷¹ Fred T. Smith, 'Death, Ritual, and Art in Africa' *African Arts*, Vol. 21, No.1 Nov 1987, p.28.

⁷² Rikshana Zaman, Chomangkan 'Death Ritual of the Karb' *Indian Anthropologist*, Vol.33, No.1, June 2003, pp.14-24.

religious beliefs and symbols are in Turner's perspective essentially related. He expressed this well in another definition:

*“Ritual is a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests. Rituals are storehouses of meaningful symbols by which information is revealed and regarded as authoritative, as dealing with the crucial values of the community. Not only do symbols reveal crucial social and religious values; they are also (precisely because of their reference to the supernatural) transformative for human attitudes and behavior. The handling of symbols in ritual exposes their powers to act upon and change the persons involved in ritual performance. In sum, Turner's definition of ritual refers to ritual performances involving manipulation of symbols that refer to religious beliefs.”*⁷³

Present day analysis of ritual, especially, mortuary ritual, has been strongly influenced by the writings of Robert Herz, Arnold Van Gennep, and Victor Turner. In his schema for rites of passage, Van Gennep divided ritual into three stages, separation from one state or status, reincorporation into new one, and a transitional or liminal period in between. The liminal phase is critical and is often associated with special behavior, symbols, and objects.⁷⁴ According to Turner,

*“Liminality itself is a complex phase or condition. It is often the scene and time for the emergence of a society's deepest values in the form of sacred dramas and objects...”*⁷⁵

⁷³ Mathieu Deflem, 'Ritual, Anti-Structure, And Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner's Processual Symbol Analysis', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 30 No.1,199, p.6. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1387146> (accessed 12 January 2016).

⁷⁴ Smith, *African Arts*, p.28.

⁷⁵ Smith, p.28.

For Van Gennep, rituals performed at death resemble those played out during other critical periods in the life of the individual, e.g., at birth, social puberty, or marriage. Life is a journey, the individual a passenger. Along the way, the individual confronts periodic challenges which he must manage if he is to move to the next social station. To help the person cope with these crises, society has developed ceremonial responses which Van Gennep labeled the "rites of passage." He further stated that the performance of the converging rites is in accordance with the general idea that the sacred, the divine, the magical and the pure are lost if they are not renewed in periodic rites.⁷⁶ All rites of passage follow a standard pattern. A rite of separation is followed by a rite of transition and concludes with a rite of incorporation. These themes of separation, transition, and incorporation mark every life cycle ceremony, although each is differentially emphasized depending upon the group and the occasion. Rites of separation are important in death, transition in death, pregnancy, betrothal, and initiation, and incorporation in marriage.⁷⁷

Among rites of separation, some of which include the various procedures by which the corpse is transported outside; burning the tools, the house, the jewels, the deceased's possessions; putting to death the deceased's wives, slaves, or favorite animals; washings, anointings, and rites of purification in general; and taboos of all sorts. Among rites of incorporation, for example the meals shared after funerals and at commemoration celebrations. Their purpose is to reunite all the surviving members of the group with each other, and sometimes also with the deceased, in the same way that a chain which has been broken by the disappearance of one of its links must be rejoined. Sometimes a meal of this sort also takes place when mourning is lifted. The transitional period in funeral rites is first marked physically by the more or less extended stay of the corpse or the coffin in the deceased's room (as during a wake), in the vestibule of his house, or elsewhere.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Solomon T. Kimball, Introduction in Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, USA, University of Chicago Press, 1960.

⁷⁷ Milton Cohen, 'Death Ritual: Anthropological Perspectives', available from <https://www.presentica.com/doc/11805962/the-ritual-murder-libel-and-the-jew-pdf-document> (accessed, 28 January, 2015).

⁷⁸ Arnold Van Gennep, 'The Rites of Passage', in Antonious, C.G.M Robben, (ed.), *Death Mourning and Burial A Cross-Cultural Reader*, USA, Blackwell Publishing, 2014. pp.229-220

Death rituals often have a ceremonial presence, that is to say, they require preparation and a display of various accompanying elements (special garments, colours, old factory materials, etc.). Inthamar Gruenwald briefly explained rituals and stated:

*“Rituals, like ceremonies, are repeatable events; people can do them for the same purposes, in the same orderly manner, and with the expectation of the same results. Some rituals have a more localised character, which means that they represent a specific function or identity. In these cases, the specific place and time chosen for the doing of the rituals indicates functional specificity.”*⁷⁹

So, while analyzing death rituals, we must at the same time try to explain the detail funeral ceremonies as death rituals and ceremonies are inseparable.

2.6 Traditional Death Rituals of the Mizos

Van Gennep saw mourning as an aggregate of taboos and negative practices marking the keeping away from the community people affected by death who are hidden from the society because they are deemed to be in an impure state. It is a transitional period for the survivors, and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society (rites of the lifting of mourning).⁸⁰

He also remarks that:

“During mourning, the living members and the deceased constitute a special group, situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and how soon living individuals leave that group depends on the closeness of their relationship with the dead person. During mourning, the social life is suspended for

⁷⁹ Inthamar Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual theory in ancient Israel*, Boston USA, Brill Leiden, 2003, p.7

⁸⁰ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* p.214.

all those affected by it, and the length of the period increases with the closeness ties to the deceased and with a higher social standing of the dead person”.⁸¹

Generally, when a Mizo died, men and women of senior members from the family or clan, washed the dead body, and *temh* (a bamboo structure where the deceased would be put in a sitting posture) was then quickly prepared where they placed the deceased body in a sitting position, next to this a long thread of red cotton cloth was wrapped around the chin through the top of the head of the deceased and then the body was placed in a sitting position.⁸² R.A Lorrain also observed that, among the Lakhers in the south, the stretcher is placed in a diagonal position against the wall, and the corpse is placed on the stretcher and dressed in all its best robes and decorated with the beads that the deceased possessed along with any other ornaments; and if he is the possessor of a plume, the plume also is placed in his hair.⁸³

T.H. Lewin has observed that:

“The corpse is then dressed in its finest clothes, and seated in the center of the house in a sitting posture. At the right hand is laid the dead man’s gun and weapons; on the left side the wife weeping. All the friends assemble and there is a big feast. Food is placed before the dead man, who sits upright and silent among them; and they dress him saying, “You are going on a long journey, eat.””⁸⁴

It was a compulsory for a wife to wrap the dead body of her husband with a *puandum/zawlpuan* which according to Mizo custom was obligatory to every girl. According to custom it is also mandatory to own *puandum* and is also compulsory to

⁸¹ Phyllis Palgi & Henry Abromovich, ‘Death: A Cross Cultural Perspective’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol.13, 1984, p.390, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2155675>(accessed, 3 March 2017).

⁸² Kauva, *Pi leh Pute Serh leh Sang*, Aizawl, The Author, 1995, p.33.

⁸³ R.A Lorrain, *Five Years in Unknown Jungles*, Aizawl Mizoram, Tribal Research Institute, 1988, pp.155-156.

⁸⁴ T.H. Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein*, Reprint, New Delhi, Tribal Research Institute, 2004, p.152.

take such clothes to her husband's house.⁸⁵ Kauva stated that an egg was quickly boiled and it was portrayed on the head of the deceased. This egg is believed to lead the deceased to the *mitthi khua*. The practice is on the belief that their ancestors or relatives would welcome the spirit of the deceased before entering the *mitthi khua*. This death ritual was known as *Artui Zualko*, and it was a common practice especially among the Pawi.⁸⁶ Among the Lakhers when a person dies, if he is the owner of a gun, or if the family can borrow a gun for the time being from any of their fellow-villagers, a shot is fired, and sometimes two or three, into the air from the outside of the hut, and with all speed a "wake" is called for. During the time that the deceased has been lying at the death's door his house has been filled with relatives and friends who have spanned away the hours drinking rice beer, and immediately life has left the body and the shot has been fired, the huge brass gongs which almost every Laker possesses are brought into play and these boom out the doleful kneel of the dead.⁸⁷

Unlike the Lusei, the Paites have an *Inndongta* institution, which is an organized institution formed at the household level comprising of agnates, affines, enates and other selected non-clan members within the village which their roles and obligation were appointed to them. They occupy the role of washing and dressing the dead body, placing the corpse in the grave, offering food. Much of the rituals and ceremonies were performed under the supervision and auspice of the *Inndongta* members.⁸⁸

According to C. Lianthanga there was a difference in death rituals from *mitha chhungkua* (the well to do families) and to *michhia chhungkua* (ordinary families of no influence, who enjoyed lower economic status and social standings). The dead body of *michhia* was simply laid on the bed while the dead body of a *mitha* was supposed to undergo *zalh*, according to this practice the dead body was to be laid on his back on a sitting position like a living person usually at the opposite side of the

⁸⁵ H.S. Luaia, *Hmanlai Mizo Khawsak Dan & Mizoram Buai lai Thu*, Aizawl, Lengchhawn Press, 2012. p.18

⁸⁶ Kauva, *Pi Leh Pute Serh leh Sang*, p.33.

⁸⁷ Lorrain, *The Lakhers*, p.155.

⁸⁸ Zamkhan Khual Guite, 'The Earlier Funerary Practice of the Paites', *Historical Journal Mizoram*, Vol. XIX, September 2018, p. pp.122-131.

hearth or fireplace. The dead body was dressed up and placed on a bamboo or wooden structure placed- leaning against a sort of cupboard attached to the wall near the water place. This was a general practice among the Luseis and its attributed clans. Among the *Raltes* and the *awzia* dead body was usually the placed near the *khumpui* (the inner bed), facing outward.⁸⁹

In the Gazetteer of Bengal it is noted that:

*“After death the corpse is dressed in its finest clothes and fastened to a bamboo frame in a sitting posture. A big feast is then given to the friends and neighbors and food and drinks are offered to the corpse. On the evening following the death, the body is interred just opposite the house...”*⁹⁰

Like the other household members of the village, when the *mitha* (elite) or well to do family died, his body has to undergo *zalh*, but the deceased death body was wrapped properly with clothes in order to reflect his distinctive contribution in the society. The death body was usually wrapped with *thangchhuah puan* (the name of a cloth worn as a mark of distinction by one who has a coveted life of *thangchhuah*). And then let him worn a *thangchhuah diar* (a turban or a worn as a distinction by one who has coveted life of *thangchhuah*). After completing this process clan members and neighbors gathered and seated on the floor of the deceased house. Crying and weeping started expressing their grief and sorrow.⁹¹

It was an obligation for the family members to arrange the dead body as mentioned above - washed and dressed up as deemed necessary. From time immemorial collective mourning becomes part of the Mizo process of mourning and wailing for the dead person. Characteristic of collective wailing of close relatives especially women shows gender role was apparent in death rituals among the Mizos. It is also apparent that kin based social relation was held important, this is clearly

⁸⁹ Lianthanga, *Hmanlai Mizo Nun*, p.13.

⁹⁰ B.C. Allen, et.al., *Gazetteer of Bengal and North East India*, New Delhi, Mittal Publication, Reprint, 1984, p.463.

⁹¹ R. Chaldailova, *Mizo Pi Pute Khawvel*, Aizawl, Vanlalnghaki, 2011, pp.204-205

reflected on death ceremony and ritual performed, where all these functions were guided by the family members especially the eldest or their *makpa*. The magnitude of the mourners has greatly built the status of the deceased as well as his family. To borrow Radcliff-Brown's assertion "death rituals are the collective expressions of feeling appropriate to the situation. In this common display of emotion, individuals signal their commitment to each other and to the society itself. Ritual functions to affirm the social bond."⁹² This is also quite true in the context of death ritual among the Mizos in the pre-colonial period.

The clothing, dresses, material buried along the corpse and rituals like the firing of guns and chiming gongs frequently expresses values of identity and incorporation. All these rituals symbolized the deceased status and indicate his or her role in the society. In case of the death of *pasaltha* (a notable warrior), the body was decorated with guns, *fungki* (a gun powder horn) to indicate his identity as a warrior.⁹³ Death rituals were also greatly affected by the nature of how a person died, generally the deceased were dressed according to his status in the society, if a warrior died he was dressed with all his appropriate amours and attire, this was also evident in the case of the death of the *thangchhuah pa* and the chief. But unusual death like *sarhi* (accidents) *raicheh* (died of a woman at child birth) and *hlamzuih* (when a child died shortly after birth) have had a few different rituals which were very less expensive and sometimes often without a ceremony and rituals.⁹⁴

These differences, in the process of treating the death, reflected social, political and economic hierarchical structure while performing death rituals in pre-colonial Mizo society. Generally *mitha* were privileged group of the society including the *Lal* (chief) and their families along with their *Khawnbawl Upa* (an elder to the chief or chief adviser), *zalen (free)* and *ramhual* (agricultural experts).

T.H Lewin has observed that:

⁹² AR Radcliffe Brown 'Taboo' *Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology*, John Middleton (ed.), New York, Thomas A. Crowell Co, 1968, pp.175-195

⁹³ Mizo te Khawsak Phung, Aizawl Mizoram, Tribal Research Institute, 1993, p.37.

⁹⁴ Thanseia, interviewed by Lalchhanhima, 2015, Aizawl, Private audio archive.

*“On the death of a father of a family, notice is sent to all his friends and relatives. The corpse is then dressed in its finest clothes, and seated in the centre of house in a sitting posture. At the right hand is laid the dead man’s guns and weapons; on the left is the wife weeping. All the friends assemble and there is a big feast. Food is placed before the dead man... and they dressed him saying, ‘You are going on a long journey, eat.’ These ceremonies occupy twenty four hours, and on the second day they bury the corpse”*⁹⁵

Close relatives sat around the corpse and hid the deceased’s face with their hands, it was because of this reason that they choose close relatives to sit round nearby the corpse, and were called *“Thihnia hmaiuptu”*.⁹⁶ Here the root of social ties and relationship was clearly portrayed; where the smallest unit of social web was seen, ie clan based or family. One approach to the study of ritual emphasizes the social and psychological functions of behavior. Social functions refer to the effects of a rite on the social structure, the network of social relations binding individuals together in an orderly life. The immediate or direct effects on the individuals involved in the ritual are psychological functions. Mourners gathered as soon as they heard the death of their clan members or maybe a member in the village. According to J.H Lorrain, *Mitthi vui* is a combination of two words, *Mitthi* refers to a dead person, a corpse or the deceased, and *Vui* means to bury or dispose the dead in any manner.⁹⁷

Death rituals subsume elements of separation, transition and incorporation. Symbolic of separation in death is the deposit of the corpse in the grave, coffin etc. The *Thado Kukis* buried outside the house.⁹⁸ Like the *Lusei* and other clans, among the *Chins* in the case of unnatural death and a man dies outside the village is buried

⁹⁵ T.H. Lewin, *Wild Races of South Eastern India*, Reprint, Calcutta, FIRMLA KLM Pvt Ltd, 1978, p.143

⁹⁶ Liangkhaia, *MizoAwmdan Hlui & Mizo Mi leh Thil Hmingthangte leh Mizo Sakhua*, Mission Veng, LTL Publications, 2008, p.78.

⁹⁷ ‘Mitthi vui’ *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*.

⁹⁸ William Shaw, *Notes on the Thado Kukis*, Calcutta, Asiatic Society of Bengal on behalf of the Government of Assam, 1929, p.53.

outside the village. The *Hakkas* and southerners, Tashon and their tributaries bury their dead inside village; the Chins, Suktes, and Thados bury outside the village always.⁹⁹ Almost all the burial custom practiced in the Chin Hills were similar, even though we have seen some differences, the trends were almost similar throughout the area among the different Mizo clans. The practice of the Mizo treatment of their burying their death is quite similar to the burial customs of the Chins of Myanmar. Although there may be some differences in the process of treating the dead body, the practice was almost the same throughout the Chin Hills and Mizoram.

Generally speaking, traditional Mizo death rituals were practice based on the belief that the dead have a continued existence both in the physical world and the world beyond. In pre-colonial Mizo society, the soul, like the body, is undergoing transition. The soul lives marginally in two worlds. It belongs neither to the afterworld, nor can it resume its existence on earth. Treated as an intruder in both worlds, destined to wander indefinitely, the living ensures a favorable outcome by meeting their responsibilities until the soul permanently leave. The bereaved is segregated, physically and socially, from the living. They are cut off from the dead and from their friends and neighbors. Normal social life is suspended for them for a prescribed period of mourning, their activities hemmed in by taboos.

Among the Mizos, if there were no time to hold *mitthi vui* ceremony on the same day the person died, it was customary for the Mizo to wake the dead till morning. But sometimes in the case of the death of a *mitha* (elite) it was extended according to convenience as it requires more preparation than the ordinary family.¹⁰⁰

Mitthi chawpek is a practiced of placing food for the deceased. A small amount of rice and some vegetables were placed onfaikhiat at the time of every meal on one corner inside the house. It was believed that the soul of the deceased resided nearby house and village for about three months. A widow is obliged not to have any sexual intercourse with another man within this period, if such happened it was

⁹⁹ H.N. Tuck & Carey S Betram, *The Chin Hills*, Reprint, Calcutta, FIRMLA KLM Pvt Ltd on behalf of Tribal Research Institute Aizawl Mizoram, 1976, p.192.

¹⁰⁰ Lalmangaiha Chawngthu Serchhip, interviewed by Lalchhanhima, Aizawl Private audio archive 6th March, 2015.

regarded as *uire* (adultery). After three months having gone through a ritual called *inthian* a widow was incorporated back into her normal life.¹⁰¹

Thihthiapven is another ritual performed at the death a distinct person, it is the name of a ceremony and a ritual performed while the body of a man who killed a tiger during life, and duly performed the *ai* ceremony, is awaiting burial. The corpse is carefully protected from any flies and grasshoppers which may attempt to settle upon it, and every time such an insect comes near a cry is raised by the watchers and numbers of boys outside the house immediately begin to beat the walls and floors with sticks of firewood, making a tremendous dust and racket. This is because these insects are regarded as emissaries or transformation of *thihthiap* (The King of Tigers) seeking to avenge the death of the tiger which the dead man killed during life, and some such demonstration is necessary to impress upon them the fact that both the man and his spirit are immune from such vengeance because the *ai* ceremony was duly performed.¹⁰² After performing such ritual, the body is taken for burial or for *kuangur*. As the deceased was a distinct person in the society, the way to burial was marked by the sound of firing guns and the sound of gongs. This ritual usually elaborates the greatness of the deceased and was mourned with great reverence and respect.¹⁰³

Mitthi Vui was the main ceremony observed on the day when death occurred in the village or when death took place in night it was observed the next day. Whenever death occurs, *Mitthi vui* ceremony was held by adjusting day time where an ample time was given for the grave diggers to bury the corpse before sunset. This means that *mitthi vui* ceremony generally took place in the evening. There was no chanting known or connected with this ceremony, but it was evident that crying and weeping by close families, friends and natives was common on this occasion. Among the Mizos crying and weeping was an indication of deepest sorrow so, when death

¹⁰¹ Zatluanga, *Mizo Chanchin*, Reprinted Aizawl, Zasanga, 1997, p.16.

¹⁰² 'Thihthiap' *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*.

¹⁰³ Chaldailova, *Mizo Pipute Khawvel*, p.181.

took place the number of persons cried or wailed upon the deceased greatly marked the status of the deceased.¹⁰⁴

*“Ceremonial customs are the means by which the society acts upon its individual members and keeps alive in their minds a certain system of sentiments. Without the ceremonial those sentiments would not exist, and without them the social organization in its actual form could not exist.”*¹⁰⁵

Thlahualven is another important ritual practiced by the Mizos. When a woman's husband dies; she would first perform the *thlaichhiah* ceremony in her husband's house. She will then perform *thlahual* in her husband's house and for this occasion she would kill and eat a fowl, which was given to her for the purpose by her *Pu*. If she did not have any *Pu* or her *Pu* failed to turn up or failed to perform *thlahual* she would use her own parents or folk for the said ritual. After three lunar months she would give a portion of rice from each meal to her husband's spirit. The practice of sharing the portion of cooked rice to the spirit of the deceased is called *mitthi chaw pek*. When the *mitthi chaw pek* was completed, the parent of the bereaved woman would take her to their house and immediately perform the *thlahual*. After the *thlahual* was over the deceased wife once again returned to her husband's house. The object of the *thlahual* ceremony was to console or show sympathy as the woman had lost a husband who had been her supporter and assistance in everyday life. The significant fact to be noted here is the presentation of a fowl by her *pu* was obviously an act showing sympathy and condolence. This daily offering of rice is called *mitthi chawpek*. When the *mitthi chawpek* has been completed her parents will take her back to the house and will there perform *thlahual* again. After this, woman will return to her husband's house. The object of the first *thlahual* ceremony is to console the woman her loss and the presentation of a fowl by her *pu* which obviously was an act of sympathy and condolence. The object of the ceremony performed in the widow's parent's house is to purify the woman and in a sense to separate her from her husband. Until the widow's parent or relations have

¹⁰⁴ *Mizo te Khawsak Phung*, p.40.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Huntigton & Peter Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, New York USA, Cambridge University Press, p.27.

performed the *thlahual* ceremony for her in their house the widow was still regarded or considered to be the wife of the deceased husband. One may suggest that the *thlahual* ceremony connotes a kind of divorce from the deceased or husband. The practical object of the ceremony is to save the woman from certain penalties which she would incur, if while living as a widow in her husband's house had sexual intercourse with a man. When a woman had not performed *thlahual* in her parent's house and committed promiscuity or even love affairs while living in her husband's house, she was liable to be dealt with in the same manner as if she had committed adultery (In her husband's lifetime) and would forfeit the whole of her marriage price and her dowry.¹⁰⁶

Arthlahual is important ceremony almost similar with the *thlahual* which was performed when any of their relatives died. If a relative of married dies such as her mother or brother like in the *thlahual* the woman's *Pu* would give her a fowl for performing *arthlahual* and she would kill the fowl and eat it. The *Pu* has to do this in order to console the woman who had loss her relative as a token of sympathy. Similarly a man's *Pu* would do the same for him if any relatives die.¹⁰⁷ This ritual also connotes that the concern *Pu* would always be present at the time of their sorrow and would always tries to be there to comfort them and to make them rely on him according to circumstances.¹⁰⁸

Another important ceremony was called *Lukhawng*. N.E Perry Stated:

“Lukhawng is a due which is payable to a man's pu when he dies. Usually however it is paid by the man on whose account it is payable during his lifetime, in order to save his family from having pay it after his death when they may be in straightened circumstances. The ordinary lukhawng payable by a common person is Rs.2. If the man has performed the khuangchawi he has to pay Rs.10. A chief's lukhawng is Rs.40

¹⁰⁶ N.E Perry, *A Monograph On Lushai Customs & Ceremonies*, p.77

¹⁰⁷ N.E Perry, *A Monograph On Lushai Customs & Ceremonies*, Reprinted, Calcutta, FIRMLA KLM Pvt Ltd on behalf of Tribal Research Institute Aizawl Mizoram, 1976, p.78

¹⁰⁸ *Mizo te Khawsak Phung.*, p.33

and whether he has performed khuangchawi or not it remains the same. If a man's lukhawng has not been paid during his lifetime it can be claimed from his heirs and if a man refuses to pay his father's lukhawng after having been ordered to do so by the court, he is liable to pay Rs.40 pubanman Cases about lukhawng, however are of rare occurrence as it is considered very disgraceful for a man not to pay to his father's lukhawng promptly. When a man's dies sarthi nolukhawng can be claimed for him. Also, a householder is entitled to claim a due of atlai of Rs.20 from the relations of any one, who is not a relation of his and who may happen to die in his house.”¹⁰⁹

There were instances where the family cried the whole night and day to show their passionate expression of grief or sorrow. Lamentation in the form of crying in an eloquent manner was regarded as a prestige for the deceased and the person who cried in such manner were usually praised by the household members. Due regard was given to the deceased depending on the number of people who had cried and wailed in mourning. Thus, the Mizo ceremonial weeping is a symbol not only of sorrow but of social ties or and also mark the degrees of prominence among the deceased and his family as well as in the society. Generally in the “*mitthi vui*” the ceremony was guided by the deceased's family, especially by the grandest family member or oldest member of the household the family, or their *makpa* (a sister's or daughter's husband, son-in-law).¹¹⁰

R. Chaldailova who is a prominent local author mentioned some of the rituals performed with music. He has noted that:

The use of music while performing death rituals was also seen in the funeral procession especially of the *mitha* (elites) family, where *Darkhuang* (a large gong) and *darbu* (a set of three different sized gongs) along with a group of people those played these instruments set their post as convenience, sometimes inside the house;

¹⁰⁹ N.E Perry, p.77.

¹¹⁰ *Mizo te Khawsak Phung*, p.40.

sumhmun (the verandah) and *luhkapui* (the platform in front of a Lushai house). While the above mentioned mourning ceremony took place inside the house, these groups were playing gongs, probably the song sung while performing this ritual were “*Kanlal lai*”, “*mitthirawpchawi*”, and “*nguntethi*”.¹¹¹

The death of the *mitha/ miropui* (elite) was distinctly marked by the firing of guns, the households of the village who owned guns, carried loaded guns to the deceased house and when reaching the verandah of the house they had discharged their gun pointing towards the sky. The firing sound symbolized the death of a *mitha*. They soon entered the deceased house and started crying and weeping. The number of guns placed on the verandah and front platform of the deceased house reflected the status of the deceased and also marked his social standing as compared with the commoners or masses. The firing of guns glorified him and his family in the society. On this occasion mourners from nearby villages gathered and did the same like the above mentioned process.¹¹² At this time the sound made by mourners such as crying weeping, the drumming of gongs, firing of guns are all meant to glorify the death of an eminent person in the society.

In both the cases an ordinary family and the *mitha* family there was hardly any ceremony regarding death, no involvement of priest was known, but what was regarded as the main funeral ceremony of the *mitha* was marked by the incorporation of *Chawnglaizuan*. This type of dance is also sometimes known as *Chawnglaizawn*. In the olden days this dance was usually performed by young boys and girls of around four each in numbers. This dance was performed to signify that the deceased had undergone *Chawng*, which was a coveted status of the procession in Mizo *Sakhua*. Boys and girls are in line on both side of the dead body. And they started performing *Chawnglaizuan* where *darbu* (a set of gongs) was played in an appropriate rhythm sounding *Chawnglai, chawnglai, chawnglai*. In certain cases it was found more convenience and preferable by the bereaved family to perform such dance by themselves. (In case of inconvenience it was performed outside the house.) At the end of this dance the dead body was now placed to a *hlang* (a support made to

¹¹¹ Chaldailova, p.205.

¹¹² Chaldailova, pp.206-207.

keep a corpse in a sitting posture) and was lifted up and marched from the front street of the deceased's house. During such procession the corpse was tossed up and down for three times and then they marched towards the grave. This march was usually accompanied by music by beating a set of small gongs called *darbu* and a large gong called *Darkhuang*. These sets of gongs were played by persons who know the art of beating such gongs. Along these music players goes the masses crying and weeping slowly towards the grave.¹¹³

Among the Lakhers/Maras, a very interesting ceremony is carried out, which goes by the name of "*Ra-kha...tla*," the idea of which is to cause the spirit of the departed man never to return again to his hut, for it is believed at times that he comes and sits upon his tombstone, a matter which the Lakhers/Maras greatly dread. The ceremony consists of a dance, when all the family gather together with friends and in the usual manner have a large beer-drinking bout, while outside on the little piece of flat ground in the front of the hut are ten bamboos arranged parallel to one another, at the ends of which sits five small boys hit the bamboos on a log of wood which is placed crossways at either end, lifting them again into the air they bring each two bamboos into contact with each other, making a very fascinating noise, keeping time the whole while, whilst the young men and maidens of the family, dressed in their best apparel and the gun of the deceased and wearing his many ornaments dance in a most clever way between these two bamboos as they are being worked by the boys. At this time a pig is generally killed, which forms the chief part of the feast, and the whole ceremony is completed within twenty four hours.¹¹⁴ According to F.K Lehman, *Sar Lam* is also danced at funeral and memorial celebration among the Chins. Dance became an important ritual element among the different Mizo Clans.¹¹⁵

C. Lianthanga cited:

"When the corpse was finally buried in the grave, old men and women gathered in the deceased house, each carrying their

¹¹³ Chaldailova, pp.207-208.

¹¹⁴ R.A Lorrain, *Five Years in Unknown Jungle*, p.159, Guwahati Assam, Spectrum Publication on Behalf of TRI, Mizoram, 1988, p.159.

¹¹⁵ F.K Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society: A Tribal People of Non-Western Society Adopted to a Non-Western Civilization*, Illinois, The University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1963. p.184.

zu(rice beer) and started lamenting in the form of songs, which would best suit to arouse the sentiments of the bereaves. Songs like Khiangi nu zai, Darpawngitahzai, Lianchhiarizai and Chawngvunginutahzai and others were sung which continued till before sleep.”¹¹⁶

The earliest known songs which were the expression of sorrow and grief at the times of death were *Thuthmun Zai*. It is also termed as a song for the bereaved family, which was believed to have originated during their settlement in the *Kawlphai (Kawbaw Valley)*.¹¹⁷

However according to B. Lalthangliana:

“It was estimated around 1550-1560 during the Mizo settlement east of Tiau. It was the time when all the Mizo clans lived together as one uniting tribe. It was during this time that they were struck by a severe famine known as Tingpui Tam, which was of rare occurrence in the hills. The severity of the famine was aggravated by epidemics. The famine caused starvation, resulting death in a row and took a number of lives. Every family was wiped by death, thus, the village was in chaos and turmoil, and this had resulted in the spontaneous expression of their grief in the form of songs.”¹¹⁸

According to Za Tawn Eng:

“Thuthmun Zai, is a song or poem which expresses sadness about someone’s death is usually performed in lamenting speech tone and also chanting style. In the society of Chin, the songs were transmitted by oral tradition, handed down, from generation to generation. The oldest known songs were short, simple and concerned about sadness...Melancholic refrains and song of love were also introduced employing the same tunes. “Thuthmun Zai” was presented as an example of

¹¹⁶ Lianthanga, p.19.

¹¹⁷ Thanmawia, *MizoHlaHlui*, p.1.

¹¹⁸ Lalthangliana, *Mizo Culture*, p.266.

funeral songs in speech tone style. While the songs and funeral songs of both men and women would perform lamenting songs were almost always performed by women sitting directly next to the corpse or at the grave. Such songs were commonly subject to immediate composition.”¹¹⁹

“*Ai maw Thanzaui nu, chutimai a mual min liam san chu ava pawl takem ve aw...*”¹²⁰

The English Version: Oh...Thanzuali’s mother, what a pity! You just left us

The next day after burial was observed as “*Inthutpui ni*” neighbors and relatives gathered at the deceased house with an objective to console and to mourn the deceased family. The next i.e. the third day was observed as “*Thlanphoulh ni*”. It was observed not only by close relatives but all the clanmates of deceased, where touching of soil with the body was forbidden and even combing of hair was regarded as taboo.¹²¹ After one month *Rau hnek* was again observed by killing a fowl and drinking *zu* or rice beer then after having done all the required rituals they can go back to their normal life.¹²² Among the Paites, the next day after the burial was observed as *Siatvat ni* or *Han dal ni*, where members of the *Inndongta* and relatives of the family organized beer drinking and make fence around the burial site. *Tanupi* of the *Inndongta* would take up the responsibility of offering food in a basket and bottle of beer near the pole in the middle of the house known as *sutpi*. The food and drink kept for the soul was known as *Si-ansiah*. When it was full moon another ceremony known as *Silouh paih* was organized in order to mark the end of funeral process. A ceremonial feast was held *Khen an*, the food of separation which is

¹¹⁹ Za Tawn Eng, ‘Traditional Music of the Chin People’ in K. Robin, (ed.), *Chin History Culture & Identity*, New Delhi, Dominant Publishers and Distributions on behalf of The Euro Burma Office, Brussels, Belgium in collaboration with the Department of History & Ethnography, Mizoram University, Aizawl, 2009, p.70.

¹²⁰ ZaTawng Eng, *Chin History, Culture & Identity*, p70.

¹²¹ Kauva, *Pi Pute Serh leh Sang*, Aizawl, The Author, p.35

¹²² Kauva, *Pi Pute Serh leh Sang*, p.35.

believed that the departing soul ate with them. This ceremony marked the final separation of the deceased with the living.¹²³

Among the Luseis and their cognate clans, the next day was observed as “*Thlanngah*”. On this day relatives from the nearby villages who could not attend the burial ceremony would gather at the deceased house to show sympathy to the family or bereaved known as *in ral*. As per convenience each of them contributed their *zu* (traditional rice beer), and they spend the day drinking *zu* and singing *khawhar zai* all day. By the evening a meal was prepared for those coming from nearby villages.¹²⁴

According to Van Gennep:

“*The practice of sharing food and drinks is obviously a rite of incorporation which is a physical union in nature and Van Gennep calls this as “sacrament of communion”*. He considered rites of incorporation as “symbolic”...*The Movement of objects among persons constituting a defined group create a continuous social bond between them in the same way that a “communion’ does.”*¹²⁵

Feasting was common among the Mizos whenever death took place; *Zu* (the traditional rice beer) in the context of death rituals among the Mizos exhibit the same feature as mentioned in the above explanation. It served as the main item which symbolizes a bond between the mourners who gathered at the deceased at the time of wake keeping and on the *mitthi vui* ceremony through *thlaichhiah* they had organized a feast. Whenever a person died it was a tradition for the Mizos to perform *thlaichhiah*, generally four legged domesticated animals were killed as a sacrifice. Pigs and goats were killed, the well to families even killed *mithun* and the ritual practice is known as *thlaichhiah*.

According to N.E Perry:

¹²³ Zamkhan Khual Guite, ‘The Earlier Funerary Practice of the Paites’, *Historical Journal Mizoram*. Vol.XIX, September, 2018, pp.127.

¹²⁴ *Pi Pute Khawsak Phung*, p.3.

¹²⁵ Arnold Van Gennep, p.31.

*“It is the ceremony performed after a man’s burial to speed the soul of the departed on its way. It is to be performed by a man’s wife or if he is unmarried by his father or brother or any relation, failing relation it would be performed by the owner of the house a man died in. A pig is killed for the spirit to eat and a dog is killed to go ahead and show the dead man’s spirit the road to mitthikhua the place to which all spirits must go.”*¹²⁶

But we have come across that poorer families hardly met the necessities to perform such ritual. Average family used a dog for performing the *thlaichhiah*.¹²⁷ However, as Mizos hardly eat dog meat it can be argued that such assertion was common to all Mizos. This ritual practice was ubiquitous among almost all the Mizo clans, and there is evidence that this ritual practice was also common among the Paites, *“Still, if the dead is a well to do person, they kill many domestic animals as offerings to the departed soul and set up on poles, on the grave the skull of the animals”*.¹²⁸ On the death of the head of the family, the family is obliged to perform this ritual. In the initial stage, their intention was to feed those bachelors who were engaged in the digging of the grave, this feeding is called ‘*Thlanlai hraina*’. After many years of *thlanlai hraina* the process turned into the prerogatives of the deceased. Usually, the liver and lungs were *chhiah* for the deceased which was believed to be eaten by the dead man’s soul. The family who were abstaining from performing this ritual was looked down upon by the society. On the death of a *mitha* (elite) family it is an obligation to perform *thlaichhiah* in a larger scale than the ordinary family, which means they have to kill *ranpui* (all the four legged domesticated animals). It was believed that the animals killed were to be inherited by the deceased and would go with these animals while proceeding towards the afterlife in *mitthi khua*. Relatives from the neighboring villages would also bring

¹²⁶ NE Perry, A monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies, p.76.

¹²⁷ Perry, p.76.

¹²⁸ CB.No.1, Mizoram State Achive.

domesticated animals, where a big feast was prepared by some 20 to 40 *fatu* (one who presides at a feast; one who prepare and cook a feast).¹²⁹

One of the most important feasts for the death is the *Mim Kut*. *Mim kut* festival was observed which was held at the end of August or the beginning of September. The village chief and his elders fixed the date for celebrating the festival. It was regarded as a festival in honor of the dead. Before the day of the festival, *zu* was fermented in every house. They also brought all kinds of vegetables from their *lo* (jhums) to their homes in advance. On the day of the festival all the village households stayed at home and regarded as a day for rest. The men and women folk drank *zu* for the whole day. They offered the first fruits of their vegetables to their demised relatives. They pounded glutinous rice, wrapped it in plantain leaves and made Mizo bread or dumpling. Some were offered to children and some to the dead. They believed that during the *Mim Kut*, the spirits of their departed came home to eat the vegetables and dumplings. Sentiments, tender feelings and longing for their dead relatives were arisen during the festival.¹³⁰ In sorrow, grief and longing, they would sing songs of lamentation to the dead, such as:

*The banyan lost its branch, its top is black and thin,
And I have lost my mate; the bed is not slept in.
Lurhpui is the highest mount on earth it is said,
From its peak will I see the abode of the dead?*¹³¹

Mim Kut festival was observed for three days. The following day was observed for resting, and on the third day, the vegetables which they had offered to the dead were collected, cook and eat it themselves. On this occasion *zu* was served and songs were also sung. They believed that the spirit of the dead now departed and returned to the land of the dead. Therefore it was no longer necessary to offer the food anymore. That is why the month of *mim kut* (August) was observed. Traditionally this is known as *Thi Tin thla*, the month in which the dead disperse.¹³²

¹²⁹ Chaldailova, p.206.

¹³⁰ B. Lalthangliana, *A brief History and Culture of Mizo*, Aizawl, The Author, 2014, p.p.129-132.

¹³¹ Lalthangliana, *A Brief History and Culture of Mizo*, p.132.

¹³² Sangkima, p.72.

Among the Lakhers at the close of the year after the burial, a very interesting ceremony is carried out, which goes by the name of “*Ra-kha...tla*,” the idea of which is to cause the spirit of the departed man never to return again to his hut, for it is believed at times that he comes and sits upon his tombstone, a matter which the Lakhers greatly dread. The ceremony consists of a dance, when all the family gather together with friends and in the usual manner have a large beer-drinking bout, while outside on the little piece of flat ground in the front of the hut are ten bamboos arranged parallel to one another, at the ends of which sits five small boys hit the bamboos on a log of wood which is placed crossways at either end, lifting them again into the air they bring each two bamboos into contact with each other, making a very fascinating noise, keeping time the whole while, whilst the young men and maidens of the family, dressed in their best apparel and the gun of the deceased and wearing his many ornaments dance in a most clever ways between these two bamboos as they are being worked by the boys. At this time a pig is generally killed, which forms the chief part of the feast, and the whole ceremony is completed within the twenty four hours.¹³³

The Lusei firmly believed that the spirits of the dead are constantly present and need to be propitiated, which the ritual practice and sacrifice was embedded in the practice of *sakhua*, where one of the principal *Thangchhuah* feasts, a series of feast to attain *Pialral* (Mizo Paradise) the third feast is in honour of the dead known as *Mi-thi-rawp-lām*.¹³⁴ In this feast the effigies of the dead would be prepared, made with clothes draped around frames of wood, about two feet high. These effigies would be erected on the bamboo *hlang* (bier or stretcher) at the top a distinct effigy “*Thlalhpa*” was put up.¹³⁵ The oldest living member of the clan then comes slowly from his house, bringing with him a gourd of zu, and gives each effigy in turn a little zu, muttering a charm as he does so; he arranges his tour so as to reach his own father’s effigy last, and when he has muttered his charm and given it the zu he dashes the gourd down on the ground and, bursting into tears, rushes into his house, whence he must not emerge for a month. The effigies are then carried about the village with

¹³³ Lorrain, *The Lakhers*, p.159

¹³⁴ Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, p.65.

¹³⁵ Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua*, p.23.

much shouting. This carrying about of their effigies is supposed to be very pleasing to the spirits of the ancestors, and it is evident that the people consider that these spirits are able to influence them for good or for bad.¹³⁶

While analyzing Mizo death ritual, the practice known as *kuangur* and waseventually connected with the death of *Lal* (village Chief) and the *mitha* family, this custom was expensive and requires wealth, it was common among the Mizo clan especially among the *Lusei*.¹³⁷ But it is evident that this custom was also practiced among the different Mizo clans. It is a practice of putting the corpse in a wooden coffin, with a plank cover, elevated over a fire with a bamboo tube fixed leading to a hole to the bamboo to the ground.¹³⁸ This continued for around six weeks till the destruction of the flesh, the opening of the ceremony was celebrated by killing of the pig and the usual drink *zu*. When every flesh excepting the bones were thought to be destroyed it was put in basket and kept in a special shelf at the opposite side of the hearth. The remainder of the bones were collected and buried generally in an earthen pot.¹³⁹ This ceremony and ritual is in line with the general theory of death ritual formulated by Hertz,¹⁴⁰ as death is not seen an event, but a process. When respiration stops, the body receives a temporary burial. A transitional period between the initial disposal and the final burial provides the time for the decomposition of the body, the purification of the bones, the journey of the soul, and the liberation of the mourners. During, the intermediary period, the link between the living and the dead continues. He remains a member of the group until the final ceremony.

Arnold Van Gennep a classic anthropologist who was the first to study human behavior at ceremonies of death commented on the Mizo death rituals and the concept of reincarnation:

“The ceremonies of the Lushae tribes of Assam furnish a good example of the ‘eternal return.’. The deceased is dressed in his best clothes and tied in a sitting

¹³⁶ Shakespear,p89

¹³⁷Shakespeare, p.87

¹³⁸B. Sangkhuma, Museum Curator Rtd, Mizoram State Museum interviewed by Lalchhanhima, 5th Oct 2014, Aizawl, Private Audio Archive.

¹³⁹Shakespeare, p.85.

¹⁴⁰Huntington & Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death*, p.81.

position on a scaffold of bamboo, while next to him are placed the tools and weapons of his sex. A pig, a goat, and a dog are killed, and all the relatives, friends, and neighbors divide the meat; the deceased is also given food and drink. At nightfall he is placed in a grave dug right next to the house. His nearest relative says goodbye and asks him to prepare everything for those who will come and join him. The soul, accompanied by those of the pig, the goat, and the dog – without whom it would not find its way – goes dressed and equipped to the land of Mi-thi-hua, where life is hard and painful. But if the deceased has killed men or animals on the hunt, or if he has given feasts to the whole village, he goes to a pleasant country on the other side of the river, where he feasts continuously. Since women can neither fight nor hunt nor give feasts, they cannot go to this beautiful country unless their husbands take them there. After a certain time, the soul leaves one or the other of these regions and returns to earth in the form of a hornet. After another lapse of time it is transformed into water and evaporates in the form of dew, and, if a dewdrop falls on a man, that man will beget a child who will be a reincarnation of the deceased. When the child is born, two chickens are killed, and the mother washes herself and the child. The child's soul spends the first seven days perched like a bird on the clothes or the bodies of his parents; for this reason they move as little as possible, and during this time the household god is appeased with sacrifices. All sorts of ceremonies follow, and during one of them the nearest maternal relative gives a name to the child – that is, the child is permanently incorporated into the clan.”¹⁴¹

Bloch, in his theory of rebounding conquest, or rebounding violence, describes the ordinary facts of life in terms of people being born, maturing, and then dying. Most human cultures, however, are unhappy with this simple progression. Through ritual forms they take living people and in a symbolic sense cause them to "die" and be "reborn" as new kinds of individuals, shedding old, used-up selves so new ones can take their place. Not only are they given a new status but they will also have experienced inner changes to their sense of identity.

¹⁴¹ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, p.162.

Many rituals of initiation in religions as well as in some secret societies use the natural idioms of birth and death but reverse them to speak of death and rebirth. It is as though the ordinariness of human nature is "killed" and a new and higher nature is bestowed. In the Mizo ritual tradition this scheme of rebounding conquest can be applied to death rites when physical death is said to be the basis for a new and spiritual life either in future transmigration of the soul or in some form of resurrection.¹⁴²

2.3.1. Rituals on *Thihchhia* or Bad Deaths

Pre-colonial Mizo belief system has greatly impinged on the classification of death, due to this reason death which are regarded as '*thihchhia*' or unusual death were given different burials from those of '*Awmlai*' or natural death. When an infant died at or soon after birth, it was known as '*Hlamzuih*'. The Customs were not the same from village to village. In some villages, when a three month old baby died, it was regarded as '*Hlamzuih*'. Sometimes when a child from a poor family died which was older than three months, as the parents could not afford to sacrifice animals at the funeral, they made it as '*Hlamzuih*'.¹⁴³ In general *hlamzuih* were buried without any ceremony under the house.¹⁴⁴

The treatment and process of burial for the *hlamzuih* was less pronounced and when an infant died their neighbor would assist the bereaved family digging grave. The corpse was wrapped with swaddling clothes and to assuage his or her thirst they would soak a piece of cotton wool with the mother's milk. This was done to quench thirst of the deceased that was believed to be on her way to *Pialral*. They also put some husked rice in one of the baby's hand (with closed palm) to sustain the infant hunger. Again a fowl's egg was placed on the other palm as it was believed that the egg would roll on her way towards the after world and lead her to *Pialral*. It may be suggested that in the pre- colonial Mizo society the treatment of the *hlamzuih* was

¹⁴² 'Rites of Passage' *Encyclopedia of Death & Dying*, <http://www.deathreference.com/Py-Se/Rites-of-Passage.html#ixzz78XxzyReA> (accessed, 12 January, 2019).

¹⁴³ Chhuanliana BVT, interviewed by Lalchhanhima, 5th March, 2015, Private Audio Archive.

¹⁴⁴ Shakespeare, p.86.

apparently not taken seriously and considered not so important to community mourning without ceremonies and rituals. It often goes almost unnoticed to the household members of the village.¹⁴⁵

The next unusual death among the Mizos was ‘*Raicheh*’. This is the death of a woman during child birth and sometimes the death of a woman soon after giving a birth was also regarded as ‘*raicheh*’.¹⁴⁶ This kind of death was regarded as the most horrible, feared and dreaded by women. Since such was the case of all Mizo women, trying to avoid death. A woman after delivering was usually sent to fetch water to the village water hole. It was the duty of the women to carry water with bamboo tubes. The women on pain of death would carry water on her back and returned home without any hindrance or complain to the household members. Unfortunately, if she died after doing such arduous work her death was not counted or regarded as ‘*raicheh*’ it was rather ‘*awmlai*’ or natural death.¹⁴⁷

When a woman died of ‘*Raicheh*’, nobody would fetch water or carry firewood from the jungle. No one would weave cloth and during the night no one would spin or wind cotton. It was a taboo to touch the loom of the deceased; no one would dare to touch her clothes. No women would sit in the same place where the deceased sat when weaving. It was believed that the spirit of the deceased would roam around in the village on the day when a ‘*raicheh*’ took place. It was because of this reason, and the fear of the deceased spirit entering their house that every households would fix a branch of leaf or a broken fern outside the door, which signify that, “it was a taboo to enter” their house. By doing this, they sincerely believed that the spirit would not enter their house.¹⁴⁸ A.G.Mc Call the superintendent of the Hills during 1930-1940, cited:

“At times of calamity, sudden death, death in the hunt or in war, there would be a day of rest, and death would fall upon any who broke this... The moral standard of society motivated

¹⁴⁵ Mizote Khawsak Phung, p.p.31-32.

¹⁴⁶ Lianthanga, p.78.

¹⁴⁷ Mizote Khawsak Phung, p.25.

¹⁴⁸ Mizo te Khawsak Phung, p.25.

*by a terror of the unseen supernatural was certainly very high”.*¹⁴⁹

If a person dies an unnatural death without any ailment; as such if he was mauled and killed by a wild beast, if he fell from a tree and died; fire and other kinds of accidents his death is known as ‘*Sarathi*’.¹⁵⁰ It was regarded as the most unfortunate, terrible and horrible way of dying. It was believed that when this kind of death took place a strong wind or gale was sure to blow, known as ‘*sar thli*’ (*sar* wind). When a part of rainbow or a short rainbow appears in the sky during a clear or good weather, it was said, “*sar a zam*” (a *sar* has formed or appeared) this was believed as a sign to indicate that somewhere, someone met an unnatural death. When a person died an unnatural death and was carried home, it was a taboo to carry the corpse through the front door of the house, so the corpse was carried through the back door of the house. The corpse was also not allowed to spend the night in the house, they dug the grave hurriedly and the corpse was again carried out through the back door and buried immediately. If the corpse was not buried immediately and allowed to the night in the house it was believed that another unnatural death would occur.¹⁵¹

Generally when a person died, the bereaved would deliberately and willfully refuse to eat any food. Two or three days after the funeral, they would eat just a little to sustain themselves, due to this they became drawn, haggard, pinched and thin. Nine weeks or about three months after the burial, they would perform the ‘*Inthian*’ or ‘*Inthen*’. It was a ritual by sacrificing a fowl, accompanied by drinking of *zu* or traditional rice beer. They regarded it as the worldly nature of the spirit of the dead. After performing this ritual, they were now purified and stopped their mourning. They washed and cleaned themselves, oiled and comb their uncombed disheveled hair and they now washed the clothes they had worn during the period of mourning, and dried, folded and put them away. They were free to do anything what their

¹⁴⁹ A.G. McCall, p.74.

¹⁵⁰ Lalthangliana, p184.

¹⁵¹ Lalthangliana, p184.

friends were doing. They endeavored to be as happy as they could, and now associated with their fellow neighbors.¹⁵²

According to Shakespeare:

“Three months after the death a small chicken and placed with some rice on the shelf which runs along the wall. The family indulges in zu. This is apparently a sort of farewell to the soul.”¹⁵³

After performing this ritual the bereaved family was incorporated back to the society and followed normal life like other household members of the village.

2.3.2. Ceremony and Ritual performed on the death of *Ral* (foe or enemy)

In pre-colonial Mizo period there were instant raid and war against the enemy villages and inter-tribal war as well between clans. As such was the case, admiration was given in the society to a man which they called “*mitha sakap*” which meant slayer of both men and animals.¹⁵⁴ According to Joy Pachuau:

“The earliest mention of death among the Mizo in colonial records is often in the context of its practices, especially the practice of ‘head hunting’.”¹⁵⁵

In such war and a raid against enemy or foe, the head of the enemy so hunted were taken back to their village as a trophy for their success, it was believed that the afterlife journey of the man who had slain such head were accompanied by the man which the deceased had hunted in during his lifetime. It was also believed that the person whom the head had been taken would serve to the one who took his head as a master in *mitthi khua*. Taking off enemy’s head was also a marker of an act of valor for a warrior, to attain this coveted position. Simply killing of foe was not enough but

¹⁵² *Lalthangliana*, p.184.

¹⁵³ Shakespeare, p.86.

¹⁵⁴ Sangkima, p.65.

¹⁵⁵ Joy. Pachuau, p.111.

it was a must to carry home the heads of their enemy and is liable to perform *mual lam*. In order to solemnize his victory he had to perform *bawh hla* (chanting or reciting) this was followed by firing his gun. After completing what a victorious man would perform he then entered his house. Then the next morning they had to perform *mual lam* on the front open yard of the chief's house. The victor warriors who brought home the head of the enemy were dressed in appropriate attire with *arkeziak* (bracelet) *tuirual* and *zawngchal*. These warriors were accompanied by girls and started *mual lam* (a dance) in a peculiar way around the heads which were placed at the front yard. This ceremony was accompanied by the display of music such as *Darbu* and *tumphit*, and the recurring firing of guns.¹⁵⁶ Soon those warriors are obliged to perform 'ai' or 'aih' (to sacrifice a domestic animal and perform a ceremony). This was done with a view of getting the spirit of the slain into the power of the slayer after death, and to protect him from evil consequences during this life.¹⁵⁷

When a person died outside his village or in a jungle the corpse must be brought to his village, by following certain customs known as *Mitthi zawn*. A stretcher is made of bamboo, and they wrapped the corpse with cotton cloth and then laid the corpse on a stretcher. Both ends of the cloth were stitched closed to protect the corpse from exposure. For instance, a person died in a nearby village; generally youth of the village were in charge of carrying the corpse to the deceased village. But each village would try to carry the corpse within their village boundary and try their best to proceed to the deceased village. In this situation we can see the display of Mizo *tlawmngaihna* where the youth folk from the village wrestle against each other, where and the victor would claim over the corpse and would carry and proceed to the deceased village.

2.4. Traditional Burials and Memorials of the Mizos

Most of the Mizo clans bury their dead bodies but they do not seem to have any special place for burial, and in some cases the places of burials differ from clan

¹⁵⁶ Zawla, p.p. 90-99

¹⁵⁷ 'Ai/Aih', *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, p.4.

to clan and person to person.¹⁵⁸ But generally, burial customs were ubiquitous throughout among the different Mizo clans. It is evident that there are different custom regarding the disposal of the dead body among the well to do families and the chiefs family. However burial was common among the general masses, the Mizo notion of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ deaths played a significant role in prescribing the kind of burial.¹⁵⁹ Even the modes of preparation of the grave were different, in accordance with the status of the deceased; accordingly they prepared different types of graves for burying the dead bodies.¹⁶⁰

Generally speaking there are three different methods of disposing of dead bodies, which indicate that the Mizo classified the dead bodies into three categories, they are: the bodies of youth and warrior, body of a prominent persons and chiefs, the body of common people.¹⁶¹ But while going through the Mizo classification of death, unusual death like *sarhi* and *hlamzuih* were given burials other than the above mentioned methods.

2.4.1. *Tianhrang Thlan*

K. Zawla has asserted that *Tianhrang Thlan* is a grave for the youths.¹⁶² Malsawmliana also stated that, it is a tradition when a youth or warriors died that the grave were dug as deep as possible to show their respect and care to them. The bottom of the grave was made slope instead of leveling the ground so that the deceased appear to be standing in a slanting position as the grave known as *Tianhrang Thlan*.¹⁶³ This type of burial was also found among the *Pawis* of the Southern Hills.¹⁶⁴ When a great, prominent and highly favored person in the village died, after digging the grave to a depth of a man’s chest, on the uphill side of the grave they would excavate a cave long and wide enough for the corpse in an inclined

¹⁵⁸ Malsawmliana, ‘*Traditional Burial System of The Mizo*’*Historical Journal Mizoram*, Vol.XIV, 2013, p.15.

¹⁵⁹ Joy Pachuau, p.215

¹⁶⁰ Malsawmliana, *Historical Journal Mizoram*, p.16.

¹⁶¹ Malsawmliana, p.21.

¹⁶² Zawla, p.56.

¹⁶³ Malsawmliana, p.16.

¹⁶⁴ *Pawi Chanchin*, 2nd Edition, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 2011, p.181.

posture.¹⁶⁵ The body was laid according to the shape of the grave in a slanting position leaning against the wall of the grave.¹⁶⁶ The walls of the grave would be lined with stone slabs. They placed the corpse in the cavity at the top in a slanting manner. Lastly, they would cover the body with a huge slab of stone. This kind of grave was known as ‘*Tian-hrangthlan*’.¹⁶⁷

According to Zofate Chanchin by Hualngo literature the origin of this tradition goes like this:

*“There was once a chief named Tianhranga from Tuallawt clan. One day all of his villagers had gone for fishing at the river Run, (to the east of Mizoram) while all his villagers had gone for fishing, Tianhranga’s village was raided by Chhungchung; their intention was to hunt the head of men, while they only saw children and women in the village. Suddenly they saw their chief Tianhranga hiding on a Pang tree and killed him. When Tianhranga’s villagers knew that their chief was killed by their enemy while they go for fishing, they were surprised and felt sympathy for their dying chief. To show their sympathy and plight, they prepared an extraordinary grave which was not practiced ever before, known as TianhrangThlan”.*¹⁶⁸

According to C. Lianthanga this type of burial was common among the *Pawi* which was accustomed to the well-to-do families and that of the brave hunters and warriors.¹⁶⁹ Considering the origin of this burial practice, it was especially specified to the dead chief as a token of their appreciation to the deceased. As time goes by, this type of burial was practiced by the well-to-do families and some prominent

¹⁶⁵ Lalthangliana, p.186.

¹⁶⁶ K.L Chhuanvawra, Serchhip interviewed by Lalchhanhima, 2015, Private audion archive,Aizawl Mizoram.

¹⁶⁷ Lalthangliana, p.186.

¹⁶⁸ Zofate Chanchin, Tahan, Hualngo Literature & Cultural Association, 1995, p.227

¹⁶⁹ Lianthanga, p.82

figure in the society. It also served as a symbol of priority to a prominent person especially youths in the Mizo society. Notwithstanding the fact that the social and economic status of a person was highly regarded, it also suggests that good conduct according to social norms was also highly important to earn such distinction in the society. It definitely highlighted the status of the deceased and also symbolized his status during his lifetime.

2.4.2. *Khaukhurh*

It is a common form of burying dead bodies of ordinary peoples. The whole body was covered with a coarse bamboo matting (*dap*) around the body instead of clothes, in some places a piece of wood was also used. A pit about 5 feet deep was burrowed out at one wall for putting the corpse. When the burial takes place, they pushed the head first into the hole and closed with a coarse bamboo mat. Finally the grave was filled with earth.¹⁷⁰ Stones and wood were used to lid the hole where the corpse was placed, generally a flat stones was used to close the hole, but there is evidence that a logs of wood were also used as per convenience.¹⁷¹

2.4.3. *Lungkuang*

It is a grave prepared especially for the chiefs as well as for the prominent persons. The term *lungkuang* means a grave made of stone and when after digging about 4 feet deep, a hole was made at one side of the grave wall preferably to the eastern side for putting the corpse. It is interesting to note that the floor and each walls of the hole were made of flat stones. Thus, after putting a corpse, the hole was closed with flat stone and then the grave was filled in with mud.¹⁷²

4.2.4. *Burials among the Non-Lusei Clans*

Among the Mizo clans, the Ngente do not attach any importance to burying the dead near their place of abode. They put up no memorials and offer no sacrifices, and make no offerings to the deceased's spirit. The dead are buried where ever it is

¹⁷⁰ Malsawmliana, p.17.

¹⁷¹ Chhuanliana BVT, interviewed by Lalchhanhima, 2015, Private archive, Aizawl, Mizoram.

¹⁷² Malsawmliana, p.17.

most convenient. This is a most singular divergence from the general custom. The Fanai buried their dead in the usual Lushai way, but no rice is placed on the grave. An offering of maize, however, is suspended above it.¹⁷³

The early Maras customarily buried their dead in the vault, which was constructed near the house or outside the village fence. There was no trace of either cremation or platform burial. They do not use coffin or rough plank. They wrapped the dead body with a piece of cloth and buried in the vault grave.

K. Zohra mentioned that, in their early days the Mara had maintained three types of burials:

“Thlapi or Lo-o meaning ‘stone house’ was customarily maintained only by the chief or important families. A grave about six feet deep, eight feet long and six feet wide was dug. Its floor, sides and roof were lined with flat stones; a small place was left as a doorway and was closed with large flat stone. In the vault, the chief or wealthy family usually placed a brass pot or a gong just below the head of the deceased, and the idea was that the skull of the deceased would automatically fall on to the brass pot or the gong after decaying of the dead body. Thlato was a grave of the commoner, who died pithi or a natural death. It was also known as the commoner’s grave. It was usually dug near the deceased’s house or outside the village fence. A pit of about five feet deep, six feet long and three feet wide was dug. When and after completing this, the vault hollowed at one end of the grave just enough to hold the dead body was excavated at the end of the grave. The vault was usually closed with a large flat stone. Thlaphei or

¹⁷³ Shakespeare, pp.130-136.

Thlachhie was the grave of a person who died an unnatural death (sawvaw or thichhe). The grave thlaphei or thlachhie was also dug as thlato, but the vault was simply excavated at the lengthwise of the grave, and was closed with a log of wood or bamboo.”¹⁷⁴

While analyzing the burial practices among the different Mizo clans, one clear thing is that there were hardly any differences in respect of burying their death. And the types of burials along with the classification of graves are ubiquitous among all the Mizo clans. Still there are slight different practices among the different clans, but in general burial practices were almost all the same among the Mizos.

“When a person dies, they dig a grave on the ground just in front or on back side of the house and bury the corpse therein. No sign as to the sex or position of the person is set up on the grave. Still if the deceased is a well to do person they kill many domestic animals as offerings to the departed soul and set up on poles, on the grave, the skulls of animals. The Paites never erect a lungdoh.”¹⁷⁵

According to Zakhu Hlychho, a common household grave known as *Thlanpui* burial was practiced among the chief and the well-to-do families, this type of burial was almost similar to that of *Tianghrang thlan*.¹⁷⁶ Although the process of preparation of this types of burials was almost identical to that of *Tianhrang thlan*, but among the Pawi it was often used as a common grave for all members of the common households which was made exclusively for the chief and the well-to-do families.¹⁷⁷

“The burial was, I was told, usually close to the home of the deceased, where a pit was dug; a good death required that the pit be slanted and covered

¹⁷⁴K.Zohra, *History of the Maras*, Guwahati, Assam, R.K Pillai, 2013, p.83-34.

¹⁷⁵ Exploration of Kolodyne by Mr. Murray & Attack on his Party, 1981, CB-N0 1, G-6, Mizoram State Archive.

¹⁷⁶ Zakhu Hlychho, *Mara teTobul*, Reprint, Aizawl, The Author, 2009, p.p.77-78.

¹⁷⁷ *Pawi Chanchin*, p.180.

*flagstones; a bad death required that the body be placed in niche that was craved into the wall of the pit, which was covered by logs of wood”.*¹⁷⁸

Thus, study has revealed that the notion of good and bad deaths played a significant role in prescribing the kinds of burials given to a person in the society at the time of death. Generally among the Lusei and some other clans bad deaths were classified into *Hlamzuih*, *Raicheh* and *Sarathi*. In the case of *Hlamzuih* they simply put the corpse in a big earthen pot and buried it.

2.4.4. Kuang Ur

The practice of *Kuang ur* was common among the Lusei and many other Non-Lusei clans. In the case of the *mitha* (elite) family *kuang ur* was common. Literally *kuang* means a coffin, a trough, a groove and *ur* means to smoke, fumigate, to heat or bake. According to James Herbert Lorrain *Kuang ur* means:

*“To dispose of a dead body by placing it in a sealed coffin made out of a hollowed out tree and keeping it in the house close to a constantly burning fire until the flesh has decayed and only the mains remain. This was a common practice among the ruling chiefs and the wealthier classes in the earlier days of the early British rule in the Lushai Hills.”*¹⁷⁹

From the existing literature, the Mizo writers and other local informants, it is evident that *Kuangur* was practiced only by the *mitha* families due to the requirement of heavy expenses and to mark the status in the society. According to R.Chaldailova as the practice of *Kuangur* was very expensive In terms of economic resources as

¹⁷⁸ Joy Pachuau, p.215.

¹⁷⁹ ‘Kuang Ur’, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, p.p.274-275

well requires extensive human resource, only the chiefs afford such tradition.¹⁸⁰ “Few Lusheis, except Chiefs, can afford the expense incurred in this method of disposing of their dead.”¹⁸¹ Slightly away from this assertion, Joy L.K. Pachuau in her book *Being Mizo* stated “in the practice of *kuang ur*, the stature and wealth of the person so treated, which in reality was practiced mainly by the chiefs.”¹⁸² Thus, this tradition was exclusively practiced among the Chiefs and the fewer *mitha* elite) family in the society.

It is almost impossible to figure out the exact time and place where this tradition originated, but it has been widely known that some Mizo clans in their way of migration towards the west crossing the Tiau river had brought along them a number of bones which were stored in a cave at different places, these bones were extensively found in *Lamsial puk*, *Vapar puk*, *Biata khampuk*, a cave on the adjoining areas of *Maite* and *Hnahlan* etc. It has been noted that the migrating Mizo tribes from the Chin Hills moved on different phases on a clan based, this makes us uncertain to which clan these bones belonged.¹⁸³ What evident here is that the *kuangur* tradition had been practiced before the crossing of *Tiau* river.

J. Shakespeare has given detailed account of *Kuangur* and stated:

“The body is placed in a box made by hollowing out a log, a slab of wood is placed over the opening, and their joint plastered up with mud. This rough sort of coffin is placed in the deceased’s house near to the wall. A bamboo tube is passed up through the floor and through a hole in the bottom of the coffin and into the stomach of the corpse. The other end is buried in the ground. A special hearth is made close to the coffin and a fire is kept burning day and night on this for

¹⁸⁰ R. Chaldailova, ‘Kuang Ur’, In *Seminars and Important Papers*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute Art & Culture Department Government of Mizoram, 2008, p.178.

¹⁸¹ Shakespeare, p.85.

¹⁸² Joy K. Pachuau, p.216.

¹⁸³ Chaldailova, p.178.

*three months, and during the whole of this time the widow of the deceased, if he leaves one, must sit alongside the coffin. Over which are hung and valuables owned by the deceased. About six weeks after placing the corpse in the coffin, the latter is opened to see if the destruction of the corpse is proceeding properly and if necessary the coffin is turned round so as to present the other side to the fire. The opening of the coffin is celebrated by the killing of a pig and the usual drink, and is known either as enlawkor looking or examining. When it is thought that the bones have been destroyed, the coffin is opened and the bones removed. The skull and the larger bones are removed and kept in a basket, which is placed on a special shelf opposite the hearth. The remainder of the bones are collected and buried generally in earth ware pot.*¹⁸⁴

An eyewitness who had experienced the practice of *Kuang Ur* stated that the *Sailo* chiefs mostly preferred *khiang* tree for *kuang*, this is because *khiang* tree has denser tree ring compared to other trees which gives more strength to the wood and are found best for erecting *kuang*. A number of log of woods was cut to fit the width hollow of the coffin, each was placed on top of the coffin till it covers the coffin then on top of the woods, a large number of ashes were collected mixed up with water to form loam like a mud then plastered on the lid in order to maintain air tight lid, so that the odor smell and vapor will not go out. A special hearth was made out of mud near *pathlang*, as ashes were collected with hands it requires the involvement of large number of people.

¹⁸⁴ Shakespeare, pp. 84-85.



Figure 2.1: *Mizo Kuang*.

Source: Mizoram State Museum, Aizawl Mizoram.

The duration of not uniform, they often maintain in an odd months like three months, five or six months respectively. Larger populated villages had observed a longer ritual. The village youths are responsible for the supervision of this practice; collecting log of woods for fire and wake keeping was the main task, sometimes they make routine for those who were to be on duty. On this occasion *zu* or rice beer was the main items, at daytime old man and married man gathered at the deceased house singing, lamenting the whole day. This continues till the destruction of the flesh, the commencement was marked by the opening of the *kuang* or coffin by the *upa* or village elders. The bones were separated, washed and oiled and dried in the sun, the skull, thigh bones and arms are most valued and preserved. This final opening of the *kuang* was celebrated with the final *thlaichhiah* ceremony accompanied by the killing of a *sial* (bison) or *vawk* (a pig). On this ceremony extensive consumption of *zu* was required and the deceased family feasted the whole village.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ Chaldailova, pp.147-152.

This tradition was common among all the different Mizo clans; it is evident that the Paite in Mizoram has also practice *kuang ur* tradition:

*“In olden days the dead were not immediately disposed of or buried. Some people preserved the dead body by keeping over the fire and buried only after it had been shriveled up, the practice was known as kuanguk. It was expensive and rather impossible for ordinary families. While the rich people could retain the dead body for a month or two... The occasion of death, therefore, marked a clear distinction between the poor and the rich.”*¹⁸⁶

As stated above the dead Chief was mourned with distinct rituals as compared to the ordinary person in the village, *Kuang ur* required large amount of workforce for a long period of time, at the same time it also incurred heavy expenditure as it requires continuous feasting of mourners until the final opening of the coffin. This was regarded as the glorification of the dead chief; as well a means to show his distinction in the society. The typologies of burials indicated the status of a person in the society. Firstly the Chief and prominent household members of the village known as *mitha*, were most favored and were given the best types of burial. Next was the *pasaltha* or brave warriors, youths, the common household members, lastly the *sarathi*, *raicheh*, and *hlamzuih* which is regarded as unusual death. Typologies and classification of burials among the Mizos clearly indicates that social stratification was highly embraced according to the social, economic and political status of the deceased in the pre-colonial Mizo society.

¹⁸⁶*Paite in Mizoram*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, p.155.

2.5 Memorials

The practice of erection of a wooden post or sacrificial post for commemoration of a feast of merit as well as in memorials to the dead was one of the common features of some of the tribal cultures. Among the Mizo clans like the Maras, there also prevails a custom of setting up of a wooden memorial post at the grave for memorials to the dead and the practice of erecting sacrificial post (i.e yfork) was prevalent among and the *Lusei* and their cognate clans in their early society which were mostly connected with a feast of merit.¹⁸⁷ In the Pre-colonial Mizo society the memorial to the dead was usually erected in memory of the chiefs and generally not by a commoner, where a platform *lungdawh* placed on the path approaching the village rather than by the grave itself. Each of the platform were often erected as a memorial of the dead, and the skulls or bones upon the posts are those of wild animals killed in the chase or domesticated animals sacrificed to demons. A hunter's prowess is thus recalled as a village tradition, his wealth and religious devotion being indicated by the number of beasts he had been able to offer to propitiate the spirits...the elders sit upon them in the evening to discuss the events of the day.¹⁸⁸ J. Shakespear stated that:

“The skulls of all animals killed on such occasions are placed on poles round the grave if the body has been buried. If the body has not been buried, the heads will be placed on poles round the “lungdawh,” or platform erected in memory of the deceased. These “lungdawh,” in most cases, are merely a rough platform of logs placed beside the road just outside the village, but in the case of chiefs and of men who have killed men in war, the platform is built of stones. A big upright stone is placed in the centre, and on this various figures are roughly outlined, representing the deceased and sometimes his wife and children and the various animals he has killed. An india rubber-tree is very often planted by a chief's grave. Sometimes a

¹⁸⁷ Malsawmliana, 'Thori: The Memorial Post of The Mara', *Mizoram University, Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, Vol V, Issue I. June, 2019, p.47.

¹⁸⁸ Herbert Anderson cited in Heath, Joanna, Khawahar Zai: Voices of Hope in the Bereavement Singing of Mizo Christians in Northeast India, p.72, Durham theses, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11588/>

person who either has no near relatives, or who mistrusts those he or she has will get the young men of the village to build the lungdawh during his or her lifetime."¹⁸⁹



Figure 1.2: Mizo Lungdawh, Source: Joana Heath, Khawhar Zai: *Voices of Hope in the Bereavement Singing of Mizo Christians in North East India*, Ph.D Thesis, and p.73.

The sites were not always gravesites in the technical sense that they did not contained the mortal remains of the person concerned. They were memorial sites. Those of a powerful person like the Chief and the *Thangchhuah* were marked with a raised platform and the centerpiece was a big upright stone, animals they had killed during their lifetime. The skulls or other remains of animals sacrificed during their funeral ceremonies were displayed on the poles around the platform.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Shakespeare, p.86.

¹⁹⁰ Joy L.K Pachuau and Willem Van Schendel, *The Camera As Witness: A Social History of Mizoram Northeast India*, Delhi, Cambridge University Press, 2015. P.61.



Figure 2.3: Rangte Grave

Source: J.Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, p.147.

The Maras customarily erected memorials only for those people who died a natural death *pithi*. Memorial was erected after sometime the death of a person.¹⁹¹ The Maras have practice erecting various kinds of memorials for memorials to the death. The *lobo* was the cheapest and ordinary memorial stone, to commemorate the deceased, it was a flat stone erected in a diagonal position on the grave or near the deceased house or outside the village along the road.¹⁹² The *lophei* was a funerary stone; it was ordinarily erected in memory of the dead on the grave. A *lophei* is a plain flat stone which is laid on top of the grave, supported on all four sides by four stones of the same length planted on their sides. The size of *lophei* varies from village to village or person to person, depending on the prominence of the deceased person in the village and the prosperity of the family. The wooden post called *Thori* is also erected over the grave along with the *lophei*. The Mara perform *Athipatyukhei* ceremony, which means ‘sitting with the dead,’ the idea being that on this occasion the dead man’s spirit will visit its home for the last time before going off to the final abode of the dead. The funerary stones were planted on the day when the *Athipatyukhei* is performed. The *thori* (also calls *Thangri* by NE Parry in his ‘The Lakher’) was a wooden memorial post, usually erected near the grave or memorial stone *lophei* or *lodo*. It was a traditional practice erected in memorial to the deceased person, who was economically wealthy in the village. The *lodo/lodawh* is regarded as memorials restricted only to the chiefs and wealthy persons in the society. It was a large in size usually measuring about 2m in length, 2m in width and 1m in height, is usually located at the entrance of the village. Each platform (*lodo*) is made up of a number of stones each of which measure 2 feet in length and 1 foot in breadth. Thus, the *lodoh* takes the form of a square enclosed by four stones walls about 3ft high, and the empty space in between is then filled up with soil and a flat stone placed on it. The *tliatla* was a very simple memorial stone. It was ordinarily a platform of about

¹⁹¹ K.Zohra, ‘The Maras of Mizoram a Study of their History and Culture’, PhD Thesis, Guwahati University, 1994, pp. 112-114.

¹⁹² Zohra, ‘The Maras of Mizoram a Study of their History and Culture’, pp.112-124.

six to eight feet, two feet wide and two feet high. It was erected for the memory of both the deceased men and women.¹⁹³

Another type of memorials was a heaped up stone rubble (or cairns) i.e. *Pura/Phura*. They are pyramidal in shape. It was a memorial to deceased chiefs and wealthy persons in society. The heights of these monuments are usually about 2 to 3 meters and its bottom is a circle base of about six feet wide in diameter. It may be noted, that cairns are raised as memorials only for male members in society. This type of memorials was a heavy and expensive in its constructions which require many labours and feasts, therefore, only the chiefs and wealthy families could afford it. The Maras calls such types of stone monuments as *Phura* and they are usually erected at the entrance of villages on one of the approach roads. Since the erection of *phura* is associated with the memorials of dead chiefs and wealthy persons of the Mara clans, they are concentrated only in the Mara inhabited area within and outside Mizoram particularly in the Haka area and Thantlang range in the present Chin Hills of Burma.¹⁹⁴

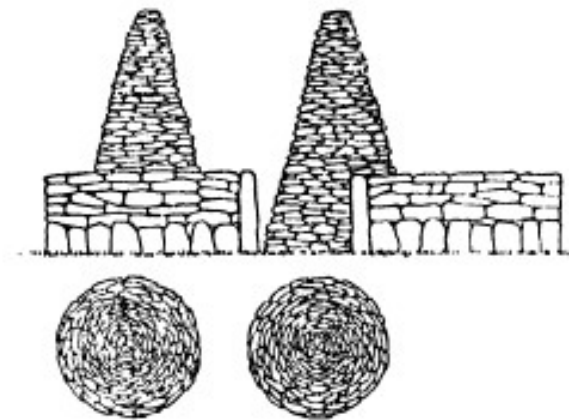


Figure 2.4: 'Longdong' A stone memorial to a chief. Figure 2.5. Phura

Source: N.E Perry *The Lakhers* p.417

Source: N.E Perry, *The Lakhers*, p.417

¹⁹³Malsawmliana, 'Thori: The Memorial Post of The Mara', *Mizoram University, Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, Vol V, Issue I. June, 2019, pp.48-49

¹⁹⁴ Malsawmliana, *Mizoram University Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, pp.48-49.

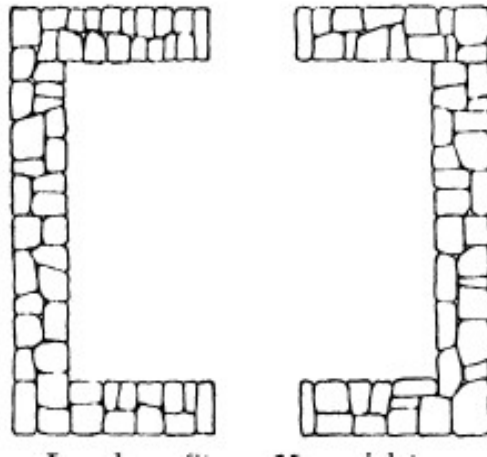


Figure 2.6: Thori Memorial.

Source: N.E Perry, *The Lakhers*, p.416.

Among the Paite or Vuite a memorial was erected on the grave of a distinct person in the society; the wild animals killed by the deceased were hanged. This signifies that the deceased was a prominent man in the society who performed *Sialsut* or the *Lusei Thangchhuah* festival during his lifetime. These platforms are in no way visited by the spirits of the ancestors. They do not contribute directly to the fertility or prosperity of anyone living. However they indirectly do. The relationship between the living and the dead are reciprocal. In order for one's secular status to have a lasting effect, it must be validated through sacrifice to the other world and also memorialized in this world. The prosperity of the living is guaranteed by a connection with past generation. This connection is supplied not only by a sacrificial link to the world of the dead but also by the substantive memorials of the prosperity and achievements of those who have gone before.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ F.K Lehman, pp.193-194



Source: J.Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans*, p.147.

2.6 Conclusion

In traditional Mizo belief system, death and its surrounding rituals functioned to reaffirm societal bonds and the social structure itself. Death channelized the accompanying emotional reactions into culturally elaborated frames and placing them under social control. Thus, traditional belief system exhibits the display of several spiritual and cultural elements and practices. Death rituals functioned as a means to promote the solidarity of groups, families and clan members of the village. It is also evident that the households of the village gathered during such occasions or tragedy, and observed such unfortunate day so as to share their sentiment to the bereaved family. In this common display of emotion, individuals signal their commitment to each other and to the society itself.

Rituals symbolized the deceased and his or her role in the society. Among the Mizos death rituals were also greatly affected by the social status of the deceased and also by the nature of how a person died. The display of wealth, social and political

status of the deceased in death and funerals ceremonies symbolized the hierarchical pattern of the pre-colonial Mizo society. The nature of traditional death rituals among the Mizos clearly reveals that, death was not seen as an abrupt end for a person, but a process of continuity. Death rituals often served as an establishment of social identity through rites of passage, where death rituals exhibit a state of separation, transition and incorporation. The study on funeral ceremonies and death rituals has shown that the death of a person brought certain changes in the structural norms of the society. Under such circumstances funeral and death rituals has become tools in reconstructing the social order and identity. In fact all rituals depict signs and symbols and marked both the individual and collective identity of the society.

Among the Mizos, death is not seen as an event, but a process. When respiration stops, the body receives temporary burial. A transitional period between the initial disposal and final burial provides the time for the decomposition of the body, the purification of the bones, the journey of the soul, and the liberation of the mourners. During the intermediary period, ritual of the dead chief was prolonged to six months before the final burial, the link between the living and the dead continues, until the final incorporation of the deceased into the afterlife. The traditional burials and the interment of a dead body clearly portrayed how death was perceived among the Mizos. The disposal of the body symbolized how a body was used to present moral and social values.

Considering death as a social product, death in the Mizos culture is bound to attribute some meaning in order to locate some problem of death in the social construction of reality through rituals. This meaning, accessible and perceivable by human individuals, involves constructing a unique concept of death and afterlife. It can be argued that the whole process of the construction of knowledge on the nature of death is permeated by the epistemological imperative of anthropomorphizing.

The significance of anthropomorphizing was emphasized at the beginning of the 20th century by a number of scholars. When an individual has surmounted death, he will not simply return to the life he has left. He is reunited with those who like

himself and those before him, have left this world and gone to the ancestors. He enters this mythical society of souls which each society constructs in its own image. The afterlife which was that of a world analogous to the living, but more pleasant, and of a society organized in almost the same way as the living.¹⁹⁶ Thus, Mizo concept death, dying and rituals centered on anthropomorphic features, concept of death, the fear of the spirit, ancestors worship, the afterlife and the abode of *mitthi khua* and *pialral*, the procession of death rituals are all interconnected. Therefore, the concept and ritual practices in most cases would take an institutionalized form; in the Mizo context the kin and clan based social and cultural institution held responsible for constructing the death concept. While constructing the reality enwrapping death, social institutions draw their legitimacy from two basic sources. The first is anthropomorphic character of their death concept, as this concept promises the fulfillment of the people's broken natural desire for a more or less broken continuation of existence in a completely different form. The second is the worldly influence these social institutions, comprising mostly the control of the process and social spaces of socialization, which lays at the basis of the normative efficiency of these social institutions and which thus endows the beliefs distributed by them with the appearance of reality and legitimacy. The social institution which control the maintenance of death concept has to harmonize its notion about the substance of dead continuously with other slices of reality with some changes of society and culture. The next chapter looks at the changes in culture and social institution and its influence on ritual practices, and how anthropomorphic character of death and its concept as well the institutional changes underwent a significant shift which was brought about by Colonialism and Christianity among the Mizos.

¹⁹⁶Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1960, p.152.

3.1 Introduction

Colonialism has brought tremendous changes in almost every sphere of the Mizo life. With the introduction of new institution whether colonial or religious institution, Mizo death practices, concept and attitudes on dying were somehow significantly transformed. Traditional rites and beliefs are re-shaped by the spread of Christianity and other aspects of colonialism. All these transformation makes it more and more difficult to sustain the age-old practices that have brought meaning and order to the chasm and grief of death. This chapter explores the impact of colonialism in the attitude and practices towards death among the Mizos. It also seeks to explore the ways in which Mizo engaged with western notion and practices which contributed to the re-inventions of practices and beliefs surrounding death which are 'modern' and yet also have a deep link with tradition. This notion of death which developed in the early colonial period has become the foundation and base for Mizo Christian notion of death which survived till the present day.

Soon after the annexation of the Lushai Hills by the British, the Welsh missionaries entered the Hills which left an indelible imprint on the life and culture of the Mizo. The main purpose of the British annexation was securing peace, law and order whereas missionaries contact was to convert the Mizo from their previous belief system. The Christian missionaries imparted in the Mizo minds the western thought form through Christianity and education. It was because of this influence, traditional world views and practices had undergone a gradual change.

3.2. Christian Missionaries & the Deathly Encounter

Christian missionaries in the then Lushai Hills were the missionaries of evangelical awakening in the 19th Century. The Presbyterian and the Baptist missionaries were the products of this evangelical awakening and the churches to which they longed are the outcome of evangelical movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The new born church was nursed and developed under the parental care of the missionaries. Its creed and constitution were formulated after the

creed and constitution of the western church and also adopted many practices of the parent church.¹⁹⁷ The faith of the young church in Mizoram was influenced by the evangelical faith and theology right from the beginning. Their Biblical interpretations and theological thinking was the product of western evangelical theology. Therefore the Mizo world views and cultures are considerably affected by the preaching of western evangelist or the missionaries.¹⁹⁸ It can be seen that the first two missionaries F.W Savidge and J.H Lorrain were sponsored by a wealthy British Philanthropist, Arthington of Leeds in England who was an eschatologically motivated person who believed in second coming of the Christ. The imprint of Arthington's motif could be seen in the preaching of the two pioneer missionaries. They preached the gospel with an emphasis towards the end of life hereafter.¹⁹⁹

J.M Lloyd writes:

*"Mr. Arthington...believed in the second coming of our Lord and his view was that his workers would busy themselves solely with proclaiming the gospels among the tribes who had never heard it. They were then to move to a new area, and not even to waste time in writing or translating books, not even in translating the scripture"*²⁰⁰

Upon arrival, the missionaries soon realized that the message had to be preached in frames so that the people recognize and understand easily, which made them to articulate to the tribes in a language and expressions that was comprehensible. Thus, the first Baptist missionaries, Savidge and Lorrain, made the message more relevant once they initially presented Christ as a liberator from the clutches of malevolent spirits instead of as a saviour from sins. This message was seen to own a greater resonance amongst the people.²⁰¹ It is in this way the use of

¹⁹⁷ Tlanghmingthanga, 'An Appraisal of the Eschatological Contents of Selected Mizo-Christian Songs with Reference to their Significance for the Church in Mizoram.' MTh Thesis, Senate of Serampore College, 1996, pp.78-79.

¹⁹⁸ Tlanghmingthanga, 'An Appraisal of the Eschatological Contents of Selected Mizo-Christian Songs' p.79.

¹⁹⁹ L.H. Rawsea, 'The Eschatological Orientation of Mizo Christianity: Manifestation and Causes', In Rosiamliana Tochwawng, et al., *Ground Works for Tribal Theology in the Mizo Context. Tochwawng*, Delhi, Rev.Dr. Ashish Amos ISPCK, 2007, pp.134-135.

²⁰⁰ Rawsea, *Ground Works for Tribal Theology*, p.135.

²⁰¹ Joy L.K Pachuau, 'Why Do People Convert? Understanding Conversion to Christianity in Mizoram', in Neelandri Bhattacharya and Joy.L.K Pachuahu (eds.), *Landscape Culture and*

pialral to refer to heaven among Mizo Christianity may be understood, since the victorious identity of the *thangchhuah* man and his hope in a future state free from fear, matched the Christian hope for certainty and transcendent after death. As the early Mizo convert Zakunga wrote in an article for *Kristian Tlangau* in December 1911 “*Thihna chu nunna a ni*” for Christians, ‘death is life’. This presents a significant shift in the attitude towards death among the Mizo.²⁰²

The belief in and worship of *Pathian* replaced the difficult and costly *Thangchhuah* as the path to *pialral* (heaven or paradise). The belief in life after death was a major resource for missionaries to conjoin the Mizo belief system and Christianity. The belief in the existence of two different and contrasting abodes of the dead further provided a deeper link between the two. The existent contrast between the two places was furthered in the Christian message when *mithi khua* was supplemented and subsequently supplanted by *hremhmun* (hell). Although *mithi khua* (abode of the dead) was not hell, it provided the means to form the idea of hell in the Christian teaching of life after death. *Pialral* on the other hand came to be identified with the Christian hope of life after death right from the beginning. From the early days of Christianity in Mizoram, Mizo Christians related their Christian hope of heaven with the existing belief of *pialral*.²⁰³

Mitthi Khua (village of the dead) in traditional belief system can be summarised as shortage of food and drink, intense labour under poor physical health and uncertainty about the environment leading to fear and insecurity. These points to three basic aspects of life’s aspirations which form a significant expression of hope in Mizo society: sufficient and abundant food and drink, minimal labour and abundant rest and material and spiritual certainty, which represent local values. But all these esteemed condition was not guaranteed after death without the performance of necessary rituals by the living which can only be attained in *Pialral* (Paradise)

Belonging: Writing the History of North East India, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019. P.303.

²⁰² Joanna Heath, ‘Khawhar Zai: Voices of Hope in the Bereavement Singing of Mizo Christians in North east India’ PhD Thesis, Durham University, 2016, pp.199-200, Available from <http://etheses.dur.uk/11588>, p.203, (Accessed 24 October 2018).

²⁰³ Lalsangkima Pachuau, ‘Mizo Sakhua in Transistion’, in ‘*Missiology*’ vol.no 34, Jan 2006, pp.49-50, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/009182960603400105> (Accessed 21 February 2017).

which was almost impossible for commoner to achieve such status. Thus, Christianity offered a new understanding of the afterlife. Mizo concept of *pialral* was transformed by the Christian concept of ‘heaven’. Access to Heaven or Mizo *Pialral* is opened not only for the skilful, the mighty and the rich, but for everyone, male or female who put their trust in Jesus.²⁰⁴

J.H Lorrain had observed a scene in 1896 when a Mizo woman was mourning the death of her daughter, which he had recorded in his Log Book entitled “Sorrowing without hope for the dead” to quote:

“One day in the village we had heard rending sobs and the sound of a woman calling in a voice half choked with tears the name of a girl. Asked a bystander if someone had just died. He shook his hand and pointed to mound of red clay by the side of the house and said that the poor woman had lost her daughter some months back and buried her there and that she was crying now because her heart had gone strolling (using a lushai expression lung a leng) Some which produces such bitter sobs is of no common order-It is the sorrow who has no hope; and when the heart tries to follow the dear ones who has gone from earth forever, it is overwhelmed with despair and dreadful fear. It fell them as I listened to the agonised groans of that poor solitary mother, that compared with the work of speaking comfort to such souls and pointing them to the saviour all earthly riches, praise, honour and power as naught”²⁰⁵

It is apparent that the subject of death, grief and bereavement was among the major point of contact made by the early missionaries, where comfort and transcendent hope was to be relished in the Christian heaven. When the group of first generation Christians were asked, “*what was the Gospel message they first heard?*” Only one person remembered the message well. This person, who later became a pastor, said the message he first heard from the first Welsh missionary D. E. Jones in

²⁰⁴ C.L Hminga, *The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram*, Serkawn, Lunglei Dist., Mizoram: Literature Committee, Baptist Church of Mizoram, 1987, pp.294-295.

²⁰⁵ J.H Lorrain ‘Sorrowing without hope’, Log Book, 1896, ATC Archive Durtlang.

1899 was, “Believe on ‘Pathian’ Jehova and worship him, then you don’t need to sacrifice to the demons any more. Even when you die you shall go to ‘Pialral’”²⁰⁶

This evidently was a message assembled solely for the Mizo responding to their religious aspirations and goals. The missionaries learned to preach in such tone through their experience of interacting with the people. By putting a new stress on the belief in *Pathian* (God), interpreting him to be active and loving and even calling for his worship, the other two concerns of the Mizo, namely healing of sickness and the (new) way to *pialral*, were addressed in a profound manner.

Grace R. Lewis quoted how Lorrain and Savidge recorded an early account of a Christian funeral from 1906:

*“The converts saw how wonderfully the consolations of the Gospel upheld the bereaved family, and while the young men dug the grave on a hill-top, hard by, many sat around the beloved dead, speaking of the land beyond the tomb to which her spirit had gone. When the evening shadows began to lengthen she was laid to rest, and as we stood around the grave in the midst of that grove of waving banana trees, many of the converts witnessed for the first time a Christian funeral, and realised, as never before, that the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal”*²⁰⁷

Lorrains’ description of the early Christian funeral scene involves young men digging the grave and the burial taking place on the day of the death according to Mizo customs that survives today, is furnished with a new hope in Christian terms which offers consolation to the bereaved and the hope of future happiness. Heath opined that the missionaries explicitly suggest that their funeral arrangements served to offer a new vocabulary and basis for hope, which encourage emotional attitude towards death.²⁰⁸. Influenced by the fervent evangelical awakening in Europe the pioneer missionaries adopted new style of preaching, which abandoned dense

²⁰⁶ Lalsangkima, *Missiology*, p.48.

²⁰⁷ Grace R. Lewis, *The Lushai Hills: The Story of the Lushai Pioneer Mission*, London, The Baptist Missionary Society, 1907, pp.72-73.

²⁰⁸ Heath, *Khawhar Zai*, p.203.

theological discussion and debate, and favoured instead, an effective approach which sought a strong emotional response from listeners which explicitly aimed at conversion to evangelical Christianity.²⁰⁹ In the revivalist evangelicalism an awareness of death and eternity had an important role in evangelical conversion. They viewed death not as a threat but rather as a gateway into promised eternal life. Death was thus, the object of evangelical hope, sinners were warned of dying and entering eternity without Christ, the corollary was that believers could be consoled with the hope of dying as a Christians.

In a monthly article *Kristian Tlangau* entitled “*Thanga Thu*” the author Saihnuna clearly highlighted the Christian death bed scene in the year 1912. In the month of September 1912 a brethren Thanga had fallen seriously ill which led him to a near death experience causing him to collapse, in this situation Thanga had spoken out that “my redeemer leaded me”. His pain was becoming severe that his family and close friends even convinced him to perform traditional sacrifices, but he stood fast and sung two Christian hymns and was about to leave. In the midst of his imminent, impending death, Thanga had spoken out that “I’m leaving, I wish all my families a formal goodbye”, he had held their hands and finally died.²¹⁰ This instance from *Kristian Tlangau* evidently suggests that, as the last moment of life was approaching a dying person was lying in his bed, surrounded by his close one, the moment leading up to his death was unfolding quite vigorously, where the dying person soon realised that his death is near and he accepted it.

Another instancethat depicted the Christian death bed scene was written in *Kristian Tlangau* on November, September 1931 entitled “*Thihna Ava Mawi Em*” (How Beautiful is death), Kamlala had wrote an article about the glory of Christian death. In this article the author narrated the death bed scene of Saichhungi one of among the devoted followers of Christ in the village. Towards the beginning of 1930 she was stricken by severe fever and her illness become worsened from 14th March,

²⁰⁹ Christopher M. Moreman, *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying*, Oxon U.K, Routledge, 2018, p.18.

²¹⁰ Saihnuna, ‘Tanga Thu’, *Kristian Tlangau*, Bu-11 na, November, 1912, pp. 170-172.

1931 and she was gradually getting weaker day by day which soon made her families worried, cried and pray instantly. One day on a Sunday morning, 22nd March 1931, there came an abrupt joy among the family members who were sitting around the sick bed, started laughing instantly. Their sorrow and pain had suddenly wiped away. One night on the 23rd March 1931, after having a dinner, Saichhungi invited her families to pray, and after having a prayer she said that “Father, it was so bright” his father replied “what is it?” Saichhungi replied “Heaven” and she suddenly died. Her families and youths in the village had waked the dead and a funeral ceremony was held the next day and was buried. The author instructed the reader by drawing lesson from the story that even at the deepest valley of death, in their anguish and moment of sorrow, when death the most daring enemy on earth happened, Christians can turn the darkness into a brightest light.²¹¹ Apart from death bed scene, there were numerous religious teachings like sermons and Christian articles etc written in the *Kristian Tlangau* magazine depicting the early Mizo Christian concept of portraying death as conquering and equalizing the power of death. The theme of these sermons and articles were intended to teach and remind people no matter how rich or poor they were, or no matter how powerful, they were death was inevitable and everyone had the same destination.

Notion of Christian good death in the early colonial period was heavily influenced by British evangelical theology which required piety and life-long preparation, as well as fortitude in the face of physical suffering. It should take place in a good Christian home, surrounded by a loving family, with the dying person making explicit farewells to family members, comforted by the assurance of a future family reunion in heaven. There should be time, and physical and mental capacity, for the completion of temporal and spiritual business. The dying person should be conscious and lucid until the end, resigned to God’s will, able to beg forgiveness for past sins and to prove worthy of salvation.

²¹¹ Kamlala ‘Thihna Ava Mawi Em’, *Kristian Tlangau*, Bu No.240, September, 1931, pp. 150-155.

3.2.1 Social Condition of the Mizo in the Early Colonial Period

The prevailing social condition and lives of the early Mizo Christians has also been instrumental in shaping their world views and orientation towards death and the afterlife. In the early stages of colonisation resistance to Christianity from several Mizo Chiefs led to persecution of the converts, they had faced physical torture and were even ousted from their village. For the converted Mizo Christian life was harsh. Christians were still not in the majority. Some chiefs developed an intense dislike of the Christians, accusing them of disobeying his order when they would not work on Sunday and refused to participate in the annual *Kawngpui Siam* sacrifice.²¹² In the Mizo experience, his 'religion' was chiefly a means of avoiding sickness and of postponing death. Its function was to maintain him and his family in life and death.

Between 1911 and 1912 a great famine popularly known as *Mautam* broke out in the Mizo Hills.²¹⁴ The Mizo had experienced many such famines, and was used to the hardship, starvation and death that accompany the phenomenon.²¹⁵ The famine of 1911-12 was the first famine experienced by Mizos under the British rule. The missionaries had written that some Mizo were still nursing the feelings of resentment against those who have occupied their country. The Christian missionaries called this disastrous calamity the means to extend their evangelisation as J.H Lorrain and F.W. Savidge had reported in 1912, "*The gaunt spectre of famine has been spreading distress and sorrow all over this fair land, but we have been spared the still more terrible experience of pestilence which at one time seemed to seep the country, and the trying times through which we have been passing have strengthened our faith and have been the means of extending the saviour's kingdom*"²¹⁶ In many parts of the

²¹² Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, p.223.

²¹³ J.M Llyod, *History of the Church in Mizoram: Harvest in the Hills*, Aizawl, Synod Publication Board, 1991, p.210.

²¹⁴ C. Rokhuma, 'The Periodic Famine and Bamboo Flowering in Mizoram', Aizawl, Directorate of Information & Public Relation, Mizoram, 2006, p.4.

²¹⁵ Sajal Nag, 'Bamboo, Rats and Famines: Famine Relief and Perception of British Paternalism in the Mizo Hills (India)', *Environment and History*. Vol.5, no.2, 1999, p.249, <http://www.jsotr.org/stable/20723104>. Accessed 8 Feb 2021

²¹⁶ Lalrofel, 'Food, Famine and Consolidation of the British Rule in the Lushai Hills', *Senhri Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*. Vol.3, no.2, July-December, 2018, p.6.

Mizo Hills this famine caused much suffering and ill-health among the people. Outbreaks of Cholera in several Districts accompanied it, and carried off considerable number of victims. Many sad cases of destitute orphan children and other poor people hand to be dealt with.²¹⁷

The subsequent result of the famine was thus rekindling of *Harhna* (the spiritual revival) with a theological theme of the Second Coming of Christ. The emphasis on the imminent second coming of the Christ led to more and more excitement as the revival continued. As that was the essence of their preaching, many impressionable young people were literally making themselves ready for the end. This led many to adopt a negative attitude towards the present life and things of the world.²¹⁸ The economic life of the people was at stake and physical hunger made the Mizo attuned to the Gospel.²¹⁹

Only a few years later towards the end of 1918, the influenza epidemic swept through Europe and many other countries following the First World War reached Mizoram. Large number of people died, especially in the village. According to Liangkhaia, there were 40 to 50 deaths in each village located on the high ridges, and 100 to 200 in many of the low lying villages. In addition to Influenza there was an outbreak of small pox, with an estimated death toll as high as 380.²²⁰ An epidemic of such extensive spread and with so many deaths had not been known in the living memory. While the surviving population were still mourning for the dead and a feeling of depression was widespread and extraordinarily powerful a revival broke out on 26th July, 1919.²²¹

The British colonisation and the missionaries' activities from the nineteenth century did lead to a crisis that shattered the stability and hope for future security that had hitherto been the bedrock of community cohesion. Famines caused by the

²¹⁷ K.Thanzauva, *Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales on Mizoram 1894-1957*, Aizawl, Synod Literature and Publication Boards, 1997, p.52.

²¹⁸ Kipgen, pp.259-260.

²¹⁹ Hminga, *The Life and Witness of the Chruches in Mizoram*, pp.75-80.

²²⁰ Hminga, p.164.

²²¹ Kipgen, p.237.

flowering of the bamboo and other pestilences, as well as numerous epidemics added to struggle to survive in the early decades of the twentieth century. Young men had previously fought in skirmishes against the British, Mizo later served alongside the British in Europe in the World War I between 1915 and 1918 leaving them unable to provide the security and labour-force to those at home. The forbidden killing of some animals, imposed not just by missionaries but also by the British administration, closed the accepted routes to *Pialral* (paradise). Notwithstanding the British paternalist characteristics during this period, the Mizo way of life had been compromised by British activities. The encounter with the British whether colonial or missionary, led to an “identity crisis”.²²² As study reveals that, such situation demands careful emotional navigation. This offered a possible stimulus for the emergence of *Khawhar zai* in the 1920s following the third wave of revival. Given the theme of the third wave of revival, most of the new Mizo Christian songs erupted during this period was about the suffering of Christ. A large number were also devoted to the present suffering of the people. This reflected the hard life the Mizo lived in a hard land and a longing for *Pialral* (Heaven). Soon these new songs were popular and were sung with great fervour both in regular church worship and in fellowship in gathering homes called *Lengkhawm* or *Zaikhawm*. A large portion of them were associated with death predominantly used at homes in which someone has recently died in the *khawhar in* (house of the bereavement). The singing of such song in this context is called *khawhar zai* (bereavement singing).²²³ The new form of singing and style of composition brought a paradigm shift from traditional style, stressing the Mizo Christian concept of ‘*Vanram*’ (paradise) which was not known before. Generally the new style of composition which sprang out as a result of 1919 revival have emphasized the people’s longing for the Christian heaven, stressed the Christian philosophy of eschatology.

Thus, the subject of death played a central part in the conversation between the missionaries and their converts. Missionary insistence on speaking about death

²²² Heath, pp.22-23.

²²³ Lalzama, ‘Mizo Lengkhawm a Zai’ in Darchuailova Renthlei and F.Lalzuithanga, *Lenchawm*, Aizawl, Department of Mizo, Govt. Hrangbana College, p.37.

provoked fascination amongst their potential converts, and helped to convey a sense of the authority of the Christian God. For the Mizo, Christian depictions of the resurrection of the dead and the second coming of Christ held particular attraction, as these offered an innovative theological perspective on the death-process. Believers no longer had to fear death, nor the wrath of malevolent spirits, and could instead await with anticipation the rising up of their dead. Thus, conversation about dead involves tricky linguistic and cultural translation. As a result of the discursive encounter, new narrative on the notion of dead and the afterlife were incorporated into an autochthonous eschatological framework. To quote Joy Pachuau “*It was this active collective engagement with the Western form, rather than its blanket adoption, that eventually led to people’s identification with Christianity. What was Western was indigenized and transformed even as it was translated into vernacular form*”.²²⁴ This led to a formulation of distinctive Mizo Christian notion of death, which Joy Pachuau termed as a creation of alternative culture, not necessarily an imposition but rather the outcome of an active engagement in which the foreign agents that often acceded to local interventions.²²⁵ Since the major portion of Christian element was incorporated into traditional beliefs, there has been a strong line of continuity as traditional notion of death was utilized to link the new Christian element. As found in the form of *Lengkhawm/Khawhar zai* tradition and death rituals that holds several form of traditional elements in the early colonial period which is still in practiced today.

The Christian Missionaries imparted in the Mizo minds the western thought form through Christianity and education. It was because of this influence and teachings imparted by the missionaries, traditional world views and practices had undergone a gradual change. Missionaries were quite successful in conjoining the Christian eschatology with traditional notion of death and the afterlife. This resulted in a new understanding of death and afterlife. In this process many traditional elements were incorporated within the framework of Christian concepts. Mizo Christianity from the beginning was seen as eschatological oriented; as evangelical

²²⁴ Joy Pachuau, *Landscape Culture and Belonging*, p.298.

²²⁵ Joy Pachuau, p.298.

awakening in the 1850s Great Britain had greatly influenced on the missionaries' approach in imparting the gospel in their early contact with the tribe. Also the prevailing social condition of the Mizo in the early period of Colonisation has been instrumental in shaping their notion towards death and the afterlife. Thus, an active engagement with foreign ideas had led to a new understanding of death and the afterlife; still there has been some trace of continuity from traditional notions surrounding death and afterlife. Thus, the practices and notion surrounding death that developed during the early colonial period became the foundation of Mizo Christian notion of death, which survived till the present day.

In the previous chapter traditional Mizo concept of death and its surrounding rituals is seen as a social product which construct death ethos through anthropomorphic character and this concept promises the fulfilment of the destruction of death into continuation of existence in the afterlife. This was controlled and legitimate by the loosely structured social institution, and this social institution is influenced by the changes in society and culture resulted in the construction of the concept of death. Thus, with the introduction of Christianity, anthropomorphic character and idea was shifted to Christian views and perception, since there are links and traces of continuity in the Mizo perception of death, the whole idea was derived from Protestant/Evangelical Christianity and this has also greatly influenced on the ritual process in the early colonial period. Thus anthropomorphic character of death and its concept as well the social institution for legitimizing the authority has undergone a gradual change in this period. This may be due to the proximity of Mizo anthropomorphic character of death and the Christian anthropomorphic character of death.

3.3 Negotiating Tradition & Modernity: Death Rituals in the Colonial Period

In the previous chapter the varieties of traditional death rituals were highlighted in the light of structural functionalist explanation. Like many other tribal cultures of the world, the Mizo have developed a complex set of death rituals. Collective mourning and common display of emotion, lamenting, preparation of the

body, varieties of clothing, dresses, burials and materials buried along the corpse, the firing of guns, chiming of gongs etc were highlighted. The nature of traditional death rituals among the Mizo clearly reveals that, death was not seen as an abrupt end for a person, but a process of continuity. Death rituals often served as an establishment of social identity through rites of passage, where death rituals exhibit a state of separation, transition and incorporation. Funeral and death rituals have become tools in reconstructing the social order and identity. This is evident from a close examination of ritual performances where a group of people assembled in order to assert their identity. In fact all rituals depict signs and symbols. This has its connection with traditional belief system surrounding death and the afterlife, and marked both the individual and collective identity of the society.

As discussed in the previous section, despite a short resistance to Christianity in the early period of colonisation, Mizo notion of death had undergone a gradual change. This was a result of their active engagement with Christianity. In the midst of this development many old customs and practices surrounding death was continued within the framework of Christian practices. Many changes have occurred in the way Mizo visualize and understand death, one of the most important being the aspect of homogenization.²²⁶ Although the Protestant Christian meta-narrative of the afterlife now reigns supreme, none the less practices that validate community and community responsibility continue to play an important role.²²⁷ The decade of the Christianizing movement prior to the revival movement in Mizoram was marked by cultural clashes, transition and assimilation. The decade saw a conflict between traditional culture and Christianity.²²⁸ Instruments of westernisation and modernisation underwent a process of acculturation. The wave of revivals in 1906, 1913, 1919 and 1935 showed local agency in defining and appropriating the religion

²²⁶ Joy LK. Pachuau, *Being Mizo, Identity and Belonging in Northeast India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.218.

²²⁷ Joy Pachuau, *Being Mizo*, p.218

²²⁸ Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and its Subaltern Culture: Revival Movement as a Cultural Response to Westernization in Mizoram*, Delhi, Rev. Ashish ISPCK, 2006, p.127.

for itself, this has resulted in the creation of a uniquely Mizo-Christianity. This strong force of revival had paved way for the reification of identities.²²⁹

The inhabitants of the then Lushai Hills at the time of the arrival of the missionaries comprised of various 'tribes'. Affinities of the tribe were determined by the similarities of the rituals or the proximity of the *sakhua* which the clan or tribes perform. Generally ones identity and a tribe identity depend on the type of *sakhua* they embrace or perform. Thus one could perform *saphun* (change ones tribe) by adopting the *sakhua* of the particular tribe into which one wished to be incorporated. Thus, identities were fluid rather than fixed. Thus, the new tribe spirit, Christianity which had undergone a process of localization and vernacularization has made it possible for the different tribe to indentify on the basis of religion.²³⁰ Joy Pachuau saw Mizo identity or the ethnic self in terms of social patterns and practices through which people act and identify themselves. In which she saw identities are located in practice, rather than abstraction as she claims Mizo's practice of Christianity and their death rituals were significant to identification as Mizo, making explicit the boundaries of Mizo identity.²³¹ Thus, the Mizo practices and notion surrounding death which was re-invented and re-formulated during the colonial period as a result of interaction between traditional and western practices death and its practices became an important locus of Mizo Christian Identity.

It can be argued that community orientation of the people is the most fundamental basis of the common tribal values and ethos in Northeast India. There is no doubt that social background greatly determines the value-system of any group of people in human society. Anthropological research acknowledges that kinship ties in general dominate and characterize the basic social system of many tribal peoples living in different parts of the world. The traditional bonds of family, kinship or community are generally very strong in the tribal social structure. Like many other

²²⁹ Joy Pachuau, p.160.

²³⁰ Joy Pachuau, pp.179-182.

²³¹ Joy Pachuau, p.232.

communities, rural kinship ties or village-based communitarian ways of life largely characterize the traditional social system of the different tribes in Northeast India.²³²

Thus, for the Mizo, *Khawtlang/Vantlang* or Community is the first group beyond the family to which personal loyalty is attached and in the value system of which honor and its antonym shame plays a significant role.²³³ Through the ages collective mourning becomes part of the Mizo tradition. It is also apparent that kin based social relation was held important, this is clearly reflected on the funeral ceremony and ritual performed, where all these functions were guided by the family members especially the eldest or their *makpa* (Son-in law). The magnitude of the mourners has greatly built the status of the deceased as well his family. Imbued by the unique ethos; traditional Mizo *tlawmngaihna*, when an individual died in the village, all members of the entire village took responsibilities to carry on certain customs surrounding death through a set tradition. The community gathering at the times of death ensures that the bereaved are rarely alone, and everyone finds a role to console based on their age, gender and relationship to the family. Thus, the deceased home becomes a temporary public space in which imaginaries and intimacies can intersect, what Turner has called the liminal phase. The informal gathering clearly marks the boundary of this space creating a border around what may be called as ritual space of the *Mitthi in* or *Khawhar In*, reinforcing the notion that participation as part of the space can make a person insider or such participation marked both individual and collective identity as well marked a person with the quality of the so-called Mizo *tlawmngaihna*. Thus, death in Mizo society has been a social space which marked the individual performance which can be judged in terms of the value of honor in Mizo community as attendance and participation in the funeral ceremonies and the surrounding death related activities was regarded as an act of *tlawmngaihna* the core value in Mizo Society. The Mizo mindset is largely dominated by the core value *tlawmngaihna* as being a *tlawmngai* is honorable and the opposite is shameful.

²³² R.K Kar, 'Tribal Social Organisation' in T.B Subha and G.C Gosh, (eds.), *The Anthropology of Northeast India*, New Delhi, Orient Longman Pvt Ltd, 2003, p.221.

²³³ Lallawmzuala Khiangte, 'Values and Ethos of the 8th C Prophets A Mizo Perspective', PhD Thesis, School of Theologies and Religious Studies, Bangor University, United Kingdom, 2009, p. 44.

Community singing was an essential way of mourning, at the time of wake, the day of burial and night where community gathered at the deceased house, playing *tuium khuang*, (musical instrument made of bamboo)²³⁴. Thus, singing followed the event of death in consoling the bereaved family, and *Mim Kut*; an annual occasion observed every year as a farewell to the dead was mark by community singing. There are some varieties of singing style related with mourning, like *Thuthmun Zai*, *Khawhar Zai* and *Mitthi Hrah Zai*, besides these Zai there were some singing tradition composed in mourning theme such as *Darpawngi Lusun Zai*, *Aikhiangi Zai*, etc. The Mizo Christians practice of community singing in the house of a bereaved family is, in fact, a continuation of this pre-Christian tradition.²³⁵ Thus, singing together as is practiced in the *Khawhar In* to console the bereaved family seems to have been a practice before Christianity. The earliest known songs which were the expression of sorrow and grief at the times of death were *Thuthmun Zai*. It is also termed as a song for the bereaved family, which was believed to be originated long back, during the Mizos settlement in the *Kawl Phai*.²³⁶ Thus, singing together as is practiced in the *Khawhar* in order to console the bereaved family seems to have been a practice before Christianity. It is believed that the early Christian composers were still influenced by the musical style that prevailed before Christianity.

In traditional Mizo Death ritual when the corpse was finally buried in the grave, old men and women gathered in the deceased house, each carrying their *zu* (rice beer) and started lamenting in the form of songs, which would best suit to arose the sentiments of the bereaves. Songs like *Khiangi nu zai*, *Darpawngitahzai*, *Lianchhiarizai* and *Chawngvungi nu tahzai* and others were sung which continued till before sleep.²³⁷ The earliest known song that was used for expression of sorrow and grief at the times of death was *Thuthmun Zai*. It is also termed as a song for the bereaved family, which was believed to be originated during the Mizos settlement in the *Kawl Phai*. *Thuthmun Zai*, is a song or poem which expresses sadness about

²³⁴ C. Vanlallawma, *Hringlang Tlang*, Aizawl, The Author, 1998, p.36.

²³⁵ T.Vanlalremruata Tonson, 'History of Mizo Music: Antiquity to Contemporary Times,' PhD Thesis, Mizoram University, 2017, p. 218.

²³⁶ Thanmawia, *Mizo Hla Hlui*, p.11.

²³⁷ C. Lianthanga, *Hmanlai Mizo Nun*, p.19.

someone's death is usually performed in lamenting speech tone and also chanting style. In the society of Chin, the songs were transmitted by oral tradition, handed down, from generation to generation. The oldest known songs were short, simple and concerned about sadness. Melancholic refrains and song of love were also introduced by employing the same tunes. *Thuthmun Zai* was presented as an example of funeral songs in speech tone style. While the songs and funeral songs of both men and women would perform lamenting songs were almost always performed by women sitting directly next to the corpse or at the grave. Such songs were commonly subject to immediate composition.²³⁸

It is believed that the early Mizo Christian composers were regularly exposed to the musical style that prevailed before Christianity. The exact year and time when Christian *Khawhar Zai* at the deceased house started cannot be traced back. In 1909, Fraser wrote in a letter that a Mizo father who lost his baby daughter had found particular comfort in the hymn "I have heard of a land far away". His wife wrote another letter in the same year that an orphan girl's last words had been the Mizo words to the chorus of "Take the name of Jesus with you".²³⁹ This account attests to the fact that early Mizo Christians had eventually continued the Mizo custom of singing at the wake followed by two to three nights. Joanna Heath stated that Kitty Lewis had experienced a Lushai custom of singing hymns all night in the house when anybody dies for two or three. It is evident that by the time around 1909 Mizo Christians solely depends on the western hymns translated by the missionaries as a means to console the bereaved family at the time of wake in the *Mitthi In* or *Khawhar In* (deceased house). But the evidence for the singing of Mizo original evangelical songs at bereaved family homes of Christians was accounted at the beginning of the revival of 1913 in the village of Hmunhmeltha near Champhai.²⁴⁰

The Mizos gradually left their traditional belief system, as the new religion and belief system instructed the removal of traditional beliefs and culture. At the

²³⁸ Za Tawn Eng, *Chin History Culture & Identity*, p.70.

²³⁹ Heath, pp.202-203.

²⁴⁰ Heath, p.203.

same time the new culture and religion does not fit to fill up the void of the then newly converted Mizo, and at the same time western concepts and practices were very alien to them. In the context of worship and spirituality, western hymns and style does not attract the Mizo, in this entangled space, a new form of poetic expression/composition and new style of singing emerged. While going through most of the songs composed during this period, we can trace a strong line of continuity from traditional world views surrounding death and the afterlife which was ideologically portrayed through poetic expression. In the traditional concept of death and the philosophy of eschatology, the Mizo imagination goes as far as '*Pialral*' and "*Mitthi Khua*"²⁴¹ which were somehow discordant with the new belief system under Christianity. At this point, traditional philosophy of the afterlife and traditional poetic expression were employed to bridge the Christian philosophy of death and eschatology as the Mizo found it impracticable to express from the western perception.

Thus, during the first decade of the 20th Century, the early Mizo Christian converts gradually developed a new form of composition and singing style known as *Lengkhawm*. A large portion of them were associated with death predominantly used at homes in which someone has recently died in the *khawhar in* (house of the bereavement). The singing of such song in this context is called *khawhar zai* (bereavement singing).²⁴² The new form of singing and style of composition brought a paradigm shift from traditional style, stressing the Mizo Christian concept of '*Vanram*' (paradise) which was not known before. Generally, the new style of composition which sprang out as a result of 1919 revival have emphasized the people's longing for the Christian heaven, stressed the Christian philosophy of eschatology. "*The believe that they will meet again in heaven is the substance of Mizo Christian hope which is practiced in the music and practice of Khawhar*

²⁴¹ R. Thangvunga, 'Aspects of Romanticism in Mizo Lengkhawm Zai', in Darchuailova Renthlei & F. Lalzuthanga (eds.), in *Lenchawm: A Study of Mizo Lengkhawm Zai*, Aizawl, Govt. Hrangbana College, Aizawl Mizoram, p. 311.

²⁴² Lalzama, 'Mizo Lengkhawm Zai', in Darchuailova Renthlei & F. Lalzuthanga (eds.), *Lenchawm: A Study of Mizo Lengkhawm Zai*, Aizawl, Govt. Hrangbana College, Aizawl Mizoram, p.37.

*Zai*²⁴³ Almost all of the new Mizo style of composing i.e. '*Khawhar Zai/Hla*' between 1919 till the 1940s in its lyrical content emphasized the Christian philosophy of death and the afterlife by making use of traditional Mizo imagery of death and the afterlife through their composition and poetic words. With the final suppression of resistance to Christianity which was expressed in the form of *Puma Zai*, the outbreak of evangelical song of hope through *Lengkhawm/Khawhar zai genre* accomplished the blending of traditional elements to offer a hope which the Christian hymns cannot offer. While introducing and constructing Christian anthropomorphic character of death concept, traditional anthropomorphic character of death cannot be completely wiped out. In this entangled space many of the traditional concept and practices were accommodated within the Christian anthropomorphic character of death. This process has shaped the Mizo Christian concept of death and its surrounding rituals.

The new religion introduced to the Mizos formed the bedrock of the new group identity that took shape in the first decade of the twentieth century. It is through Christian practices and concepts that Mizos found a way of creating new solidarities. Christianity became a yardstick to understand both their true selves and what distinguishes them from others.²⁴⁴ *Harhna* (revivals) led to the massive spread of Christianity as they made skilful and effective use of Mizo culture for revival expression. However, resistance in the form of counter movement of *Puma Zai* (also called *Tlanglam Zai*) followed soon after. A community song in which an old Mizo tune was set to new words accompanied by feast and dancing by both men and women became instantly popular. Later in response to the resistance movement, Christianity in Mizoram adapted the traditional way of life. Soon after the first revival which celebrated Christian eschatological themes of redemption and heaven, *puma zai* sought to return to Mizo hope in Mizo terms by popularizing a new song, which spread as fast as the revival hymns but belonged to the old tradition.²⁴⁵ Even though '*Lengkhawm Zai*' took the style and form of '*Puma Zai*' which was the only

²⁴³ Heath, p.277.

²⁴⁴ Joy L.K. Pachuau & Willem van Schendel, *The Camera As Witness: A Social History of Mizoram, Northeast India*, Delhi, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p.83.

²⁴⁵ Heath, p.118.

remaining instrument and a response to westernization by the Mizos it was firmly incorporated within the Christian context. This moment of contestation offered space where the colonized individuals can do, articulate and negotiate their own identity through the re-invention of *khawhar zai* rituals at the wake and the deceased house.

According to Dr. Lalzama there are two variants of theme in Lengkhawm Zai “*Hlim Hla*” (Praise, worship etc) and “*Khawhar*” or “*Lunglen*” (Lamentation, funerals, etc). From 1919 individual composers began to introduce songs that would soon belong to a large body of hymns known as *Lengkhawm zai* (songs of gathering together). A large portion of theme are associated with themes of death and are predominantly used at homes in which someone has recently died, the *khawhar in*(house of the bereavement). The singing of such song in this context is called *khawhar zai* (bereavement singing).²⁴⁶ The year between 1921 and 1940 saw a rapid rise in composition of such new musical genre known as *lengkhawm*. Within these years around 290 songs had been composed by the Mizos and around 38 songs in the next two decades. Therefore between 1921 and 1965 the Mizos composed 336 *Lengkhawm Hla*. Out of 336 *lengkhawm* songs 110 songs were *Khawhar hla*.²⁴⁷

Vanlalchhuanawma stated that:

“The indigenous thought-forms and poetic expressions of the new hymns quickly gripped the Mizo sentiments. The people under revival influence immediately cherished and propagate the new hymns with unrestrained zeal. The strong current of the revival movement redirected the traditional carnal emphasis into the Christian conceptual framework of transitory earthly life. The search to rise above the plane of life found some immediate realization in the practical opportunities offered by the Church and its educational and social upliftment programmes. The hardship of life found its consummation in the Christian hope for the promised eternal glory

²⁴⁶ Lalzama, *Lenchawm*, pp.35-37.

²⁴⁷ in Darchuailova Renthlei & F. Lalzuithanga (eds.), *Lenchawm: A Study of Mizo Lengkhawm Zai*, Aizawl, Govt. Hrangbana College, Aizawl Mizoram, p. 311.

²⁴⁷H.C Engzuala, ‘Lengkhawm Zai Tobul leh Hmasawn Dan’, in Darchuailova Renthlei & F. Lalzuithanga (eds.), *Lenchawm: A Study of Mizo Lengkhawm Zai*, Aizawl, Govt. Hrangbana College, Aizawl Mizoram,p.390.

*obtained through the sufferings of the returning Christ. The exhausted cultivators could now sing of becoming heirs with the Son of the Father God through the undwelling Holy Spirit. The revival movement thus gave a new song to the Mizos and made a significant contribution to create a distinctive Mizo Christian Culture.”*²⁴⁸

A series of Revival Movement between 1906 to 1919 and 1930 has set the scene for *Lengkhawm* to emerge in a relatively new musical context in which traditional music was still predominant, but in which a small number of Christian converts were singing a very different set of songs that were gaining widespread popularity even ahead of the Christian tradition itself. By far the most significant factor in the formation of the Mizo people as a Christian society was the period of spiritual revivals that began in 1906. Revivals were also instrumental in shaping the music of the Mizo people into what it has become today. An analysis of Mizo Christian *Khawhar zai* in the context of *Lengkhawm* genre reveals the fact that local agency was able to compose evangelical songs of hope that retrospectively acknowledged the significance of music and lamentation practices of the past that shaped and formulates the Mizo Christian attitude towards death and the afterlife within the Mizo Christian context. This tradition became gave the foundation and the base for Mizo understanding of death and the afterlife, as well a distinct Mizo Christian identity.

Hope, nostalgia and longing are central to *khawhar zai*, mizo self-identification, Mizo hope is characterised by looking back to old days there lies and emotional and intellectual foundation where they had based their hope. Mizo hope before Christianity was understood to have been strongly associated with the present life seeking a safe and secure future for the community through positive volitional actions framed by a system of ethics. Yet, many early composers deviated from this towards future oriented longing for heaven. The composers of *Khawhar zai* are not just expressing their evangelical hope, but they are also alluding to the Mizo beliefs about death and making reference to the possibility that the soul may face with the

²⁴⁸ Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture*, pp. 295-296.

choice to grieve or move forward.²⁴⁹ Thus, *khawhar zai* at the bereaved house is the retention of past *zaikhawm* practices, which combined with drums. The sense of maintenance of the musical traditions of the past grants secure feelings of continuity who gathered at the *khawhar* in. Therefore, *khawhar zai* has remained the repertoire of choice at time of death in part because of its ability to evoke a habitus that mobilises its participants towards an imagined past. Using Evangelical Christian theology, the rise in eschatological songs and language during revivals became the new term of Christian hope that dominated the discourse in the following years. Joy Pachuau opines that, local expressions of Christian practice could not be curbed; the identification with Christianity was made possible because of the ease with which Mizo engaged institutionally with the religion. *Khawhar Zai* offered Mizo Christians a way to mourn for their dead in a way appropriate to their sense of identity and matched the social values by being able to convey the sentiments of *lunglenna* and *ngaihna*²⁵⁰ through poetry and several aspects of the musical style.

The practice of community mourning at the deceased house which was accompanied by the new Mizo Christian hymns and style that developed in the early colonial period clearly testified the fact that traditional ideas and practices could not be completely wiped out and at the same time the force of Christian and western element become strong. This led to the creation of new practices and custom which had become the common practice and norms among the Mizo in ensuing years till today.

If a person dies unexpectedly away from home, every effort is made to return the body of the home as soon as possible. The importance of being buried in one's own community gave way to the custom of carrying the dead body to their home village. Volunteer messengers would send the news ahead to each village, and young men were expected to ready in all conditions. This custom survived in the colonial period as there were some references to Christian missionary Lorrain records the death of Buka in Lunglei in 1906 that the dead body was arranged to be carried

²⁴⁹ Heath, pp.68 & 87.

²⁵⁰ Heath,

home, a distance of three ordinary days journey over the mountains. After a prayer, the corpse was wrapped in a sheet, and then lashed to a pole, and several of the young men started with their journey and passed on to every village they had passed.²⁵¹ From an article in Kristian Tlangau, YLA (Young Lushai Association) Thubelh Section in April, 1938 we came across that traditional custom, *Mizawn Inchhuh* was still in practiced, and a bearer of Mizo *Tlawmngahna* which cannot be obliterated in the present condition, but there has been an advice among the youth that traditional practices of passing and transportation of the sick or dead body between villages had caused chaos, and sometimes sound rude to the sick or bereave family, which need to be look upon.²⁵²

The idea of what constitutes a good and bad death has changed in different cultures and societies throughout history. The good and bad death depends on one's society, culture and belief system. Mizo has a very particular notion of good and bad death long before Christianity was introduced in the Hills. Pre-colonial Mizo society was shrouded with the mystery of superstition, taboos and unique belief system which impinged on the classification and notion of death such as *Thihchhia* (unusual death or bad death) *Sarhi* caused by any outward incident accident, killed by tiger or wild animals etc, along with *raicheh* (death at child birth) and *hlamzuih* still birth or were considered *rapthlak* (terrifying) and in contrast to this, a preferable death was *Awmlai* (natural death) death caused by known chronic disease or old age under the communion of a family in one's own house was favourable .²⁵³ In connection to this, a variety of mourning rituals are also employed by the Mizos in order to 'make' death 'good', and the degree to which belief system and afterlife beliefs are widely held often determine the success.

In the past when mother died in child birth her baby would be buried alive with her. This arose out of a belief that the baby would not survive a year without its

²⁵¹ Heath, p.214.

²⁵² 'Mizawn Inchuh', *Kristian Tlangau*, Bu No. 317, April, 1938, pp.28-29.

²⁵³ Joy Pachuau, *Being Mizo*, p. 214.

mother because her spirit would come to take the baby away, so it would be better to let the baby go with her immediately.²⁵⁴

An account from Mizo *Chanchin Laishuih* testify the case as following:

"In olden days when a mother died during the very period of childbirth, it is estimated that the child or infant will also die soon after the mother died. However nowadays when mother who is having an infant on a breast feeding stage died the child was to be brought to Aizawl the Borsap (superintendent) will help by giving a bottle of milk. The article highlighted there were some instances when an infant whose mother had died was brought to the superintendent's wife and was taken care, staying there the whole breastfeeding stage that the baby had made it through successfully where the baby was returned to his father."²⁵⁵

Lorrain and Savidge's wives found as early as 1905 that their working in caring contributed to the cessation of these practices, since they demonstrated that babies could survive even in unlikely circumstances. The acceptance of these new methods shows that babies had not been buried out of contempt or religious fears.²⁵⁶ This example given here reflects a general shift towards inclusive community responses to all types of death, an exception in the case of *hlamzuih* (still birth). In the case of *hlamzuih* (still birth) there can be one explanation that infant mortality was very high according to the reports made by the J.H Lorrain about illness and death, and was firstly observed by the Christian missionaries in their early years. As early as 14th March, 1904, J.H Lorrain in his Log Book vividly recorded that Infant mortality is fearfully high in account of ignorance. *Hlamzuih* (still birth) were regarded as taboos and were feared and simply go unnoticed with no rituals which have some connection with traditional beliefs. It may be due to high infant mortality rate in pre-colonial period and the consequent years. Apart from traditional beliefs and superstition, such high rate of mortality might be a burden in the case of the

²⁵⁴ Heath, p. 231.

²⁵⁵ Mizo Chanchin Laishuih, *Laishuih-2*, Aizawl, 24 August 1898, ATC Archive Durtlang.

²⁵⁶ Heath, p. 232.

Mizo to perform necessary rituals in the likes of adult that led to a certain approach to the death of *Hlamzuih* (still birth) even under the influence of Christianity.

In a pamphlet written by N.E Parry in 1927, he had recorded the customs by which the Lushais are governed in their daily lives. As the customs was never been recorded he found it extremely difficult to in trying case to ascertain the correct custom. Thus, for the use of officers and chiefs engaged in the administration of justice in the district he had made a record of the customs in consultation with the Chiefs of Aijal Sub-Division, Chiefs in Lungleh Sub-Division, Makthanga PWD clerk and Chhinga, a personal chaprassi. In the context of funeral customs many of the traditional rituals and customs have been highlighted like *mim kut*, *thlaichhiah*, *thlahual*, *ar thlahual*, *lukhawng*, *insil* and traditional burials of ordinary people and the Chiefs.²⁵⁷ With the process of Christianization many of the traditional rituals were gradually abandoned, but in the 1920s there are some communities which still hold on to traditional beliefs during this time. While going through the practice of death rituals in a more detail, en mass conversion or abrupt conversion to Christianity was not achieved, and there are many traces of traditional beliefs and practices surrounding death in the Colonial Period. But the Presbyterian Church Assembly in 1927 prohibited performances of Mizo traditional *Thlaichhiah* to the dead or practices of killing animals which have connection to sacrificial purposes to the dead.²⁵⁸

One of the most important traditional institutions has been the *Zawlbuk* which met socio-educational and charitable needs of the community. *Zawlbuk* served as the educational, cultural and communal centre for the village. The most important outcome of *Zawlbuk* training with lasting effect was the development and perfection of *Tlawmngaihna*. *Tlawmngaihna* is the term used for the Mizo code of morals a highly prized virtue and a wonderful philosophy of life which is so rich in meaning and wonderful philosophy of life which is so rich in meaning and so wide in scope

²⁵⁷ N.E Perry, *Monographs on Lushai Cutoms and Ceremonies*, FIRMLA KLM Pvt Ltd, Reprint, 1971, pp.76-81.

²⁵⁸ Presbyterian Handbook, Mission Veng, Aizawl, Synod Literature & Publication Board, Revised & Enlarged, 2014.p.156.

which is impossible to render any single word or phrase of another language. Putting it contextually, a person who possesses *tlawmngaihna* must be obedient and respectable to the elder; courteous in dealing with the weak and the lowly; generous and hospitable to the poor, the needy and the strangers; self-denying and self-sacrificing at the opportune moments in favour of others; ready to help those in distress; compassionate to a companion or fellow villagers; will do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient that might be to oneself or to one's own inclinations.²⁵⁹

One of the most important areas where *tlawmngaihna* was exhibited was when death occurs in the village. When death occurred in a family, other would come with presents for the bereaved family as a token of their sharing of the sorrow. They tried to console the family by their presence and conversations. It was the practice of every family in the village to contribute one or two pieces of fire-wood for the bereaved family. The grave for the deceased was dug by young men of the village in a voluntary basis. No young man would stay away from this work as it would be against *tlawmngaihna* to do so. It was with a willing and altruistic spirit that such help was rendered. If death happened when it was too late to dig the grave on the day, young people would come together for a wake. Thus, community mourning and funerals which has been long practice among the Mizo has been an exhibition of a genuine spirit of *tlawmngaihna*.²⁶⁰

No area of the Mizo life was left untouched by the wind of change. The entire social life and thought process and also their sense of value drastically changed.²⁶¹ In spite of countless terrors and resistance against Christianity in the early years of colonization, which found its roots in Mizoram in 1894, the entire region was swept by Christianity within a decade. Even the chiefs and their subordinates gradually started to recognize and embrace it. Various churches and institutions came into existence resulting in the decline of the *Zawlbuk* (Bachelor's dormitory) which was

²⁵⁹ Kipgen, pp.64-65.

²⁶⁰ Kipgen, p.68.

²⁶¹ Kipgen, p.175.

one of the most esteemed establishment among the Mizo, which served as a training institution for youths in defence of village, useful arts, warfare, village welfare and the most esteemed Mizo code of morals *Tlawmngaihna*, a highly prized virtue. While the number of participants in schools and churches increased, the attendance in *Zawlbuk* met a drastic fall. The Church has a strong dislike on the old institution of *Zawlbuk* while there were those who valued its contribution to the society, thus a tussle arose between the two forces. The attempt of the Governor to bring about revival in the *Zawlbuk* institution had no significant outcome, thus the most valued institution came to a sad end. In the face of sweeping changes Mizo *tlawmngaihna* underwent a trying period but survived. Its survival even after the disappearance of the *Zawlbuk*, its foster institution, and the abolition of chieftainship, its patron, clearly shows the extent, ensured the preservation of Mizo identity and progress, especially in the realm of death and its related customs.

During those days the only way of sending messages between villages was through voluntary young men. Even a slight mention by members of a family of their desire to send a message to another village about sickness or death in their family would prompt execution. Young men would try to be the first to take the message to other village. To brave the dread of wild beast and the fatigue of the run of long distances between villages alone at night through thick forest called for a genuine spirit of *tlawmngaihna*.²⁶² Christianity has changed the burial customs, with the colonial government order in the 1930s, every village has its burial ground outside the village where every person died in the village, rich or poor are buried. When a person dies, the church bell is tolled to inform everyone in the society. If it is a night, young people will quickly gathered at the decease house, wake the dead sing a Christian hymn the whole night. In the morning young ladies collect firewood and rice from every family in the village for the bereaved family. The young men dig the grave voluntarily, friends and relatives bring extra supplies of food or money to meet necessary requirements for the funeral as well a symbol to console the bereave family. Singing hymns may continue for a week or longer.²⁶³

²⁶² Kipgen, pp.68-69.

²⁶³ Hminga, *The Life and Witness of the Churches in Mizoram*, pp.294-295

Though the *Zawlbuk* disappeared, the practice of *tlawmngaihna* continued. This was not however to deny the existence created by the disappearance of the *Zawlbuk*. While the church attain selfhood at the earliest possible time the early missionaries claimed to have no direct responsibility for the rules that affected local customs. But they acknowledge, as did the Mizo church leaders, that much of old discipline had been lost and that there was an increase in immortality and unsocial behaviour. To the Mizos to accept the teaching of Jesus meant to be *tlawmngai* and to serve God at whatever cost was to fulfill the old Mizo *tlawmngaihna*. Kipgen opined that, though the Church was able to retain *tlawmngaihna* for a higher service in a modified form during this period, the society suffered for the decline of *tlawmngaihna* observance in the traditional form.²⁶⁴ Thus, while constructing the reality of death; social institution drew legitimacy from anthropomorphic character of death concept, basically from Christianity. Another source was how the social institution was influenced by other agency, like in the case of Mizo *tlawmngaihna* and the institution of *zawlbuk* which was reinterpreted with the changes in culture and society. We can find that, through the establishment of YLA later became YMA, the social institutions were legitimizing and controlling the death concept and rituals by harmonizing cultural changes i.e western notion and Christian concepts. Soon the Church and the YMA became the two social institutions as the basic source of constructing the concept of death and legitimizing it through a ritual process.

In an article from *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin* entitled *Tlawmngai Thei Pawl* in August, 1923; Pakunga 1st Assam Rifles wrote that there were 25 Mizo young boys known as *Belnawt Naupang Pawl*, who were engaged in works cleaning the dishes of the 'Vai' Assam Rifles. He stated that the Mizos living in the vicinity of Aizawl should appreciate those boys rather than look down upon them. He further stated that this group of boys exhibits the true spirit of Mizo *Tlawmngaihna* in times of *chhiatni thatni*²⁶⁵ in the vicinity of Aizawl.²⁶⁶ As, Aizawl was the most populated hills in the

²⁶⁴ Kipgen, pp.69-70

²⁶⁵ *Chhiatni / Thatni* is a binary which denote the opposite of each other, *chhiatni* is when a community had faced misfortune like a calamity, disaster or catastrophe mostly used when death took place in a community used to denote adversity. *Thatni* is an event used to denote when something positive took place like wedding, feast etc in a community.

region during those period, there arose a workforce who would volunteer in times when death took place, these group of boys were always helpful in lending services and step forward for community works from their true spirit of *tlawmngaihna*. They constantly volunteered themselves in attending the death, digging the grave and other task involved.

Seeing the danger inherent in such a situation, some younger missionaries felt that something new should be introduced to fill the vacuum and thus prevented further deteriorating. The Christian Missionaries and the church leaders found it necessary to establish an institution that could take the place of *Zawlbuk* that was gone. Consequently, a meeting was summoned at the residence of a Christian missionary Miss Katie Hughes (Pi Zaii) on June 3, 1935. ‘Young Mizo Kristian Association’ was one of the names suggested but it was rejected due to its exclusive nature. One of the Christian missionaries Rev. David Edward (Zorema Pa) suggested that “Young Lushai Association” would be most fitting and it was agreed that it would officially start functioning from 15th June, 1935. Its chief purposes are uplifting of the nation by the social application of Christian principles and giving (the youth) opportunities of service and guidance in the use of leisure hours. Thus, in this state of transition in the colonial period *Tlawmngaihna* had been refined, strengthen and given truer and surer ground by Christianity and accepting the teaching of Jesus meant to be “*tlawmngai*” and ‘to serve this God, at whatever cost was to fulfill the old idea of *tlawmngaihna*.²⁶⁷

The birth of the new Christian Association, a replica of the old institution of *Zawlbuk* bring alive most of the Mizo funeral rituals that took shape under the influence of Christianity and at the same time traditional elements which were attuned to the new religion was also retained. With the establishment of Young Lushai Association, the traditional ethos of welfare regarding death was gradually taken up by the new Association. It took the place of the Old *Zawlbuk* and soon gained popularity, opening branches in many villages. Thus, with the withering of

²⁶⁶ Pakunga, ‘Tlawmngai Thei Pawl’, *Mizo Leh Vai Chanchin*, Bu 8 na, August, 1923, pp.230-233.

²⁶⁷ Kipgen, 185.

Zawlbuk institution the most important traditional institution, in times of “*chhiatni-thatni*” sorrow and joy in the society apart from the Church, YLA was now becoming the main authority and driving force in prescribing the Mizo Christian death rituals, as YLA was a Christian based social and community organization, with its main objective of preserving the Mizo ethos on a religious line.

After 1935 there are few records in *Kristian Tlangau*, a few pages in YLA section was devoted for the necessary information and awareness of the Association. Gathered from these records in the initial years of the establishment of YLA the welfare concerning the funeral rituals and customs were undertaken by some villages where a branch was established. Record of the activities of the newly established institution YLA through *Kristian Tlangau* gave some information that how traditional death rituals and practices were preserved and restored on religious line. In an article published in May 1938 on *Kristian Tlangau Thubelh* section, a man named Thangthara, Mizo wrote an article entitled “*Khawhar Lenpui*”, (community gathering at the deceased post burial to console the bereave family) in this article the author advised the youth that their behaviour in the deceased house at the time of *Khawhar lenpui* does not reflect the real spirit, theme and ethos of the Mizo, at the time of gathering at the deceased house to console the bereave family. He stated that the main objective of Mizo collective mourning is to console their grief, sorrow and pain as a result of their loss. He gave many advices to the youths like manner, etiquette and behaviour, to be displayed at the time of *Khawhar in riah* (waking the dead), singing hymns, and *Khawhar in riah* a Mizo tradition in which youth in a community sleep over at the *Khawhar In* (decease house) which the author assumed waning in the present day. This evidence suggests that by 1938 much of the Mizo Christian death rituals has taken shape and practiced in certain community.²⁶⁸ *Kristian Tlangau Thubelh* a section devoted for Young Lushai Association was issued from the year 1936. In some of the reports a few established branch in some villages had started taking up the welfare of the dead and their families by extending voluntary works at the time of death in the society. There has been a report in the

²⁶⁸ Thangthara, ‘*Khawhar Lenpui*’, *Kristian Tlangau*, May, Bu No.317, 1938, pp. 33-36.

year 1946 in this magazine that looking after the cemetery in the villages was among the voluntary works done by YLA.²⁶⁹ It has been reported that when a person died in the village, Vandawt YLA had extend the practice of *Ral* by giving a sum of money contributed by the YLA members in the village.²⁷⁰ Among the early records from the magazine, Sialhau YLA was one of the early established branches reported to have taken up the welfare when death took place in the village. It can be noted from the sources that it was that the practice *ral* a symbol to demonstrate their sympathy and comfort the deceased family by donating 1 rupee from every YLA members in the village was practiced. It can also be noted that the practice of waking the dead especially by youths was practiced by YLA members around 1944.²⁷¹ Vanzau YLA had reported that an awareness programme was held in September, 1940 among the topic discussed, manners and etiquette at the “*Mitthi Lenpui*” gathering at the deceased house in intent to console the family was taught to the YLA members in the village.²⁷² In an article published in *Kristian Tlangau*, Young Lushai Association section, there were a few paragraphs which instruct the members about consoling the bereaved families through gathering at the deceased house. Advice was given to the youth to behave nicely in order to exhibit the theme of such gathering. This suggests that by this time Yong Lushai Association was taking care of the welfare and tried their best to uphold Mizo ethos at the time of death. Some reports from the YLA conference held during 24th -25th February, 1947 was published in an article in *Kristian Tlangau*, among the many subject discussed, “*Khawhar In Riah*” the community practice of sleep over especially by the youth in the deceased house was discussed in length that in olden days the sleep over in the deceased house had some limited time frame for about one week, that there were some instances where youth would continue sleep over more than a week which can become a burden for the deceased family. It has been discussed that if they were not invited by the bereaved family to extend the sleep over, one week is quite enough. It was also resolved that in Aizawl those village sharing a burial ground should be regarded as a unit or area for

²⁶⁹ ‘Mizoram Y.L.A Chanchin leh Thiltih Tlangpui’, *Kristian Tlangau*, Bu No.414, September, 1946, p.7.

²⁷⁰ ‘Vandawt Y.L.A’, *Kristian Tlangau*, Bu No. 364, January, 1942, p.2.

²⁷¹ Sialhau Y.L.A Chanchin, *Kristian Tlangau*, Bu No.392 June, 1944, p.137.

²⁷² Vanzau Y.L.A, *Kristian Tlangau*, Bu No. 347, August, 1940, p.238.

collecting fire woods for the deceased family.²⁷³ Lamchhip YLA reported that in the year 1938 that help was given to those bereaved families in the village. Among the voluntary works YLA members were *ral* (gift for consoling) by one pack of firewood along with collecting *mitthi thing* a special voluntary work of collecting firewood for the bereaved family.²⁷⁴

In the like of other cultural area, many of the notions, rituals surrounding death and dying among the Mizos had undergone a transformation in the early decade of the twentieth century. Local expression and practices were accommodated within the framework of western and Christian practices which was soon fabricated to form a new Mizo Christian practice which took shape in the early colonial period. *Mitthi Ral* was one of the most common rituals which continue to survive in the colonial period. J.H Lorrain defined *Mitthi Ral* in the colonial Mizo context, which means to show sympathy with the relatives; to contribute towards the refreshments used at the wake. J.M Lloyd had stated that Christians have preserved the age-old custom of '*Ral*' and improved upon it by injecting into a large portion of helpfulness and charity.²⁷⁵ Thangrikhuma from Aijal had wrote a report in 1924 about "*Mitthi Ral*" in *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu* about his experience from his visit to three villages in the Lushai Hills. He had reported that those villagers were very helpful to the deceased family at the time of death. He had stated that all the villages he had visited were seriously practicing the Mizo tradition of *Mitthi Ral*. Even the village chiefs had attended *ral*, but the author stated that in olden times there were no instances that the Sailo Chiefs had to attend this *ral* to the ordinary families of no influence or families without any status and social standings. The author stated that it would be the Christian re-invention and interpretation that the Sailo Chiefs attended the *ral* to the bereave family who are underprivileged having no influence on the society.²⁷⁶

J.M Lloyd stated that, in pre-Christian times *Ral* meant a funeral feast in honour of the dead person. There was plenty of singing and drinking and the event

²⁷³ 'Y.L.A Conference Thu Te', *Kristian Tlangau*, Bu No. 420, March, 1947, pp.4-5.

²⁷⁴ 'Lamchhip Y.L.A', *Kristian Tlangau*, Bu No.315, February, 1938, p.9.

²⁷⁵ Lloyd, p. 113.

²⁷⁶ Thangkhuma, 'Mitthi Ral', *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin*, Bu 4 Na, April, 1924, p.86.

would last for a day and night. When Christians attend a *ral* they express sympathy with the bereaved, give some small gift, sit inside or outside the house where they drank tea, talk together, sing hymns, offer prayers, and stay for hours at a time. The young men and women chop firewood, fetch water from the spring, cook food and do all kinds of odd job around the house that will relieve the bereaved ones and leave them free to receive their friends and guests and have fellowship with them. These expression of sympathy and practical help continue day and night for about a week. J.M Lloyd stated that “*all these may seem strange to people of other cultures but unquestionably this Christian care and constant help serves greatly to heal the anguish of the bereaved.*”²⁷⁷ Lloyd had described that the burdensome and wild gathering death rituals of the chiefs was replaced by the visits of the sympathetic Christian friends. Gifts are taken to the bereaved. Services are held in the house; hymns are sung for many hours and a great deal of genuine helpfulness and neighbourly affection is shown on such occasion.²⁷⁸ With the introduction of Christianity, Mizos had gradually left their traditional beliefs, notion about death was reformulated within the framework of Christian teachings, and this has impinged on the practices or rituals surrounding death. Many of the traditional notion and ritual practices surrounding death were discarded and reformulate by Christian missionaries and early Mizo converts. A closer look into the encounter between Christianity and tradition in the realm of death suggests that there has been a gradual compromise between the two forces, which was not abruptly changed, and many traces of continuity have been found in the ritual practices surrounding death in the colonial period. It came to be the spiritual revivals that occurred between 1906 and 1930 that led to the formation of the Mizo Christian society that exists today. The interaction of western and traditional notion in the realm of death has been instrumental in the formation of Mizo Death practices which has been the base till the present day.

²⁷⁷ Lloyd, p. 113.

²⁷⁸ J.M Lloyd, *On Every High Hill*, Liverpool, Hugh Evans & Sons Ltd, 1956, pp. 66-67.

3.4 Christian Burials and Memorials

In the initial period of Colonization, Christianity was dressed in the western garb; the missionary goal of retaining the tradition which was attuned to Christianity was not achieved. The early Mizo Christian converts simply adopted Christianity in its western form. This has led to abandonment of most of the cultural tradition along with their belief system, which seem incompatible with Christianity. Anything that was perceived to be associated with the old culture, and hence the old religion, was rejected.²⁷⁹ In this entangled space, funeral especially burial has become the locus of tension and controversy between adherents of traditional belief system and Christians. Lloyd commented that: *“In some villages non-Christians refused to bury when a Christian died, which was a real trial when there were two or three Christians and it was contrary to the traditional Mizo custom to refuse burial to anyone”*.²⁸⁰ Christianity claimed to have conquered death completely and held out the promise of individual salvation, but this could only be achieved by giving up those relationships with the dead which were so central to the lives of the living. Over time, the practice of Christian burial, which is a very important sign of Christian identity, became more open to a degree of negotiation.

The choice to bury one’s kin in a newly erected cemetery under Christian rites represented a ‘final test’ of allegiance, and for the Christian convert it was a decision potentially fraught with doubt, controversy and dissension. It is evident that some aspects of Mizo beliefs and attributed rituals could be incorporated into Christian practice, and others could not. Like the western communities, the significance and solemnity of death even from the earliest times has never been ignored among the various tribes and cultures of the world. The Mizos were no exception either before or after becoming Christians. For a converted Christians, faith in a personal resurrection after death is a cardinal part of their belief and fundamental to their Christian joy.

²⁷⁹ Kipgen, p. 326.

²⁸⁰ Lloyd, p. 73.

J.M Lloyd stated that:

*“Customs relating to death and burial have also changed. Christians naturally have a very different attitude towards death from that of their forefathers. The confidence with which many die is in itself a proof of the power of the Gospel. Christian nowadays set a plot of land apart for the cemetery. The body of the dead man was buried near the house where he had lived. It was undoubtedly an unhealthy custom and one which probably could not have been practised except by a semi-nomadic people”.*²⁸¹

Thus, cemeteries or Christian burial were undoubtedly a part of British colonists' bid to reorganize Mizo societies according to Christian schematics of “civilization”—what has been called the “civilizing mission.” There is no proper record for the exact year and time when Christian cemetery or burial was introduced in the Lushai Hills. Zosaphluia (D.E Jones) arrived at Mizoram in 13th August, 1897.²⁸² Soon after his arrival Zosaphlui (D.E Jones) had set up a model village for the Mission works, solely for the settlement of the early Mizo converts (*Pathianthu awih veng*) at Hriangmual khua (Aizawl, Mission Veng) and introduced a Public Cemetery for the early converted Christians at Hriangmual.²⁸³ Record has shown that the first Mizo converts was buried in 1905, thus it is can be noted that Christian Missionaries had introduced a separate burial site *Kristian Thlanmual* (Christian Cemetery) in the year early 1900s for the newly converted Christians which was designed solely for the Christian converts.

²⁸¹ Lloyd, *On Every High Hill*, pp.66-67.

²⁸² Lalchhuanliana, *Mizoram Presbyterian Kohhran Chanchin*, Aizawl Mizoram, Synod Literature and Publication Board, 2007, p.49.

²⁸³ Vanlallalwma, *Hringlang Tlang*, p.103.



Figure 3.1: Surviving headstones from the late 1920s & 1930s at *Kristian Thlanmual* Mission veng. Source: Lalchhanhima (Collection from fieldwork).

The earliest record showed that a four months old baby named Vanhnuaitang-i/a (gender cannot be clarified) was the first Mizo to be buried at this cemetery which took place in the year 1905. Thus, this suggests Christian burial was introduced as early as around 1905.²⁸⁴ Some of the surviving headstone at the grave was documented, but due increasing population, construction works and urbanization, these headstone and sites vanished today. Among the surviving graves, the names of 10 people were recorded between 1908 and 1919. In the initial years of the practice of Christian burial a coffin was not used but Zakunga's daughter Pi Vaninliani stated that they have to pay for price of the Coffin. She stated that Lalhnaia who died in 1917 was the first person who was laid in a coffin for burial.²⁸⁵ Apart from the introduction of Christian burials, another innovation which emerged during the colonial period was the use of coffin.

²⁸⁴ C. Lalduhzuala, *Mission Veng Chanchin*, p.60

²⁸⁵ Lalduhzuala, *Mission Veng chanchin* , p.61.



Figure 3.2: Headstones from the 1930s & 1940s at *Kristian Thlanmual* Mission Veng. Source: Lalchhanhima (Collection from fieldwork).

Apart from Hriangmual (Aizawl, Mission Veng) Theiriat in the South, was among the first village where Christian burial was practiced, known as *Kristian Hmasa te Thlanmual* (A cemetery of the early Christian Converts) which is situated at Theiriat village near Lunglei. Before the pioneer missionaries Rev. R.A. Lorrain and Rev. F.W. Savidge arrived in Lunglei, Sehan Roy, a Khasi Officer who supervised the construction of Aizawl-Lunglei bridle path had evangelised some Mizo labourers and as many as 40 families had been converted by 1900.²⁸⁶ The centre of persecution in the South was Pukpui, the village of chief Dara, where the Christian population of the south was concentrated. The chief developed an intense dislike of the Christians, accusing them of disobeying his order when they would not work on Sunday and refused to participate in the annual *Kawngpui Siam* sacrifice. First he had the leader of the small Christian community, Thankunga imprisoned and, Harassed and ostracised, the Christians at Pukpui village were expelled by the Chief. The dispossessed Christians made a temporary settlement at Sethlun village, a site allotted by the government. Here in 1901, they founded a Christian village which the non-Christians called Pathian Khua (God's village). Later in 1909 they moved to

²⁸⁶ Lalromawii interviewed by Lalchhanhima, Chanmari, 2020, Chanmari, Personal audio archive.

Theiriat which became permanent resident. They intended to make it a model village, worthy of the name *Pathian Khua* (village of God).²⁸⁷ Later, with the arrival of the missionaries these people immediately approached them and became the first village to get formal education.²⁸⁸

Kyle Jackson put forward that to quote, “*Mizo Christians, known in the hills as Obeyers of God (Pathian thuawi), were under strict injunction to transgress traditional Mizo norms. These could be as emotive as where to bury dead family members, as fundamental as which actions were socially acceptable or as conceptually diverse as ideas about marriage, gender or entry to the afterlife. In doing so, Obeyers of God met with much opposition at this time.*”²⁸⁹

This practice had gained momentum as Christian population increased gradually. As a result of western education and the civilizing mission, awareness was disseminated by some Mizo converts since the early years of the 1900s, Vanchhunga, Champhai wrote an article ‘*Thlanmual Thu*’ in *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu* on February, 1914. In this article he advocated having a common burial ground or cemetery for each village. He further argued that the Mizo practice of burying in an open space near the house as well the traditional practice of erecting *Lungdawh* caused public nuisance and will be soon over populated the open space of every village. He had propagandized the advantages of having a western style burial ground where an epitaph would contain the name, and biography of the deceased which would be more convenient for memorial.²⁹⁰ Thankunga a church worker designated *tirhkoh* (apostle) wrote on the implications of being Christians in an article entitled *Kristian Dan Thu* or “Regarding Christian customs”. “Also when Christian die, when you are about to bury him, you should read an appropriate passage from the Bible, sing songs of missing the deceased, and then pray. At the *thlan* ‘grave site’ when you are about

²⁸⁷ Kipgen, p.223.

²⁸⁸ Lalromawii, interview.

²⁸⁹ Kyle Jackson, ‘Hearing Images, Tasting Pictures: Making Sense of Christian Mission Photography in the Lushai Hills District, Northeast India (1870-1920)’ in Maja Kominko, (ed.), *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of Endangered Archives Programme*, Cambridge U.K, Open Book Publisher, p, 469. Available from <https://books.openbookpublishers.com/10.11647/obp.0052.pdf> (accessed 6 May 2019).

²⁹⁰ Vanchhunga, ‘*Thlanmual Thu*’, *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin*, Bu 2 na, February, 1914, pp.24-25.

to bury him throw some earth in, let us also sing, read Pathian's book and pray there too. Also when you are going to throw the mud in, in order to show empathy, it is good for us to throw a little mud".²⁹¹ The above quotes make us aware of the different kinds of orientations the new Christians were being exposed to. Christianity entailed a new moral code: it implied changes in the way one engaged with previous religious and social practices, while proposing new ways of social engagement that were predicated on the new modernity that the Mizo were being introduced to. As the practice of Christianity was associated with education, meeting in Churches, a new way of social interaction, the discourse against Christianity also arose as it was seen as a means of causing cleavage in the society.²⁹²



Figure: 3.4 Headstone from 1915 at Kristian Hmasate Thlanmual, Theiriat.
Source: Lalchhanhima (Collection from Feildwork).

Thus, for the Christian missionaries and their congregations, traditional Mizo funeral and burial represent the most visible sign of heathenism, which they sought to combat by enforcing an austere culture of death among their fellow converts.

²⁹¹ Joy Pachuau, 170.

²⁹² Joy Pachuau, 71.

After a decade had passed, Dorawta Saitual Chief, Zotlang Chief Thanghuta, and M.Suaka Durtlang Chief had practice public burial in a village cemetery. These chiefs were among the early Mizos who practice public burial. But almost all other villages had followed traditional burial, but in the year 1929, Makthanga the Editor of *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu* wrote in length the need for public burial in the Hills. Makthanga had clearly saw the present situation in the Lushai Hills, a change that was brought by colonialism and Christianity, where all the old cultural practices were slowly redundant and were not compatible with the new culture brought about by the British which the Mizos have been practiced in the following years. In this article the author emphasized the need for such practice in every village that every chief and their villages were administered with fixed boundaries unlike the pre-British period which had become the norm in those period. He further stated that if the Mizo custom of random burial was continued, every village space would soon be over populated. The author had anticipated population growth which would soon cause overcrowding as well highlighted hygienic concern. In the light of this statement he had instructed the reader the benefits of having a public cemetery in the suburb area of the village.²⁹³ C. Vanlallawma had stated that it was part of the initiative of Makthanga that by the year 1930 the the Superintendent of the then Lushai Hills made an order that every village chiefs must practice public burial in a village cemetery.²⁹⁴ Record has shown that Chawngtlai an iconic historical village was among the first rural village to introduce public cemetery in the colonial period.

²⁹³ Makthanga, 'Thlanmual' *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Bu 7 na, July, 1929, pp.161-162.

²⁹⁴ Vanlallawma, p.103.



Figure 3.5: Surviving headstone from 1930, at Saitual.

Source: Laldintluangi Tochwawng



Figure 3.6 Surviving headstone from the late 1920s at Chawngtlai

Source: Lalchhanhima (Collection from fieldwork)

In the turn out event of the Lushai Expedition 1900 Chawngtlai village was ransacked and burnt down where the village chief Nikhuala was captured by the British force. Soon Chief Nikhuala's wife along with the villagers fled to "Hmawngmual". After the death of Chief Nikhuala at the Captivity under the British, they shifted to Kelkang and Nikhuala's younger son became the Chief. Not long had passed after they had shifted to Kelkang, Nikhama's older son Dokhama returned to his father's village which was ransacked and burnt down by the British incursion. He then became the Chief at Chawngtlai. Soon the British missionaries bring the gospel to this village and many villagers along with the chief converted to Christian. Christian enrolment was done in the year 1911. It was recorded that the Christian cemeteries was introduced under Nikhuala's grandson Zahuata who became chief of Chawngtlai before 1924. Thus the practice of Christian burial was introduced before 1924 which was 6 years before the superintendent of Lushai Hills ordered Public burial in 1930. A stone head count suggests that there are around 50 graves in this site which was carefully arranged and planned.²⁹⁵

In 1930, due to hygienic issues the government had ordered every village Chiefs to introduce separate burial sites.²⁹⁶

"From now onwards all the Village Chiefs are instructed to have a public burial ground, it is not a healthy practice to bury corps on the street and near residential areas. From now, every village must make burial ground on the suburb of the village 'Thlanmual'. Action will be taken to those who do not conform to this order. Please avoid contact with village water point 'tuikhur'."

Dated: April, The 21-5-1930

C.G.G Helme
Superintendent

²⁹⁵Chawngtlai Mizo Historical Village: Tourist Guide Book,p.21

²⁹⁶ C.G.G Helme, The Superintendent of Lushai Hills 'Thupek', *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Bu 5 na, 21 May 1930, p.82.

ORDER NO.1 of 1.5.1919²⁹⁷

“In order to ensure the healthiness of the soil in the villages at Champhai which are intended to be permanent is not unnecessarily destroyed, all chiefs within the bend of Tuipui must set aside burying grounds at least 50 hlams from the houses. In these grounds all dead bodies must be buried. Breach of these rules must be reported by the Chief and will render the offender liable to heavy fine.”

Dated Aijal,
The 1st May 1919

Sd/- G.P Barua
fSuperintendent, Lushai Hills.

The intervention of the colonial administration into the established necro-geography through public burial ground or cemetery was followed by sanitation and hygienic campaigns soon resulted in the crumbling of traditional regime of the dead. This transformation in the regime of western burial is beyond dispute, made legitimate through the supreme power of the Superintendent, and breach of the order was liable to be punished. Apart from the Church intention which was based on the Christian practice to manage and organized their converts, alternative explanation emphasizes the growing scientific evidence for the danger posed to public health by the accumulation of dead bodies lies at the heart of the rapidly expanding population.

The record from 1920-1921 showed that prior to the establishment of YLA, the welfare concerning the cemetery in Aizawl was taken up by the Church. During these years the church had the full authority in administering the working of cemetery, finance; cleaning etc which was discussed by the committee of church elders in Aizawl. These records had shown that Christian population in Aizawl had shared one cemetery which is known as ‘*Aizawl Kristian Thlanmual*’ (Christian cemetery at Aizawl) at the Mission centre in Mission veng. Anticipating the population growth in Aizawl, the committee on 1st June 1931 resolved to look an alternative space for the Christian community in Aiawl.²⁹⁸ In the year around 1933-

²⁹⁷P. Rohmingthanga (ed.), ‘Compendium of Standing Orders of the Superintendent of Lushai Hills (1904-1919)’, Aizawl, Mizoram, P.Rohmingthanga & Michael Zothankhuma, 2009, p.124.

²⁹⁸Aizawl Upa Ho Thurem-na bu 2.1917-1934, J.M Lloyd Archive, Aizawl Theological College Archive Durtlang.

34 a topic on the administration of Cemetery was discussed by a church elders' committee and resolved that the cemetery administration was transferred to the local community i.e every *veng* (locality) in Aizawl, where each locality was assigned two-to-three-months routine to take the charge.²⁹⁹ According to Joy Pachuau an important change brought by colonialism was the burial practice that one has to be buried in the *veng thlanmual* (Local cemeteries) that was introduced into the region sometime during the 1920s and 1930s which began with the creation of *sap thlanmual* (white man's graveyard). She elaborated that before the arrival of the British the Mizos were a migrating tribe, raids, headhunting, shifting from one place to another did not require permanent sites, landscape was a locus of habitation, not one that yield permanent status, with no particular topography and fixed boundaries.

But the introduction of public cemetery and when people insist on being buried within the precincts of their own *veng thlanmual* (local graveyard) and to be mourned by people who know them. Thus Christian rituals in death had provided scope for association with land and create identity imbibe with *veng* (locality) in the early stage of colonialism.³⁰⁰ She argues that the locality (*veng*) is a key locus of Mizo identity formation and maintenance. There, belonging and alien-ness are enacted and negotiated through ongoing praxis, centered on death rituals. Mizo 'death ways' have a specific temporality and spatiality. *Thlanmual* (Burial mounds) have a central and symbolic location within the *veng*, and the death of any person from that *veng* entails the necessity for other locals to pay their respects and fulfill certain roles for the bereaved, in a highly codified way. Together and individually, *veng*-centred death rituals serve to assert the Mizo-ness of deceased and mourners alike.

Christian identity was more likely expressed by being buried in the Christian cemetery by employing Christian funeral. This signified that Christianity is new tribe spirit which created a cleavage between the two identities; Mizo Christians and Mizos who adhered to traditional beliefs. Soon, the hegemonic rule of the English in

²⁹⁹Aizawl Upa Ho Thurem-na bu 2.1917-1934, J.M Lloyd Archive, Aizaw Theological College Archive Durtlang.

³⁰⁰ Joy Pachuau, p.219.

the colony, along with the new religion introduced ensured the transformation of the Mizo worldviews and outlook. The English language was very dominant among the early educated, and it was often the language in epitaph. Throughout the cemeteries, epitaphs were more likely to describe family relationships. Social identity of the deceased was also expounded in epitaphs for community members of less renown. This identity was important to the bereaved to describe their relative's contribution to society, and also to establish or maintain a collective social identity for the ongoing bereaved family and friends. In the initial period of Christianization due to resistance from several chiefs, the modes of funeral rites, attitudes and ideas related to death co-exist between Christian practice and traditional practices, but soon the en mass conversion after a wave of revivals, and through colonial administrative orders, Christian burials in common burial ground was legitimized. Since the introduction of new religion and western culture do not completely wiped out the traditional ideas, rather mixed with traditional practices which formed the new identity and practices. The practice of Christian burials became an important factor in homogenizing the tribe under one umbrella.

The most popular and traditionally-rooted form of memorialization is the *lungphun*. This is the erection of a special headstone at the grave, and perhaps the construction of a more long-lasting tombstone. In the past this could take a form of the *lungdawh* platform. The epitaphs on a *lungdawh* would reveal the achievements of the person and the family's hope for their future destination. Before there was a written script, surviving stones shows that the number of animals hunted could be marked on the stone as sign of a man's prowess.³⁰¹ Though the practice of erecting stone is a tradition for the Mizos, it served different purposes and was practiced by Chiefs and some great hunters and heroes in the village to commemorate the deceased as well as his or her achievements during lifetime.

Schendel has described that the early British photographs displayed a shrine which were covered with bamboo posts and streamers, feathers, skulls and other

³⁰¹ Heath, p. 271-273.

offerings. The sites were not always gravesites in the technical sense that they contained the mortal remains of the person concerned. They were memorial sites. Those of a powerful people were marked with a raised platform and the centrepiece was a big upright stone, sometimes adorned with the outline of the deceased, their relatives and the animals they had killed during their lifetime. The skulls or other remains of animals sacrificed during the funeral ceremonies were displayed on poles around the platform.³⁰² It seems that the ritual practice of erecting memorial stones or a tomb stone at the time of death by a commoner was a practice developed after the Mizo Hills was colonised by the British. The introduction of Christianity and the establishment of British administration had impacted on traditional practice of memorialisation. Schendel opines that the grafting of new concepts onto familiar ones took place in many other ways, because Mizos rejected European forms. It is in this way, a change that was coming in the colonial period fostered the birth of a new tradition; such practices soon fabricated and have become the Mizo Christian practice of Lungphun memorialisation when someone died in the village.³⁰³

The story of Dova Lungphun (Erecting memorial of a deceased) was issued in *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu* 1907 by his friend Chhunruma from Maite village; this record represents one of the earliest surviving records of the Christian practice of *Lungphun*. Dova was a Christian convert; a large stone of about *hlam* (about one and a half metre) was erected in memory of Dova, Cross a Christian symbol was engraved along with “*Isua a muhil ta*” (rest in Jesus). Chhunruma further stated that there has been a tension arose between the Christian community and non-Christians in the village over the matter of erecting such Christian theme memorial.³⁰⁴ As Mizos were so much aware of the past tradition and faced the new culture with reluctance, Missionaries often made a conscious attempt to superimpose³⁰⁵ Christianity over traditional beliefs in order to express relevance on the subject being introduced. This *Lungphun*, erection of tombstone was marked by a formal gathering of friends,

³⁰² Joy Pachuau and Schendel, *The Camera As Witness*, pp.60-61.

³⁰³ Joy and Schendel, p.64.

³⁰⁴ Chhunruma, ‘Dova Lungphun’, *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Bu 1 na, January, 1907, p.13.

³⁰⁵ Joy and Schendel, p.64.

neighbours and relatives. Which usually took place at least a year after a person's demise?³⁰⁶

As late as, 1919, Lorrain observed two memorial stones and copied them into his log-book. They both recorded the number of maidens seduced by each man, achievements that guaranteed their access to the paradise of *pialral*. When the first Christian, Khuma died in 1917, it was resolved that a memorial would be erected in front of the church. This was clearly an action appropriate to the traditional Mizo forms of memorialisation but also suited the Christian traditions. The missionaries who died in Mizoram, including Sandy and Evans, were also given elaborated memorial stones at their graves in Durtlang in the 1920s. Even on the death of Frasers in Wales it was resolved that a memorial would be erected in his honour.³⁰⁷ According to Lloyd this *Lungphun* ceremony traditionally took place during the *Mim Kut* festival.³⁰⁸ Joy Pacuhau and Wilem Van Schendel portrayed a photograph of a Christian funeral in 1911 which display a mix of pre-colonial and colonial funerary traditions. It displays the stone that marked the grave of a young woman from the village of Dawn who died in 1911. The photographs clearly conveyed the absence of the Christian idea of cemetery burial, as the grave located in front of the deceased house. Later the government decreed that, graves should be at least 60 *hlams* from the nearest house. As the Christian burial was practiced in the Mission centre in Aizawl, Mission veng and a very few other villages, the idea of a common burial site did not develop until the 1930s. The occasion usually was a ceremony known as *lungphun* marked by inviting friends and family for a "prayer service" and a feast. The *lungphun* could take place several years after a person had died.³⁰⁹ The introduction of a fixed burial ground or cemetery had made it more convenient for all members of the community to practice the tradition of erecting memorial stones, as each deceased grave were not a fixed grave with markings. This *Lungphun* ceremony often took place about a year after the death. Neighbours, church members and relatives from far off villages were invited to attend the ceremony. Generally, it was

³⁰⁶ Joy Pachuau, p.210.

³⁰⁷ Heath, pp271-273.

³⁰⁸ Lloyd,pp.12-13.

³⁰⁹ Joy and Schendel, p.213.

a ceremony marked by singing of *Khawhar zai* (bereavement singing), a formal function was held, and speeches from the bereaved family and sermon and prayer were held. This function was followed by a large feast made to all those gathered. Gifts were given to the bereaved family. The *Lungphun* ritual was an alternative or a new interpretation to traditional *Mim Kut* festival in the Christian understanding and practice. In olden days festival was observed for three days in the month of *Thi tin thla* (the month in which the dead dispersed or vanish) or September, offerings and food given to their departed spirit or soul was no longer necessary, after the performance of this ritual it is believed that the spirit of the dead now departed and returned to the land of the dead. Thus the *Lungphun* ritual a formal ceremony with feast, the erection of tombstone represents the final closure of the mourning period.

In the late 1920s to the early the 1930s, with the growth of population and the Christian community grew in numbers, the practice of erecting memorial stone at the gravesite in times of death now became a common ritual practice among the Mizos. Record have shown that Christian practice of erecting memorials were numerous, gaining grounds but without uniformity and form. A Christian memorial stones were found on the outskirts of every village *Lungdawh* where the number of game hunted or killed by the deceased was depicted on the stone. Sometimes it was fused with Christian theme “*Lalpa ah a mu ta*” (Rest in God) was simply written.³¹⁰ In 1929, C.GG Helme, the Superintendent of Lushai Hills made an order for restricting memorial stone close to the government roads which was punishable if a person found infringing the order.³¹¹ The new religion, in contrast with the traditional practice made eligible to all household of different strata of the society to perform such ritual. In the 1932 an article was published in *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu* urging the general masses from every village the drawback of erecting memorials as villages were densely populated with a fixed territory. He further elaborates that it was the church and the Christian community that initiate and support the practice of erecting

³¹⁰ Kawnga, ‘Lung Phun Dan Tur’, *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Bu 8 na, August, 1929, pp. 202-203.

³¹¹ C. Helme, The Superintendent Lushai Hills, ‘Order’, *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Bu 4 na, April, 1929, p.76.

memorials with a certain ceremony.³¹² As it was a new tradition was taking shape during this period. This tradition became a very useful means of remembering, depicting the sentiments, sorrow or grief of the bereaved family through inscribed text. The use of English text in writing epitaph was becoming common; Thaihawma in his article criticized the use of English language used in the epitaph. He argued that only a few Mizos understand the writings and become inconvenience for all. He therefore, advocated the use Mizo language for inscribing text in Memorials Stones.³¹³

Thus, increased socio-cultural changes due to colonialism affecting ideas and practices of death include increased ideological and physical control by the colonial government and its right hand the Christian church over local ritual practice and study have reflected the broad influence of missionaries and the colonial government on the way people negotiated their indigenous funerals and burials for the self-proclaimed ‘civilized’ and ‘sanitized’ mortuary rites. Despite the colonial government’s introduction of the germ theory of diseases and western medicine and healthcare, the growth of codified formal religious tradition, the authority of the church was stronger and responsible for creating the broad cosmological canvas underlying funerals and burial practices.

3.5 Trends in Mortality and causes of Death in Colonial Mizoram

The establishment of the British colonial rule from the last decade of the 19th Century was a momentous development in the history of the Mizos. Apart from the total near disjuncture from the pre-colonial root, the Mizos have witness a new socio-cultural domination by colonial rule. It was in this period that a new approach to disease and health was introduced to the Mizo. This has significantly contributed to the Mizo understanding of death and disease in the then colonial Lushai Hills. This section tries to uncover the history of major diseases which took the lives of the Mizo

³¹² Rokhuma Fanai ‘Lungphun’ *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Bu 6 na, July, 1932, p.99.

³¹³ Thaihawma, ‘Lungphun Ziak Dan’, *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Bu 7 na, July, 1931, p.95.

and the role colonial authority and the missionary endeavor in the cross-cultural setting at the time of colonization faced the rising mortality.

In the colonial literature the countries lying in the Indian Ocean are described as a disease zone. India in particular is described as a home of lethal diseases and epidemics. Diseases like plague, malaria, cholera and small-pox are classified as Indian epidemics, thriving on an enervating climate, untidiness, obscurantism and lack of social service among the people.³¹⁴ Also, in the case of the Mizos, most of the colonial constructions regarding health, hygiene and unhealthy environment were untenable. The Mizos much like the other ‘primitive tribes’ across the world regarded health according to the community and cultural standard.³¹⁵ They were relatively simple, but when gleaning from the European lens, the Mizos might seem backward in their treatment of their health, but however they have the knowledge of maintaining their health and were civilized in their own capacity and coped with the environment they lived in.³¹⁶ Records suggest that the number of deaths in the Lushai hills in the early colonial period was critically high amidst the prevailing colonial Public health policy. The health services catered by the British colonial government of implementing dispensaries including travelling dispensaries, hospitals and vaccination was found inadequate in the long run as the Lushai population gradually grew simultaneously with their health consciousness.

Recent historical analysis of colonial health care suggests that the British colonial occupation of Mizoram (the then Lushai Hills) had significantly altered the health scenario of the Mizos. Establishment of health services in the initial period of colonial rule were not intended for the general population but for colonial administrators, military personnel and government employees. Thus, the health of the general population was not given due importance where western medicine and health

³¹⁴Goswami, Kishor. ‘Disease and Medicine in Colonial Assam: British Health Policies, Objectives and Social Impact.’ *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 72 (2011): 978–85. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44146789>, (Accessed 4 July, 2019).

³¹⁵ Andrew Lalruakima, *Social History of Epidemics in Lushai Hills*, Mphil Dissertation, Mizoram University, Aizawl Mizoram, pp.51.

³¹⁶ Zothanpuui, ‘History of Health Care in Mizoram: Pre-Colonial Period to 1972’, PhD Thesis, Mizoram University, Aizawl Mizoram, p.91.

care served only a tool of empire so as to further the interest of the colonialist.³¹⁷ The British unquestionably made an effort to improve the Mizo public health. But the colonial health care programme seemed ineffective in late 19th and the early decade of the 20th Century. Apart from the colonial government, the entry of Christian missionaries and the introduction of health care facilities have been found to reinforce the newly introduced faith in Christianity. Health care of the missionaries acted as an agent of conversion in this process traditional faith and healing was sidelined and western style health care replaced the traditional customs which were regarded as superstitious and irrational by the missionaries.³¹⁸ The basic objectives of the missionary were to secure converts through evangelisation, education and literary and medical works. And then moulds these converts through training into a team of medical cadre group who would actually carry out the evangelizing and other related activities at the grass root.³¹⁹ Colonialism resulted in increased movement of population, exposure to the outside world, many new diseases were brought to the then Lushai Hills. Added to this, recurring famine *Mautam & Thingam, Minpui kum* (a year of heavy landslides) and epidemic swept the hills in the early decade of the 20th Century.

In India famine took about five millions of lives between 1896 and 1901, Malaria was the greatest destroyer of life; from the mid 1890s to 1921 it took twenty million lives. Respiratory diseases, tuberculosis, pneumonia, bronchitis may have been the most next fearsome killers. Dysentery and diarrhea are almost equally deathly. Cholera has swept ten percent of those who perished, plague was even more deadly and the Influenza epidemic in 1918-19 took millions of lives. As a result great mortality population in India between 1896 and 1921 grew less than five percent.³²⁰ Cholera, small-pox, fevers, dysentery and diarrhea were the Chief cause of Mortality

³¹⁷ Zothanpuui, 'History of Health Care in Mizoram', pp.216-217.

³¹⁸ Zothanpuui, 'History of Health Care in Mizoram: Pre-Colonial Period to 1972', PhD Thesis, Mizoram University, Aizawl Mizoram, pp. 216-222.

³¹⁹ Laldena, 'Christian Missions and Colonialism: A Study of Missionary Movement in Manipur and Lushai Hills 1894-1947', PhD Thesis, Jawahar Lal Nehru University, Delhi, 1983, p.150.

³²⁰ Ira Klein, 'Death in India 1871-1921', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol.32, August 1972, pp.642-643, Available from JSTOR, accessed 2 April, 2021.

in Assam Province in early decades of Colonial Period.³²¹ The Lushai Hills was surrounded by mainland India and attached to Assam Province for administrative convenience.

The early years of colonization (1894-95) was not marked by any epidemic. However, a sporadic case of cholera or small-pox was normal occurrence. Some cases of small-pox were found in Aizawl with no further cases. During the same year of 1894-95 a severe epidemic of malaria fever was reported to have carried off nearly 100 souls in the village, 323 houses were afflicted at Chim Lalbura village during the month of May. The Colonial government dispatched one compounder to treat the cases and report on the nature of the outbreak, unfortunately he arrived too late to be of much service. The number of death reported by the Lushais was doubted by the government and believed to be much exaggerated. The general health of the North Lushai Hill district during that year was good. The London Baptist Mission Society in South Lushai Hills recorded the existence of chicken pox, German measles and bowel in 1906. In Demagiri there was a mild epidemic of cholera among the new batch of coolies 13 cases with 7 deaths was reported during 1897-98. During this period majority of the sick were from the coolies. It can be observed that most of the disease during this period was spread through movement of coolies and military personnel right from the expedition. Malaria fever increased considerably in 1897-98 with 379 cases in Lunglei, out of which 5 sepoys died from malaria fever. Dysentery was not a stranger in the Lushai Hills which was seen among the sepoys and did not cause serious high mortality rate.³²²

A treatment camp was established in 1894 at Aizawl to provide medical facilities to labourers which was upgraded to dispensary in 1896 with twenty beds. Prior to these eight bedded dispensaries was established at Champhai in 1886. In 1904, the district possessed seven dispensaries and five military hospitals with accommodation for 144 in- patients; the number of cases treated was 34,000 of

³²¹Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam for the year 1898-1899, p.169, Printed at the Assam Secretariat Printing Office, Shillong, 1899.

³²² Zothanpuui, pp.95-97.

whom 1,200 were in-patients and 300 operations were performed, that expenditure was Rs 14,400, which was entirely met from Provincial revenues. There were only 8 dispensaries till the 1930s which served a population of about 1.2 lakhs in the 1931 census. A military hospital was set up by Assam Rifles in the initial years of their setup in the Lushai Hills and Aizawl Civil Hospitals was established by Major J.Shakespeare in the year around 1904-05, which could house only 30 patient. Only in the 1940s hospitals were setup in the South and due to increase in population, dispensaries in Aizawl and Lunglei were upgraded to full- fledged Civil Hospitals.³²³

In 1909 H.W.G Cole Major published health awareness among the Mizos through a monthly newspaper *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin*. In this column he stated that the health status of the Mizo in general was severely bad and not in a favourable condition as compared to the passing years. He recorded that the number of deaths recorded by that year preceded the number of births by 182. He further urged the village chiefs and the general masses to comply with the government initiatives measures for health care in the Hills.³²⁴ On 20th July 1911 a man named Hlianga, Mission Veng, Aijal wrote an awareness and precaution on some common diseases in the prevailing years. He had reported that half of the population was medicated in the mission hospital in the last two years. *Khawsik, ruhna, rulhut, pan* was very common during the last two years and took the lives of many people.³²⁵ Record had shown that in the year 1905 there were 485 males died in Aizawl and 561 females died, with a total of 1046 died in Aizawl by this year. There were 834 new born males and 795 new born females, with a total of 1629 new born in the year 1905. In Lungleh there were 361 males and 304 females new-born with a total of 665 new born. While there were 252 males died and 273 females died with a total of 525 died in Lungleh. 1571 people died and 2294 new born in the whole of Lushai hills in the year 1905.³²⁶ Circle interpreter and Chaprasi visited every villages and recorded death and birth as well as the health and prevailing diseases in the villages. High death rate and immense spread of disease were recorded and Dobasi and Chaprasi

³²³ Zothanpuui, pp.94-98.

³²⁴ H.W.G Cole Major, 'Hrshelna' *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Bu 5 na, May, 1909, May, pp.92-93.

³²⁵ Hlianga, 'Fimkhur Na Thu' *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Bu 7 na, July, 1911. pp.231-232.

³²⁶ Sentawta Poi, 'Piangthar leh Mitthi' *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Lehkha VI, April, 1906,p.54.

had reported to the Sap and precautionary measures were taken. B.C Allen observed that epidemics seldom occurred in the district, but fever was the most deadly lethal agent in the district.³²⁷

Table 3.1 Record of Birth & Death Rate of the Hill Districts of Assam during the year 1908-1911.

Districts	Birth Ratio		Death Ratio	
	Average 1908-10	1911	Average 1908-10	1911
1	2	3	4	5
Garó Hills	---	---	---	---
Khasi & Jaintia Hills	---	---	---	---
Shillong	18.98	25.23	12.00	15.54
Naga Hills	28.88	32.60	28.47	21.04
Lushai Hills	38.71	41.16	34.96	28.65

Source: Report on The Administration of Assam 1911-12, Printed at the Assam Secretariat Printing Office, Shillong, 1913, p.118.

In the initial period of colonial rule, introduction of western medicine and health services were however exclusively for the colonial administrators and military personnel as well as for the many labourers employed by the colonial administration. In fact, the colonial authorities were compelled by circumstances to provide medical and health services to ensure that their subjects had good health and later on due to public demand. In order to ensure the smooth process of colonizing a new territory such as building roads, offices and living quarters etc, the colonial administrators were obliged to pay attention to the health condition of their employees. This implies that initially, the health of the civilians was not taken into consideration by the new rulers.³²⁸

³²⁷ B.C Allen, 'Assam District Gazetteers, vol. X, The Khasi and the Jaintia Hill, The Garó Hills and the Lushai Hills', Allahabad, The Pioneer Press, 1096, p.44.

³²⁸ Zothanpuui, p.94.

High mortality rates were recorded in the report made by the government of Assam during the year 1908 to 1911. Records have shown that, infant mortality was severely high in the then Lushai Hills in the first decade of the 20th Century. In the year 1905 there were 1629 new born and 1046 died in the vicinity of Aizawl.³²⁹ And in the next year 1906 the same newspaper reported that there were 2242 new born and 1517 died in Aizawl circle.³³⁰ Among the early reports made by the missionaries on the subject of illness and death, high rate of infant mortality was firstly observed. Lloyd accounted that 50% of the children died before reaching adolescent,³³¹ this may seemed exaggeration but looking at the available record suggests that infant mortality was severely high in the then Lushai Hills. As early as 14th March, 1904, J.H Lorrain in his Log Book vividly recorded that Infant mortality is fearfully high in account of ignorance. He stated that:

“The women often go to work in the fields the day after giving birth to a child and the little one is left at home in charge of some child or old woman. Of course, it cries and had to be fed and as it has become universal custom to feed babies on chewed rice from the very day of their birth. This is more than any infant can stand and gives rise to all kinds of troubles which often result in death. The other day a woman from the village close to our compound brought her newly born baby for medicine. The poor little mits was terribly bruised and had several swellings on its limbs, we asked if it had had a fall or anything of the sort, but the mother said “No”. A day or two after however, we heard that an old woman who was nursing the child first often it was born had let it fall on the ground 3 or 4 times. If the baby recovers, which seems doubtful, it will probably be a cripple for life, but it seems that it has received some internal injuries, for all kinds of complications have set in and we feel that it will be a mercy if the poor creature is taken. It is crying day and night and nothing we have done for it seems to do any good. It did not improve matters when the mother and father took the injured child a long days journey over the mountains two days after

³²⁹ ‘Circle Report ,Kum 1905’, *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Lehkha VI, April, 1906, p.54.

³³⁰ Darthuami, ‘Mihring Thih Tam’, *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Lehkha V, March 1907, p.54.

³³¹ Lloyd, *On Every High Hill*, p.41.

its birth and it was after this return that they brought it to us for treatment. It strikes me that.”³³²

The Editor, *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu* 1911 May issue had reported a detail record of new born and deaths in the then Lushai Hills during the year 1910. There were 1950 males and 1898 females, the total of which 3848 new born babies during the reported year. There were 1469 males and 1377 with a total of 2846 person died during the year 1910. He had also reported that the increased infant mortality had a serious impact in slowing down the population growth during these years. Among the cause of death reported, 741 died of *Khawsik* (fever), 648 died of *Pumna* (stomach ache), 1380 died of *Awmna* (respiratory disease), 39 died from *Sarathi* (unnatural or accident), 14 died of *tui hril* (cholera), 34 died of *Nantna kai thei* (contagious disease), and 214 died of *Nausen thi a piang* (died during labour or delivery, stillbirth). The author stated that, still birth or death during infancy period was extremely high, impacting on population growth. ³³³ “*The maternity work has greatly increased and we have no ward for the women. The majority of the women who were here had had difficulties labour in the past or else had lost every child. Figures given to me in Aijal, out of every thousand children born 250 die in the first year*”³³⁴

In July 1931 Lukir, S.A.S ITC, Dispensary, Aijal had wrote in length an awareness article entitled “*Lusei Rama Nausen Thi Tam Zia Leh Engtinngge Kan Lo Tih Tlem Theihnazia Tur*” (The rising infant mortality rate in the Lushai Hills and its preventive measure). This article highlighted the increasing number of infant mortality rate among the Mizos. The author stated that the causes of death among infant in the Lushai hills was dysentery, pneumonia, typhoid, tuberculosis, whooping cough, and poor nutrition etc. He then stressed the necessities of preventive measures and awareness to the masses.³³⁵ This suggests that infant mortality was rampant

³³² J.H Lorrain, Log Book, 14th March, 1904, ATC Archive, Durtlang.

³³³ Makthanga, ‘Mitthi leh Piangthar Thu’ *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Bu 5 na, May, 1911, pp.93-94.

³³⁴ K. Thanzauva, ‘Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Pres byterian Church of Wales on Mizoram’, 1894-1957.

³³⁵ Lukira, ‘Lusei Rama Nausen Thi Tam Zia Leh Entinngge Kan Lo Tih Tlem Theihnazia Tur’ *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Bu 6 na, July, 1931, pp.158-160.

throughout the colonial period. Records in the early period of colonization suggest that infant mortality was severely high, throughout the decade of 1900s, this continued till the 1930s. Record suggests that the health of an infant was not favourable for a long period for more than thirty years during the colonial period. Despite various attempt made by the colonial authority and the mission health programmes, large number of infant had succumbed to death and was hardly improved from the initial period of colonization till the 1930s.

The first Christian missionary medical practitioner Dr. Fraser came to Mizoram in 1908. During his short stay, a dispensary was built in 1910 in Aizawl with corrugated iron and plastered walls and this was the first dispensary established by the mission in Mizoram and he soon left in 1912. As a mission doctor he was able to combine both Gospel and healing through medication.³³⁶ Mizoram remained without a missionary doctor and in 1919 a native compounder D. Thianga was put in charge of Fraser's old dispensary in Aizawl. A few years later Thianga had opened a dispensary at Durtlang which later became the major centre of the church's medical centre.³³⁷ Until this period, the earliest missionaries in the Lushai Hills worked with a very little formal medical knowledge. In Aizawl D.E Jones and Edwin Rowlands worked with a very little limited medical kit. In Serkawn, Lunglei in the South, under the Baptist Missionary Society J.H Lorrain and F.W Savidge were in 1905 woked with a very basic medical knowledge. Missionaries found patients with troubles ranging from pneumonia and malaria fever to inflation of eyeball and injuries from accidents.³³⁸

In 1911-1912 a Mautam famine took place, affecting a region covering the Mizo hills, Chin Hills, Chittagong Hills, and Chin Hills falling under the British jurisdiction. The Mizo tribals had experienced many such famines, and were used to the hardship, starvation and death that accompany the phenomenon.³³⁹ At the time of

³³⁶ Lloyd, pp.126-127.

³³⁷ Lloyd, p.210.

³³⁸ Kyle Jackson, *Missionaries and their Medicine: Religious and Medical Contact in the Lushai Hills*, M.A Dissertation, University of London, 2009, p.20.

³³⁹ Nag, *Environment and History*, p.245.

actual *Mautam* famine no word is sufficient to express the scarcity of food and food grains. From every corner of Mizoram, people started seeking for food in western part of the country namely Bungle village and nearby areas where food grains were stock by the government in the previous year. According to the Superintendent report in 1913-14, the British Government expended Rs. 539927 and 11 annas only, towards the cost of importing food stuffs to Mizoram. As the Mizo Hills was recently annexed by the British India at that time there were so many pieces of work to be done, perhaps to subjugate the people according to their will; forced labour like construction of roads, coolies, carrying the belonging of officials and soldiers by head load. Due to this type of frequent forced labour many people moved out of Mizoram to such places like Lakhimpur in Cachar Districts, and to Tripura. Considering all the hardships faced by the Mizos, one can discern how far the great famine affected the lives of the people.³⁴⁰ Due to dearth of record, the exact figures of death caused by the famine during this period cannot be obtained. But a thorough analysis of the famine implies that hardship, starvation, poverty and malnutrition had caused fatality to many people in the hard struck areas in the Hills.

The famine of 1911- 12 was the first famine experienced by Mizos under the British rule. The missionaries had written that some Mizos were still nursing the feelings of resentment against those who have occupied their country. The Christian missionaries called this disastrous calamity the means to extend the F.W. Savidge had reported in 1912, "*The gaunt spectre of famine has been spreading distress and sorrow all over this fair land, but we have been spared the still more terrible experience of pestilence which at one time seemed to seep the country, and the trying times through which we have been passing have strengthened our faith and have been the means of extending the saviour's kingdom.*"³⁴¹ During 1911 there was net increase of three hundred and twenty-five, which brought the total number of 1130. In the government census that year the number of Christians had doubled the previous year. Lorrain had stated that living has been difficult for boarders, owing to the

³⁴⁰C. Rokhuma, 'The Periodic Famine and Bamboo Flowering in Mizoram', Aizawl, Directorate of Information & Public Relations, Mizoram, 2006, p.6.

³⁴¹Lalrofel, 'Food, Famine and Consolidation of the British Rule in the Lushai Hills' in *Senhri Journal of Mutidisciplinary Sciences*, vol. 3, No. 2, 2018, p.6.

scarcity and the price of rice. Rats in countless numbers are roaming over the country and everywhere they are destroying the crops. Many people have had to subsist entirely upon roots that grow wild in the jungle. In the midst of this incident medicines have been in great demand everywhere.³⁴² Subsequently during the grave famine year of 1912 the Christian community had increased by four hundred fourteen. And In 1913 Christians had increased six times as rapidly as the church membership.³⁴³

In the consequence of the 1911-1912 famine cholera proved a scourge and terrified the village. A man of Lalhrima's village had been to fetch rice from 35 miles away. The night after he reached home he developed cholera symptoms. The poor man was dragged out before he was dead. He died outside the village and buried there.³⁴⁴ Dr. Fraser, in reviewing the work of the Lushai Medical Mission for the year 1912, writes: - "*The Medical Work has increased in amount during the nine months, January to September; the average number of our-patient cases treated was about 2000 a month. The number of in-patients was at time greater than could be accommodated in the Dispensary, so that some had to be admitted into the orphans' and schoolboys' houses for a while. Several came for treatment from a long distance, over 100 miles in some cases.*"³⁴⁵ Dr. Fraser also reported that cases like Pneumonia, heart disease, phthisis, liver abscess, wound of abdomen, injuries to internal organ and two proved fatal.³⁴⁶ The famine that broke out in 1911 stopped the conquering power of the new heathen song *Puma Zai* which had drawn away most people from the gospel during the past few years and gave the missions an opportunity of witnessing through Christian social service where physical hunger as a result of famine made the people hungry for the word of God and people were tuning their ears again to hear the preaching of the gospel.³⁴⁷ The year after the famine witnessed a spiritual revival movement among the Christians and the Christian population show rapid increase.

³⁴² Hminga, *Life and Witness of The Church in Mizoram*, p.151.

³⁴³ Hminga, p.90.

³⁴⁴ Lloyd, p.149.

³⁴⁵ K.Thanzauva, *Reports of the Foreign Mission*, p.51.

³⁴⁶ Thanzauva, p.48.

³⁴⁷ Hminga, pp. 75 & 80.

Missionary reports have also highlighted that due to the famine, several members from the church members had perished during this period. *“The famine, due to the growing crops being destroyed by rats, continued during 1912 in many parts of Lushai, and caused much suffering and ill-health among the people. Outbreaks of Cholera in several Districts accompanied it, and carried off considerable number of victims. Many sad cases of destitute orphan children and other poor people hand to be dealt with. Helped by the kind contributions towards the Lushai Famine Fund, opened by the Mission Directors, and by other gifts, we were enabled to relieve a good many sufferers”*³⁴⁸

In south Mizoram, rice was procured from the plains (chiefly from Assam) and from Bangladesh. Although the colonial government imported some amount of rice during the *Mautam* which occurred in 1912, rice in large quantities were never imported from the plains especially from Cachar. Besides, the total amount of rice imported could not sustain the famine stricken population as a result of which lack of food led to acute stomach disorder, and other related diseases. To increase their sufferings, the lack of medical facilities which for the most part was unavailable was also extremely felt which further led to increase in the death toll. People therefore had to vacate their homes in search of food and other means of subsistence elsewhere.³⁴⁹

The birth and death rate in 1913 was 35.9 and 32.03 in 1912³⁵⁰ which saw an increased in the death rate as compared to the previous years. Nag opined that Christian missionaries played pied pipers role. By arranging famine relief, it made them completely dependent on the administrative machinery. The British Government was the new order and Christian missionaries through their work helped people to accept and adjust to the new order. They changed the tribal perception that the colonial administration was an alien government and made them feel as if it was their own. While the British made the colonial conquest of the Lushai, the

³⁴⁸ Thanzauva, pp. 47-52.

³⁴⁹ Zothanpuui, p.127

³⁵⁰ ‘Annual Sanitary Report for the Province of Assam for the Year 1913’, L.T Colonel H.T Banatvala I.M.S, Offg, Sanitary Commissioner of Assam, Assam Secreatariat Printing Office, Shillong, 1914, p.5.

Missionaries, by transforming them morally and culturally, consolidated the conquest.³⁵¹ Dama and Thanzinga, Thenzawl had wrote a report in the monthly newspaper *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu* that on 9th March 1913, Santen disease was fast spreading in Thenzawl village and 2 children died. After one month on 27th April 1913, 5 children and one adult died because of this disease. And on the same year it had been reported that due to the spread of several disease many people died because of some diseases like *santen, tuihri, zanghri, naupang hri, hrawkna, biangboh, santen and khuihhip*.³⁵²

It seemed that the combined efforts of the colonial administration and the church were able to relieve the distress of the famine affected people to a considerable extent which had affected a metamorphosis of the image of the British Raj in the minds of the tribal. After the relief measures were provided by the Raj, they saw them as kind and merciful. The administration was paternalistic.³⁵³ But report has shown that the years after the famine combined with epidemic had not seen much improvement. From report of the Civil Surgeon in 1915 the general condition of the health of the population was improved, still there were epidemic of Cholera and dysentery and the death rate was 32.90 against 35 in the preceding year.³⁵⁴ Report has shown that in 1917 Lushai Hills have 40.7 Birth rate and 31.75 death rate. The dispensary returns of the Lushai Hills shows that mortality was high and the year under report was not healthy. During the year 1917 there were no epidemics of Cholera and Small-pox. But dysentery was prevalent to a large extent. Fever especially malaria was reported to be more prevalent than the preceding year.³⁵⁵ The famine of 1911-12 combined with epidemic had seriously impinged on the prevailing health, economic and social condition of the people.

³⁵¹ 'Pied Pipers In North East-India, Bamboo-Flowers, Rat-Famine and the Politics of Philanthropy', Revised by H.Vanlalhruaia. http://www.epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=reviews.books.Pied_Pipers_In_North_East_Iia, accessed, 11th September, 2021.)

³⁵² Dama and Thanzinga 'Santen Vei Thu', *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Bu 3-na, March, 1913, p.127.

³⁵³ Nag, p.250.

³⁵⁴ Letter to the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills from the Civil Surgeon, 17 April, 1915. [G-537, GB-42] Mizoram State Archive.

³⁵⁵ 'Annual Sanitary Report of the Province of Assam For The year 1917', Major T.C McCombie Young, MD., DPH. IMS, Sanitary Commissioner Assam, The Assam Secretariat Printing Office, Shillong. 1918, p.5-6

In the same decade after the 1912 famine in the Lushai Hills, influenza swept across the globe in two waves in 1918 and a third in 1919 which was the worst pandemic in history since the Black Death. Influenza had erupted into pandemic form before 1918-19 was severely felt in 1889–1892. But none approached the impact of the World War I era pandemic. It killed at least fifty million people. The first known outbreak was at Camp Funston, Kansas, on March 5, 1918. From there it travelled to other forts and military facilities. It boarded ships bound for France in April. It spread quickly across Europe, reaching North Africa and India, and then going on to China and Australia by July. Flu struck so many longshoremen in the Philippines that dock work ground to a halt. The pandemic travelled the globe in four months. The second, far more deadly, wave began in France in August 1918. It raced across the world via maritime trade and troop. Within a few months the second wave had washed over nearly every inhabited place on the planet. The milder third wave arrived in the winter of 1919 and was gone by the spring. The pandemic was over.³⁵⁶

Due to unavailability of sources, or may be some reason to obscure the consequences, the impact of the 1918 Epidemic in the Lushai hills was often estimated to be less important when it comes to human mortality in the past. In the Lushai Hills, the virus was believed to be brought home by Lushai Labour Corps who went to France.³⁵⁷ This influenza pandemic was followed by “Zawngkhri” “Small Pox” which spread from Tripura and Manipur. It was recorded that Hriangtuinek village was severely devastated by this ‘Small Pox’ amidst the prevailing ‘Influenza’ in the Hills. Makthanga the editor *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu* reported that the influenza was felt at Aizawl by 24th October, 1918 where people get severe fever, it created breathing problem and heavy coughing affecting mostly older people and younger age group. Only a month had passed around 60 people have died

³⁵⁶ Christian McMillen, *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction*, USA, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp.89-90.

³⁵⁷ Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, Mission, Veng Aizawl, L.T.L Publications, 5th Reprint 2002, p.165.

from this disease in the vicinity of Aizawl. He had also reported that 40 Mizo coolies and 11 soldiers who went to Manipur have died from Influenza.³⁵⁸

Towards the beginning of 1919 Influenza was contracted in Hriangtuinek village which took the life of many villagers, meanwhile some villagers who had travelled to Manipur brought home the virus “small pox” which soon spread in the village. By the month of May 1919, the rapid spread of small pox and its shocking nature had overshadowed even the prevailing influenza in the areas. 35 people died of influenza while 195 people died because of small pox infection only within the month of May. The highest death toll record in one day is 24 people died of small pox. There were instances where small pox took the life of the whole members of the family only in one night. The whole village was in chaos, increase in number of death toll rises and the disposal of the dead body became a problem.³⁵⁹ In some villages about 400 persons died within a year. The disease might have been brought by those who returned from War service. Apparently Southern part of the Hills was not much affected by this epidemic.³⁶⁰

According to Kipgen, it began among the men of the Assam Rifles stationed in Aizawl and by the early part of 1919 had spread in the villages. In the south, Savidge reported large numbers of death in distant villages from a variety of disease, but especially influenza. But north suffered the most. According to Liangkhaia, there were 40 to 50 deaths in each village located on the high ridges, and 100 to 200 deaths in low lying villages. The worst attack was Hriangtuinek, the village of a Thadou chief named Letzakai. In addition to influenza there was an outbreak of small-pox. James Dokhuma estimated the death toll as high as 400, but Liangkhaia is probably more accurate in fixing the number of deaths at 380. As he put it “An epidemic of such extensive spread and with so many deaths had not been known in living memory.”³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ Makthanga, ‘Chanchin Tinreng’, in *Mizo leh Vai Chanchinbu*, Bu 12 na, December, 1918, p.191.

³⁵⁹ C. Lalnunchanga, ‘Pathian Khawngaihna Mizo te Chungah a Lang’, *Zoram Today*, 17 March 2020, <https://zoramtoday>. (accessed 7 June 2020).

³⁶⁰ Hminga, p.113.

³⁶¹ Kipgen, p.237.

From oral sources, this Epidemic had also swept the Old village of Serchhip at the time of their settlement in Kawlri, in 1918. It took as many as 98 lives in the month of January, digging two to three graves every day. Even though this epidemic had suddenly swept the village and took hundreds of lives it became a blessing in disguise for the early Christian Church. The general masses had witnessed that old tradition of “*hri dai theu*” and the healing of *Bawlpu* (village priest) does not work by the end of the events. They resorted to enroll their names in the Christian Church as their faith in traditional beliefs was shook by this epidemic. As a result, many villagers had converted to Christianity. And this conversion served as a precursor for the 1919 Revival which covers the whole of Mizoram.³⁶²

C.L Hminga from his pro-Christian sensibility commented that the year was great trial for the Christian. An epidemic of pneumonia spread from village to village, claiming as its victim young men in the prime of life; so virulent was the disease that the majority succumbed within three or four days, and only a very small percentage recovered. To the non-Christians the epidemic was due to the direct agency of evil spirits and the traditional way of stopping the epidemic *hridai theu* was tried. But all the precautions could not stop the spread of the epidemic. Home after home was plunged into mourning. At some places Christians suffered heavily as their non-Christians neighbours. Notwithstanding the fact that even Christians had suffered, Lorrain had emphasized that those whose faith in Christ had given them a certain hope beyond the tomb. He further stated that for some Christians their passing was a complete triumph over death and its powers and whose witness to the presence of the ‘last enemy’ served as a strength and comfort to those left behind for many years to come.³⁶³ The missionaries and the Christian interpretation of such incident were gaining grounds and it resulted in abrupt conversion to Christianity, followed by *harhna* (revival movement) often was the consequence of adversity that took place in the Mizo society.

³⁶² Laldusanga, ‘Serchhip Khaw Chanchin’ *Serchhip News*, 26 June 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/serchhip-news/serchhip-khaw-chanchin/290139707835330/> accessed 17 August, 2018.

³⁶³ Hminga, p.92-93.

Vital statistics recorded by the Assam government is an important source that portrays the impact of the Epidemic in the Lushai hills. In 1918 birth rate was 40.43 and death rate was 35.55; during the year 1918 Lushai Hills suffered but little from Influenza as compared to neighbouring Khasi Hills and Garo Hills.³⁶⁴ This may be due to the geographical isolation from mainland India, less human movement with neighboring areas and sparse population. In 1918, fevers and respiratory diseases increased due to the outbreak of influenza. Total mortality from influenza and other causes recorded in the Lushai hills was 477 which is 5.23 per 1000 population which was the least among the Districts in Assam.³⁶⁵ But the number was quite high compared to present day mortality rates. In contrary with the neighboring Hill districts the effect of the first wave in the Lushai Hills was mild, report showed that in the year there were 1499 parcels of quinine was sold in the district. As compared to 1917 it increased was marked by 108 more parcel sold in the period under report. This suggests that Malaria was not decreasing in the district.³⁶⁶ And in the year 1919 parcel of quinine sold in the Lushai Hills increased to 2042 preceded the previous year consumption by 543 parcels. An increase in consumption of quinine was seen in the areas which were severely affected by Malaria.³⁶⁷

Table 3.2 Record of Birth & Death Rate of the Hill Districts of Assam during the year 1918-1919.

Districts	Birth Rate		Death Rate	
	1918	1919	1918	1919
1	2	3	4	5
Khasi & Jaintia	27.45	21.28	55.72	29.32

³⁶⁴ 'Annual Sanitary Report of the Province of Assam For The year 1918', Major T.C McCombie Young, MD., DPH., IMS, Sanitary Commissioner Assam. The Assam Secretariat Printing Office, Shillong, 1919, p.4.

³⁶⁵ Annual Sanitary Report, p.6

³⁶⁶ Annual Sanitary Report, p.18.

³⁶⁷ Annual Sanitary Report of the Province of Assam, 1919', Printed at the Secretariat Printing Office, Shillong 1920, p.17.

Hills				
Naga Hills	15.46	10.01	47.71	34.20
Lushai Hills	40.43	39.13	35.55	65.60
Garo Hills	25.64	23.83	34.99	26.27

Source: Annual Sanitary Report of the Province of Assam for the Year 1919, pp.4, Assam Secretariat Printing Office, Shillong, 1920.

Thus, record has shown that the year 1919 was an unhealthy one in all the Hill Districts, where the death rates appreciably exceeded the birth- rates, but the Lusahi seemed to have suffered the most, for the death-rate of 39.98 in the Lushai Hills from ‘respiratory diseases,’ which includes mortality from influenza, was high. It is reported that Aijal Sub-division suffered from influenza more than Lungleh sub-division. And the superintendent of the district attributes ‘the high death rate of the year largely to the results of malnutrition as a result of scarcity’. He adds that ‘the prompt localization and suppression of small-pox outbreak is creditable to the medical staff, and to the Lushai custom of isolating villages in which infectious disease appears.’ The civil surgeon Lushai Hills brings to the notice the prevalence of malaria in the Lushai Hills.³⁶⁸

The year after the Epidemic in 1920 there has been an improvement in the health of all districts during the year, this being especially notable in the Lushai Hills which suffered severely from Influenza in the previous years. Malaria and respiratory disease continue to cause high mortality in the district, the death rate of which remains above that of the pre-Influenza period.³⁶⁹ By 1928, the Welsh Mission had recruited another missionary doctor, Dr John Williams (known to the Mizos as Pu Daka) to work among the Mizos. The beginning of 1929 also saw the arrival of the first fully trained nurse to work in Mizoram in the person of Miss Winifred Margaret Jones (known to the Mizos as Pi Hmangaihi). Under their charge, a number of major operations, many difficult midwifery cases, epidemics of dysentery etc. were

³⁶⁸ Annual Sanitary Report, 1919, pp.4-5.

³⁶⁹ Annual Sanitary Report of the Province of Assam for the Year 1920, p.5 Printed at the Assam Secretariat Press, Shillong, 1921, p.5.

performed.³⁷⁰ In this year a new hospital was established by the Welsh Mission, which was upgraded in 1935. A regular health mission was started by the Baptist Missionary only in 1919 where a small dispensary was built at Serkawn where medical works were undergone. In the South a fully equipped hospital was built in by the mission in the post-colonial period.³⁷¹

After the 18th year of *Mautam*, famine another recurring famine known as *Thingtam* famine occurred in 1929. People took all precautionary measures since the *Mautam* famine. Unfortunately, there had been an unusual heavy down pouring that year beginning from the month of June followed by the long spell of rainy days. There were heavy landslides causing heavy damage to fields and farms. Due to this unusual calamity, that year is also known as '*Minpui Kum*' (The year of heavy landslides) Mizoram was cut off from mainland India due to landslides, blocking roads for four weeks. To make matter worse dysentery spread in Aizawl which later spread to other villages.³⁷² Tigers, elephants and even human being were seen caught up in the torrential current in some places. Lorrain had reported the damage in Southern Mizoram alone 23 villages report losses aggregating 4213 maunds of grain belonging to 80 different families. 42 villages reported damage to this year's crop by carrying away of the standing rice by rushing water or landslides. Crop stored in granaries was swept away by flooding of river with a total loss of 1090 maunds.³⁷³ The year 1930 was the actual famine year. Many people perceived the need for extensive cultivation in the previous year. The government also did not expend for famine relief measures as heavily as it did in the *Mautam* Famine in 1911. The destruction caused by rats was not as extensive as had been feared. Although there was considerable hardship and suffering, actual starvation was avoided.³⁷⁴ There were no specific archival records or oral report of fatality cause by the famine and its attributed epidemic, heavy rain and landslide in 1929. But it can be observed such extensive calamities might have impacted the health of the population to a great

³⁷⁰ Zothanpuii, p.137.

³⁷¹ Zothanouii, p.147.

³⁷² Lloyd, pp.274-275.

³⁷³ Kipgen, p. 243.

³⁷⁴ Kipgen, p. 244

extent. But official record highlighted that the condition of healthy was not good compared to the previous years. There is great prevalence of malaria and severe dysentery of mixed type which broke out in epidemic form in some villages in the Aijal Sub-Division. Two itinerating Sub-Assistant Surgeon touring the districts inspecting and report on the sanitary condition of the villages.³⁷⁵ The Civil surgeon also reported that the health of the public in 1929 was not good with numerous cases of Malaria throughout the year, and there have been an outbreak of dysentery epidemic in Aijal town with 5 deaths.³⁷⁶ Lorrain noted that fear of the famine on top of heavy rains were turning the thoughts of people Godward. The epidemic of sickness have been softening many hearts, the chief and leaders calling Christians together for an all-night prayer-meeting to beseech God to stop the ravages of the rats. The day following this gathering not a fowl was killed, not a drop of water was drawn, it was kept as humiliation and supplication by the whole village, the converted Christians and non-converted alike, commencing with a big prayer-meeting at cockcrowing in front of the Chief's house.³⁷⁷

The table below shows the recorded birth and death rates in the Hill Districts in 1930 as compared with those of preceding year: -

Table: 3.3 Record of Birth & Death Rate of the Hill Districts of Assam during the year 1929-1930.

Districts	1930		1929	
	Birth Rate	Death Rate	Birth Rate	Death Rate
1	2	3	4	5
Khasi & Jaintia Hills	29.25	16.99	26.79	18.72
Naga Hills	26.94	18.84	20.05	17.63

³⁷⁵ 'Annual Sanitary Report of the Province of Assam for the Year 1929', Lieut Colonel, TD Murison, DP.H, IMS, Director of Public Health Assam, Assam Government Press Shilling, 1930, p.6.

³⁷⁶Civil Surgeon, Lushai Hills, A Short note on the Public Health of the Lushai Hills District during the Year 1929-30. [G-413. CB-33] Mizoram State Archive.

³⁷⁷ Kipgen, p.243.

Lushai Hills	51.03	30.04	53.45	28.38
Garo Hills	29.73	23.37	28.25	19.09

Source: Annual Public Health Report for the Province of Assam for the year 1930, Lt Colonel, T.D Murison, D.P.H., I.M.S, Director of Public Health Assam, Shillong, The Assam Government Press, 1931, p.6.

From the record of 1930 in the Lushai Hills, a lower birth rate and higher death rate shows that the general health of the district was worse than that of the previous year. The Chief disease was Malaria. Two itinerating sub-assistant surgeons with medicines and equipment toured throughout the district. One of their chief duties is to inspect the sanitary condition of villages and to advise the villagers on sanitary matters, especially in connection with the protection of water supplies. The campaign against syphilis was as usual carried out throughout the year with fairly good results. The majority of cases of this disease were found in the Lungleh sub-division, chiefly among the 'Lakhers'. These patients were admitted into the Lungleh hospital after the closure of Tuipang civil hospital for in-patients.³⁷⁸ Reports have shown that 1902 parcels of quinine were sold in the Lushai Hills in the year 1930, parcel sold in the Lushai Hills increased by 61 parcels. The increase in sales is due to the prevalence of Malaria in the district.³⁷⁹

According to the Census 1931, the population of Lushai Hill in 1931 was 124404, with birth rate 31.35 and death rate 20.93. In the Lushai Hills district the lower mortality rate during the year under review indicates better health conditions than that which prevailed in the preceding year. The existence of enteric fever in the district for the first time has been definitely established. Influenza, mild in type, was prevalent in certain parts of the district. Anti-syphilitic measures were carried out as usual with fairly satisfactory results. Infection would appear to be high in the

³⁷⁸Annual Sanitary Report of the Province of Assam, 1930, p.7

³⁷⁹Annual Sanitary Report of the Province of Assam, 1930, p.27.

Lungleh subdivision. A ward for the treatment of syphilis was re-opened at Tuipang during the year.³⁸⁰

In the 1940s till 1952 there were 4 hospitals and 8 dispensaries under the Medical Department as recorded by Dr. M Ahmad, then Civil Surgeon of the Lushai Hills. In 1953, Vahai (south Mizoram, Saiha district) dispensary was added to the lists of hospitals and dispensaries.³⁸¹ Towards the 1940s there was a gradual improvement in health and witnessed a decline in death rate of 19.61 in 1944 as compared to the 1930s. There were 4,882 births and 3,181 deaths during 1944 as compared to 4,998 births and 3,907 deaths in the preceding year. Of the total number of deaths, “fevers” accounted for 1,961, respiratory diseases for 799 and dysentery and diarrhoea for 302. The health conditions in the district remained, on the whole, satisfactory. Deaths from fever are mainly due to malaria and other diseases having fever as the predominant symptom. In the year 1944 the control of Public Health activities passed from the hands of the Civil Surgeons- to the District Medical Officers of Health, who were made directly responsible to the Assistant Directors of Public Health. But this was implemented only in the plain districts and all the Hill Districts were left out.³⁸² Soon, the decade saw a gradual decline in death rate. In 1949, the initial years of independence, death rate declined to 10.27 and in 1951 it dropped to 8.23 per 1000 population.

Table 3.4: Decadal growth of the Population of Mizoram (then Lushai Hills) during the colonial period:

Year	Male	Female	Total	Decadal Variation
1901	39004	43430	82434	X
1911	43028	48276	91204	10.64
1921	46652	51754	98406	7.90
1931	59186	65218	124404	26.42

³⁸⁰ Annual Public Health Report of the Province of Assam for the year 1931, pp.6-7

³⁸¹ Zothanpuui, p.100.

³⁸² ‘Annual Public Health Report of the the Province of Assam for the Year 1944’, Major T.D Ahmad, IMS, Director of Public Health Assam, Assam Govt Press, Shillong, p.4.

1941	73855	78931	152786	22.81
1951	96136	100066	196202	28.48
1961	132465	133598	266063	35.61

Source: Mizoram District Gazetteers, Mizoram, 1989, Directorate of Art & Culture, Government of Mizoram & Education and Human Resource Department, p.61.

The decadal growth rate during 1911-1921 recorded a fall from previous decade and the percentage point of difference was 2.7. The main reason for a drop in the growth rate during this period is mainly influenza epidemic and famine.³⁸³ The *Mautam* Famine in 1911-1912 and the Influenza epidemic in the 1918-1919 had caused many deaths and this compelled many families to leave the then Lushai Hills. In 1912,³⁸⁴ the consequences of the epidemic and famine are reflected in the population growth rate during this decade. The 1921-1931 saw a very high growth rate and suddenly fell in 1931-41 alternating growth rates is generally characterized by high birth rates and high death rates, fluctuating in response to the condition of prosperity, famines, epidemics and fertility being in its natural state. The decadal growth rate is expanding since 1931-1961 as mortality declined due to gradual improvement of living conditions and a result of decline in infectious diseases like cholera, influenza etc.³⁸⁵

From the above discussion, certain aspects of disease, pattern of morbidity and fatality in the Colonial period is discernible. Challenged by the alien environment and the certain new diseases, colonial authorities and the Christian mission in the then Lushai Hills faced them by introducing western medical health care. In which the medical intervention was sporadic and highlighted the limit of the concept of limited interest in healthcare. In India the British impact in beginning an economic transformation destroyed many social and environmental safeguards that had hindered the spread of disease. Death in India in this area showed one of the

³⁸³ T.C Hlimawma, 'Studies in Demographic Profiles in Mizoram' M.A Dissertation, North Eastern Hill University, 1995, p.24

³⁸⁴ Mizoram District Gazetteers, 1989, p.62.

³⁸⁵ T.C Hlimawma, 'Studies in Demographic Profiles in Mizoram' M.A Dissertation, North Eastern Hill University, 1995, p.24.

ways that modernization interacted with indigenous condition to produce modernization crises, as traditional societies began to be transformed in the image of the modern West. Taking inference from epidemiological transition theory which focus on the shift in disease patterns and cause of death, study have shown that the early colonial period reflected the first two stages of transition; the age of pestilence and famine and the age of receding pandemics. The age of pestilence and famine was considered an extension of the pre-modern pattern of health and disease. In European societies this stage extended until the middle of the 18th century, and for less developed countries it had extended into the 20th century. Unpredictable and uncontrollable major cause of death in the context of the Mizos include epidemics, famine etc. Other causes of death include parasitic and contagious diseases and malnutrition effects for children and tuberculosis, perpetual infection. Infant and child mortality is very high; females are more vulnerable to infectious diseases and also die due to complication associated with child birth. In the age of pestilence and famine average life expectancy at birth is variable and ranges from 20 to 40 years. Despite the first stage, the colonial period also exhibit the character of the age of receding pandemic fewer peaks and fluctuations in death rates, although mortality continue to be high. Infant and child death rates remain elevated. As this stage progresses improvements are first gained in maternal and adolescent mortality for females. Later infant and child mortality rates fall, in part due to increased health of females of child bearing ages. Life expectancy steadily increased from 20 to 55 years.

Conclusion

With the introduction of new institution be it Colonial and Christian institution, Mizo concept of death, ritual practices and attitudes were significantly transformed. Evangelical Christian influenced on the notion of death, the prevailing social-economic condition of the Mizos and the imposition of western cultures and their interaction with local agency was instrumental in reshaping and re-invention of the notion and rituals surrounding death in the colonial period. Apart from imparting anthropomorphic character of death through Christianity, the introduction of

Christian burials which was soon followed by colonial government order to make legitimate the practices suggests new ways of social engagement and the new modernity which was instrumental in shaping the Mizo sensibility towards death and identification with practices. A closer look into the mortality and causes of death in the colonial period offered us a lens through which the colonial government and the Christian mission was challenged by the unfamiliar environment and certain new diseases. In which medical intervention was sporadic and highlighted their limited interest in health care.

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have discussed how Colonialism brought a remarkable transformation in almost every sphere of the Mizo life. The introduction of new institution whether colonial, religious or nascent state institution, impacted on Mizo death practices, concept and attitudes on dying. The incorporation of western practices and beliefs somehow significantly transformed and contributed to the re-invention of practices and beliefs and notion surrounding death. This chapter will look into the period from 1966 to 1986 during the *rambuai*³⁸⁶ (troubled years) period faced by the Mizos in which the so called nationalist waging a war against the state which resulted in political turmoil, lawlessness and social disorder, in this situation a new experience and perspective on violent death thrilled the society.

With the turn of the twentieth century during the British rule in the Mizo Hills, there developed a deliberate pace of mounting political consciousness among some section of the population in the Mizo Hills. The introduction of Christianity along with the introduction of western education created a new elite class who challenged traditional political system. In 1926 a political activity started among some few Mizos in Aizawl but was suppressed by the British.³⁸⁷ The introduction of modernity, a more globalized world and exposure to the outside world has led to the gradual progress of political consciousness among the Mizos. They formed associations in the 1930s and in 1946 a political party was formed. They started to express and gave voice on different demands and seek for their involvement in the administration. This has led to the birth of the District council in the Mizo Hills in 1952. The idea of independence or separation from the Indian Union and a nationalist sentiment was still loomed large in the post-independence era in the year following decolonization in the 1950s. The armed revolutionary movement commonly known as *Rambuai* outbreak in 1966 has led to chaos in the Mizo Hills, followed by groundless law and order and confusion in the society. The church and

³⁸⁶*Rambuai* literally means the disturbed land, between 1966 & 1986, generally used in common parlance to denote the 20 years of political turmoil where the nationalist regime (MNF) fought against the Indian government in order to gain political independence.

³⁸⁷Sangkima, 'Political Consciousness Leading to the formation of Mizo Union Party in Mizoram', *Historical Journal Mizoram*, vol. 5 Issue I, 2004, p.2.

religious institution cannot served its purport, human lives lost its dignity, many people lost their lives unattended and uncared, and had died an unnoticed. Thus, the twenty years between 1966 to 1986, till the restoration of peace is often termed as “*Ram Buai Lai*” which means the period of disturbance.³⁸⁸

‘Insurgency’ has been the common term employed by most Indians/Non-Mizo speakers or writers, as it was seen as an action against the state. Whereas the term ‘*Buai*’ or ‘*Rambuai*’ troubled or troubled land, time of disorder³⁸⁹ is the word often labelled to this period in Mizo common parlance. The labelling of this period as ‘insurgency’ has been avoided as it is found to be limiting and in several ways politically incorrect, for it can be seen as denoting an underlying implication of condemnation of an ideology that others have sacrificed their lives for, or died in the countering of it.³⁹⁰ This expression often stirs up different conflicting perspectives on how to understand the historical record, event and how we imagine the past. However there cannot be one definite term to represent the movement, not all agrees with one usage. Some leaders from the defected MNF group prefers to call it ‘MNF Movement’, while the pro- Laldenga and the MNF Party saw it as a ‘Mizoram War of Independence’³⁹¹ However, the Mizo common parlance *Rambuai* or *Buai* has been used in order to do justice from every sides, stressing how people of different backgrounds and convictions lived their lives in an age where military confrontation ripped the social fabric of Mizoram. H. Raltawna stated that the twenty years between 1966 and 1986 is often termed “*Rambuai Lai*” (The troubled years) as it signifies the real meaning of the period where everything was in chaos. There was no law and order, dignity has faded; religious life and Mizo community and societal life was suspended and many innocent lives were violently taken unnoticed.³⁹²

³⁸⁸H.Raltawna, ‘Mizoram Buai Lai Hun’ in *Ram Buai Lai Leh Kei*, Aizawl, Mizoram Upa Pawl General Headquarters, 2010, p.1

³⁸⁹Willem van Schendel, ‘Visual Narratives of Troubled Times: Mizoram India Between 1966 and 1986’, in Lalhlimpuii Pachuau & Rosie Vanlalruati Ralte (eds.), *Revisiting Rambuai*, p.243.

³⁹⁰Margaret Ch. Zama and C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, *After Decades of Silences: Voices from Mizoram*, New Delhi, Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, 2016, p.57.

³⁹¹Roluahpuia, ‘Memories and Memorials of MNF Movement’, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol LIII, No.25, 2018, p.43, (PDF) Memories and memorials of MNF Movement (researchgate.net) (Accessed: 28 March 2020).

³⁹²Raltawna, *Mizoram Buai Lai Hun*, p.1.

More than half a century has passed, there emerge a great corpus of literature including research paper, thesis from different fields and subjects, literature in the form of novels, prose, plays, essays, poems etc and documentation through oral narratives and visual document as well as scholarly debates on the subject of *Rambuai*. Memories of the MNF movement are highly fragmented and scattered. Different participant and organisations are engaging in constructing a narrative depending on their socio-political position in the contemporary period and their relationship with the movement during the period.³⁹³ Notwithstanding the fact that there are many approaches and areas to which interpretation and studies have been done, the dominant cultural memory of the Mizo experience of this *Rambuai* years has little space for representation of death. In order to have a new perspective and reconstruct the social histories of *Rambuai*, it has been felt that the period witnessing the changing violent of death requires an understanding of specific history and nature of death and dying in such period. Also a comprehensive analysis of the twenty years from this perspective would have brought new meaning and perception as well as the changing concept of death within the Mizo society.

4.1.1 *Rambuai* Background

A recurring famine known to the Mizo as Mautam hit the Mizo Hills in 1959. Anger and frustration at the Assam government's failure to effectively distribute promised petty relief focused attention on other issues and led to action by the class formed by the founded Mizo Cultural Society in 1950 to preserve Mizo identity. When a famine ravaged the Mizo Hills, the cultural society addressed the famine and the need to save people from the impending catastrophe of deadly famine. On February 19, 1960, upon the arrival of the Assam government delegate to investigate the famine in Aizawl, the cultural society held rallies to express their dissatisfaction with the Assam government and district council in the handling of the famine. The Assam government responded by punishing the leaders of this rally R.B. Chawnga and Laldenga, who worked as civil servants and clerks respectively in the District Council Office, were suspended from their posts.

³⁹³Roluahpuia, *Economic and Political Weekly*, p.44.

Unable to organize further protest they formed Mizo National Famine Front in September 1960. Based upon strong Mizo nationalist feelings, they include nation in forming the organization. It has been the MNFF intention that relief work and other famine-related issues could be used as tools for creating awareness about the difference of Mizo culture and religion and its compatibility with the Indians. When the famine struck the Mizo District, the MNFF work effectively to distribute famine relief even to remote areas, and many youths voluntarily engaged. Soon the MNFF gained considerable support and recognition; tension emerged between the Mizo District Council and the Assam government the former criticizing the latter for delaying famine relief funds; and the Assam government, in turn, accused the Mizo District Council of producing a false report of the cases of starvation and death. Seeing the popularity of the MNFF the Assam government sought help of the MNFF for the distribution of relief materials. After the famine was over, the original objectives of the Cultural Society was revisited. Eight members of the MNFF gathered at the house of Laldenga to form a party on 22nd October, 1961 and the MNF became a nationalist organisation known as Mizo National Front.³⁹⁴

The idea of the new organization was complete secession from India. Faced with this new ethnicity, a political ideology was formulated with various goals, such as, to serve supreme sovereignty and to unite all Mizos (and their inhabited areas) to live under one political boundary, to elevate and develop the Mizo position to the highest degree, and for the preservation and preservation of Christianity. Meanwhile, the party leaders made contact with the agents of East Pakistan and the Naga enemies and went to East Pakistan to draw up plans for an insurgency. An MNF unit was set up in each village to recruit volunteers to reinforce their activities. By February 1966, MNF had intensified its activities and the party decided to launch an armed revolt by declaring Mizoram's independence on March 5, 1966. Immediately the district was declared a disturbed area under the Assam Disturbed Areas Act 1955. The Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur Special Power Act 1958 were also enforced in the area.

³⁹⁴Mary Vanlalthanpuii, *Womens in Action: The Mizo National Front Movement 1966-1986*, New Delhi, Zuuban Publishers Pvt.Ltd, 2019, p.6

When Indian troops entered the district, MNF leaders and numerous volunteers in East Pakistan perished. Serious efforts were made by government and non-governmental organizations undertaken to bring the nation state and the MNF together for negotiations. The historic Memorandum of Settlement was finally signed on June 30, 1986 between the Government of India and the MNF.³⁹⁵

4.2 A War to the Death: Mizo National Army & Dying During the *Rambuai* (Troubled) Years

There are different perspectives on death and dying during the “Nationalist Revolutionary Movement” i.e the twenty years of *Rambuai*.³⁹⁶ The MNF or the National Armies’ perspective was somehow different from the perspective of the common masses depending on their affiliation and loyalty to the movement and the ideology of the party. There are divergent and contradictory views among those who had experienced the *rambuai* period. Also there are differing views and perception among the contemporaries and those generations in the post- *rambuai* period. Historiography leans heavily on political views, ethic categories, heroism, betrayal, war crimes, and victimhood. In such diverse perspective, narration often distorted and cannot be settled. Sometime the movement produces multiple narrator who saw the movement as a triumph or a betrayal, failure and shame or glorious campaign which was still shrouded with unsettled common assumption about the struggles.³⁹⁷ The martyr narratives told of the selflessness, courage and patriotism of the Mizo National Armies. Since the long period of *rambuai* years, commemoration in the form of state rituals, a special burial site and erection of memorials, eulogies in the form of poetry & songs, memoirs were kept alive. The idea of Mizo nationalism and its element of violent antagonism towards the state subscribed by the MNF which resulted in the death of many Mizo National Armies and civilians was a very

³⁹⁵Hmingthanzuali, “Memories Trauma and Resistance: Mizo Womens Narratives on Rambuai” in Lalhlimpuii Pachuau & Rosie Vanlalruati Ralte (eds.), *Revisiting Rambuai* , Guwahati, Assam, LBS Publication, 2019 p.147.

³⁹⁶C.Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, *Rambuai Literature*, Aizawl, Lengchawn Press, 2014. p.xv.

³⁹⁷Willem Van Schendel, “A War within a War, Mizo Rebels and The Bangladesh Liberation Struggle”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Oct 2015, p.1, available from (PDF) A War Within a War: Mizo rebels and the Bangladesh liberation struggle (researchgate.net) (accessed: 23 January 2021).

intricate issue in the history of the Mizo that has been played out in the post-independent political scenario where the narrative on death and martyrdom has been an important issue for political gains and legitimacy as well it has become an issue for political tussle between opposing parties. Martyrs have long been lauded as effective tools of mass persuasion. Once firmly identified with Christian faith, the martyr has emerged within the secular world of politics and, in particular, within states embroiled in revolution. There are conflicting views on Martyrdom, whether it should be extended to civilians in the attempt to justify the unprecedented scale of violent atrocities leading to fatality on the hands of both the nationalists and the Indian Army.

At the beginning, the MNF volunteers were called Mizo National Volunteers (MNV). But after the armed revolt, the MNF were divided into two- the combatant force called Mizo National Army (MNA), and the reserved force called the Mizo National Volunteers (MNV). The MNA were fully armed while the MNV was a body organised throughout the whole Mizo District who were politically trained or indoctrinated to propagate the party's programmes. The MNV was further divided into three groups. Group A consisted of young men who underwent military and political training ready to join combatant force whenever necessary. Group B consisted of women, trained in nursing, signalling and were trained to use arms in case of emergency. Group C comprised of children and aged people who were always ready to render free services in any possible manner.³⁹⁸ Armies and volunteers recruited in the MNF movement were given the epithet *Hnam Pasaltha Rammu* (Brave warriors in traditional Mizo Society). In traditional Mizo society a *Pasaltha* was always considered to be brave, who possessed a distinct quality of sheer strength and courage to save the village from wild beast or enemies. The word *pasaltha* is common in connection with big game hunting and sometimes may be a warrior too; confronting wild animals and enemy respectively.³⁹⁹ They were highly valued and admired in the Mizo society as they function as the village vanguard from

³⁹⁸Chawngsailova, *Ethnic National Movement in the Role of the MNF*, Aizawl, Mizoram Publication Board, 2007, pp.189-190

³⁹⁹Orestes Rosanga, 'Theorising The Concept of Mizo Hero: An Indigenous Perspective in Revisiting Mizo Heroes,' *Historical Journal of Mizoram*, vol-xvii, 2017, pp.27-28.

all sort of external threat. In the context of Mizo tradition *Rammu* means to be engaged in hunting or raiding expedition.⁴⁰⁰ Etymology of the word *Pasaltha* and *Rammu* has a persuasive and impressive effect and impinged on the how the popular discourse has been made in the *Rambuai* period as the idea and meaning has been derived from tradition Mizo notion of heroes in the society whom were revered and endorsed. Traditional notions of sacrifice, martyrdom and heroism were adopted and demonstrated the spirit of traditional *pasaltha rammu* and pledged to give up their lives in the service of an imagined Mizo nation. The MNF successfully wove it within the nationalist discourse of *pasaltha* by naming their army battalions carrying the names of Mizo *pasaltha* such as *Vanapa*, *Chawngbawla*, *Taitesena*, to name a few. The MNF in their homecoming are revered with the same status in continuity with the old tradition of acknowledging the sacrifice and valour of the *hnampasaltha*.⁴⁰¹



Figure 4.1: A banner welcoming 'MNA' at Sairang, 1986.
Source: Sawichhunga, Ex-MNA.

⁴⁰⁰'Rammu' in James Herbert Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, Kolkata, Ramakanta Chakrabarty General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, 4th Reprint, 2008,p 378.

⁴⁰¹Roluahpuia, 'Politics for Peace and The Peaceful Silence' [website], 2020, para.17,https://www.india-seminar.com/2020/732/732_roluahpuia.htm, (accessed, 27 July, 2021).

The MNF movement since its inception has drawn support from men and women as active participants. Before the outbreak of the conflict, the MNF started a grassroots mobilization by recruiting volunteers at the village level. In fact, the social base of the MNF was characterized by its mass based support. The literate and illiterate, the young and old, flocked in numbers to join the movement that put at awe the more established political parties such as the Mizo Union (MU) of the time.⁴⁰² The MNF leadership was quite adept in mobilising the sentiment of the Mizo and obtaining mass support for their cause. They adopted several tactics and methods like propaganda campaign, issuing of pamphlets, leaflets, press-hand-out etc. The MNF made a mass campaign throughout the length and breadth of the Mizo District; skilfully exploit the ethno-cultural differences of the Mizo against *Vai*, and spread hatred and mutual distrust. Several pamphlets, booklets and leaflets, etc like “Mizoram Marches Towards Freedom” by Laldenga, “Exodus Politics” by Lalhmingthanga, “Mizoram Politics” by Tlangchhuaka, “Government of Mizoram” by S. Lianzuala, “*MNF Thiltumte Hrilhfhahna*” (in Mizo) issued by the MNF Headquarters.⁴⁰³

A volunteer was formed towards the end of October 1963; more than 100 volunteers enrolled their names by the end of December that year. The year 1964 and 1965 was declared a year for volunteer drive, apart from Aizawl and Lunglei town, a drive was organised in almost all the villages during these years. By 1965 Volunteers were organised and constituted in a more structured hierarchical form and was named ‘Mizo National Volunteer’. By the end of 1965 Volunteers recruit from different villages had numbered fifteen thousand and were grouped into fifty Battalions.⁴⁰⁴ After the 1966 November -December Parliament, Brigade were reduced to two; namely the Dagger Brigade and the Lion Brigade with seven Battalion under Brigade and the eighth battalion was added in the later years. These Battalions were named after the Mizo *Pasaltha*.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰²Roluahpuia, ‘Politics for Peace and The Peaceful Silence’, para.12.

⁴⁰³ Chawngsailova, *Ethnic National Movement in the Role of the MNF*, p.49.

⁴⁰⁴R. Zamawia, *Zofate Zinkawngah-Zalenna Mei a Mit Tur a Nilo*, Aizawl, 2007, R. Zamawia, 2007, pp.236-239.

⁴⁰⁵C. Zama, *Nun Hlantu Pasaltha Te*, Aizawl, Mizoram Publication Board, 2019, p.13.

Due to the lack of systematic records and the inconvenience to obtain detailed records during the conflict, it is not possible to figure out the exact number of MNA who lost their lives during the 20 years *Rambuai* (Troubled Years). In the martyr's cemetery there were 1563 names of fallen MNV inscribed, since there were many unrecovered bodies of those soldiers temporarily buried and lost in the battle field, the number may be far more from the names inscribed in the martyr's cemetery.⁴⁰⁶ Recovery and re-burial of fallen MNA who died in the *rambuai* has been a project of the Ex-MNA, under this project many more remains were recovered and the number increased as many more unrecovered and unnoticed fallen armies were recovered retrieved and recorded. In 2016, the MNF has updated the record of the lists of martyrs, the number increased to 1702 martyrs in the lists.⁴⁰⁷ The MNA army long roll records suggest that throughout the twenty years of *Rambuai*, the brutal warfare between the revolutionary nationalists (MNA) and the Indian Army took many lives of the MNA. Majority of the death of MNA or volunteers were due to heavy gunshot during an army encounter, ambush, bombs and incendiaries and other violent action etc. Apart from this there are a few MNA and volunteers died from several illness, diseases, murder, accident etc.⁴⁰⁸

The revolutionary movement may have secular goals, although it is widely recognized that deep patterns of religious thought often underlie how revolutionaries understand the behaviour of their own movements. The willingness of MNA and Volunteers to sacrifice their lives for greater purposes links their action to the basic form of religion. The Martyr's monument sent the message that the former revolutionary would conquer death and live forever in the hearts and mind of his compatriots through sacrifices for the cause of the nation.⁴⁰⁹ Zoramthanga stated that "*Zalenna Sualtute*" (freedom fighters) has the slogan "*Pathian leh kan Ram*

⁴⁰⁶C. Lalhmanmawia, 'Perspectives on Human Rights in Mizoram: A Critical Study', PhD Thesis, Mizoram University, 2006, p.

⁴⁰⁷Sub-Committee on Documentation, Archive & Award, *Zoram Chhantu Martarte*, Aizawal, MNF General Headquarters, 2016, pp.i-xii.

⁴⁰⁸Documentary of Mizoram War of Independence 1966 to 1986, *Mizo National Movement-MNA Army Long Roll*, MNF General Headquarters, 2017, pp.1207-1316.

⁴⁰⁹ Shukla Sanyal, 'Martyrdom in Revolutionary Nationalism: Mourning, Memory and Cultural Politics', in Ishita Banerjee Dube and Sarvani Gooptu, (eds.), *On Modern Indian Sensibilities: Culture, Politics, History*, Milton Park Oxon, Routledge, 2018, p.130.

tan,”(For God and our Country) they embraced Christianity at the centre of their cause, and paid heed to Christian faith, Church and God. Even in underground, wherever the place may be, they build church and a service was organised.⁴¹⁰ This testifies that they somehow based the revolutionary movement on Christianity, fighting for the cause of the Mizo Nation. Vanlalbela an Ex-MNA stated that the MNF slogan right from the inception is “For God and Our Country”. He assumed that around 70% of those enrolled in the MNF were inspired by the religious sentiments which made them willing to sacrifice their life for the nation. He further elaborated that the MNF underground were keen worshipper and most of them were religious. In his narration about religiosity of the MNF, when Revival broke out among ‘Z’ and ‘L’ Battalion they often proclaimed that ‘ *We are martyr, I now possessed the spirit of courage to become a martyr, which will be revealed someday through dead, therefore I’m now a martyr, it is impending and I dare to be a martyr.*’⁴¹¹

The movement was extensively based on religious thought, entwined with what the MNF has termed ‘Mizo Nationalism’, as they were inculcating among the masses the idea of religious nationalism. This has greatly shaped on how death was perceived among the National Armies and the masse those who have subscribed the ideology of the MNF. The blood of the so called martyrs dying in the fight over the Mizo claims for full sovereignty called for their sacrifices for the preservation of a sacred moral religious order. The nationalist ideologies also relied heavily on Christian imagery and doctrine to justify killing and being killed in the service of a higher good. The construction and labeling of heroic figures and conceptualizing the idea of Martyrdom in revolutionary nationalism established a context for imagining innovative ways for making the sense of the so called ‘martyrs’ death.

R. L Thanzawna stated that:

“The Mizo youth were inspired by the Mizo Nationalism, and the faith that they have to fight for the survival of Christianity, like the Muslims have been fighting their

⁴¹⁰Zoramthanga, *Mizo Hnam Movement History*, Aizawl, Zoramthanga, 2016, p.64.

⁴¹¹Vanlalbela, ‘Arakan Harhna’ in *Documents of Mizo National Movement: Documentary of Mizoram War of Independence, 1966-1986*, Kolkata, MNF General Headquarters, 2017, pp.462-468.

*'jehad'. MNF had propagated that they are fighting a war of God. This thought kept the morale of the Mizo boys who had joined the MNF and its volunteer force high and made them willing to suffer and even die. 'They would be considered as heroes and martyrs by all Mizos'-they were told.'*⁴¹²

All the Mizo National armies and volunteers at the time of taking oath of allegiance placed their hands on the Bible. The tri colour, navy blue, red and white horizontal cross on the National flag has Christian elements. The tri colour symbolized Trinity and the red horizontal cross represented the Christian Cross. "*Ro min relsak ang che*"⁴¹³ a hymn composed by Rokunga was officially declared as a Mizo national song, but it was shortened by taking out the first two lines from the first stanza, and last six lines from the third stanza were:

Aw, Nang kan Lal kan Pathian, (O thou art God our King)

I hming ropui ber se ;(Glory be your name)

Kan ram kan hnam min hruaia 'n, (To guide our land and the nation)

Nang chauh kan thlang a che,(You are the only one we choose)

Chhunglam leh pawn lam hmelma, (Enemy from within and external)

Indona thleng mah se; (When battle breaks out)

Hneh zel turin min pui la. (Help was to win and)

*Ro min relsak ang che. (Reign upon us)*⁴¹⁴

The Oath of Allegiance is an indicative of the Mizo National armies and volunteer's commitment to sacrifice for the nation. The volunteers signed a form where they pledged to sacrifice their body, all their heart without any reservation for the freedom struggle. They also pledged to steadfast and abide in times of different hardship even to its extremity even to death.⁴¹⁵ Thus, the idea and emotion that surrounded the death of an MNA into martyrdom were expressed in popular discourse among the MNF regime. Since the beginning of the movement the idea of

⁴¹²C.G Verghese and R.L Thanzawna, *A History of the Mizos*, vol 2, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House PVT LTD, 1997, p.21.

⁴¹³R. Zamawia, *Zofate Zinkawngah*, p.238.

⁴¹⁴R.Zamawia, pp.243-244.

⁴¹⁵R.Zamawia, p.238

sacrifice for the nation was inculcated among those influenced by the ideology of the MNF. In this subliminal expression of war or violence against external force, self sacrifice confers a kind of abstract immortality. The acceptance of death and sacrifice a was a major theme in the revolutionary discourse, since dying is anticipated, the armies and volunteers under took and resorted violence to liberate the ‘imagined nation’ which is believed a sacrifice for one’s own nation.



Figure 4.2: Col. Lalrawnliana laying a wreath at the Memorial Stone built in commemoration of the Martyrs during a state ritual.

Source: Col. Lalrawnliana (Ex-MNA)

The Army Chief declared a notice that a martyr day to be observed from September, 1980 in commemoration of those National Armies and Volunteers who gave their lives in the name of the nation. Order was given to different battalions who were placed at different locations. The national flag was flying at half mast, a Stone parade was held in front of a national stone erected in a tribute to the martyrs. A special ceremony was held where speeches was delivered followed by a mass

prayer. A commander and some civilians hung a *parthi* (flower garland) at the memorial. The name of every martyr listed and written down was displayed at every headquarters.⁴¹⁶

An Ex MNV re-told that when an MNA died in war or injury or by any other means, rituals were performed on behalf of the fallen army, by the MNV in East Pakistan, in the Independence day of 1971 a special ceremony was observed for the Martyrs in the Army Headquarters which he claimed “*Ram leh Hnam Tana Nunpete*” (those who sacrificed their lives for the nation and the land) he further stated that as soon as the trumpet was played in honour of the MNF soldiers who had laid their lives for the nation, the crowd suddenly silent as if they had vanished. Some high officials of the MNF put some flowers in the memorial stone. To quote the author “*the fallen comrades were reminding us time and again to continue their unfulfilled task from heaven*”.⁴¹⁷ R. Zamawia recounts the death of his comrades Malaythanga and Thlenga in an encounter with the Indian army at the suburb of Tualpui village in 1968 where two MNV were killed. The dead bodies were laid in the village yard and were not allowed to cover with cloth. But one of the VC member deny the idea of leaving the dead bodies uncovered in the yard which was not a Mizo custom and inhumane, he then covered the bodies with a cloth and brought to Lianbawia’s house rather than leaving in the yard and gave a formal funeral according to a Mizo rituals and customs by the villagers. They were both buried in Tualpui cemetery on 10th July, 1968. After 19 years in 1987 their bones were recovered and brought back to their respective villages. Zamawia further commented that:

“They both fulfilled their pledge; they fought against the subjugation of the Mizo tribe till their last breath and die, it is the subjugation of a tribe which was

⁴¹⁶ Lalrawnliana, *Zoram Zalen A Sual*, vol X, Aizawl, Lalrawnliana, 2002, pp.149-150.

⁴¹⁷ Laithuama & Zoramthanga, *MNF te East Pakistan/ Bangladesh a an Rammut Lai, 1970-74 Chanchin Gaihnawm*, R.M Press Aizawl, 1997 p.16.

contradicted to nature and God's design upon the Mizo tribe. They gave their lives For God and the Country"⁴¹⁸

An Ex-MNA narrates one encounter with the combined force of The East Pakistan Rifles and the Indian Army on 10.9.1971 in the Chittagong Hill Tracts where two MNV were killed in a gunfight; he described the death of their comrades as being a sacrifice for the nation, leaving the trouble and sorrow of an unforgiving world and will rest in heaven for eternity. He further stated that, due to the remoteness of the location transportation of their dead bodies was impossible; they buried their bodies in a Mizo Cemetery in Rangamatti.⁴¹⁹ To quote "*The torch of freedom had took many lives so that all the Mizo will gain freedom, scores of human lives was taken, it is the price we are giving for freedom, we'll continue giving for it, there is nothing much for the price of freedom*".⁴²⁰

State funerals for fallen fighters were performed with dignity. The national flag is spread over a coffin during a memorial meeting. Among the most significant rituals was the celebration of Mizoram Independence Day, held on 1st March in commemoration of the Revolt of 1966. At this occasion a wreath was laid at the Memorial to the Departed in Mahmuam in East Pakistan.⁴²¹ On 27th October every year, 'V' Battalion Rising Day was observed, in such ceremony, a memorial stone for the fallen soldiers who had given their lives to the nation were erected. Each of the representatives from Battalion, Company, Platoon and section had laid flower on the memorial stone. This service was followed by a speech from Commanding Officer Lalkunga. And a great feast was prepared which was served in the evening.⁴²²

⁴¹⁸ R. Zamawia, p.588

⁴¹⁹ Laithuama and Zoramthanga, *MNF te East Pakistan/ Bangladesh a an Rammut Lai*, pp.24-25.

⁴²⁰ Laithuama and Zoramthanga, p.26.

⁴²¹ Joy, L.K Pachuau and Willhem Van Schendel, *The Camera As Witness*, p.338.

⁴²² C. Zama, *V Battallion Sulhnu*, Aizawl, Mizoram Publication Board, 2012, p.354.

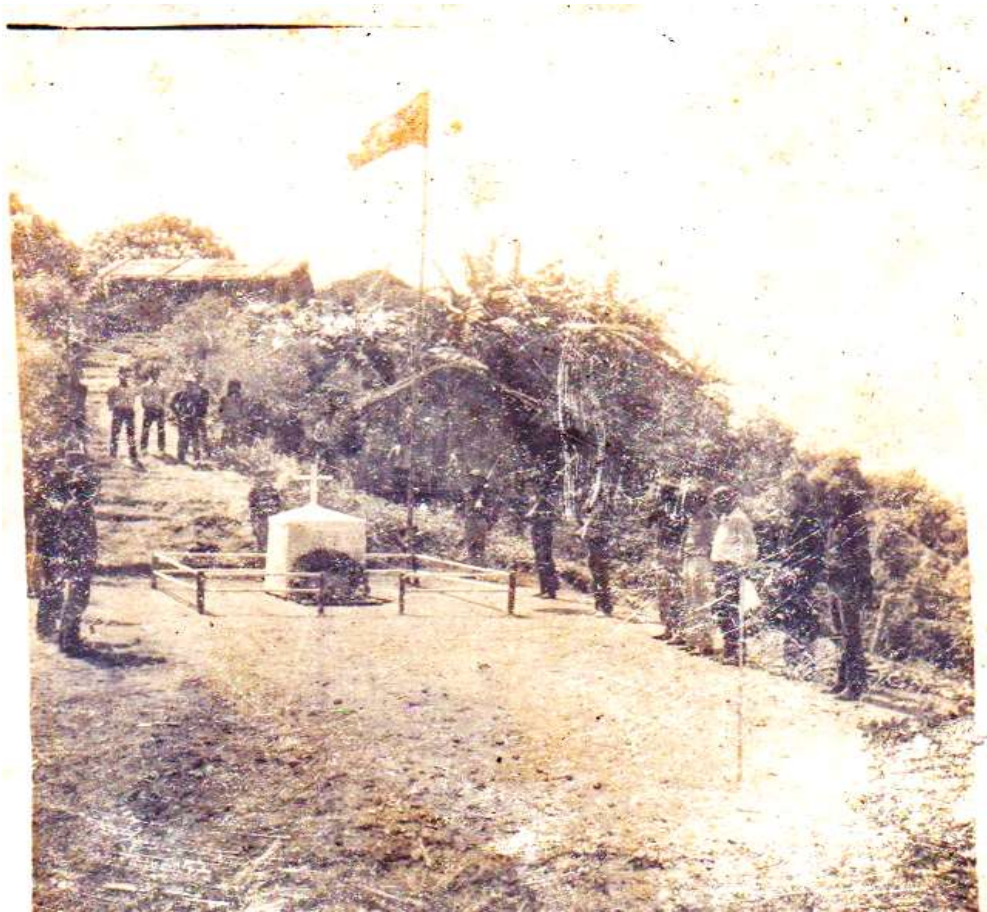


Figure 4.3: Mizo National Armies standing around the Memorial Stone & the National Flag in commemoration of the Martyrs at the Capital. (Circa, late 1960s). Source: Col. Lalrawnliana (Ex-MNA).

Thus, the mourning practices involved the commemoration of political events at the military camp which played the role of visual pedagogy. At a time of political and spiritual crisis these ceremonial discursive practices and symbolic actions attempted to transform military virtues like tenacity, spiritual and physical strength, sacrifice for others, into civil virtues, and to make discursive practices on the population.⁴²³ State ceremonial culture sought the hierarchical structuring of these values and norms in order to overcome the traumas of defeat. The mourning

⁴²³Snezhana Dimitrova, 'The Culture of Death (1915-18) and Its Remembering and Commemorating Through First World War Soldier Monuments in Bulgaria (1917-18)', *Social History*, vol.30, no.2, 2005, p.192, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4287189> (accessed 28 April 2020).

marches, the carrying and raising of military ensigns, the basic content of speeches devoted to those who died on the fields for the nation confirmed the image of the heroic death and the moral individual. The rituals and mourning culture reframed death in elevated terms-morality, duty, honour and fame in order to create such normative structures as noble mourning and patriotic heritage which rationalized and accepted the precious human sacrifices.



Figure 4.4: Dignitaries and the Armies performed ritual in honour of the fallen armies in front of the Memorial Stone at the state capital. (Circa 1968)

Source: Remchhunga (Ex-MNA).

In peaceful times, death is often experienced as a painful, disruptive, and confusing moment that requires individuals to draw on strongly held religious convictions about meaning of life, the fate of the soul, and the stability of an ordered cosmos. During war and conflict, when individuals are called to sacrifice their lives for the good of the nation and prepare for an early, violent end, the religion of nationalism makes a distinctive mark on meaning making efforts circulating throughout public culture. Indeed, the religion of nationalism becomes an integral frame of reference when war breaks out, setting earthly, political conflicts in a

cosmic realm of ultimate good battling ultimate evil. The observation of rituals, creation of memorials, was one concrete innovation in the meaning making of the soldier's death. Thus death created a new form of sacred space which gave material expression to religious sensibilities tied to both Christianity and Nationalism.

Despite mortality from armed conflict, disease and infection had the potential to seriously reduce the numbers of soldiers. Many soldiers died as a result of poor health in camps and makeshift hospitals. As in underground camps there is no adequate supply of clean water, healthy food and sanitation and a hygienic practice was not up to mark. This had made the soldiers vulnerable to several kinds of diseases, equally threatening as enemy.⁴²⁴

By the month of April, 1969 almost all the underground The National Armies and Volunteers had left Mizoram and settled in the then East Pakistan. They were setting up their capital near Chhippui and Mahmuam, Civil Dept, Army HQs and most of the volunteers were positioned in this area. A dispensary was set up in the suburb of Mahmuam which was administered by the Chief Medical Officer with a team of six medical officers and other nine staffs. The Dispensary has twenty beds but can perform only minor operation due to lack of facilities and medical tools. Most of the volunteers had gone underground for many days without proper food and nutrition, many volunteers' health was deteriorating when reaching East Pakistan due to starvation. They had hidden in jungles and deep forest without proper basic amenities. They were soon vulnerable to different health problems, like stomach cramps, malaria, jaundice, skin disease, swollen bodies. It was because of this health problem dispensary was becoming very demanding and full of activity from the very first day. Unfortunately due to shortage of money, the MNF government cannot meet the necessary requirement on medicine supply for the patient, which became the main problem faced by the dispensary. Apart from minor injuries and health problems most of the severe injuries were sent to Rangamati Civil Hospital, Chandraghauna Kristian Hospital and Chittagong Medical College. As medical

⁴²⁴C. Zama, interviewed by Lalchhanhima, 2021, Private Audio Archive, Aizawl.

practitioner was very demanding, a Nurse Training School was setup and headed by a superintendent. A young lad from the volunteers and appointed person from different battalions with a total of twenty seven people had undergone a nurse training in this school.⁴²⁵

As there was not much threat for more than a year in the underground, the year 1970 was marked by increased illness especially malaria and skin disease known as 'dat'. Disease relating to stomach was also prevalent during this period. All these resulted in the flooding of the army headquarter Hospital with patient. Injuries from gunfire, fractured bones and other several injuries and severe illness which cannot be treated in the army hospital were usually sent to Chandraghona Christian hospital. Many illness and injuries were treated in those hospitals while there are some members who had died in the hospitals. Among the MNA, Lt.Col. Chuauding and Capt. Lalrualta died in the hospitals. Due to financial constrains, the health facilities and condition of the MNA was not up to mark, with only a few trained medical practitioners in the underground and a make shift hospitals and small amount of medicine supply. Therefore a number of patients which cannot be treated in the army hospitals were sent to the hospitals in East Pakistan namely Rangamatti Sadar Hospital, Chittagong Medical College and Dacca Medical College.⁴²⁶

Vanmawia who served in the MNF force wrote his famous song "*Ram Eng Mawi Tak Chu A Awm*" during his underground period in East Pakistan. The condition of the Underground forces in deep Jungle was harsh. Vanmawia under the influenced of a terrible war experience along with his excruciating battle with physical sickness in the wilderness and lack of basic amenity and sustenance etc had caused him to gaze towards heaven for hope. Under such circumstance he had a vivid elaboration of his Christian hope which is located in heaven. The central theme of the song was the joy and happiness which would be enjoyed in the afterlife with saviour Jesus.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵C. Zama, *Zalenna Sualtute East Pakistan Ah*, Aizawl, C.Zama, 2019, pp.59-63.

⁴²⁶R. Zamawia, pp.698-699

⁴²⁷C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, *Rambuai Literature*, Aizawl, Lengchhawn Press, 2014, p.59.

4.2.1 The Fallen Soldier's Bodies and Cemetery: A Symbolic Representation

Death poses the greatest challenge to any political regime, and the dead continue to exert considerable effect on the political affairs of the living. However, given that death also invigorates social systems and their value frameworks, polities have long realized the utility of death for both social change and political consolidation. Attempts have been made in this section to look at the Nationalist regime and the so called martyrs and its relationship in constructing a political legitimacy during the *Rambuai* and Post-*Rambuai* politics. Given the centrality of death to cultural value system as well as religion's historical demonstration of the power accruing to those monopolizing its meaning and fears, the ability to harness death is the key political power. Death is routinely employed by political regimes to invigorate collective solidarity and to stimulate unified action. This is evident in many of the Wars that had happened in the world, eg: the world wars where the dead can symbolized the social order evidenced by their remains in mausoleums and war cemetery etc. They were eulogized as martyr; the dead legitimize the policies of the political elite.⁴²⁸

Historically political systems have sought to monopolize violent death, whether by legitimizing deadly force, as in the case of war or by controlling its illegitimate use. Collective remembering has also been very instrumental when the past needs reinterpretation to legitimize the activities or ideologies of the national regime. In this case certain personages must be resurrected and biographies reviewed. On the other hand there may be a political need for the past to be forgotten, which leads to the dead being deindividuated or ignored. Sacred political immanence was invested in the form of dead body, the discourse of martyrdom and post conflict memorialistaion.⁴²⁹ Katherine Verdery set forth the way in which cultural symbolic approach invigorate the accounts of political study by offering a strong argument for the power and value of dead bodies as political symbol. She used the dead bodies/reburial in the Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union since the

⁴²⁸ Michael C.Kearl, *Endings: A Sociology of Death and Dying*, New York, Oxford University Press, pp.296-297.

⁴²⁹ Kearl, *Endings*, pp.298 & 305.

1989 as an analytical tool and recounts the central aspects of post-socialist changes which are encompassed in the political lives of the dead bodies.⁴³⁰ Even though *Rambuui* served a different purpose and context there are similar attributes to how Verdery has used bodies, reburial in giving a new meaning to uncover the political power of the dead bodies and its remembrance.

Digging deeper into the history of the *Rambuui* and post-*rambuui* discourse on the fallen Mizo Nationalist Army, one may have come to realize that the nationalists' agenda have been accompanied by many activities around the dead bodies, and re-burial. There may be a politics concerning them and bear significance and may also be different from other times and place. This section investigates the corpse of fallen soldier's bodies, exhumation and re-burial as having a political significance in the Nationalist political agenda during the *Rambuui* and Post-*Rambuui* Politics.

Guided by a Christian concept of redemption and resurrection, the body was understood as physical, not just metaphysical, realities, and therefore the body, even in death and dissolution preserved a surviving identity. Therefore the body required sacred reverence and care and the absence of such solicitude would indicate a demoralized and rapidly demoralizing community. The body was the repository of human identity in two senses: it represented the intrinsic selfhood and individuality of a particular human, and at the same time it incarnated the very humanness of that identity—the promise of eternal life that differentiates human remains from the carcasses of animals, who possess neither consciousness of death nor promise of either physical or spiritual immortality. Such understandings of the body and its place in the universe mandated attention even when life had fled; it required what always seemed to be called decent burial, as well as rituals fitting for the dead.⁴³¹ Apart from this universal notion on the body, Verdery opined that dead bodies have properties that make them particularly effective political symbols. They are thus excellent means for accumulating something essential to political transformation, in

⁴³⁰ Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of the Dead Bodies: Reburial and Post-Socialist Change*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1999, pp.

⁴³¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, New York, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2008, p.78.

short it can be a site of political profit, political legitimacy etc.⁴³² Verdery tracks the political significance of reburials in post socialist Romania and former Yugoslavia. These reburials may be of famous or anonymous figures, long dead or recently dead, but the relocating of their corpses has played a role in the movement of rebuilding national identities, rewriting histories, reorienting time, and reinforcing national stories of suffering and justice. Dead bodies, the author argues, serve as particularly powerful symbols stirred by psychological needs intensified in times of great upheaval, such as the postsocialist transition of the 1990s. In an extraordinarily ingenious exegesis, she shows how this phenomenon has helped recast national histories.

The bodies of dead MNA were valued; it was the duty of the surviving friends to collect the dead bodies. The recovery of military fatalities was the most daring task undergone during the conflict. As due to shortage of fighting men and experts, formal operation of recovery was not made during the movement. It was done by the fighting force in the field amidst the gunfire. Combat recovery was the most common form of recovering dead comrades used by the MNF Volunteers during the war. It is regarded as the most heroic and dangerous means of recovery. It is conducted under fire by those bonded to the dead. The notion of repossessing the dead was a command, as is evident from interviews and writings of surviving Ex-MNA the return of dead soldiers was their first priority.

Captain Lalthlana an Ex-MNA wrote the story of how they recovered their friends' dead bodies that were killed by the Indian army in 12th February, 1968. Five of their friends were attacked at their camp while they were sleeping in the early morning hour around 3 pm. In this attack two MNA had succumbed to injuries but survived the gun attack and fled away but the other five volunteers had died instantly. He stated that when the news reached their Company they resolved that the dead bodies of their comrade who had died in the hands of their enemy should be recovered by any means. The recovery and bringing back of their comrades bodies

⁴³² Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Post Colonial Change*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1999, p.33.

was not an easy task. Villagers had informed them that the India army anticipating the recovery of the dead bodies were guarding and night watch the dead bodies and they feared that it might cause a sever repercussion upon the villagers if they try recovering the bodies. As requested by the villagers they have waited for eight days, in the eighth day they planned to retrieve the bodies and moved out. Fortunately the Indian armies had withdraw their surveillance and left the scene, bodies were recovered, but eight days has passed since they were killed, the bodies starts decomposition, bloat and blood containing foam leaks from the mouth and nose and emitted distinct odour. The bodies were soon kept in a coffin and transported back to Phaizau village. A large grave was dug and five bodies were buried.⁴³³

The recovery of soldiers' remains during and shortly after battle is known as combat recovery. However, it is an unfortunate fact of war that often some are not recovered at or near the time of death. The bodies reflect the ravages of weapons and the effects of the passage of time and exposure to nature. Some of the dead lie in shallow individual graves, and many are hidden by brush or entombed in shelled bunkers and foxholes. They may not be found for years or decades, if at all. Then, too, some bodies are inaccessible—deep in the ocean—and some are simply destroyed, forever beyond any meaningful recovery.⁴³⁴ Carrying out the promise to military service personnel to find and bring them back home only partially fulfils the soldier's obligation. Also to identify their remains, for it is a name that transforms a casket full of biological material and minerals into a son, brother, husband, and father, or daughter, sister, wife, and mother. Confidence in the identification of remains helps the bereaved to face the reality that their loved one is dead. But even if the soldier dead had no family whatsoever to whom a name would be important, they consider their comrades to be family and desire that they be brought home and buried with all due recognition.⁴³⁵

⁴³³Lalthlana, *Vangvat Kai Lai Nite*, Aizawl, Lengchhawn Press, 2021, pp.74-77.

⁴³⁴Michael Sledge, *Soldier Dead: How We Recover, Identify, Bury and Honour our Military Fallen*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2005, p.66

⁴³⁵Michael Sledge *Soldier Dead*, p.96.

C. Chawngkunga an Ex-MNV had recalled how they had recovered their fallen comrades' bodies in the *Minpui Dai* Ambush, which took place on 4th July, 1966 where three MNA were killed in the encounter with the Indian Army. The next morning after the ambush had taken place, they become aware that three of their comrades were missing and soon learned that, Major Chhunlinga, Tv.Sangkima and Tv. Hrangtluanga were missing. A plan was made to recover and retrieve their friend's whereabouts and moved out to the place where the ambush had taken place. After climbing a steep and thick forest they found Chhunlinga's dead body. As the Indian armies were still nearby they have had to move steadily, with no sound and unrecognised. He further stated that it was a rainy day; and they had to climb and traverse steep, thick forest hiding from their enemy carrying a dead body. When evening was approaching and will be soon dark, they reached a small flat area and planned to rest for a while. But darkness soon fell and they made an effort to bury the corpse in that place. They dug a small grave only a feet depth intended only to conceal the body. A leaves were laid on the floor of the grave and the body was laid and covered with dust. A small Christian symbol cross was placed on top of the grave and a simple funeral was held where the author recited a short life story of the fallen soldier, followed by The Lord's Prayer. Sangkima's body was recovered and was temporarily placed near the river Khangpui as the body will be recovered soon and will be transported to the deceased village Tawipui. Tv. Hrangthantluanga's body was recovered only after the Indian army had left the scene in a peaceful state.⁴³⁶

In the underground in East Pakistan, MNA were not having a separate burial ground or cemetery and they often use the closest villages' burial ground. In some cases, in times of intense combat with no permanent settlement, they buried fallen soldiers' bodies at a yard near the temporary camp. In some cases of intense combat in the wilderness, there are many incidents where the bodies of fallen soldiers were not recovered and left in the jungle due to intense threat from their enemy.⁴³⁷ There are some incident in the initial years of the outbreak before the MNA went

⁴³⁶ C.Chawngkunga interviewed by Lalchhanhima, 2021, Private Audio Archive, Aizawl.

⁴³⁷ C. Zama, interviewed by Lalchhanhima, 2021, Private Audio Archive, Aizawl

underground, the dead bodies of MNA were recovered by the villagers at the place of encounter. C.T Thangluaia recalled his memories in one of the incident where The MNF Volunteer Camp was shock and surrounded by the Indian Army. In this incident 5 MNA were killed. In such situation recovering the bodies of fallen comrades was a terrifying task, amidst crossfire and incendiaries. After the gunfight was over the Indian Armies instructed the civilians to recover the dead bodies of the MNA for a proper burial. Since the MNV camp was burnt after the encounter, as the dead bodies were severely consumed by fire, it became charred and was hard to recognise. The arm of one MNV was chopped off by a gunshot; the loose arm which was not quickly recovered was stole by wild animals. The author stated that such incident was terrifying, the horrible way of dying and the way the bodies was recovered intensified the pain inflicted upon their relatives. All the bodies were buried in the villages' cemetery and a *Lungphun* ceremony was held with erected headstone on their grave.⁴³⁸

There was one incident in 1967 where MNF Volunteer named Romawia from Khawhai village was killed by the Indian army on one of the encounter, whose body was recovered by nearby villagers from Riangtlei. All the villagers were summoned whether they knew or can identify who was the deceased was, but none of the villagers knew him. And then the VC ordered the village youth to dig his grave; as it was dug in a hurried way under the command and surveillance from the Indian army, the grave was not fit with the deceased height as the deceased was a tall man. But there was no other option but to bury him. After 7 days it was recognised that the deceased was from Khawhai village and the village youth were planning to recover and transport back the dead body of the fallen MNA to their village. As by the time of burial performed by Riangtlei village they were forced to be hurry and even the body was not wrapped with cloth. Under the guidance of Y.MA the body of Romawia was dug out and transferred back to Khawhai.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸C.T Thangluaia, Rambuai Laia Hliappui Khua in *Ram Buai Lai Leh Kei*, vol.2, Aizawl, Mizoram Upa Pawl General Headquarters, 2010, pp.157-159.

⁴³⁹Vanlalchhunga, 'Buai Lai Riangtlei Khua' in *Rambuai Lai Leh Kei*, vol.2, Aizawl, MUP General Headquarters, 2014, p. 287.

C. Zama had recount the death of two MNA in an encounter with the 9th Bihar Regiment platoon at the Old village of Tualbung, near Ngopa. Two bodies of two MNA was recovered and transported back to Ngopa village along with the dead bodies of Indian Armies. The villagers asked for permission to bury two Mizo MNA according to the Mizo customs and were permitted. A large grave was dug by the youth and a funeral ceremony was held at the village graveyard. A farewell song was sung by the crowd and it goes like this:

“Aw i hming a dai loving, (Your name will not be forgotten)

Thang leh thar chhuan tam leng mah se; (Even after many generations)

I ram chhana i tawrhna hian a man a tawk e. (The price you paid for your nation is worthy)

Chham ang i zalna piallei hmun leh (the grave where you were laid to rest)

Zan mu chhing lo doral karah kan tuanna mual (all the comradeship in the battle field)

*Tuai ang tharin nghilhni i awm loving” (will not be forgotten, all alive in our hearts).*⁴⁴⁰

Finding and recovering the bodies of fallen National Armies and Volunteers in order to provide burial in a martyr’s cemetery or return to their families was a major task towards the end of the *rambuai*. During the whole *rambuai* years almost all of the recovered dead bodies were buried in temporary cemeteries in different parts of the underground camps, war zone in different areas of East Pakistan, Burma and different parts of Mizoram, among them there are numerous remains which are unaccounted for. Complex political reason motivated the return of the bodies of a dead soldier. Michael Sledge argue that at a symbolic level the soldier’s body became the physical representative, or envoy of his ‘imagined nation’ embodies its ideology, political beliefs and culture. He further elaborated that the human body is the most readily available image of a social system.⁴⁴¹ The search for remains of

⁴⁴⁰C. Zama, *Zoram A Tap*, Aizawl, The Author, 2008, pp.151-152.

⁴⁴¹Sledge, p.26.

those killed many years ago is a subject that is highly charged, both emotionally and politically, and there is a sharp division and view among different sections of the society. Gaining the ownership of the dead bodies of fallen soldiers is of highly importance. Right from the beginning of the movement, the MNF party often used the body of a fallen soldier as tool for legitimising and mitigating the circumstances of the movement. The exercise of power and control over remains, was important issue in the *rambuai*, wherein put their interests significantly on the body. It has been noted that the remains of the dead carry weight with the living and that the dead mean different things to different people. This issue brings into mind to whom do the dead belong? Ownership applied not only to physical remains but also to information about the dead and to their memory. The interpretation of the martyrs body and remains gave an insight into social discourses regarding the dead and these discussions assume many shapes, some verbal, and many visual.

On the eve of peace settlement with the centre, when peace become certain, it was decided that the remains of every fallen soldier who were given temporary burial were to be exhumed and brought home. Every Battalion were instructed to conduct a recovery procedure, this is to unearth and collect the skeletal remains and bones of the fallen soldier who were temporarily buried in nearby camps and villages. This is a tedious work which require strenuous effort on the part of the surviving armies who has done the recovery work. Some were buried for a long period and passed a complete decomposition stage and remained skeletal. While some were buried only for a few months, those bodies have to undergo a process where the bones were separated from the flesh. Each specific bone were identified with the person's identity where sheet of steel bearing the name of each of the dead soldier were attached and wrapped with a bamboo string and put in a small casket solely designed for transportation. The interviewee had stated that the V Battalion were having numerous corpses to collect which was a painstaking task, therefore every Battalion

were instructed and seven members from each Battalion were detailed to help the collection of bones.⁴⁴²

“Their bones well packed in Mizo National flag-draped caskets transported homeward bound-the roars of joy and sorrows were mixed-melodies that rent the sky once upon a time in the mid-80s. Honourable homage paid to them-adorned with wreaths by the survivors and the over ground civilians in a suitable-spectacular place dedicated for them-MARTAR-TE THLANMUAL (The Martyr’s Cemetery) somewhere in the outskirts of Luangmual Remna Run, Aizawl. Martyrs, who laid down their lives for a cause they believed best, deserved such State Honors. As yet, epitaphs could not hold their dreams and deeds together.”⁴⁴³



Figure 4.5: Caskets containing the corpse of the fallen Mizo National Armies & Volunteers were welcomed with honour at Hnahthial. Source: Remchhunga (Ex-MNA).

⁴⁴²Lalsangluara interviewed by Lalchhanhiam, 2021, Private Audio Archive, Aizawl.

⁴⁴³Lalthangfala Sailo, ‘Epilogue’ in Chawngsailova, *Ethnic National Movement in the Role of MNF*, Aizawl, Mizoram Publication Board, 2007.



Figure 4.6 Caskets of fallen Mizo National Armies & Volunteers reached Remna Run, Luangmual Aizawl. Source: Col. Lalrawnlina (Ex-MNA).



Figure 4.7: A funeral ceremony was held at Remna Run, Luangmual Aizawl June, 1986. Source: Remchhunga (Ex-MNA).

In Aizawl, it was a solace and a combination of sheer bliss and grief that washed over the towns anticipating the return of their revolutionary heroes. Students from all over Mizoram were showing up to offer their services to the grand welcome

for the MNF. In Aizawl, hundreds of volunteers crammed the rooms, preparing posters making paper garlands, wreaths, collecting donations and finalising other details of the programme, right down to which group would sing what song. In the villages along the route of the returning guerrillas, celebrations were already in progress. The MNF had chosen to take their time in getting into Aizawl for the welcome function and were stopping at every village, attending local receptions and accepting food prepared by the villagers. Villages were full of black and white flags - black for the dead and white for peace.

And for every Mizo, the returnees were heroes. In Aizawl, it was a time for laughter and tears, for reminiscing and rejoicing. As exuberant Mizos thronged the capital's Main Bazaar last fortnight to welcome their heroes home, the narrow streets of the state capital came alive with a spectacle the like of which they had not seen in years. Surging crowds crammed the narrow lanes, choked the congested marketplace, perched atop ledges and parapets and leaned from windows and balconies. At the centre of the bazaar was a platform made of a row of trucks. The 500-odd MNF guerrillas followed with 47 shrouded coffins carrying their dead, the cheers turned to wails and the historic moment became a moment of catharsis for the Mizo people. Flooding swarms packed the thin paths, stifled the blocked commercial center, roosted on edges and railings and inclined from windows and overhangs. At the focal point of the market was a stage made of a column of trucks.

An anonymous writer has expressed his live experience in the event:

“Villagers gathered at Aizawl to welcome the returning MNF Volunteers. Guests from different villages were swarming the Aizawl town prior to the date of their arrival. Finally on the day of their arrival on 2nd August, 1986, I have never seen such a huge crowd in Aizawl. Crowds were singing “Zawlkhawpui zopui kurin a tliak hlei lawng e, Hnam sipai kan hmuahna tlang liai lui” ... People from different villages and different age group had gathered at the Aizawl town to welcome the returning of the MNF Volunteers along with the remains of their fallen comrades. Among them crowd many of them were the families and relatives of the

deceased MNA & Volunteers whose physical remains were only skeletal remains transported home in a small casket. When realizing the fate of those families and relatives in the midst i feel sympathy for them. At 2 'O' clock in the afternoon a white colour shrouded jeep was running from Sairang towards Aizawl which was a pilot jeep, announcing that the MNF from Tactical Headquarters would arrive after 10 minutes. Finally a vehicle hanging a long piece of black cotton arrived, which was followed by an announcement that the car is carrying the corpse of Hnam Pasaltha (heroes) and listed out their names. Suddenly one old man burst out crying 'Mama im still alive! Aren't you calling me back and say Pa, are you fine'. Many of the crowd started crying out on the arrival of the corpse, mourning the loss."⁴⁴⁴



Figure 4.8: Casket of the MNV Source: R. Zamawia (Ex-MNA)

⁴⁴⁴Anonymous author, 'Ka Ropui Ni' in *Rambuai Lai Leh Kei*, Aizawl, MUP General Headquarters, 2010, pp.83-85.



Figure 4.9: Caskets of fallen MNV reached Aizawl after peace was restored in 30th June, 1986. Source: Col Lalrawnliana (Ex-MNA).

While the MNA who die have brothers-in-arms who look after them, back home are brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, nephews, nieces, cousins, wives, sons, daughters, fathers, and mothers who may have nothing at all. It is difficult for families to cope with the death of a loved one in any circumstance; it is more difficult when the death is premature and violent, and it is most difficult if they have no body to mourn and bury. Soldiers who die are usually young men in the prime of physical life; they are not octogenarians for whom death may be a form of release or awaited transition, and their deaths, because of how, where, and when they die, present special problems. Families have been reluctantly accepting symbols in place of the bodies of deceased loved ones. For some, the symbol is actually preferable to remains. An article published in the weekly *Hriatna* 29th July-4th August, 1986 entitled '*Ka Bialpa Ruhro a Tel Ve Lo*' (my lover's remains is not included) was written by Sakhawmawii-probably a reference to the remains/bones brought home for burial by the MNF returnees, of their fallen comrades from the jungles after the

signing of the Peace Accord in 1986.⁴⁴⁵ Incidentally, these remains were provided a resting place at the Luangmual now christened *Martarte Thalanmual* (graveyard of the martyrs) wherein the collected bones of MNF lie, all individuals' names were engraved in granite.

There are many families who had experienced unrecovered bodies of their relatives died in the conflict. One among them was Lalpawmawii from Chanmari, Aizawl, recalls the death of his son Lalzamlia who had volunteered in the MNF movement. He was killed in an ambush by the Indian Army at Parva, southern border of Mizoram, where the body was buried in nearby villages. Transportation of the dead body was a daunting task as there were no proper road transportation facilities such as vehicles and proper passable roads, which was the only means of transportation during the *rambuai* period. It was only after peace was restored that some members of the families had visited the burial site after traversing a long journey to the southern border of Mizoram where the body was buried. What they saw there was barely a temporary burial site, on the outskirts of a small village; the burial site was marked by a wooden Christian cross.⁴⁴⁶

4.2.2 Martyrdom, Collective Memory and the Politics of Commemoration

According to Cambridge English Dictionary “Martyrdom is an occasion when someone suffers or is killed because of their religious or political beliefs”.⁴⁴⁷ The martyr is common to every modern culture, and all societies are proud to acclaim the sacrifices of their spiritual heroes. However martyrdom as a concept is difficult to define, let alone distinguish from simple heroism or idiotic folly, because the awarding of the martyr's crown lies as much in the eyes of the beholder as in the logic of a precise definition. Yet everyone agrees that the martyr exists and that certain acts of sacrifice can legitimately be called martyrdom because martyrdom assigns meaning to death, transforming it into an act of choice and purpose that can

⁴⁴⁵Sakhawmawii, 'Ka Bialpa Ruhro a Tel Ve Lo', *Hriatna*, vol iii, No-7, 29th July-4th August, 1986, p.5.

⁴⁴⁶ Lalpawmawii interviewed by Lalchhanhima, 2021, Private Audio Archive, Aizawl.

⁴⁴⁷'Martyrdom' in Cambridge Dictionary <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/martyrdom>, (accessed 20 June 2021).

be remembered, treasured, and, if necessary, emulated by later generations. Martyrdom is a performance that has evolved and changed over time, requires the interaction of the state and the individual as the martyr attempts to change the power and moral structure of society, and poses questions of motivation that lie outside both history and sociology.⁴⁴⁸

Shukla Sanyal, saw martyrdom as the most potent symbol in the representation and commemoration in Militant Nationalism which has influenced the people's reception and understanding of the movement. Martyrdom along with its function, symbol and ideology has impinged on the social reception and cultural memory of the movement. There are many arguments spawned at various times by the form and terms of commemorating the movement, from an analysis of this diverse perception, the way society constructs and transmits its memories can be seen and how these memories that are often influenced by changing power relations among social groups, as well as evolving sensibilities that may influence a society's sense of its own identity. Memory plays a powerful cultural force with which peoples and nations seek to symbolically organise their relationship with the past and, consequently, exploration of this symbolic universe provides important insights into the type of identity they seek to construct and legitimise in the present.⁴⁴⁹

The term collective memory is often used as shorthand for the repertoire of myth, legends, values, beliefs, and customs transmitted across generations through cultural artefacts, both written documents and visual representations, that a community draws upon in order to affirm an identity in the present. Collective memory, however vague the term, has coercive power. It sets the parameters within which acts of remembrance have to be carried out. When commemorative acts do not conform to the unwritten rules provided by the social frame of reference, social tensions surface. These tensions appear to be unavoidable for collective memory; even while it strives for hegemonic power it is often confronted by strong currents of

⁴⁴⁸ 'Martyrdom', in Robert Kastenbaum, (ed.), *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Death and Dying*, vol-I, New York, USA, Thomson Gale, 2003.

⁴⁴⁹ Shukla Sanyal, *On Modern Indian Sensibilities*, p.125.

alternative memories which claim to represent the past differently. These tensions may be resolved through accommodation or they may permanently fracture the unity of the community and lead to a parting of ways among groups who have divergent claims on and therefore conflicting memories of the past. Such conflicts may lead to a reorganisation of historical tradition through the foregrounding and inclusion of new elements from the landscape of collective memory. Collective memory thus becomes a site for the playing out of operations of power in society, which in turn indicates the changing dynamics of relationships among different social groups.⁴⁵⁰

Remna Ni (A Day of Peace Settlement) *Martarte Ni* (Martyr's Day) etc was another institution that disciplined the culture of mourning and imposed the image of heroic death. The state institutionalized its celebration and regulated all the rites, including the official gathering its attributed ritual practice. The symbolic practice of this culture reconstructed the memory of *therambuai*, marginalizing and excluding from those hidden memory of the war the 'traumatic places' that included violence and loss of many innocent lives. Meanwhile it overcame both individual traumatic reminiscences of fear, weakness, betrayals of the body and soul facing death and collective critical war experiences.

In the context of nation states, war memorials, for instance, are one of the most common forms of commemoration. This is not surprising since most nation states across the world are products of war or violent conflicts. This is evident in the proliferation of war memorials, which coincided with the emergence of new nation states in Europe post-World War I. Memories of war, in the form of statues or cemeteries are therefore closely related to the formation of modern nation states. In fact, war memorials serve a strong social purpose, and in most cases, they also serve practical purposes of profitability and utility to the extent of misrepresentation, invention, and manipulation. They carry a narrative of sacrifice, courage and valour,

⁴⁵⁰Shukla Sanyal, p.136

but also of loss. They give credence and legitimacy to the existence of the nation state not merely as a territorially defined space, but as a sacred landscape.⁴⁵¹

In the subsequent years after the Peace Settlement, the memories of the *rambuai* continued to be carried by construction of the martyr's monuments or memorials in different parts of the villages and locality. Fallen in the name of sacred duty was supposed to neutralize any resentment against that death and to represent it either as an accomplished duty or as a willing sacrifice. This new sensibility towards death expressed in the new locus of commemoration itself influenced the official politics which transformed the monument into a place which tamed the so called martyr's death by assigning to this death a sense of a patriotic act accomplished by a conscious citizen-nationalist.⁴⁵² And when the MNF Party became power in during 1998 to 2008, the MNF policy implemented its architectural project *Martarte Thlanmual* and constructed new places of common memory.⁴⁵³ Martyrs cemetery is the most visible monument constructed in relation to remembrance of Mizo Nationalist Movement. It forms an important site of memory. However, despite its significance, this memorial is not without contestation, particularly in the local. This is because memories of the MNF movement are "multi-sited" in the narratives and as well as in construction of memorials. Besides, the 1,563 dead commemorated at the Martyr's Cemetery, an organization of Mizoram Martyr Families lists out 2,186 victims. There exists a sense of exclusiveness, tied with the understanding of Mizo nationalism by the MNF. In fact, although the cemetery was intended to include all those who lost their lives during the period of the movement, it, however, is exclusively for the MNF and ex-MNA members.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵¹ Roluahpuia, *Memories and Memorials of the Mizo National Front Movement: Problem and Politics of Memorialisation*,

[Website], https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326009360_Memories_and_memorials_of_MNF_Movement/citation/download, (accessed, 9 July 2020).

⁴⁵² Snezhana Dimitrova, 'Taming Death: The Culture of Death (1915-18) and Its Remembering and Commemorating through First World War Soldier Monuments in Bulgaria (1917-44)' *Social History*, vol. 30, No.2, May 2005, p.188.

⁴⁵³ Roluahpuia, *Memories and Memorials of the Mizo National Front Movement: Problem and Politics of Memorialisation*.

⁴⁵⁴ Rohmingmawii, 'Impact of Memory and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Efforts Mizoram', *Mizoram Universtiy Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, vol.4, no.2, 2018, p.133.

In the inaugural ceremony of the *Martarte Thlanmual* (Martyr's Cemetery) on 30th August, 2008 quoting the famous war memorial lines, Zoramthanga the MNF leader-turned Chief Minister said, " *They (the martyrs) had given their today for our tomorrow. They deserve much more than just inscription of their names on the stones, but this is the most we can do for them. Even though they had died, they will live on in our hearts.* " ⁴⁵⁵

The cemetery produces the historical narrative of the MNF struggle as an act of heroism, equalising death to "martyrdom." Like any other war memorials, the sacrifice of the ex-MNA members are extolled and exalted. There is an equivocal relationship between "martyr" and "hero." They are revered and honoured, and their sacrifice justified as a just cause. The MNF party commemorates "martyrs' day" on 20 September each year since the *rambuai* period in 1980.⁴⁵⁶ *Martarte Ni* (Martyr's Day) was another institution that disciplined the culture of mourning and imposed the image of heroic death. The MNF institutionalized its celebration and regulated all the rites, including the official mass, the mourning hymn and the salute etc.

Rolualpuia opines that construction of a memorial for their lost comrades is, in a way, an act to remember their sacrifice, the construction of such a monument is political in itself particularly for a political party that continues to seek political legitimacy and support on the basis of the movement and the struggle. However, there is a sense of exclusiveness, tied with the understanding of Mizo nationalism by the MNF. In fact, even in the case of the martyr cemetery, although the cemetery was intended to include all those who lost their lives during the period of the movement, it, however, is exclusively for MNF members and ex-MNA members. The construction of the cemetery fixed the meaning of the movement, assigning it a single interpretation of heroism and sacrifice. This has suppressed alternative voices and contested pasts of the movement. The nature of remembering the movement is

⁴⁵⁵ 'MNF Remembers Fallen Comrades', *Oneindia* 30 August, 2008, <https://www.oneindia.com/amhtml/2008/08/30/mnf-remembers-fallen-comrades-1220105786.html> (accessed 3 March 2020).

⁴⁵⁶ Roluahpuia, *Memories and Memorials of the Mizo National Front Movement: Problem and Politics of Memorialisation*.

far from linear, even among the leaders and members of the party, as well as the army.⁴⁵⁷

The language of martyrdom continued to dominate *rambuai* remembrance and the political discourse of Mizoram in the Post Peace Settlement years. The meanings and memories sedimented in the martyr narratives framed the unwritten rules that governed the construction of cultural memory or cultural tradition and the latter, in turn, provided insights into how the community viewed its ‘political heroes’. But cultural or public memory does not encapsulate or envelop the whole of a society’s living reality, which includes the tensions and differences among ideologies, values, and beliefs among diverse social groups that co-habit in a particular social or geographical space, be it family, locality, region, or political party. These groups interpret and remember events in different and even conflicting ways, so that the construction of a collective or public memory becomes a problematic proposition.

In 2015, MNF leader Vanlalzawma, an MLA and former Lok Sabha MP, said:

*‘Mizo Nationalism was embodied by these martyrs, who fought so that the Mizo community did not disappear or was swamped demographically. Unlike regular soldiers, these men and women had no prospects of ex-gratia for their families if they died or pensions for themselves if they lived. But they fought anyway because they were willing to sacrifice everything,’*⁴⁵⁸ he said. Elsewhere in Kolasib town, the MNF’s president and former CM Zoramthanga said of the deceased:

⁴⁵⁷Roluahpuia, *Memories and Memorials of the Mizo National Front Movement: Problem and Politics of Memorialisation* .

⁴⁵⁸Adam Halliday, ‘Mizoram Martyr’s Day Observed to Commemorate Those Who Died During Insurgency’ *The Indian Express*, 21 September 2015, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/mizoram-martyrs-day-observed-to-commemorate-those-who-died-during-mizo-insurgency/>, (accessed: 12 April 2020)

*'They were martyrs because they gave their lives for Mizoram and the Mizo community. The Congress is the principal attacker of these men and women, and praising the Congress as the party that loves Mizoram the most is borne out of shallow thinking.'*⁴⁵⁹

Right from the Peace Settlement in 1986 till today, recovery of those MNA Martyrs bodies from different parts of the war zones during *rambuai* has been carried out by the EX-MNA Association, where identifiable burial of fallen MNA were unearth and the skeletal remains were transported and reburied at *Martarte Thlanmual* (Martyr's Cemetery) at Luangmual, Aizawl. A farewell ceremony for the recovered skeletal remains of fourteen MNA 'Martyrs' whose remains were recovered from different parts of Mizoram was held on 2017, where the skeletal remains of five MNA were unearthed and were brought to Aizawl where a welcome ceremony was held at Mizo Hnam Run. Speaking on the occasion, the MNF president Zoramthanga said his party paid due respect to the "martyrs" and as part of paying tribute to them the party used to observe with profound enthusiasm Martyr's Day on September every year. Zoramthanga said that collection of the skeletal remains of Mizo "martyrs" who died during the MNF's independence movement has been undertaken since the signing of peace accord with the Indian government. He said that the skeletal remains of many "martyrs" are yet to be collected and re-buried at martyr cemetery at Luangmual and also stated that the burial remains of "martyrs" who were killed and buried in neighbouring Bangladesh and some places would be collected and re-buried at one place.⁴⁶⁰

The next year other remains were recovered which were to be reburied at the Martyr te Thlanmual (Martry's Cemetery) specially designed for the Armies who gave their lives during the MNF Movement. On this ceremony Zoramthanga stated that:

⁴⁵⁹ Halliday, *The Indian Express*.

⁴⁶⁰ 'Mizoram: Remains of five Mizo Martyrs who died during the MNF Movement unearth!,' The North East Today, 6 May 2017, <https://thenortheasttoday.com/states/mizoram/mizoram-remains-of-five-mizo-martyrs-who-died-during-mnf/cid2532842.htm> (accessed 27 June 2020).

*“These martyrs have died for all the Mizos including those who were not supporting the movement even condemned and campaign against the movement. In those rambuai days these martyrs have died in inaccessible jungle, in the middle of incendiaries bomb and heavy gunfire. Recovering of the fallen bodies was impossible and often with no proper rituals and died unnoticed. Now days we have a well laid out cemetery and the martyr’s astonishing accomplishment is hailed and proclaimed. Their wonderful story will be valued and be told to offspring and generation to come. They have died for God and our Country”*⁴⁶¹ Again in 2019, five skeletal remains of the MNA martyrs were recovered from the original burials which were shifted to *Martar te Thlanmual* (Martyr’s Cemetery) in Luangmual, Aizawl.

The MNF and the Congress have been quarrelling over the *rambuai* movement, engaged in over legacy more and more vehemently in recent years, with the Congress leadership accusing the MNF’s then leaders as having begun the movement for their personal benefit, causing immense hardship to ordinary people (victims of the Indian Army’s controversial village grouping operations) and singling out the outbreak and its devastating consequences as a principal set-back for the state’s economy, which remains under-developed with little industry or private enterprise. The MNF meanwhile maintains the movement as secured constitutional safeguards for the Mizos of Mizoram and gave birth to the state as it is now from being a district within Assam before the insurgency years.

4.4 Civilians Deaths in the *Rambuai*

The greatest numbers of victims in the *Rambuai* were civilians. The *Rambuai* years witnessed guerrilla warfare, military repression, human rights abuses, population displacement, fear and mistrust.⁴⁶² Grouping and burning of villages and houses, burning of barn, famine, death from starvation, death from gunshot wound,

⁴⁶¹K.Lalnuntluanga, ‘Martar Ruang Ruh 14 Thlahna Synod Conference Centre Ah Hman A Ni’, *Times of Mizoram*, 12 June 2018, Martar ruangruh 14 thlahna Synod Conference Centre-ah hun hman a ni | TIMES OF MIZORAM, (accessed, 9 October 2020).

⁴⁶² Joy L.k Pachuau and Willem Van Schendel, *The Camera As Witness*, p.359.

intimidation and terrorizing, extreme violence, hostilities, rape, severe and death penalty given to innocent people, curfew, forced labour, robbery and burglary etc were common everyday experiences of the civilians during the *rambuai* years. The war between the MNF and the Indian forces had a great impact on the everyday's lives of the civilians, which was even described as "*tuboh leh dolung kara awm ang*" used as an expression as there were two equally danger in 'between hammer and an anvil' to describe living between two enemies.⁴⁶³ i.e. between the MNF forces and the Indian soldiers where committing a breach of both the party's command and order ensures severe penalty sometimes led to fatality. There is no doubt while the MNF was fighting for Mizo people's freedom and independence, Mizo people also suffered at their hands.⁴⁶⁴ The Presbyterian Church, the biggest Christian denomination in Mizoram announced its stand regarding the Movement in 13th March, 1966 that the Church does not support violent activities, atrocities towards human beings which are found contrary to the teachings of the gospel. And the Church also extended its condolences and sympathy to all the *rambuai* victims especially those innocent civilians who had faced had atrocities and even loss of lives.⁴⁶⁵ There are cases where preachers have feared for the safety of their lives as a result of their sermons- a person named VL Nghaka of Kolasib had preached that the one who had preached that 'thou shall not murder' does not allow murder/killing in the name of politics. As a result of this sermon, his community felt that his life was in jeopardy and he would move around from house to house felling unsafe to sleep even in his own home.⁴⁶⁶

The Civilians feared both the MNA and the Indian Army, theft, burglary was prevalent, many houses were burnt down many villages were abandoned due to grouping and agricultural production of the villages was shattered, resulted into famine which became the indirect cause of many deaths of the civilians in the

⁴⁶³Denise Segor, 'Gendering Rambuai: Mizo Women's Response to War and Forced Village Groupings' in Lalhlimpui Pachuau and Rosie Vanlalruati Ralte, (eds.), *Revisiting Rambuai*, p.109.

⁴⁶⁴Denise Segor, *Revisiting Rambuai*, p.111.

⁴⁶⁵Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, p.167.

⁴⁶⁶Lalthansangi Ralte, 'Pointer: Are They Inborn or moulded by circumstances? A Comparative Study of the Pointers During Insurgency in Mizoram and Nagalan' in Lalhlimpui Pachuau and Rosie Vanlalruati Ralte, (eds.), *Revisiting Rambuai*, Guwahati Assam, 2019, p.224

grouping centres. The trouble caused by the outbreak had a worse effect in every sphere of the civilian's lives.⁴⁶⁷

On the other hand, the Mizo Nationalist also adopted activities, which were basically human rights violation by its nature like depredations activities such as ambushing of army patrols, kidnapping certain civilians, terrorizing the loyal and friendly tribes, Government servants, looting rations, money and arms from the people, sniping at army convoys, levying and collecting various taxes like house tax, village tax and forced donations. In fact, most of the nationalist who were from unscrupulous members of the community having had loose behaviour showed untoward or unwanted behaviour towards the innocent people, which in turn brought severe suffering of the general masses. Donations and forced extraction or extortion of foodstuffs and other properties from the civilians by the insurgents, reached an extent beyond the capacity of the people, bringing untold misery of the people.⁴⁶⁸

In such situation, the tragic incident of war and disruption and even people's response to loss of life have become repressed, compromised and tamed under fear or imposed political ideology and nationalism. Civilians were trapped between the two sides, villagers, government employees, for them the future spells strife, bloodshed, terror and hatred. The *rambuai* involved the horrific violence and the terrible killing of civilians on an unprecedented scale far beyond anything that the Mizos had experienced before the outbreak.

The inhuman trauma caused to the Mizo by the Indian Army during the insurgency period resulted to the death of 2116 innocent people. Due to army atrocities countless number of men were made handicapped or physically disabled. Moreover, around 600 villages, more than 30000 houses were burnt to ashes and even the Church buildings were not spared in many villages. The army with no compensation arbitrarily confiscated around 4000 guns; the Mizo valued most among their possessions. In all such incidents, the Mizo suffered silently as there was no

⁴⁶⁷H.Raltawna, p.2.

⁴⁶⁸C.Lalhmanmawia, 'Perspective On Human Rights in Mizoram', pp.79-80.

any institution or agent to which the victims can resort to for the relief or seeking redress for their grievances. It was all a nightmare that the whole populations were made subservient to the power and authority of the Security Forces.⁴⁶⁹

As with other conflicts throughout world history, the Mizo '*rambuai*' conflict too had its supporters and detractors, the hardliners and those who tried to tread the middle path. There are also crucial questions to which there are several answers - questions such as why, where, who were the real victims, who were those responsible, and the like. And as with other conflicts, there is always a suppressed voice which none dare to foreground. Sufferings caused by army atrocities were many, but so were those undergone in the hands of the underground and yet, most narratives remain untold. But with the passing of time, there come a strong desire to set certain records straight, to retell histories, do justice to those no more, and to provide an unbiased history for the future generation. The Mizoram Upa Pawl (MUP), an association of senior citizens of Mizoram, have begun the process of this recovery of untold stories through 2 volumes entitled *Rambuai Lai leh Kei* (the troubled years and me) published in 2010 and 2014 respectively.⁴⁷⁰

There are still many unwritten records of silent voices that refuse to speak out till date from both sides of the fence, for reasons best known to them. It also includes the flip side of many a story, the 'non-MNF narrative' emanating from pastors, church elders, pensioners, ex-servicemen, politicians, former bureaucrats, school teachers and all those who have something to tell, to narrate. In a sense this category of 'non-MNF narrative' can be viewed as the counter voice of the 'other'. Though the corpus / output is still limited in number, the narratives come in the form of articles, books, memoirs, biographies and so on. Information provided by these writings depends largely upon how outspoken (or reticent) the writer chooses to be. The first-hand accounts of sufferings undergone by the writers themselves prove deeply evocative and provide an effective counter-balance to the undiluted 'MNF narratives'. This is to be appreciated as a healthy trend that provides space for debate

⁴⁶⁹C.Lalhmanmawia, p.79.

⁴⁷⁰Margaret Ch. Zama and C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, *After Decades of Silences*, p.58.

and growth besides its contribution to the enrichment of a discourse that incorporated a balanced history and its records.⁴⁷¹

It has been reported that between 1966 and 1970 around four hundred lives were taken by the Indian army, out of this only around hundred were the MNF volunteers.⁴⁷² The Quit Mizoram notices to the *vais* (Non-Mizos), sporadic killings of government officials (*vais*) extortions etc. and the victimization of common was common in the late 1970s. The MNF also get revenge by ruthlessly killing whoever they believed were traitor or informer. The civilians feared being branded rebels and at the same time feared being labelled as a traitor or informer. The MNF accused the Mizo Union as obstructing their goal, capturing many of their members and more than 200 Mizo Union members were killed by the MNF. But the Mizo Union never seek for revenge, and does not belief in violent conflict against their own tribe's men.⁴⁷³

It was 5th March, 1966 that the Government of India employed fighters dropping incendiaries or bomb at Aizawl in order to demoralise the MNF forces.⁴⁷⁴ At some point of time during this attack crowds were fleeing the city towards Dawrpui downhill to Chite searching for their own defense from the air raids. One among the two young lads from the fleeing crowd was struck by the bomb which was fired from the Jet fighter and the girl suddenly succumbed to death. The surviving young lady has expressed the loss she has been facing with a beautiful poem and it goes like this:

“Aw my dear, Kimte, Kimte,

Kan ram leh hnam tan i nunna i hlan ta; (you have sacrificed your life for our nation)

Ka thian, ka thian ka hmangaih, ka hmangaih ber! (My dear friend, my love, most beloved)

⁴⁷¹Margaret Ch. Zama and C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, p.61.

⁴⁷²Anonymous author, ‘Buaina Chhumpui A Lo Zing Tak Tak’ *Ram Buai Lai Leh Kei*, Aizawl, Mizoram Upa Pawl General Headquarters, 2010, p.55.

⁴⁷³Vanlalngaia, ‘Remna leh Muanna Hi Kawng Awlsam A Ni Lo’, in *Documents of Mizo National Movement: Documentary of Mizoram War of Independence, 1966-1986*, Kolkata, MNF General Headquarters, 2017, p.1140.

⁴⁷⁴Nirmal Nibedon, *The Dagger Brigade*, New Delhi, Lancers Publishers, 1980,p. 78.

*I thuchah ka tan lungchhiatna...mahse Kimte, (All your memories makes me despair)
Ka rauthla hian engtik ah nge a zui dawn che..? (When will my spirit meet you?)
Aw Kimte, mangtha, mangtha le...” (O Kimte, Goodbye, goodbye).⁴⁷⁵*

A feature that everyone consistently and vividly recalled was the constant search operations. Being summoned from their homes to be herded in the open fields or in the Church or school, were common features. Young men were particularly vulnerable, since any of them could be suspected as an underground worker and sometimes people would get killed in cross fire.⁴⁷⁶ A book written by C.Zama entitled “Untold Atrocity” was one of the recent and a singular work from an Ex-MNA which recollect the many act of violent activities of the Indian armies against the civilians, which resulted in the loss of the lives of countless innocent Mizos. The author recorded and documented the death of numerous civilians inflicted by the Indian army apart from their encounter with the MNA.

‘So far my knowledge goes only in North Mizo District, the Indian Army burnt down 21 villages and gutted 2133 houses, they raped 54 women, out of which 2 adult women and a minor girl died due to excessive copulation by a number of soldiers. They burnt 17 churches at present cooking, sleeping inside the churches while the villagers were not allowed to worship there. They cursed those homeless bewildered women and children saying that, ‘we do not care even if you all die, we don’t need you, what we want is your land.’ They treated the innocent Mizo with fearsome manners and as cruel as possible.’⁴⁷⁷

P.S Kapzika from Kawlkulh village has written his experience in the Pawibawkawn Ambush. It was an incident where four innocent were killed in an encounter between the Indian army and the MNF Volunteers. He forced to be part of

⁴⁷⁵C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, *Rambuai Literature*, p. 43.

⁴⁷⁶Sundar, Nandini, ‘Interning Insurgent Populations: The Buried Histories of Indian Democracy.’ *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 46, no. 6, 2011, p.52, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27918119>, (accessed, 14 March 2021)

⁴⁷⁷S. Lianzuala, Secretary, Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and Publicity Department. (MNF), Government of Mizoram, *Pamphlet*, cited in J.V Hluna, *Church and Political Upheaval in Mizoram*, Aizawl, The Author, 1985, p.101

the porter, but fortunately due to some injury in his leg that he was released from the task. In the 16th December, 1966 the Indian Army deployed coolies, who were young Mizo citizen from Kawlkulh and Dulte village. Around fifteen young men from Dulte village were also forced to join the coolies. By this time, all the local coolies had prior information that the MNF volunteers were planning to ambush the Indian Army which made them unenthusiastic on the task they were assigned. It was because of this reason that the residences of Dulte village had requested the MNF Volunteers not to make such ambush. The logic is clear that if such action had taken place, those young villagers who were employed as coolies by the Indian Army were among there to suffer fatal fire from the MNF. But things don't go as they please, it was around 9:00 A.M that the MNF from their vantage point started firing towards the Indian Army who were convoying by foot along with the band of local coolies. Many of the coolies had fled the scene but three innocent men from Dulte village were killed in the ambush. And in retaliation against the ambush the Indian army had burnt houses, one woman died from burn injury. The author had highlighted the condition faced by the civilians during the year 1968 to 1969 was harsh. They suffered severe starvation caused by the famine in the grouping centre, and shortage of grain which had worsened the situation. In the Kawlkulh Grouping centre 60 people had died during the stated year.⁴⁷⁸

The first mention of the aerial attack on Aizawl and other places in the Mizo Hills was made in the Assam Assembly on 5th April 1966. After a month had passed four aircrafts, identified as Toofani and Hunters were first seen flying over Aizawl around 10:00 a.m on the morning of March 5, 1966.⁴⁷⁹ Ngurchhuana, Right from the start the encounter between the the MNF Volunteers and the Indian Army was intense. Aizawl was devastated with sever blows death and injuries inflicted on both the parties, as well the civilians. M.E School, Thingdawl Village had elaborated his experience amidst the intense clash in Aizawl and the cleaning of Aizawl. After three days from the incident, information was given to all the local men in Aizawl to

⁴⁷⁸P.S Kapzika, 'Dulte Bul- Pawibankawn ah Ambush Thu' in *Rambuai Lai Leh Kei*, Mizoram Upa Pawl General Headquarters, 2010, p.28.

⁴⁷⁹Lalrinmawii, 'Fire in the Mountain –Run Run' in Lalhlimpuii Pachuau & Rosie Vanlalruati Ralte (eds.), *Revisiting Rambuai*, Guwahati, Assam, LBS Publication, 2019 p.81.

volunteer in the cleaning of Aizawl. They were bearing a white flag and headed towards the hub of Aizawl. A few metres away they saw one body lying near the roadside, which was soon identified. He was a civilian working in the Super Market who was unfortunately killed by incendiaries on his way to work. A shallow grave was dug nearby where the body was found and was buried. Likewise dead bodies of civilians were found after one another, who were temporarily buried in a shallow grave made on the spot by the volunteers.⁴⁸⁰

There were many cases where the Indian Army often coerced civilians for porter, transporting their goods to far off villages by foot. Being commanded to pursue this task was a severe threat to the life of the civilians. Whenever they were encountered by the MNA, the Indian armies often retaliated by killing those Mizo civilians who were forced as porters. One incident that took place in 14th January, 1967 was re-told by an anonymous writer where eighteen civilian coolies were killed as a revenge for the ambush acted out by the MNV near Champhai. The Indian armies forced the residence of Zotlang village to dig a grave near Champhai, where the dead bodies were wrapped with cloth and buried.⁴⁸¹

There are many incidents where the MNV hid in the villages; in such situation the Indian forces attempting to clear the MNV often took the lives of the civilians. Hranghleia wrote his memories and experiences in *Rambuai Leh Kei*. In his narration he had highlighted the atrocities faced by the civilians at East Lungdar village where 5 civilians were killed in the encounter between MNA and the Indian forces on the very outset of the outbreak in 1966. The author bravely highlighted that there are instances where Mizo civilians were also died in the hands of their own men i.e. the MNA due to accused of being a traitor or helping the Indian forces. He mentioned the details of those killed in East Lungdar village during this period. Thangkima was brutally killed by the MNV on 28th September, 1968 where his dead body recovered after it was hid in the forest for ten days. On 31st December, 1968,

⁴⁸⁰Ngurchhuana, 'Rambuai Ka Tawn Ve Dan' in *Rambuai Lai leh Kei*, MUP General Headquarters, Aizawl, 2010, p.38

⁴⁸¹Anonymous author, 'Mizoram Buaia India Sipai Leh Mizo Sipai Hnathawk Dan' in *Rambuai Lai Leh Kei*, MUP General Headquarters, Aizawl, 2010, pp.269-217.

Lalzama was force to leave his house and was shot to dead on the alley. Vanbawiha was abducted to the village outskirts on 9th June, 1974; and was stabbed on the neck and soon left to die. The author expressed his Joy after the peace settlement was reached between the MNF and the Indian Government in 30th June, 1986 quoted the Bible verse from Revelation 21:4 “*and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying. Neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.*” The peace settlement was celebrated with a community feast killing all the four legged animals and a stone was erected to commemorate the ceremony and the attainment of Peace.⁴⁸²

Major Dengzika recounts the encounter at Serzawl in September, 1966 which resulted in the death of 8 MNA and 9 civilians. Of the total 9 civilians 4 were given a proper burial and were recovered by their relatives and the other 5 were buried in a temporary grave dug by him and his friend alone. The author stated that as all the youths in the village had gone to the jhum, he and his friend Hmingliana had to bury the dead bodies of their fellow villagers. An old abandoned trench near the field was cleared with a shovel; he stated that digging such a big shallow which could house 5 bodies was a tiresome task only by two people that he would remember throughout his lifetime. After an ample depth, the dead bodies in the field were carried towards the grave with two bamboo strips; the bodies were laid in the grave one by one. After all the bodies were laid, his friend Hmingliana arranged the bodies in the pit and Dengziak recite a prayer and the temporary grave was filled with dust.⁴⁸³

When the situation was embroiled, there are many incidents where formal funeral customs and death rituals cannot be performed. Bodies of civilians were often recovered by their relatives under strict surveillance and under the command of the Indian armies. Sometimes for an informal burial it was obligatory to take permission from authority.

⁴⁸²Hranghleia, ‘E.Lungdar Leh Kei’ in *Rambuai Lai leh Kei*, vol 2, Aizawl, MUP General Headquarters, 2014, pp.90-104.

⁴⁸³Dengzika, *Rambuai lai Hmar Tlang Dung* in *Rambuai Lai Leh Kei* vol 2, MUP General Headquarters, 2014, pp. 105-114.

During the year 1969 human lives in Aizawl was dreadfully harsh, violation of human rights was ordinary and everyday activity, houses were checked, bedrooms and even bodies were checked of being suspicion. Male civilians above 15 years were often detained on being suspicion. On the side of the MNA, civilian suspected of being a traitor or against the MNF, those was accused and reported were killed 'dahtha', by the MNA, many civilians' lives were taken on being suspicion or accused. The term "lemchang" or 'fake' or 'mock' in English was also common in Aizawl during this period. Lemchang were those who faked the Mizo National Armies and collect donations (cash) from the civilians. During this period, unidentified dead body was repeatedly found in Vaivakawn Zohnuai area it was suspected that those were the 'lemchang' who were caught and killed by the MNF.⁴⁸⁴

There are many evidences where the rights of civilians especially women were violated often caused fatality, committed by both the Indian Armies and the MNF. Lalawpuia Vanchiau in his book Rambuai Literature clearly highlighted the incident where many lives were taken due to conspiracy and false accusation. In an incident that took place at Haulawng village in August, 1968, a young lady Kawngkharmawii was conspired and falsely reported as an agent of the 'Vai' (Indian Army) due to some personal hatred by the accuser. She was conspired and abducted for about two weeks before she was found dead on the hands of the MNF. When the news reached the village the whole community was saddened by the horrible death of the innocent young lady. Thus, the violent activities and the attitude of the MNF towards its own people are far different from what the civilians are expecting, who are claiming to fight for the freedom of the nation from external sovereignty.⁴⁸⁵ It was believed that she might be raped before she was killed in the hands of the abductor. Her grieving mother Dengchhuani had severe traumatic thoughts and memories. It was because of this unexpected murder and the nature of tragic death, this song has

⁴⁸⁴K.Lalhmingthanga, 'Buai Lai-Zirlai Hruaitu-Silchar Buai', in *Rambuai Lai Leh Kei*, vol 2, Aizawl, MUP General Headquarters, 2014, p.169.

⁴⁸⁵Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, pp.483-488.

touched the heart of the villagers and shook the whole village of Haulawng. Rotata, Haulawng composed a song entitled “*Lentupui Ram Daiah*” in the year 1968:

*“Ami an famna chu run nuamah, (While others died peacefully in home)
Lenrual lungduh te an leng; (Mourned by their beloved relatives and acquaintances)
Kei ka nau thlafamna run lo lentupui hnuaiah, Chham ang a zal ta e. ((Thou had died unattended deep in the wild woods)
Awi Awi a na lua lungleng (longing for you, i live in agony)
Min han ngai ve hian ka ring thin e.” (Hope you have missed me too).⁴⁸⁶*

There are many incident where the Indian army accused civilians of helping and having known of the location of the MNF camps or the place they were hidden, whether in the village or in the forest. In such incident civilians were abducted and charge with excessive violent which cause various fatality during the *rambuai* period especially in the initial years. Vanlalngaia retold the fate of Tv. Zoliana from Riangtlei village who was accused by the Indian army of being connected with the MNF or knowing the location of their camp. He was caught and detained all night long and tortured, questioned the location of the MNF camp. After trying all night, they got no answer from him and the army gave up questioning, but Zoliana was heavily hurt by the vicious torture he had received upon questioning, he barely died. And he was transported back to Khawzawl and from that period he went missing, no one had seen him again, his body was not found and presumed dead.⁴⁸⁷

Suakliana, Lianpui (1901-1979)

“I Tello Chuan” (1968)

This song reflects the grief of a mourning husband Khawliana after they were grouped from their village Dunglei to Vanzau. Soon after they were forced to Vanzau village, her wife Sunghleii died due to severe illness in 13th October 1968., The composer had reflected the chaotic situation of the time and blend with the sad,

⁴⁸⁶Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, p.53.

⁴⁸⁷Vanlalchhuanga, ‘Buai Lai Riangtlei Khua’ in *Rambuai Lai Leh Kei*, vol 2, Aizawl, MUP General Headquarters, 2014, p.288.

melancholic theme of grieving. In the first stanza the composer highlighted the present state of chaos and trouble caused by *Rambuai*:

*“Tunlai hunpui her velah hian,
Zoram buaina chhumpui karah;
Tuai duh lawmlai ka par mai kung;
Awmlai lengin min rawn then ta”*

And later on focusing on the loss;

*“Fam ngai min hnemtu an awmlo;
Aw van Thalarau Thianglim nunnem,
Lusun riangvai fa min aw rawh”*

After the Mizo Hills District became a Union Territory in 1972, disturbances in the hills turned a new phase. The MNF continued their desperate attempt to regain their former popularity amongst the civilians. Consequent upon this development and other reasons mentioned above, the Quit Mizoram notices for all-Mizos was first issued and the MNF contention was to eliminate the so-called enemy of the country whom they thought were betraying their nationalistic aspirations.⁴⁸⁸ By this time the activities of the MNF now called for desperate dimensions-kidnapping, assassinations, murders, assaults, sabotages, etc.⁴⁸⁹ On 6 December 1974, the rebel town commander of the MNF distributed handbills in Aizawl asking the non-Mizos to quit the Mizo hills by 31 December 1974. The MNF tried to intimidate non-Mizos and made it clear that those who flout the notice would have to face the consequences.⁴⁹⁰

The aftermath of 1974 quit Mizoram notice was harsh. On 13 January 1975, a jeep drove straight into the Mizoram Police headquarters, and Captain Lalheia of the

⁴⁸⁸O. Rosanga, ‘Revisiting Mizo National Front Movement and Its Effect’ in Lalhlimpuii Pachuau and Rosie Vanlalruati Varte (eds.), *Revisiting Rambuai*, Guwahati, Assam, 2019, p.60.

⁴⁸⁹O. Rosanga, *Revisiting Rambuai*, p.59.

⁴⁹⁰Nibedon, *Dagger Brigade*, p.194.

MNF along with three other gunmen sprayed bullets inside the conference room. The casualties were none other than three senior police officials—Inspector General of Police G H Arya, Deputy Inspector General of Police L B Sewa, and Superintendent of Police P Panchpagesan. The message that the MNF was trying to convey was that no non-Mizo, however powerful, would be spared.⁴⁹¹ As the situation became deteriorating in the early seventies, Brig. Thenphunga Sailo an army retired of high ranking came forward to rescue his own people from various atrocities committed both by the Army and the MNF underground. After assessing the situation thoroughly, he came to the conclusion of making of an institution to which victims of the human rights violation may seek redress. It was in the month of June 1974, he organized a small meeting in which persons like Lalsawia, Thangliana, Zairemthanga, J.Kapthianga, Vanlalhruaia and few others were present. The meeting decided to form the Human Rights Committee. Thus, Human Rights Committee (HRC) was established on the same day. The organizational structure of the Committee was a simple one consisting of the Chairman, the Secretary, the Joint Secretary and Treasurer. Brig. Thenphunga Sailo was the chairman, Zairemthanga and H.Lallungmuana Secretary and Joint Secretary respectively. The Committee established its office at Dawrpui locality, Aizawl.⁴⁹² The Committee, in fact had made terminology of Human Rights well known to the people and people began to realize the importance of the term for practical purposes. People were encouraged to fight for their inalienable rights even against military might. Though very successful in its endeavours, the HRC was very short live.

Almost 2 years had passed after the cease fire and maintenance of violence, the MNF employed a movement called Quit Mizoram in 1st June 1979, a movement specifically designed to oust the *Vai* (Non-Mizo) from Mizoram. In short the *Vai* (Non-Mizo) residing in Mizoram are seen as an important ally of the Central Government who became an obstacle for achieving Mizo Nationalism. Therefore the movement targeted towards the Non-Mizo and urge them to leave the land before 1st

⁴⁹¹ N. William Singh, 'Quit Mizoram Notices: Fear of the Other', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol.49, Issue No.25, 2014, <https://www.epw.in/journal/2014/25/reports-states-web-exclusives/quit-mizoram-notices.html?destination=node/129638> (accessed 10 October 2020).

⁴⁹² Lalmanmawia, p.86.

July 1979. This kind of movement '*Vai hnawhchhuah*' (expulsion of the Non-Mizo) was launched by the MNF in 1st January 1974.⁴⁹³

The proclamation of Quit Mizoram was soon followed by violence. On 13th June 1979, RC Chowdhury (S.D.O) P.W.D working in Saitual was shot dead. As soon as the corpse reached Silchar, tension turned hatred based on race, Mizo versus Non-Mizo. Violence now shifted to civilians and many Mizo civilians in Silchar had suffered hatred which turned violence and vice-versa to Non Mizo in Mizoram. A civil war like tension was soon embroiled; many Mizo youths began to move towards Silchar. In this midst of this arising tension the C.M Brig. Thephunga urged the Mizo youth to back down not to resort violent means. This violence had taken the lives of 4 Mizo and 16 were hospitalised. Apart from this there is huge property damage. There was widespread discontentment from the masses as the situation became worsened which was followed by curfew and restrictions and policing in the town. In response to the situation the Chief Minister Brigadier Thenphung had reported the detail events in All India Radio on 24th March 1980. Between January and March 1980, due to the outbreak 16 lives were taken, including army personnel and civilians, government offices and army camp were burnt down with huge property loss. As the violent activities and killings began to rise between May and June the Chief Minister again delivered a speech on 19th June 1980 in All India Radio began with the sad news of violent killings resorted by the MNF. Between May and June, 11 lives were taken violently, with many casualties and huge property damage.⁴⁹⁴

It was because of the intense violent and killings of civilians, students organised a protest against the activities of the MNF on 24th March, 1980 students were marching in the town street carrying posters, and banners showing condemnation of the activities of the MNF. This was soon followed by a widespread mass protest in Aizawl on 19th June, 1980 condemning violent, atrocities, and killings of civilians. This was the first anti-MNF protest ever made after 14 year since the *Rambuai* outbreak.

⁴⁹³John V. Hluna, *A Search for Mizo Identity*, Aizawl, The Author, 1983, p.202.

⁴⁹⁴Hluna, *A Search for Mizo Identity*, p.203.



Figure 4.10: Students marching, carrying poster saying "we are getting rid of brutal murders" 24 March, 1980. Source: C. Lalawmpuia.

The photographs here portrayed that the civilians at this stage were having a strong distaste from surfeit in the activities of the MNF of employing violent killings during this period. Students carrying poster bearing '*Rawng Taka in thatna Hi Kan Ning Tawh Bang Rawh Se*' (We are now fed up with brutal killings, Stop the Killings). Photograph of mass protester were also carrying a banner bearing the slogan '*We Condemned Brutal Killing*'. This has clearly revealed the situation that the civilians, amidst the fear of both the two parties, under severe military repression and fear to express their views and stance had physically motivated to voice against the action of killings by employing mass protest and rally in the city street.



Figure 4.11: Mass Protest Condemning Brutal Killings, 19 June 1980.

Source: The Author

4.5 Famine and Starvation Deaths in the Grouping centres.

The grouping of villages into large units by eviction and coerced resettlement was carried out during 1967-70. It was introduced under the provisions of Defence of India Rules 1962 and the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act 1953. The scheme envisaged four distinct categories of grouping of villages.⁴⁹⁵ The declared objective behind the ‘Operation security’ was to provide security to the villagers as well as initiate development in the villages. But, the real idea behind the operation was to isolate and cripple the MNF insurgent physically and politically from the bulk of the localities. There were four categories of grouping of villages “*Sawikhawm*” in Mizoram, which was done on compulsory and voluntary basis such as (i) Progressive

⁴⁹⁵Sajal Nag, *A Gigantic Panopticon: Counter-Insurgency and Modes of Disciplining and Punishment in Northeast India*, [Website],<http://www.mcrg.ac.in/PP46.pdf>, (accessed 9 December 2020).

and Protected Villages (PPV); (ii) New Group Centre (NGC); (iii) Voluntary Group Centre (VGC); (iv) Extended Loop Area (ELA).⁴⁹⁶

Progressive and Protected Village was the first stage of grouping undertaken on 4th January, 1967-under the order of Central Government Liaison Officer for Mizo Hills District in accordance with DIR, 1962 on the main road of Silchar-Aizawl-Lunglei. More than 50000 people from 106 villages were grouped in 18 centres. Immediately after the villages were vacated, all houses therein were destroyed and burned. At first PPV was under the control of the army but since February 1967, a civil officer took over the administration. The PPV grouping was completed within three months. The NGC grouping was done in 1969 according to the order of District Magistrate. 40 NGC were established which affected approximately 650000 people from 185 villages. 110 villages were grouped into 26 VGCs according to the District Magistrate order in 1969-70. However, in most cases it was rather compulsory than voluntary. Under the Extended Loop Area 40000 people from 63 villages were grouped into 17 ELAs centres.⁴⁹⁷ The total number of people left out of the grouping exercise in Mizoram was 81,931. Thus, out of a total population of 318,093 in 1970 a total of 236,162 or 82 per cent was directly affected by the grouping system. The immediate effect of grouping of villages in Mizoram was the total dislocation of jhumming as villagers had to leave the year's jhum cultivation and were unable to make a fresh start in the grouping centres. Due to constant supervision and harassment by military personnel host villages cannot work fulltime in the jhum.⁴⁹⁸

The term "*Phuahchawp Tam*" was coined by R.Vanlawma to denote the severe scarcity of food, which led starvation to many people during the twilight years of the *rambuai*.⁴⁹⁹ The term famine or starvation in this context denotes the strategy of economic suppression or 'operation starvation' as employed by the Indian army to subdue the MNV action. Burning and grouping of villages had shattered the

⁴⁹⁶Chawngsailova, *Ethnic National Movement in the Role of the MNF*, p.78.

⁴⁹⁷Chawngsailova, pp.78-79

⁴⁹⁸C. Nunthara, *Impact of Introduction of Grouping of Villages in Mizoram*, New Delhi, R.Kumar for Omsons Publicaiton, 1989, p.7.

⁴⁹⁹C.Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, p.367.

agricultural system of the masses, which was not a natural calamity but solely caused by human action. The year 1966 to 1971 has been regarded as the outbreak and peak intensity.⁵⁰⁰ C. Rokhuma has recorded the condition and supply of rice each year during the *rambuai* years, this record revealed the fact that the early six years from start of the outbreak in 1966 till 1971 has been regarded as the peak starvation period⁵⁰¹ in terms of food supply, where many people suffered and died because of the unpleasant condition of livelihood. Majority of the villages' food supply was destroyed as a result of the burning of villages by the Indian army. Villages were burned often as retribution of violence attack against them by the MNF. There are many instances where the villagers feared at times when the MNV were approaching their village for shelter and food, as if the Indian army spotted them aiding the MNV it would result in a drastic punishment. Since MNV habitually made their visit to nearby village, requests were often made by the villagers not to visit or stay in their villages as they knew they were in between the hammer and anvil.

Suakliana from Lianpui village composed a famous song *Khawkhawm Hla "Kan huntawn zingah khakham a paw ber mai"* this gloomy song was composed in the early years of the troubled period at Vanzau, a grouping centre in Eastern part of the Mizo District. His composition also includes the miserable condition of the land as a result of the outbreak⁵⁰² The song represented the situation of the period in a vivid poetical expression.

*Kan huntawn zingah khawkhawm a paw ber mai,
Zoram hmnun tin khawtlang puan ang a chul zo ta;
Tlang tina mi khalhkhawm nunau mipuite,
Chhunrawl a vang, riakmaw iangin kan vai e.*

(The most tragic times ever encountered in our history is the village grouping. Wherein the entire community is lifeless like a faded cloth, and people, mothers and

⁵⁰⁰Subhir Bhaumik, *Insurgencies In India's Northeast: Conflict, Co-option & Change*, [Website], 2007, <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/publications/insurgencies-india%E2%80%99s-northeast-conflict-co-option-change> [accessed 3 January 2021].

⁵⁰¹C.Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, p.398.

⁵⁰²C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, p. 54.

children, herded from across the hills, are hungry and homeless like the riakmaw bird in search of shelter)⁵⁰³

Prior to the *Rambuai* years in the 1960, records have shown that the general condition of health in the district was fairly good, where death rate declined to 7 per 1000 population. Under the new district council after 1952 till the *rambuai* period the declining of death rate has been witnessed which may perhaps be attributed to improved condition of life and consequent higher longevity of people in rural and urban areas.⁵⁰⁴

Between 1966 and 1971 as a result of *Rambuai*, numerous civilians suffered severe poverty in different parts of Mizoram. The condition of the masses becomes worsened, as unemployment rose, agricultural activities cannot be continued in grouping centres. Due to an inadequate government supply of food followed by scarcity of healthy food resulted in malnutrition. Beri beri was common in many of the villages which lead to the death of numerous children and old age group. As the health condition of the people was deteriorating, causing several diseases taking many lives in 12 villages: Khahrulian, Chhingchhip, Bungtlang, Zobawk, Chawngtlai, Tlungvel, Suangpuilawn, Sailam, Pangzawl, Zawngin, Thenzawl & Baktawng Famine occurred in Pangzawl village in the year 1968.⁵⁰⁵

In Sihphir grouping centre, villagers from Neihbawih, Puansen, Sehlawh, Sairum, Sentlang and Serkhan were grouped. In Sihphir it has been documented that due to shortage of food and malnutrition, the health of old age group had deteriorated and suffered swollen body and soon succumbed to death. It has also been documented that Chhiahtlang grouping centre had suffered a worse effect from malnutrition mostly by children and old age which took the lives of many

⁵⁰³Margareth Ch. Zama, 'Rambuai Literature', *North East Review*, 22 May 2015, <https://northeastreview.wordpress.com/2015/05/22/rambui-literature/> (accessed 18 September 2019).

⁵⁰⁴ Mizoram District Gazetteers, M.S Eastern Press & Publication Guwahati, Directorate of Art and Culture, Government of Mizoram, 1989, p.

⁵⁰⁵C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, pp. 368-385.

villagers.⁵⁰⁶ Laibata, 85 years old who has witnessed the grouping from Sehlahw village to Sihphir grouping centre stated that:

*“Due to scarcity of food and malnutrition, many children were suffering from Beri beri, swelling of bodies were found among many children in the centre, i had witnessed that, 2 children died because of starvation and malnutrition.”*⁵⁰⁷

In Sihphir grouping centre, he recalled an incident where one man from the grouping centre had died from starvation, but in the Mizo society, to die from starvation or hunger is regarded as a disgrace or shame. He stated that he had witnessed the actual cause of death was starvation, but the deceased family concealed the actual cause of death. During this period there were a number of families who were struck by extreme poverty, malnutrition and starvation causing several diseases. These diseases do not cause severe cases of instant fatality, but such kind of morbidity in a long run had caused fatality to many populations who were severely struck by the famine in the grouping centre. The interviewee further recalled that despite the famine and starvation worsened the lives of the population in the grouping centre, the violent threat posed by the Indian Army and the MNF was a life threatening experience. He also stated that the chance of accidentally killed by both the party was very high among the innocent civilians living inside the grouping centres in those years. The interviewee recalled an incident where one innocent man in the grouping centre was accused of violating curfew at night; he was spotted close to his door step. But the man was very unfortunate to meet a brutal and violent army duty that he was accused of breaching the law and was caught and tortured to death. The incident was cover up by the Indian army where the dead body of the innocent villager was secretly buried in the suburb of the village concealed that no one would recognise the burial mound. After three to four days of searching, the villagers had

⁵⁰⁶C.Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, p.386-387.

⁵⁰⁷Laibata, interviewed by Lalchhanhima, 2021, Personal Audio Archive, Aizawl.

spotted the burial spot and recover the dead body and buried in the proper village burial ground.⁵⁰⁸

He added that the word “*dahthat*” was a very common word in the grouping centre, literally means to keep aside or to hide. The actual meaning was to kill a traitor or a suspected person who was common among the National Armies and Volunteers. The MNF killed or murdered their own members who was suspected or accused of conspiring their movement or those helping the Indian government. The interviewee elaborated that his elder brother served as a volunteer in the Movement but the MNF unfortunately accused of conspiring the MNF and he was “*dahtha*” or killed by their own army members. There was no chance for a trial or chance to hear from the victim. He commented that the movement was brutal and violent. They got information that the dead body was buried at Serzawl, after the conflict was calm they were trying to recover the dead body of his brother at Ratu village, who was believed buried in the wild jungle. But after traversing village after villages and in deep forest, they thought that it would not be safe to recover the bodies and due to the fear build up they gave up searching for the bodies. The family has not recovered the body and never saw him from the day he was killed till the present day.⁵⁰⁹

Chemphai, Phaisen and Buhchang villages were grouped at Bilkhawthlir village; the Village Council President from East Lundar B. Hungliana reported that reported that due to malnutrition and shortage of food supply many civilians died. The worst famine took place in the year 1969.⁵¹⁰ In Haulawng village a man named Lambawia died of starvation, Villages such as Tawizo, Lenchim, Darlawng, Phulmawi, Khumtung, Nganabawk, Awmpui, Satinahmum and Zobawk were grouped at Tlungvel struck by a severe famine in 1968. A number of people died due to malnutrition, it has been estimated that death took place every day in Tlungvel village grouping centre during the severe famine period.⁵¹¹ Kawlkulh grouping centre

⁵⁰⁸Lalnunzira (witnessed) interviewed by Lalchhanhima, 2021, Private Audio Archived by the Interviewee, Aizawl.

⁵⁰⁹Lalnunzira, interview, 2021.

⁵¹⁰Lalrawnliana, *Zoramín Zalenna A Sual*, vol iv, Aizaw, The Author, 1997, p.16.

⁵¹¹Lalrawnliana, *Zoramín Zalenna A Sual*, p.60.

faced a severe famine; the condition was worsened by scarcity of food and malnutrition, between 1968-69 and sixty people had perished.⁵¹² Zaingen, Zuchhip, Darngawn, Arro, Tualpui, Tuisen, Neihdawn and Ngaizawl villages were group in at Khawzawl village, due to malnutrition, overpopulation, pollution and excess waste and flea, a kind of epidemic broke as causing high rate of fatality, with a record of 2 people died every day during two months. Many agricultural lands were devastated by wild fire resulting in drought and famine for 7 years.⁵¹³ Tarpho, Chawngtui, Aithur, Leite, Denglug and Rotlang were grouped at Hnanthial; malnutrition had caused swollen body and beri beri taking the lives of many people. At Lunglei Zobawk grouping centre malnutrition had caused the death of many lives, every locality had to mourn the dead of their members.⁵¹⁴

From her field interview and investigation, Rangasami has reported that grouping a word which seems to have passed into the Mizo language, was worse than the *Mao Tam* and *Thing Tam*, famines which recurs in cycles. She further observed that more people died after grouping than during the last *Mao Tam* before the *Rambuai*. From her interviews she observed that for about three years at Zobawk, the Regrouped Centre near Lunglei, they buried two people every day- for about eight months in twelve. A lot of people said they suffered from beri beri. In this situation what the government has provided was bad maize. She also observed from her field enquiry and interview a disciplinary measures enforced in the grouping centre do not allowed citizens to go into the forest for obtaining food or vegetables or having a jhum or garden. A lot of people therefore died, his interviewer has told that he had lost his father due to the harsh condition of lives in the grouping centre⁵¹⁵

Bualpui village at Thingsai grouping centre suffered severe malnutrition, taking the lives of many people. One infant from Khangbawk village died due to malaria. Between 1968 and 1972 36 people died in West Darngawn village. In the

⁵¹²P.S Kapzika, *Rambuai Lai Leh Kei*, p.29.

⁵¹³C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, p.388.

⁵¹⁴C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, pp.386-387.

⁵¹⁵Amritha Rangasami., 'Mizoram: Tragedy of Our Own Making.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol 13, no. 15, 1978, p. 656, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4366529>(accessed 18 March 2021).

year 1968, Kawnpui grouping centre suffered severe famine, due scarcity and shortage of food supply the condition became worsened. At Chanzawl village which was only a 30 household, 4 larger villages were grouped. This resulted in over population, shortage of food, water and basic amenities. Between 1968 and 1971 many people from this centre died due to severe poverty, and hunger.⁵¹⁶

Burning of villages; villagers at Pangzawl resented grouping and took refuge at deep forest, malnutrition, scarcity of food, health condition worsened, malaria and several other disease, after returning to Pangzawl grouping centre due to several health condition 7 children and 9 adult died in 1968. At hmuntha village due to several factors like malnutrition, the health condition becomes worsened causing swollen body, stomach ache, diarrhea, many people died. Vathuampui village suffered the same, Sialsuk 7 people died. Phuldungsei suffered the same in 1968 and 1969; many people died especially children and old age group. At Zawngin and Pangzawl grouping centre many people died because of starvation and hunger. From the Mizo ethos of *tlawmngaihna*, dying of starvation is regarded as a humiliation, nobody wants to die of starvation and hunger, but they cannot deny the fact that they were severely struck by starvation which resulted in the deaths of many civilians.⁵¹⁷ Pangzawl grouping centre was regarded as having the most number of death toll, which was caused by starvation and extreme poverty. There are 70 people died in Pangzawl grouping centre as a result of starvation.⁵¹⁸ C. Zama stated that, during this period people were often turned down or refused to recite a phrase from the Lord's Prayer "Give us this day our daily bread" due to extreme scarcity of foods.⁵¹⁹ In crowded grouping centres there was increased need for medical support, yet a severe shortage. Some contracted tuberculosis. Many spoke of increased cases of malaria. Lianziki said many from her village became ill with malaria because the areas available for them to use as lo (jhum) were in the lowlands near the rivers. Many spoke of the family members and other villagers becoming ill from swelling due to poor quality of food and/or lack of food. Thanchhingi said medicine was scarce and

⁵¹⁶Lalrawnliana, *Zoram Zailenna A Sual*, Vol 5, Aizawl, The Author, 1998, p.137.

⁵¹⁷Lalawmpuia, Vanchiau, p.391.

⁵¹⁸Zama, *Zoram A Tap*, p.345

⁵¹⁹Zama, p.346.

many died from khawsikpui.⁵²⁰ Among the few medical doctors in Aizawl who owned a clinic in the 1970s, Dr. Zokhuma from the locality of Chanmari, Aizawl recalled the poor health condition of the masses. He stated that, the condition of the of life in the grouping centre was gradually improved by the year 1970, still a number of patients were rushing to Aizawl from all across Mizoram who were severely stricken by the famine in the previous years. Starvation and malnutrition in the grouping centres in those years were affecting the health condition of the masses in the preceding years that their health was severely worsened even after the acute years.⁵²¹

Table 4.1 Various diseases and patients treated (district wise) during 1972:

Patient treated/ Diseases		Aizawl District	Lunglei District	Chhimtuipui District
A.	INDOOR	6052	1979	Nil
B.	OOTDOOR	486293	215243	173147
1.	Syphillis	Nil	Nil	Nil
2.	Gonorrhoea	Nil	Nil	Nil
3.	Malaria	517	342	171
4.	Scabies	1451	635	394
5.	All other skin diseases	4056	1872	1065
6.	Diarrhoea/Dysentery	52648	25356	7216

⁵²⁰Segor, *Visiting Rambuai*, p140

⁵²¹Dr. Zokhuma interviewed by Lalchhanhima, 2021, Personal Audio Archive, Aizawl.

7.	Stomach & Intestinal diseases	182536	115839	66873
8.	Respiratory diseases	14872	8649	4196
9.	Goitre	152	87	46
10.	Leprosy	Nil	Nil	Nil

Source: Statistical Handbook of Mizoram, 1974, p.197.

Although grouping of villages were meant to be the security of the public and to protect them from the MNF regime, it hardly served its purposes. Certain difficulties and problems were soon faced not only by the government officials but also by the people, the household members of the villages being the worse sufferers. This was indeed a reversal to the well laid out programmes and instructions envisaged for the effective functioning of the PPVs. In fact, reality was very much different in that grouping of villages not only created enormous problems but had a disastrous effect on the health conditions of the civilians.⁵²² From July to September 1968, people were famine stricken due to shortage of food supply, on account of bad road condition on rainy season and lack of food storage. Consequent to this development the health of the people deteriorated especially children and the elderly people; their condition was worsened by lack of medicine which took the lives of many people in this year.⁵²³ Lack of basic amenities, nutritious food, clean drinking water etc., in most part led to the outbreak of epidemics in the form of gastro-intestinal infection, malaria, malnutrition etc. in many PPV centres. A Report stated that some of the PPV's and outskirts of Aizawl town were unexpectedly overtaken by a calamity as a result of acute shortage of foodstuff which threatened the general health of the people and that any sort of epidemic disease was bound to break out. At this juncture, there were clamours and prayers for issue of some vitamin tablets and other medicines. Although the government claim was that essential medicines were

⁵²²Zothanpuui, 'History Of Health Care In Mizoram Pre-Colonial Period To 1972', PhD Thesis, Mizoram University, 2014, p. 205.

⁵²³Zothanpuui, 'History of Health Care In Mizoram' p.205.

distributed to the civilians within the grouping centres, however in most cases this was not sufficient to meet the needs of the people.⁵²⁴

The annual grants for public health before 1972 could not be properly utilized due to the disturbance caused by the *rambuai*. Therefore health services could not developed before 1972 and there were only two government hospitals namely Aizawl Civil Hospital and Lunglei Civil hospital. After the UT efforts was made to improve the condition of general public health service in the last part of the 4th Five Year Plan (1969-74). Practically the 5th Five Year Plan was the first five year plan in for Mizoram. During the fifth five year plan, health sector remains on high priority in the plan with greater emphasis on rural health services. Six hospitals were established at Aizawl, Serchhip, Saiha, Lunglei, Zemabawk, Champhai. 11 Public Health Centres, 15 dispensaries and 124 medical sub-centres throughout Mizoram. Still the condition of health status was not favorable and services were not up to mark. According to the Report on Socio Economic Review 1979-80 15532 people were served by one doctor in Aizawl District, whereas nearly 13000 people were served by one doctor in Lunglei and Chhimituipui Districts. It is therefore seen that medical facility available to the people during this period is very inadequate.⁵²⁵

Recent studies have shown that grouping of villages during the *Rambuai* years have affected all walks of lives of the people who suffered physically, psychologically and even took many lives. The Insurgency period had disastrous effects on the lives of the people. In the realm of health, people suffered acutely from lack of adequate health care amenities, medicines, nutritious food, epidemics etc. Although certain measures were undertaken by the government, it proved to be more of a failure than a success. The attainment of Union Territory of Mizoram in 1972 saw the restructuring of the economy, administration etc and also the introduction of many new plans and programmes.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁴Zothanpuui, p.208.

⁵²⁵ Bureau of Economic and Statistics, Mizoram Administration, *Report on Socio-Economic Review 1979-80*, Govt. of Mizoram, 1981, pp. 89-92.

⁵²⁶Zothanpuui, p.212.

Table 4.2 Medical Units and Medical Staff since 1968 to 1974.

Year	Hospital	Doctor	Nurses	Mid Wives/ ANM	Pharmaci st	Mat ron	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1968-69		12	29	80	81	Nil	202
1969-70		14	29	80	84	Nil	207
1970-71		14	45	83	84	Nil	226
1971-72		18	45	83	84	Nil	230
1972-73		31	71	113	104	2	321
1973-74	4	21	71	110	100	2	304

Source: Statistical Handbook of Mizoram, 1974, p.198.

Due to lack of medicines and proper food many people died from various illnesses. Graveyards were made outside the fences of grouping centres. When a person died the Indian security forces allowed only ten people to go beyond the fencing to dig a grave. Sometimes they did not allow having a funeral service at the graveyard. Permission from the security forces was compulsory if they wanted to go outside the fencing perimeter of the grouping centres and they should report themselves when they returned to the grouping centre.⁵²⁷ Starvation deaths were common in the camps in both Nagaland and Mizoram. A casual survey of Rangasamy among a group of 10 to 12 men in Vahne village in 1978 revealed that everyone had lost some members from their family. The army provided little or no rations. At the Ruantlang grouping centre witness stated that even if the army provided with rations to the civilians it was the worst kind. It just wasn't fit to be

⁵²⁷C. Zama, *Untold Atrocity: The Struggle For Freedom In Mizoram 1966-1986*, New Delhi, The Author, 2014, p.82.

eaten. Diseases started spreading in the villages and many died. Some survivors have helped to dig a number of graves at that time.⁵²⁸

The population growth rate suffered a serious setback during the decade of 1961-1971; the growth rate fell by 9.3 percent point. The decadal growth rate during 1961-71 was only 24.93 percent which showed declining trend in terms of percentage. Among the different factors pointed out, the *rambuai* had seemed to affect population growth to a great extent. It was due to large scale migration of people to other states and adjoining foreign countries in the wake of disturbances in 1966. A large number of people were going underground joining the MNF Movement. And many volunteers and armies were killed in this movement.⁵²⁹

Roluahpuia opines that the true meaning and the image of death and dying in the *Rambuai* has been overshadowed by the interpretation of peace in the aftermath of the conflict after the restoration of peace in the state. The experience of conflict and violence is not merely about the struggles of the MNF against the Government of India, but also about the peoples' loss of lives, destruction of homes, property, maimed due to torture, and the total suppression of civil and political rights, which was somehow silent in the post-peace settlement termed as a 'peaceful silent' in which is embedded the pain, suffering and death of many civilians, which remained unrecognised and unspoken. For many, the MNF is a symbol of Mizo nationalism while others are filled with resentment and bitter feelings. The issue of Mizoram peace has overshadowed any other issue, the MNF political party being one of its chief campaigners.⁵³⁰ Most of the *rambuai* literature and even scholarly studies often failed to see, address and account the death of civilians. The ongoing discussion in this section testifies the fact that countless civilians had perished due to the disturbances as a result of the *rambuai*. And this has also contributed the decline of

⁵²⁸Sundar Nandini, 'Interning Insurgent Populations: The Buried Histories of Indian Democracy, *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol 46, no. 6, 2011, p.53, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27918119>(accessed 7 April 2019).

⁵²⁹T.C Lalhlimawma, 'Studies in Demographic Profiles in Mizoram', M.A Dissertation, North Eastern Hill University, 1995, pp.25-26

⁵³⁰Roluahpuia, *Memories and Memorials of the Mizo National Front Movement: Problem and Politics of Memorialisation* .

population growth of during the decade 1961-1971 as the peak intensity of the *rambuai* took place between 1966 and 1971.

Conclusion

A comprehensive analysis of the twenty years of *Rambuai* from the perspective of death and dying have brought new meaning and perception of death as well as the political lives of the of dead in the context of the Mizos. The nationalist have employed death as a means of legitimizing revolutionary nationalism. The recovery, reburial and commemoration of the so called ‘martyrs’ along with the discourse and construction of martyrdom have been instrumental in the process of legitimizing the violent activities and for political gains in the post-*rambuai* politics. Because of political repression, *Rambuai* narratives often silenced and failed to focus the violent death of civilians and the impact of grouping of villages which took the lives of countless civilians. The narrative of Martyrdom and Peace has often overshadowed the magnitude of civilian deaths which was uncovered in the process of *rambuai* narration.

5.1 Introduction

In the contemporary Mizo society, a number of changes can be observed in the way people are coming to think about death and its surrounding ritual practices. The period has witnessed changes in health infrastructure, medical progress, a shift in the type of diseases causing morbidity and condition that have caused death, differentials in patterns of death, mortality rate and life expectancy, changes in political, socio-economy, new communicative technology, urbanization and changing lifestyle and cultural conditions in a globalized world. All these have acknowledged a gradual shift of emphasis in cultural and religious tradition. The old custom and religious funeral tradition has been undergoing gradual changes.

5.2 Trends in Mortality, Diseases and Death in Contemporary Mizo Society

In terms of historical trends in mortality as compared to the western world especially the developed countries, India had passed through a different history, where colonialism hold responsible in delaying the rapid improvement of health and the colonial administration heavily impacted on mortality. In the developed countries, a dramatic improvement in mortality rates was witnessed in the 20th Century, and the declining death rate resulted in an increase in life expectancy. This was the result of a decrease in the affect of infectious disease, particularly influenza, pneumonia, and tuberculosis etc. This improvement in mortality was the result of scientific advances achieved during the late 19th Century. With the decline in infectious diseases a concomitant change in the major cause of mortality was witness, shifting to chronic disease such as heart disease in the 1910 and cancer became the second leading causes in the 1930s. In the second half of the 20th century medical research and focused on chronic disease cause and symptom. Medications were introduced to treat or control the progress of chronic diseases such as high cholesterol and hypertension. Research also emphasized the influence of lifestyle factors, such as smoking, high-fat diets, and exercise on greater risks of early death.⁵³¹ Trends in mortality have been analyzed in the colonial India with reference

⁵³¹ 'Causes of Death, Historical Perspectives', in Clifton D. Bryant & Dennis L. Peck (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Death and the Human Experience*, California, U.S.A, Sage Publications, inc, 2009, pp.165-168.

to Mizo context in chapter 3, which suggested that high mortality rate, soaring infant mortality, prevalence of famine, epidemic and infectious diseases under the colonial regime and the Christian missionaries faced them by introducing sporadic western health care system in which the limitation of western health care was discernible. Thus, death in colonial India as well in the Mizo context was seen as one area where modernization interacted with indigenous condition to produce modernization crisis, as traditional societies began to transform in the image of the west.

The post-independence period witnessed a gradual decline in death rate; in 1949 death rate dropped to 10.27⁵³² which was the lowest ever since the colonial period. And by the 1950s it was again declined to 8.23⁵³³ per 1000 population. Detail records of death rates, causes, and differentials are limited in coverage for Mizoram before 1986 in the pre-statehood years. In the previous chapter it have been discussed how the twenty years of *rambuai* between 1966 and 1986 had affected all walk of lives of the Mizo people whom as a result of the disturbances had suffered physically, psychologically and took many lives. It had adverse impact on the socio-economic life of the Mizos. Village groupings, combined with armed struggle and violence, had inflicted heavy damage to the self-sufficient tribal economy. Health infrastructure were severely damaged and destroyed, due to the disturbances and grouping of villages, jhum cultivation was severely disrupted and the production of rice and crops were drastically reduced. Due to the decrease in production of rice, famine, malnutrition and even starvation deaths occurred in the grouping centre. The income of the people had been reduced and unemployment rose drastically, and heightens the already poor economic condition of the people. Medical facilities totally broke down in the rural areas. Food and medical supplies could not reach interior village. Many people faced famine starvation deaths in the absence of road, medical supplies and famine.

⁵³² Annual Public Health Report of the Province of Assam for the Year 1949, Dr. S.C, Dutt, Director of Public Health Assam, Assam Governmet Press, Shillong, 1949, p.10.

⁵³³ Annual Public Health Report of the State of Assam fo the Year 1950, , Dr. S.C, Dutt, Director of Public Health Assam, Assam Governmet Press, Shillong, 19450, p.5.

With the end of *Rambuai*, Mizoram became a fully fledged State in 1987, this status offered a new era of peace and development. The growth of modernization of health services took a new turn under the state government in the form of infrastructural and human resource development, availability of qualified persons in different disciplines of specialties, up to date appliances for treatment and diagnosis of various diseases.⁵³⁴ Several policy initiatives and development schemes have been started by the State government and the Central Government. Even after getting statehood the status of health care in Mizoram during these periods was quite slow.⁵³⁵ The newly formed state government had paid attention to the health services which remained highly neglected due to the *rambuai* disturbances for a long two decades. It underwent improvement of health care facilities, community health care centres, sub-centres, nurse's school and improvement of infrastructure to combat and control epidemic and communicable diseases. The government gives new emphasis on human resource development, infrastructural development and modernization of health care services.⁵³⁶ Statehood offered a new era of peace and development where several policy initiatives and development schemes have been started by the government under state and central government. In short, the state domestic product and per capita income increased significantly over the years, and the economy is being transformed from agriculture to service sector, the human development index prepared by the Planning commission in 1991 ranked Mizoram at 7th position out of 32 states and UTs.⁵³⁷ Some important initiatives were the introduction of New Land Use Policy (NLUP), formulation of Mizoram Industrial Policy in 1989, expansion of education and health facilities, farm mechanization, creation of new government departments, establishment of state enterprises etc. Urban centres increased in 2001 census, infant mortality rate also declined dramatically as compared to the pre-*Rambuai* years and the all Indian average. The state had achieved the 2nd highest

⁵³⁴ Zarzoliana, 'Availability and utilization of health care facility in Mizoram: A geographical Analysis', PhD Thesis, North Eastern Hill University, 2005, pp.58-59.

⁵³⁵ H.Lalchawimawia, 'A Study of Health System in Mizoram' PhD Thesis, University of Madras, 2016, p.170.

⁵³⁶ Zarzoliana 'Availability and utilization of health care facility in Mizoram: A geographical Analysis' p.47.

⁵³⁷ Dr. Vanlalchhawna, 'Mizo Socio-Economic Life in the 20th Century: A Post-Colonial Reading, *Inter-College/University Faculty Seminar On Mizo in the 20th Century: A Post-Colonial Reading*' Unpublished Manuscript, 2012, ATC Archive, Durtlang.

literacy rate in the country, rapid progress in developing infrastructure facilities, particularly power roads, education, telecommunication and health during the three decades of the Post-Statehood era.⁵³⁸

Both life expectancy and child mortality in most part of the world have improved dramatically since 1970, with the notable exceptions of sub-Saharan Africa. Globalization has something to do with these improvements come from the idea that higher income promotes better health. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a broad increase in world income and a reduction in poverty, both as a fraction of the world's population and in absolute terms. The link between income and health in poor countries is typically thought to be strong, so it is entirely plausible that globalization-induced poverty reduction has improved population health.⁵³⁹ This would have impinged on global death rate to a great extent, where the declining death rate and increasing trend of life expectancy can be seen in the context of Mizoram in the post-statehood era.

Table 5.1 Economic and Health Indicators of Mizoram during 1981-2010.

Sl. No	Years	NSDP	IMR	Life Expectancy	PCI
1	1981	6218	34.0	54.4	1289
2	1982	7005	32	54.4	1383
3	1983	7766	30.0	54.4	1471
4	1984	4971	28.5	54.4	1724
5	1985	12199	33.3	54.4	2139
6	1986	15725	18.58	54.4	2658
7	1987	19413	17.8	54.4	3165

⁵³⁸ Vanlalchhawna, 'Challenges and Opportunities for Sustaining Peace and Development in Mizoram', in Jagadish K.Patnaik, (ed.), *Mizoram: Dimensions and Perspective, Society, Economy and Polity*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 2008, pp.130-32.

⁵³⁹Dr. C Lalrinmawii, 'Impact of Liberalization on Health and Economic Indicators of Mizoram', *ISOR Journal of Economic and Finance*, vol.11, Issue 4. July-Aug 2020, www.isojournal.org (accessed 3 March 2021).

8	1988	25886	22.6	54.4	4077
9	1989	26007	21.4	58.3	4026
10	1990	28076	18.3	58.6	4135
11	1991	30560	20.0	58.6	4474
12	1992	41733	21.9	58.8	5941
13	1993	47810	21.5	59.3	6599
14	1994	61890	15.3	59.9	8319
15	1995	67178	20.9	60.3	8793
16	1996	85874	18.1	60.3	10958
17	1997	98293	18.5	62.1	12210
18	1998	102239	26.0	62.4	12393
19	1999	113896	18.4	62.6	13479
20	2000	140951	21.0	62.9	16443
21	2001	156728	19.0	63.1	17826
22	2002	175199	14.0	63.4	19430
23	2003	193268	19.0	63.1	20896
24	2004	208337	20.0	63.1	21963
25	2005	239960	25.0	64.7	24662
26	2006	266427	21.5	67.7	26698
27	2007	294409	29.7	67.7	28764
28	2008	341053	38.3	69.9	32488
29	2009	410719	36.0	69.9	38145
30	2010	492277	34.0	71.0	44758

Source: Dr. C Lalrinmawii, 'Impact of Liberalization on Health and Economic Indicators of Mizoram', *ISOR Journal of Economic and Finance*, vol.11, Issue 4. July-Aug 2020, www.isojournal.org

The analysis of the trend in the pre and post liberalization period i.e. the period after 1991 shows that the growth in NSDP and life expectancy was more significant after the liberalization of the Indian economy. The growth in per capita income is higher during the pre-liberalization period and in the case of infant mortality rate, the rate declined during pre-liberalization period while it increased tremendously at the post-liberalization period. This may be due to the increase in population after the 1990's. Infant mortality rate is high in rural areas due to lack of proper care and lack of knowledge of mothers in the area.⁵⁴⁰ Since an increase in life expectancy in the post-liberalization period can be felt, this result has a direct correlation with the overall socio-economic and health improvements in the post 1991.

Through time there have been significant changes in the major causes of death for human populations. The major causes of death have changed from infectious and parasitic diseases to chronic conditions, such as heart disease and stroke. Numerous factors have influenced the changing causes of death; including nutrition and diet, personal hygiene, exposure to new environment or, public health measures, rise in standard of living and medical and technological advances and discoveries etc. A transition from earlier the earlier pattern of cause of death among the Mizo was witness in the contemporary period.

Study from the previous chapter suggested that, during the colonial period mortality was severely high as compared with today's mortality rate, which were primarily owing to the burgeoning disease mortality, epidemic, supplemental to recurring famine. It has been observed that infant mortality was also severely high throughout the colonial period. Communicable diseases such as cholera, small-pox, dysentery and diarrhea were the chief cause of mortality in the early years of colonial period. Malaria fever and respiratory disease were also common in the first decade of the 20th Century. Compared with the post-independence period mortality rate during the colonial period was severely high. During the three decades between 1910 and

⁵⁴⁰Lalrinmawii, *ISOR Journal of Economic and Finance*, p.13

1930 death rate in the then Lushai hills was approximately around 25 to 35 per thousand populations every year. Since the trend in major diseases causing mortality was identical to that of the colonial period, record has suggested that declined in mortality was witnessed in the post-independence period. On the eve of Independence death rate drastically fall to 16.37 per thousand populations⁵⁴¹ and in 1951 the total death recorded in the then Mizo Hills was 1615, which was 8.23 per thousand populations.⁵⁴² Compared with other districts, public health in the Lushai Hills district as per the 1951 census has been very good. Medical facilities provided by the government and partly by the missions are more adequate than other districts. Jeepable road constructed due to the Second World War connected Aizawl has now considerably improved, improvement in literacy⁵⁴³ notwithstanding the fact that vital statistics like birth rate and death rate are lacking during the colonial period and initial years of post-independence era, the percentage of widows falls dramatically in 1951 as compared to 1941 this somehow established a rapid decline in mortality between 1941 to 1951.⁵⁴⁴ All these factors, social, economic, medical, educational and economic, coupled with the thin density of population would have contributed to the overall health and socio-economic condition of the people which is associated with the decline in mortality as well a shift in the causes of death which took shape from the post-independence period.

According to the record made by Registrar of Births & Deaths among Cancer was the leading cause of death from 2012, this report included those who were not medically certified by the nodal department. In the previous year around 2005 and 2006 Malaria was the leading cause of death in Mizoram which was now controlled due to government policy towards eradication of malaria. As recorded by the State Epidemiology Cell on disease burden, between April 1996 to March 2001), Malaria

⁵⁴¹ Annual Public Health Report of the Province of Assam for the Year 1945, Major T.D Ahmad, Indian Medical Service, Director of Public Health Assam, Shillong The Assam Government Press 1950, p.8.

⁵⁴² Census of India 1961 Assam vol iii, Part I B Report on Vital Statistics, Guwahati, Manager of Publications Civil Lines, p 12.

⁵⁴³ Census of India 1951, volume xii Assam, Manipur and Tripura, Part I, Report, pp. 55-56

⁵⁴⁴ T.C Lalhlimawma, 'Studies on Demographic Profile of Mizoram', M.A Dissertation, North Eastern Hill University, 1995, p.27.

topped the lists for all five reporting years. Cancer has over taken Malaria as the leading cause of mortality in the state calendar year 2004.

Table 5.2 Major Causes of death in Mizoram from 1986 to 2012.

Cause of death	No. of deaths and percentage to total deaths			
	1986	1990	2006	2012
1	2	3	4	5
Malaria	315	370	653	234
	11.7%	13.4%	13.9%	3.6%
Cancer	180	257	600	847
	6.7%	9.3%	12.7%	13.0%
Tuberculosis	58	63	81	97
	2.2%	2.3%	1.7%	1.5%
Pneumonia	173	114	168	277
	6.4%	4.1%	3.6%	4.3%
Bronchitis & Asthma	276	244	519	478
	10.3%	8.8%	11.0%	7.4%
Diabetes Mellitus	13	36	67	125
	0.5%	1.3%	1.4%	1.95
Heart Disease/Failure	90	200	256	358
	3.4%	7.2%	55%	5.5%
Transport Accidents	68	112	N.A	130
	2.5%	4.1%	-	2.0%
Total Deaths	2686	2759	4697	6503

Source: Mizoram Statistics, 2014, Compiled by Lalchhuanawma Hrahnel, p.189.

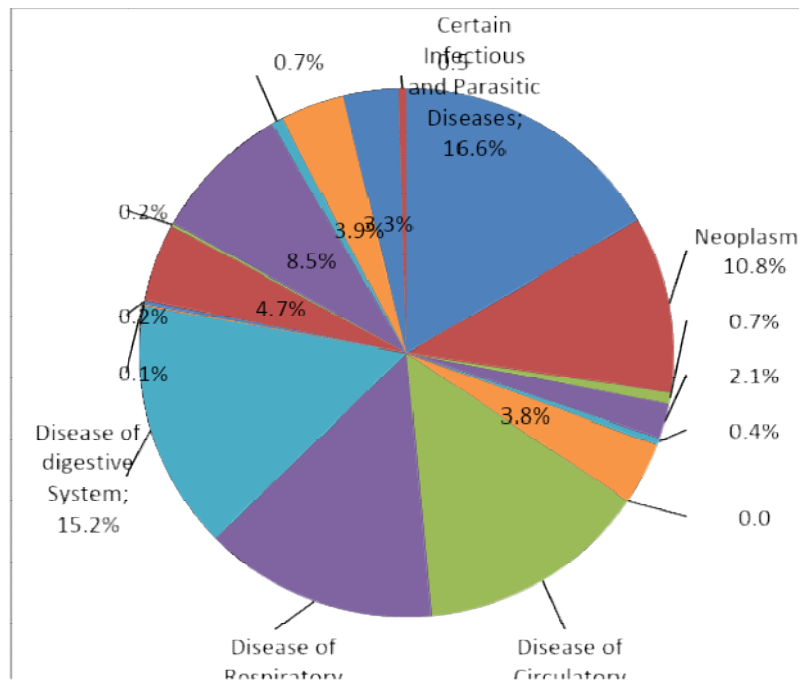


Figure 5.1: Major causes of death during 2010-2019 (MCCD).

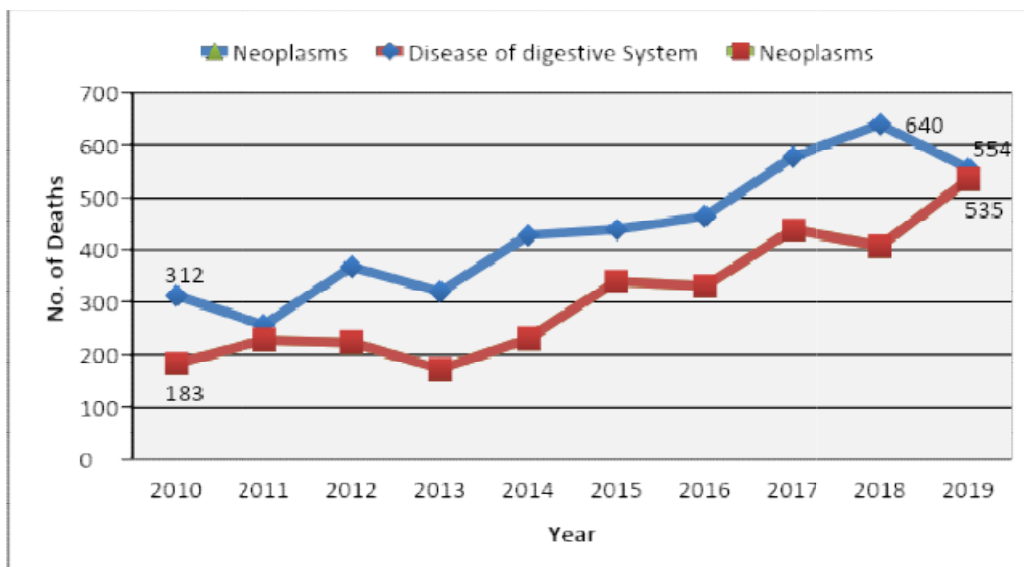


Figure 5.2: Graph showing the increase in the no deaths from Disease of the Digestive System Cacer during the last 10 years.

According to the data from MCCD, 43% of total death during 2010 to 2019 in the state was medically certified. From this procedure the major causes of deaths can be observed. 16% died from Certain Infectious and Parasitic Diseases, 15% died

from Disease of Digestive System, 14.1% died from Disease of Respiratory System, and 14 % died from Disease of the Circulatory System, and 10.8 % died from Neoplasm (Cancer).⁵⁴⁵

Among the causes of deaths over the last 10 years i.e. 2010 to 2019, cancer and disease of the digestive system were the two fast growing major causes of death. Disease of the digestive system (stomach and bowel etc) has increased in a fast rate and has become the highest number during the last 10 years. From the graph it can observe that Cancer has become the second major cause of death and the fastest increasing cause of death during the last 10 years and its rapid increase in the last 2 years is clearly notable.

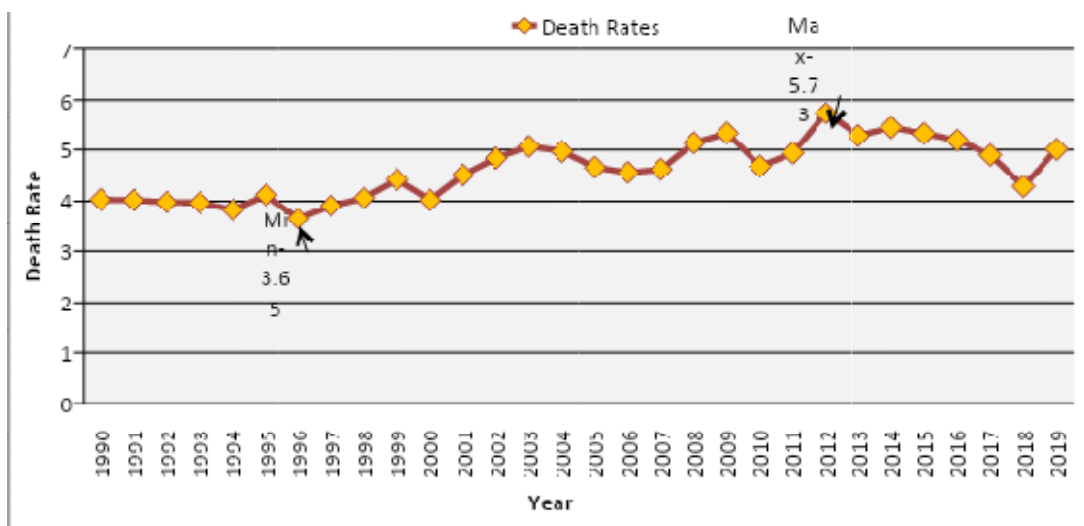


Figure 5.3: Graph showing death rates in Mizoram from 1990-2019.

According to the data accumulated from the government, a total of 139328 people died between 1990 and 2019. The year 1996 witnessed the lowest death rate with 3.65 and 2012 recorded the highest death rates with 5.37 deaths per 1000 population. The average death rate during 1990 to 2019 is 4.62 deaths per 1000

⁵⁴⁵ Data accumulated from the Office of the Addl. Chief Registrar of Births & Deaths, Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Planning and Programme Implementation Department, Government of Mizoram.

population.⁵⁴⁶ A total of 61106 people died during the last ten years. As far as death by age groups is concerned, the age group above 70 years accounted for the number of deaths with 24.5% during 2010-2019. In the age group below 70 years 45675 people died during the last ten years (2010-2019). The age group of 35-44 accounted for the most number of deaths with 17.4% from total deaths and the age group of 45-54 stood second in numbers with 16.6%. Of the total male died during the last ten years the age group of 70 years above accounted for the most number of deaths with 21.6 % and in the second place, the age group of 35-44 accounted for 15.% of the total deaths among the total death from males. During the last ten years (2010-2019), 22483 females died in Mizoram. The age group of 70 above accounted for the most number of deaths with 31.5% of total female deaths. The second is the age group of below 1 year with 13.8%.

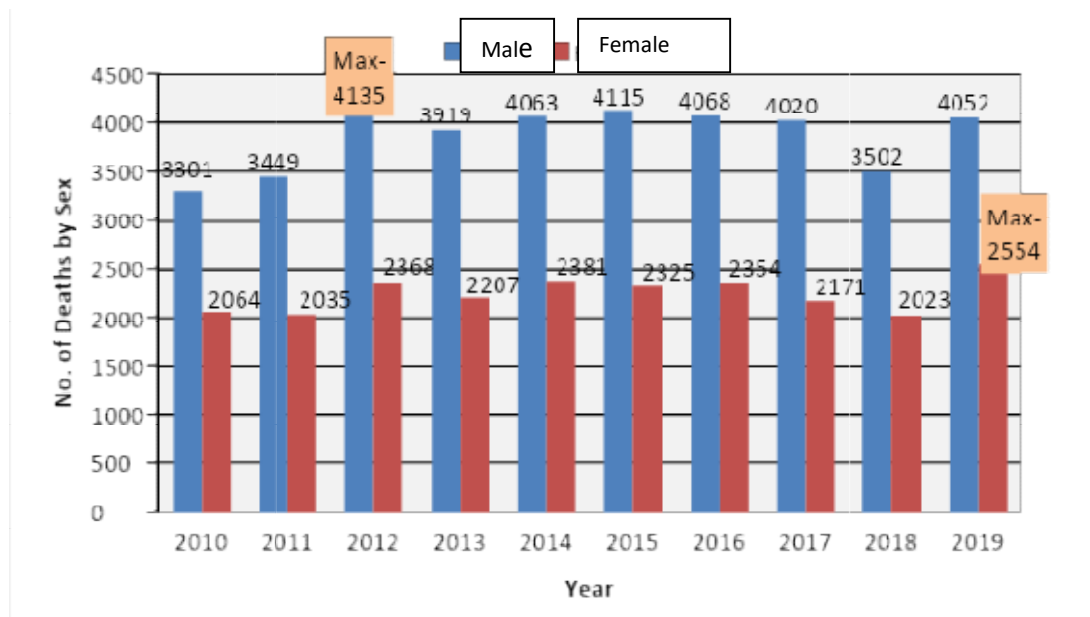


Figure 5.4: Comparison of number of deaths between Males and Females during the last ten years (2010-2019)

⁵⁴⁶ Data accumulated from the Office of the Addl. Chief Registrar of Births & Deaths, Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Planning and Programme Implementation Department, Government of Mizoram.

During the last ten years a total of 61106 people died and 38624 (63%) males died while 22484 (37%) females died in Mizoram. The most number of deaths from males occurred in 2012 with 4135 males died during the year, while the most number of deaths from females occurred in 2019 with 2554 females died in this year. The sex ratio at death during the last ten years is out of every 1000 males died 582 females died.⁵⁴⁷

Table 5.3: Reconstructed Time Series Data 1985-2020

Year	Number of Vital Events Registered			Vital Rates		
	Live Births	Deaths	Still Births	Births	Deaths	IMR
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1985	4503	1183	110	9.24	2.37	33.32
1986	11620	2686	228	19.69	4.46	18.85
1987	13060	2250	216	21.20	4.07	17.84
1988	15297	2951	221	23.82	4.53	22.62
1989	15046	3136	NA	18.84	3.93	21.47
1990	15125	2759	189	20.53	3.70	18.38
1991	15235	2828	179	22.36	4.10	20.01
1992	14269	2889	178	19.87	3.97	21.94
1993	14260	2951	239	19.28	3.92	21.60
1994	14835	2932	314	19.48	3.77	15.37
1995	15274	3234	243	22.14	4.6	20.09
1996	14616	2941	212	21.19	4.26	18.13
1997	16660	3230	193	24.15	4.68	18.45
1998	16001	3438	159	23.19	4.98	26.06
1999	16848	3822	168	24.42	5.54	18.45

⁵⁴⁷ Data accumulated from the Office of the Addl. Chief Registrar of Births & Deaths, Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Planning and Programme Implementation Department, Government of Mizoram.

2000	18856	3550	175	21.39	4.03	11.50
2001	19760	4070	144	21.88	4.51	17.34
2002	20311	4401	116	22.34	4.84	21.46
2003	20301	4697	102	21.93	5.07	14.03
2004	20222	4461	149	21.47	4.97	22.69
2005	20133	4686	124	20.07	4.66	22.40
2006	22141	4697	161	21.51	4.56	21.54
2007	22838	4907	148	21.60	4.64	29.83
2008	23294	5587	152	21.45	5.14	38.46
2009	25535	5942	151	22.88	5.32	37.99
2010	25752	5365	155	22.46	4.68	33.16
2011	25425	5484	139	23.30	5.03	33.67
2012	26042	6503	87	23.73	5.28	35.83
2013	24584	6126	170	22.20	5.28	38.92
2014	24516	6444	130	20.07	5.44	38.83
2015	24786	6640	167	20.48	5.32	18.76
2016	22497	6422	122	18.19	5.19	12.66
2017	21431	6191	131	19.61	4.90	17.35
2018	20984	5525	40	16.33	4.29	14.48
2019	23808	6606	83	18.05	5.01	13.31
2020	23320	6730	156	17.28	4.97	16.47

Source: Annual Report of Registration of Births and Deaths Mizoram, 2020, Office of the Additional Chief Registrar of Births and Deaths, Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Planning & Programme Implementation Department, Government of Mizoram.

Table 5.4: Mizoram Institutional cases of diseases in Mizoram in percentage share:

Name of Disease	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005
Acute Respiratory	8.61	8.03	7.32	8.75	7.36
Acute Diarrhoeal	3.93	3.89	3.34	3.50	3.41
Pneumonia	0.87	0.89	1.03	0.09	0.85
Viral Hepatitis	0.26	0.33	0.24	0.16	0.15
Pulmonary TB	0.27	0.32	0.21	0.22	0.22
Enteric Fever	0.54	0.12	0.06	0.36	0.99
Others	74.93	86.37	87.89	86.11	87.02
All Diseases	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Zarzoliana, PhD Thesis, ‘‘Availability and utilization of health care facility in Mizoram: A geographical Analysis’ p.145.

It can be observed that the share of other diseases not specified increased rather abruptly since 2001-2002 without any subsequent increase in the next two years. In any case this connotes the percentage share of communicable diseases to the total diseases has declined significantly since aforementioned year, indicating that there has been a substantial increase in the incidence of non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, cancer, accidents, alcohol and drugs abuse. One reason for this appears to be changes in lifestyle and growing stress of ‘modern’ social life. It can be assume that a continuous declining trend of communicable diseases can be attributed to the pattern in advanced societies, as morbidity seems to have been dominated by diseases other than communicable diseases.⁵⁴⁸ In India this trend has also seen from the report of Burden of Disease India 2005 that non-communicable such as cancer, CVD, diabetes, respiratory condition such as asthma and COPD accounts for the second largest share after the communicable health

⁵⁴⁸ Zarzoliana ‘Availability and utilization of health care facility in Mizoram: A geographical Analysis’ p.110.

condition of the disease burden in India. It has been estimated that non-communicable diseases to be risen with significant amount in 2016.⁵⁴⁹

Studies have shown that among the principal communicable diseases ARI and ADD are found to be most dramatic as far as incidence rates are concerned which is related to the living environment, habits and sanitation. A less incidence rates like PTB, ViHe, Pneu etc recorded a very high mortality rates per thousand patients. From the annual mortality rates it can be noted that the health facilities and provision is not up to mark so far as the improvement made in curbing or preventing the occurrence of these diseases. Urban centres as the focal point of health services and high literacy rates seem to produce better consciousness of health care among the people as reported cases of diseases tend to be higher in the districts which have large urban centres. Better facilities also point to the better utilization as various incidences occurred according to quality and quantity of health facilities.⁵⁵⁰ And another significant demographic change was receding pandemics and move to degenerative man-made diseases. An epidemiologic transition from the colonial period was witness in the contemporary period, when infectious and parasitic illness claimed many lives, diseases such as dysentery, influenza, cholera, tuberculosis, typhoid, malaria and other infectious diseases were replaced by heart diseases, cancer and other non-communicable diseases.

Table 5.5: Death by Major Cause of Death:

Sl no	Cause of Death	200	200	200	200	200	200	2012		
		4	5	6	7	8	9	Mal e	Femal e	Tota l
1	Malaria	500	625	653	333	474	522	149	85	234
2	Cancer	593	623	600	640	654	638	503	344	847
3	Asthma	424	453	519	n.a	583	527	263	215	478

⁵⁴⁹ National Commission on Macroeconomics and Health, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, *Burden of Disease in India*, Shree Om Enterprises Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 2005. P.5.

⁵⁵⁰ Zarzoliana ‘‘Availability and utilization of health care facility in Mizoram: A geographical Analysis’ p.145.

	&Bronchitis									
4	Heart Disease & Heart Attack	325	289	256	262	286	198	237	121	358
5	Pneumonia	189	143	168	198	265	345	167	110	277
6	Jaundice	164	117	72	58	90	83	73	25	98
7	Typhoid & Para Typhoid	139	107	145	49	91	69	35	29	64
8	Senility	110	98	108	86	112	113	45	66	111
9	Transport Accidents	133	95	59	68	85	87	97	33	130
10	Tuberculosis	99	84	81	96	79	84	66	31	97
11	Liver Disease/Cirrhosis	92	64	68	65	70	81	101	29	130
12	Diabetis Milletus	61	59	67	73	64	49	79	46	125
13	Dysentery/Diarrho ea. Gastro entirtis	61	53	56	60	43	36	27	15	42
14	Ceribrovacular	183	107	55	70	23	63	64	35	99
15	Stomach & Duodenum	284	246	222	n.a	276	203	140	84	224
16	Suicide	61	44	35	35	53	59	69	8	77
17	Meningitis	70	82	n.a	120	137	146	96	66	162

Source: Mizoram Statistics 2004 Compiled by Lalchhuanawma Hrahsel p.191

Table 5.6: Mizoram Disease Burden

Table 5.6: Mizoram Disease Burden+

Sl. No	Name of Disease	1996-1997		1997-1998		1998-1999		1999-2000		2000-2001	
		No. of Cases	No. of Deaths	No. of Cases	No. of Deaths	No. of Cases	No. of Deaths	No. of Cases	No. of Deaths	No. of Cases	No. of Deaths
1	Malaria	76363	130	55736	87	56422	131	38109	109	30854	112
2	Intestinal Infectious Diseases	43631	30	43004	37	44692	48	16965	18	15610	15
3	Tuberculosis	1618	17	1848	23	2131	30	1373	24	1230	29
4	Cancer Cases	162	4	436	11	531	13	405	26	510	43
5	Viral Hepatitis	1521	10	1359	13	1639	18	916	2	1160	4
6	Endocrine, Metabolic, etc Diseases	409	2	691	2	838	3	1616	10	1810	9
7	Anaemia	4434	5	4187	8	3562	22	4294	15	3646	12
8	Nutritional Deficiencies	904	-	929	-	864	1	1392	-	1208	-
9	Disorder of the Eye and Adnexia	13458	-	10009	-	11368	-	8699	-	8681	-
10	ARD	53175	55	53715	44	2031	70	10718	563	8724	379

Source: Zarzolia "Availability and utilization of health care facility in Mizoram: A geographical Analysis", Appendix X.

According to the ICMR report, cancer risk among the top five leading causes of deaths in the state. Close to two thirds of males and half of the females are tobacco users, about a quarter of the men consume alcohol, about one third is overweight or obese, and one fourth is hypertensive. The causes of more than half of the deaths are medically certified.⁵⁵¹

Thus, when looking at the pattern of diseases and mortality in contemporary Mizoram, the period reflects further reduction in death rates, more person are now

⁵⁵¹ Profile of Cancer and Health Related Indicators in the North East Region of India, Bengaluru, Director, ICMR- National Centre for Disease Informatics and Research, p.100. 2021.

surviving as compared to the colonial period, to advanced older ages. Mortality rates steadily declined below 20 per 1000 population. Child mortality accounts for less than, 10% of the total deaths and 70 % of the total deaths are to person over the age of 50. Life expectancy at birth continues to increase to beyond 70. Causes of death shift to chronic and degenerative diseases or man-made deaths due to environmental pollution, unhealthy eating habits etc.

5.3 Hospital and Medical Science as an Institution of Death

In the modern west, medicine has replaced religion as the institutional molder of cultural death fears and immortality desires. Medicine has become a moral enterprise that seeks to uncover and control things it consider undesirable. The most evident change in contemporary period is the introduction and adaptation of new technologies. An institutional shift from death in the home to death in the hospital has been an emerging development in the contemporary period, where legal definition of cause of death was determined and a proper registration and certification of death was introduced. The health of the social body began to change, hospital became the primary institutions to care for the sick and monitor the passage from life to death. Western medical knowledge was introduced since the Colonial period, but the colonial medical intervention was sporadic and the colonial limited interest in health care can be felt as well a speedy improvement in health was not reflected in the statistics during the colonial period.

Private hospitals and medical professionals gradually increased in the contemporary period. A brief comparison of health facilities from the pre-statehood years with the contemporary period has brought to light the improvement pattern in Mizoram. In the year 1996 there were 7 governments' hospitals with 232 medical doctors with 338 staff nurses and 4 non-government's hospitals in Mizoram. Apart from this there were 38 primary health centres (PHC), 18 Subsidiary health centres (SHC), 6 community health centre and 314 sub-centres. The doctor population ratio

in the year 1995 was 1:3600.⁵⁵² The figures in 1996 seem small but it was a giant leap in medical health as compared to the pre-statehood period as the figures were more than doubled by the year 1996. There is a gradual development as a decade passed; in 2006 there is an increased government health facilities like the setting up of hospitals in the remaining districts and medical and increased in the number of para-medical personnel.⁵⁵³ And by 2016 there were 12 government hospitals with a total of 1039 bed strength and 20 non-government hospitals with a total of 2343 bed strength.⁵⁵⁴ The dominance of medico-scientific framework of monitoring, interpreting, and responding to signs of death in contemporary period has been transforming the way in which Mizos perceived the dying process, as most of the death and dying for instance has usually been taking place in urban hospitals, with professionals that dependent on equanimity, rationality and detach commitment to saving the life of the patient. Medical advances allow increasing control over the death; medical professional has been taking much of this control.

In modern secular societies like the West, bureaucratization has become a way of controlling death which occurred with the decline of religious authority, changes in family functions which bring about the transfer of death related matters to technological rationality in specialized institutions. Since the characteristic behavior, outlook and attitude towards death and dying in the contemporary Mizo society is far more different as compared to the modern West, the recent development in modern health care and technology points to bureaucratization of death which has becoming the state policy introduced in contemporary period.

The attempts of secularized societies to record and measure patterns of mortality have much in common with what Foucault calls the “bio-politics” of populations. Appearing when the population becomes the prime object of government techniques, bio-politics is a way to explain with logical reason the

⁵⁵² Statistical Handbook of Mizoram, 1996, Directorate of Economic & Statistics, Government of Mizoram, pp.117-120.

⁵⁵³ Statistical Handbook of Mizoram, 2006, Directorate of Economic & Statistics, Government of Mizoram, p.56.

⁵⁵⁴ Statistical Handbook of Mizoram, 2016, Directorate of Economic & Statistics, Government of Mizoram, pp.86-87.

problems posed for governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a group of living beings constituted as a population: health, hygiene, birth and death rate, longevity, and race. A technique of power applied to the human species, bio-politics operates as a normalizing power integrated into the technology of the body and targeted towards the population. The bio-politics like the instrument of registration far more than people's attitude towards death structure the way death is organized in a society.⁵⁵⁵ Thus, modern bureaucratic regimen is seeking to control and reduce the unpredictability by developing registration system and systems with increasingly refined medical categories by imposing legal definition of causes of death and certification at the hospitals.

The history of Civil Registration System (CRS) in India dates back to the middle of the 19th century. In 1886 a Central Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act was promulgated to provide for voluntary registration throughout British India. In the Post-independence India, the Registration of Births and Death Act (RBD Act) was enacted in 1969 to promote uniformity and comparability in the registration of Births and Deaths across the country and compilation of vital statistics based thereon. With the enactment of the Act, registration of births, deaths and still births has become mandatory in India. The Registrar General, India (RGI) at the Central Government level coordinates and unifies the activities of registration throughout the country. However, implementation of the statute is vested with the State Governments. The registration of births and deaths in the country is done by the functionaries appointed by the State Governments. Directorate of Census Operations are the sub-ordinate offices of Office of the Registrar General, India and these offices are responsible of monitoring of working of the Act in their concerned State/UT.⁵⁵⁶

The Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969 and the Mizoram Registration of Births and Deaths Rules, 1978 framed under the Act came into force in the State with effect from 1st January, 1985. The registration of births and deaths is

⁵⁵⁵ Oscar Palma Lima & Alexandre de Padua Carrieri, 'The Accounting of Deaths and the Social Organization of Death in Brazil', *Historia Ciencias Saude-Manguinhos*, v.27, n.2, 2020, p.3.

⁵⁵⁶ https://www.censusindia.gov.in/vital_statistics/crs/crs_division.html

compulsory and free if the registration is done within the stipulated period of 21 days from the date of occurrence. It is the duty of the head of the household or otherwise in the absence, the nearest relative of the head present in the house and in the absence of such person, the oldest adult person in the house to report the occurrence of any live birth, still birth and deaths. In the case of vital events in a medical institution,, the medical officer in charge or any person authorized by him responsible in the registration of the events of births and deaths and the issuance of birth and death certificate. Also the local registrars are responsible to record, register and issue necessary certificates in respect of births and deaths within their own jurisdiction. At present there are 858 registration units where the local registrars submitted monthly returns to the Office of their respective Asst. District Registrar.⁵⁵⁷

But a more standardized procedure known as Medical Certification of Cause of Death (MCCD) scheme was proposed by WHO as an important tool to obtain scientific and reliable information in terms of causes of mortality. This scheme was introduced in India under the Provisions of Registration of Births and Deaths Act, 1969 and the act provide for issuing a certificate of the cause of death by the medical practitioner who has attended on the deceased on the time of death.⁵⁵⁸ The scheme of *Medical Certification of Cause of Death (MCCD)* was introduced in the country under the provisions of Registration of Births and Deaths (RBD) Act, 1969. Since then, it has been operational in the country, but with varying levels of efficiency across the States/Union Territories. Under the scheme, the Office of the Registrar General, India (ORGI) obtains data on medically certified deaths as collected, compiled and tabulated by the Offices of the Chief Registrars of Births and Deaths of the States/UTs.⁵⁵⁹ The Registration of Births and Deaths Act 1969 and the Mizoram

⁵⁵⁷ Annual Report of Registration of Births and Deaths Mizoram, 2020, Office of the Addl. Chief Registrar of Births & Deaths, Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Planning & Programme Implementation Department, Government of Mizoram, pp.ii-iii.

⁵⁵⁸ Medical Certification of Causes of Death (MCCD) Mizoram, 2020, Office of the Addl. Chief Registrar of Births & Deaths, Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Planning & Programme Implementation Department, Government of Mizoram, p.ii.

⁵⁵⁹ Reports on Medical Certification of Cause of Deaths 2013, OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR GENERAL, INDIA
Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Vital Statistics, R.K Puram, New Delhi,

Registration of Births and Deaths Rules 1978 frame under the Act came into force in the state with effect from 1st July 1985.

Thus, the scheme of Medical Certification of Cause of Death (MCCD) is a recent development in India and under this certification only a medical professional or practitioner from a legitimate hospital can certified the cause of death with nomenclature of International Classification of Disease (ICD). In Mizoram 43% from total deaths has been systematically recorded and certified between the years 2010 to 2019. Reports were prepared on the basis data on institutional deaths (hospital deaths) and in Mizoram those data are confined to 112 hospitals or institutions which submitted Monthly Returns on MCCD.⁵⁶⁰ Recent development has gradually made medical professionals assume the power to define death, to record the pathological details of its appearance in once living bodies, and to control the living bodies surrounding the dying. At the same time hospitals began to have control over the death. This has shaped public attitude towards about the meaning of death. As certification of the cause of death awareness increased, new medical institution gradually grew and health-care has becoming more accessible to the general masses. This has slowly led to the rise of new perspectives and attitudes towards death in the contemporary period, also the way death is understood and investigated through medico-scientific institution where disease, a risk or danger to be avoided or delayed. This has led to more innovations including public health policies. Prior⁵⁶¹ suggests that it is this instrument of civil registration (birth, deaths, marriage), official certificates, statisticians, epidemiologist etc far more than peoples' attitude or feeling towards death, that structure the way death is organized in society.

Thus, recent introduction of registration and certification of deaths through an institutionalized bureaucracy in the state has gradually impacted on the society's perception and attitude toward death. The advancement in medical-science along with the analysis has been creating discourses resulting in the knowledge production

⁵⁶⁰ Medical Certification of Causes of Death (MCCD) Mizoram, 2020. Office of the Chief Registrar of Births and Deaths & Directorate of Economic and Statistics Planning and Programme Implementation Department, Government of Mizoram, Aizawl, Government Press, p.ii.

⁵⁶¹ Oscar Palma Lima & Alexandre de Padua Carrieri, *Historia Ciencias Saude-Manguinho*, p.6.

and occupies institution and specific professional spaces. Thus, produces the physicians, nurses, patients, the dying person, deceased, kin, a certain condition, ritualized activity and perceptions relating to the human relationship with the end of life.

5.2.1 Healthcare & Palliative as means of Taming Death

Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and families who face life-threatening illness by providing pain and symptom relief, spiritual and psychosocial support from diagnosis to the end of life and bereavement. Hospice Care is the end-of-life care provided by health professionals and volunteers. The goal of the care is to help people, who are dying, have peace, comfort and dignity. However, sometimes the hospice care is equated synonymously with palliative care.⁵⁶² Palliative Care was introduced in India in the second half of the 1980s. Since then Palliative Care program has been developed, although coverage of Palliative care in India still remains a huge problem. Most of these program focus on cancer patients.⁵⁶³ National Programme for Palliative Care was launched in Mizoram in 2016 the Programme was implemented in one districts – Mizoram State Cancer Institute (MSCI), Zemabawk, Aizawl East. State Palliative Care Cell was also established at Directorate of Hospital & Medical Education under Health & Family Welfare Department. Its vision and goals being an Integration of rational, quality pain relief and palliative care services that are easily accessible at all levels of health care system in Mizoram. Develop capability and provide authorized license for procurement, storage, and prescription of medicinal opioids in all District Hospitals, Community Health Centers and Primary Health Centers of Mizoram. Educate healthcare providers and policy makers and create public awareness about palliative care.⁵⁶⁴ Recently it has been introduced at 6 districts Aizawl East & West, Champhai,

⁵⁶² National Programme For Palliative Care, Operational Guidelines, Directorate of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, 2017, p.3 accessed: [https://www.wbhealth.gov.in/NCD/uploaded_files/all_files/Operational_Guidelines_\(PC\)_2017.pdf](https://www.wbhealth.gov.in/NCD/uploaded_files/all_files/Operational_Guidelines_(PC)_2017.pdf)

⁵⁶³ Joris Gielen and Komal Kashyap, 'Belief in Karma and Moksa at the End of Life in India', in Helaine Selin & Robert M. Rakoff, (eds.), *Death Across Culture: Death and Dying in Non-Western Cultures*, Switzerland, Springer, 2019, p.30.

⁵⁶⁴ Achievement under National Programme For Palliative Care NPCC) FY 2016-17

Kolasib, Mamit leh Lunglei district-ah. For the time being Palliative care programme in Mizoram was dedicated only to cancer patients.⁵⁶⁵ Since majority of Mizo patients are Christians and the state being a homogenous Christian population, religious views and how palliative care was directed to the patient had impacted on their reaction to their illness. Thus, how individuals cope with diseases and accept their illness and even the afterlife was basically influenced by Christian teachings of hope and how it was disseminated through the palliative care. Still religious beliefs and spiritual traditions create an important context not only for how people live their lives but also how they approach their deaths. Since the introduction of Christianity among the Mizos, the belief in the immortality of soul and reunion in heaven made an idealized good Christian death.

5.1 Adapting Tradition and Modernity in Contemporary Death Rituals

In the previous chapters it have been highlighted that the unique Mizo traditional customs, notion and rituals surrounding death, which were often matters of family and community concern; grounded in worldview and beliefs that included about the supernatural. The British Colonialism from the late 19th Century till the mid 20th Century has introduced western education, new religion, health, and socio-economic changes, the attitudes and practices towards death and dying has undergone a gradual change. The en-masse conversion to Christianity during the colonial period has led to the birth of a distinct Mizo Christian identity, it was in this space that the Mizo practices surrounding death and dying was re-invented or gradually developed where many traditional ritual practices survived and incorporated within the framework of Christianity, resulted in the birth of a homogenous Mizo Christian death rituals. Thus, with the growth of codified religious formal religious tradition, the authority of the Church was considered responsible for creating the broad cosmological canvas underlying funerals and burial practices. In the post- independence period under the Indian government, progress was slow; the

<https://www.nhmmizoram.org/upload/NPPC%202016-17.pdf> (accessed 23 June, 2021)

⁵⁶⁵ World Hospice & Palliative Care Day Hman A Ni <https://health.mizoram.gov.in/post/world-hospice-palliative-care-day-hman-a-ni> (accessed 23 June, 2021)

late 1960s faced severe famine and political unrest till 1986. The post- state era Mizoram had witnessed changes in every field and areas. Modern technological advances, socio-economic change etc had impacted on the socio-cultural milieu of the Mizos. This has been resulting in a gradual shift from the existing attitude towards death and dying which impinged on the existing tradition. Thus, this section explores the changes, re-invention and adaptation of new ritual practices surrounding death and dying in the face of modernity in the contemporary period.

A study on the historical attitudes towards death in majority of the developed countries of the west were characterized from different periods, where traditional death has been characterized as essentially religious, modern death as essentially medical and the post modern death is essentially personal. Traditional societies both those existing today and in Europe in the past are characterized by a high death rate and usually by a religious culture. In traditional societies infant mortality is high and limited knowledge in modern healthcare and infrastructure and people succumbed to infectious diseases. Death attitudes and rituals were highly influenced by religious tradition and the doctor, by contrast is of little succor. Religion provides an authoritative language and ritual to prepare the soul for its ongoing journey. In the modern west curative medicine has improved life expectancy, dying is no longer seen as a spiritual transition but as a medical condition.⁵⁶⁶ But historical trends and pattern for cultural changes in the Non-Western cultures were seen as different and also how they mediate the tensions between traditional rituals and beliefs and the homogenizing force of Western system are also different according to difference in cultural context. The unique feature of Mizo death rituals and practices amidst the increasing homogenization in the global world, and its adaptation into the present era reflects the diversity of human experience across cultures.

Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski claimed that death, which of all human events is the most upsetting and disorganizing to man's calculations, is perhaps the main source of religious belief. Regardless of its origins, religion was to

⁵⁶⁶ Tony Walter, 'Facing Death Without Tradition', in Glennys Howarth & Peter C. Jupp, (eds.), *Contemporary Issues in the Sociology of Death, Dying and Disposal*, New York, U.S.A, Palgrave Macmillan, 1996, pp.194-197.

nearly monopolize knowledge about death and the hereafter for most of human history; it was to be the institution that managed the death watch and funerary ritual, oversaw the cemetery, and structured the bereavement roles of survivors. However, with secularization, medical innovations, religion's control over matters of the dying and the dead has seemingly weakened. Religion now shares its responsibility for defining and managing death with medicine, science, and philosophy. Such dramatic social change, coupled with dramatically changing technologies and novel ethical dilemmas, is producing new relationships between religion and death.⁵⁶⁷

Throughout the history of the Mizos, the practices as well as notions surrounding death among the Mizos was a community affair. Among the Mizos social structure, traditional bonds of family, kinship or community are very strong therefore every activity surrounding death was a community event and it invoked sociality.⁵⁶⁸ In the Mizo context death has always been a cultural and religious space where identity and social cohesiveness was thus maintained, and death has been regulated and legitimized through a set of institutionalized body, i.e the Church and the cultural institution Young Mizo Association, both cannot work out in a separate entity as culture, custom and religion has inextricably intertwined. One of the most distinguishes and unique feature of the Mizo death practices and custom has been the community participation in order to put up with the deceased and his family a company. *Chhiat ni/That ni*,⁵⁶⁹ mostly when death took place in the community has also been among the key cultural space where the coveted *tlawngnaihna* is exhibited. Joy opined that social practice among the Mizos, like death related cultural and religious practice exhibits patterns and reaffirms relatedness, conveying a sense of 'being' or identity and belongingness to a society.⁵⁷⁰ Since its inception during the colonial period till today social and religious institution; the YMA and the Church are the two main institutions where YMA uphold traditional customs relating to

⁵⁶⁷ Michael C Kearl, *Endings: A Sociology of Death and Dying*, p.171

⁵⁶⁸ Joy L.K Pachuau, *Being Mizo*, p.210.

⁵⁶⁹ *Chhiatni Thatni* is a binary which denote the opposite of each other, *chhiatni* is when a community had faced misfortune like a calamity, disaster or catastrophe mostly used when death took place in a community used to denote adversity. *Thatni* is an event which denotes something positive took place like wedding, feast etc in a community.

⁵⁷⁰ Joy Pachuau, p.25.

death and the Church maintains its role in performing a prescribed funeral service from theological perspective. The rise of modern hospital and knowledge in health care and infrastructure in the contemporary period has been engendering hospitals along with medical science as an alternative institution which legitimized death and plays an authoritative role in clarifying death and influenced the dying ethos in contemporary Mizo society.

Since the late 1980s to the early 90s, we can see that the YMA has been concerned about the gradual changes in the existing customs and practices related to death through its monthly Magazine. Serious campaigns and awareness among the youth for more active participation in the *chhiatni* activities were taken up, where Mizo *Tlawmngaihna* had often been seen as gradually declining and the matter was addressed through newspaper articles.⁵⁷¹ It was during this period that changes had been taking place in the form of alteration of the former practices or abandonment of current customs and incorporation of new rituals which owe much from the gradual transformation of society economic activities in the post-state era. It is not uncommon for there to be marked generational differences in dealing with the dead. Older generation seems more observant of the rituals and more dedicated to the cultural meanings and emotional forms that have been dominant in the culture. The younger generation may have been strongly influenced by schooling, employment, and contact with television and to assimilate modern ways.

In the Post-Statehood era Mizoram, the need to take steps in social reform was felt in order to tackle the socio-cultural changes and the tension brought about by the changes in the realm of death. “Seminar on Mizo Society” was held on 29th and 30th January, 1988. A study in this seminar has also reflected that there are many new practices and customs or to be more precise, an alteration or changes in traditional practices was felt to be re-considered. Practices relating to death like *puan tuam* (covering of the corpse or giving a piece of cotton cloth), at the funeral, which has been a Mizo tradition but excessive practices had misappropriated the Mizo tradition.

⁵⁷¹K.Sangthauama, ‘Mitthi Tlaivarpu leh Thlanlah’ *YMA Chanchinbu*, Bu 255 na, January 1995, pp.24-26.

The placing or giving a bouquet of flowers has never been a Mizo custom, rather it was at some point borrowed from other cultures, it was considered that excessive practice can be disturbing and burdensome. The seminar also reflected that the funeral programme which was a community event as well a local church service has become time consuming event, especially in urban areas where people were becoming busy at offices or private enterprises. The seminar acknowledged that it was high time to re-evaluate or examine the practice of *YMA hun* (night spent at the deceased house) and *Khawhar in riah* (a Mizo custom of sleep over at the deceased house for around a week in order to console and help the deceased family).⁵⁷² Mizo funeral rituals and customs have been a culturally prescribed mechanism to sustain or established mutually dependent social relationships governed by reciprocal obligation which was maintained before Colonization, where conformity to the collective takes precedence over individual interests. Since the late 1980s gradual changes can be observed, such as diminishing social ties, among relatives, neighbor, co-workers, and church members as indicated by less attendee in the ritual and funeral ceremonies. Thus, when looking back at the paper of the ‘Seminar on Mizo Society’ on the topic of funeral rituals, it can be seen that there was an urgent need to reconsider the changing face of traditional rituals in the late 1980s. The declining trend of kinship role in mortuary practice, for example the role of the deceased *Pu* in the performance of *arthlahual*, close relatives, clan mates, and *makpa*’s role were gradually diminishing. This tendency has been gradually engendering a shift from collectivist culture towards individual culture, in the midst YMA the social institution has been taking heed in preserving the existing death culture, customs and practices, and find ways to manage the changes encountered by the society whether modernity, globalization or technological changes.

In the context of the Mizos, religion has traditionally had the most influence and direct impact on the cultural death ethos and has been monopolizing the meaning of death and rituals since the introduction of Christianity in the colonial period. Since its introduction, the Christian institution has provided the conception of salvation,

⁵⁷²*Mizo Hnam Zia Khawtlang Nun Siamthat Na: Mizo Mize Mila Khawtlang Nun Siamthat Dan Tur*, Mission Veng Aizawl, Synod Publication Board, 1988, pp.50-54.

reincarnation, heaven and hell and death related rituals. The Mizo conceptualization of death and its surrounding rituals has already been analyzed in chapter 3. Apart from providing theological concept about Christian eschatology, the Mizo funerary ritual has long been influenced by the examples, regulation or guidelines lay out by the church. Since the colonial period to the contemporary times, the influenced made by the Church is still very strong in the Mizo society when it comes to conception on death and its surrounding rituals. The Mizos understand their identity to be inextricably linked to their Christianity which has made the collective consciousness of the Mizos actively propagates a ‘Mizo Christianity’.⁵⁷³ The practice of Christianity in Mizoram defines and legitimizes life cycle events: the lifespan of an individual, his or her daily life is closely guided by the Church. Thus, in the contemporary Mizo society, the Church providing theological framework and concept on a good death which is heavily based on the protestant theology, notwithstanding the fact that there are minor differences in denomination among the Christians, majority of the population are members of the Presbyterian and Baptist Church. The church role in legitimizing death rituals has also been influential and strong as Joy Pachuau opines that “Christianity is pervasive in Mizo Society, defining not only the physical landscape but also providing for a definite way of living”. The Presbyterian Church has laid out a set of guidelines to follow at times of misfortune mostly deaths among the church members.⁵⁷⁴ Likewise other denominations have their own separate ritual guidelines which were performed when their church member died. Even though there are slight differences among the funeral among the Christian denominations, the funeral rites and its objectives are the same followed by the gathering, where the community gathered at the deceased house just as they would assemble for any service of worship, from their homes or places of works to the place of the funerals mostly the house of the deceased or sometimes it took place at the church. Generally the funeral sermon, singing of *khawhar hla*, speech from the deceased family and the Holy Communion would take place and then another final ceremony was held at the gravesite.

⁵⁷³ Joy Pachuau, *Being Mizo*, New Delhi, India, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.137.

⁵⁷⁴ *Presbyterian Handbook*, Revised and Enlarged, 2014, Mission Veng, Synod Press, 2014, pp.112-114.

One of the recent changes that took place has been on the attitude towards the death of an infant '*hlamzuih*'. In olden days when an infant died shortly after birth around 90 days or three month, it is a Mizo custom there was no formal community ritual observed by the YMA and without a prescribed formal funeral ceremony by the Church, and the infant was buried hurriedly, almost unnoticed in the community. This Mizo custom has been practiced in the Mizo society till recent years. In recent years, there have been a lot of debates, writings at mass media and individuals who had advocated the banned of the long practiced Mizo customs *hlamzuih*. Towards the second decade of the millennium, there developed a mounting tide of pressure among some members of the Mizoram Presbyterian Church, the largest denomination in Mizoram, to do away with the practice of *hlamzuih*.⁵⁷⁵ The Annual Synod meeting in 2012 had passed to intervene in the matter and resolved to take step towards abandoning the customary practices of *hlamzuih* by the Church and appointed the SEC to take up the necessary steps.⁵⁷⁶ On August, 2013 The Mizoram Synod the highest decision making body of the Presbyterian church convene a meeting on the topic of *hlamzuih* where representatives from the NGOs, prominent citizens, representatives from each denominations other than the Presbyterian, the SEC members from the city and Office Bearers from the Journalists. In this meeting the Synod has clearly stated its stance to do away the Mizo custom *hlamzuih*.⁵⁷⁷ And finally agree to do away the long held custom of *hlamzuih* at the Annual Synod conference on December 2013. The Synod resolved to give certain prescribed funeral services to those infant who died before reaching 90 days, known as *hlamzuih* according to the Mizo custom were to be treated as a full grown church member. It includes the ringing of the church bell, funeral service at home and the cemetery, and they should be registered in the lists of the annual report of deaths made by the local church.⁵⁷⁸ On 2014, The Baptist Church of Mizoram, which was the second largest denomination Mizoram also resolved to give a proper funerals to those *hlamzuih*

⁵⁷⁵ 'Hlamzuih', <https://misual.life/2010/12/10/hlamzuih-2/10> December 2010 (accessed 23 Jan 2021)

⁵⁷⁶ Mizoram Presbyterian Church: Presbyterian Church of India, 2012 Inkhawmpui vawi 89-na Minute, Mission Veng Aizawl, Synod Press, 2012, pp.51-52.

⁵⁷⁷ 'Hlamzuih Chungchang Inrawnkhawm na', *Synfocity 22 August 2021*, <https://www.mizoramynod.org/periodicals/2> (accessed 30 March 2021).

⁵⁷⁸ Inkhawmpui vawi 90-na Minute, *Mizoram Presbyterian Church (Presbyterian Church of India, 2013, Mission Veng Aizawl, Synod Press, 2013, p.67.*

deaths according to the full grown members of the church expect ringing of the church bell.⁵⁷⁹ It can be noted that the Church's move to change the concept, perception and ritual performance and ceremony in the case of *hlamzuih* does not come entirely from theological rationality alone, rather influenced by the fall in infant mortality rates in the contemporary period as the number of infant deaths declined in number the logic of performing and prescribing rituals and funeral ceremony is quite probable.

The Young Mizo Association (YMA) plays an important role in the society, coordinating all aspects of social life and dealing with death and burials. Its units, present in Mizo villages, towns and cities, count all men and women above the age of 14 as members. The dead in Mizo society are given an elaborate farewell. The YMA has been publishing guidelines for every unit or branch in Mizoram known as *Chhiatni Thatni Kiahhruaina* since 1977 which was revised for the seventh time in 2014. A number of changes and alteration can be seen since many of the unit or branches have somehow had their own customs, especially differences can be seen in urban and rural areas. In case of a death, YMA volunteers swing into action, informing communities via public announcement systems, sounding the *mitthi dar* (striking a gong symbolize death occurs in a locality), preparing the homes of bereaved family members to receive mourners, making tea, singing mourning songs, and digging graves and filling them up after funerals. Funerals are arranged for the same day, if the deaths occur before 9 am. Two nights of community mourning, song and sometimes, even dance follows.

Since its inception, in 1935, under the auspice of the Christian missionaries, Young Mizo Association served as an alternative to the traditional *Zawlbuk* and custodian of the traditional Mizo community lives. Thus, the YMA has in its objective, to safeguard the Mizo tradition and cultural ethos, uplifting the Mizo tribe by social application of Christian principles and giving the youth opportunities of service and guidance in the use of leisure hours. Since the beginning the institution undertook various social welfare works, among them were at times when '*chhiatni*'

⁵⁷⁹<https://zothlifim.com/chanchinthar/2014/08/hlamzuih-vuina-kohhran-programme-a-hman-tur-ti/>

(adversity or mostly death) occurred in the community. Thus, the YMA render services in the name of the Mizo spirit of *tlawmngaihna* and at the same time legitimized the customs and rituals surrounding death without contra venting the Mizo Christian tradition. From the 20th Century to the present day, Mizo tradition has been deeply embedded in Christianity, vice versa. In many primitive societies hard hit by infant and child mortality, characteristically do not recognized infants and children as people until a certain age, therefore their death is often not accorded ritual recognition no and no funeral is held.⁵⁸⁰ The YMA has long since acted as a guardian of the Mizo ethos and culture and it has made its stance clear that there will be no changes in the custom relating to the *hlamzuih* as far as the YMA is concerned. The YMA leader has stated that there has been no objection to the church wish to do away the *hlamzuih* as far as religious rituals are concerned. The YMA however continued to the traditional custom of *hlamzuih* where no formal ritual were observed or performed. Thus, this has created diverging views on the fate of a dying infant, towards the conception and its related rituals as the church holds that the death of an infant are now look upon as the same as a grown up adult members and will be given the same ceremony and rituals surrounding death. This has also clearly reflects the church's attitude on the conceptualization of death in the case of an infant.

It is a controversial subject, and on a local level changes are taking place. For example some of the localities and the local churches and YMA branches agreed to cease the *hlamzuih* tradition within their village or locality. Again it was the influence of the church and its attitude towards bad deaths that the most unexpected death today is treated with equal exclusivity. Thus, the attitude towards *hlamzuih* also seem to be changing faster than institutional practices and guidelines as Christian context depends more on how they lived than how they died as the church has taught and interpret from theological stance.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁸⁰ Robert Hertz, *Death & The Right Hand*, Reprinted 2004, Oxon, Great Britain, Routledge, pp.84-85.

⁵⁸¹Heath, pp.232-233.

Another recent change that took place was the abandonment of the tradition of *khawhar in riah*, which is a Mizo custom for youth especially from around 14 years male to sleep over at the deceased house for around seven days. This has been intended to comfort and cheer up the deceased family from their mourning and to help them in performing certain household's activities. This period actually last for seven days, there are some instances where the period was extended where the deceased family would request some close friends to prolong their stay. Thus, this practice has also been shook by the changing lifestyle in the urban centre especially Aizawl had gradually saw a declining trend of the attendance of youth who spent their night in the deceased house towards the yearly years of the 21st Century. In the year, 2006 Zarkawt Branch YMA, a locality from the state capital Aizawl, after having a careful observation of the practices in their locality, resolved to abandoned the lifelong Mizo custom *Khawhar In Riah*. During this period, the discontinue of *khawhar in riah* faced disapproval from majority of the Mizo people as an abandonment of one of the most valued Mizo cultural ethos, *Tlawmngaihna*. But when time passed, at only about a decade passed, majority of the localities or YMA Branches in Aizawl has now discontinued the ritual practice of *khawhar in riah*, apart from Aizawl at district capitals and many villages and towns has also been following the trend followed at the urban centers.

The Mizo tradition of *Khawhar Zai* at the deceased house in the contemporary period has also faced much alteration and modification which was not seen in the preceding years. At the dawn of the 21st century, with the rapid advancement in technology and many factors including the changing outlook of the youths, traditional singing at the deceased house has also faced a gradual adjustment. It has been documented that four part hymn and sol-fa singings were often heard in some localities at the wake in the *mitthi in*, such practices has gradually eliminate the traditional *khawhar zai* tradition.⁵⁸² Contemporary Mizo death rituals has faced many transformation in the contemporary years, among them is the *Khawhar hla or zai* (community singing at the bereaved house). In 2015, Vanlalruaia wrote an article at

⁵⁸² R.T Mualyum, 'Khawhar Inah Khawhar Hla', *YMA Chanchinbu*, Bu 317 na, April 1998, pp.4-5.

Meichher, a monthly bulletin of the Adult Education wing, that majority of the youths were not familiar with the *Mizo Khawhar hla or zai* he had urged the YMA to introduce and traditional singing when attending the wake at the *Khawhar In* or the YMA night. He also stated that the *Mizo Khawhar zai* tradition has been gradually replaced by contemporary songs which were harmonized with western musical instruments, which has becoming popular among the youths at the YMA programme at the *Khawhar In* or *Mitthi In*.⁵⁸³ An article entitled *YMA kalphung hi* written by F. Laltanpui reflected that there were numerous changes in the function of the organization in upholding the Mizo culture and ethos and practices, which has been the result of global influences, changing lifestyle and outlook. The author saw the need to revive and inculcate *Mizo Tlawmngaihna* among the youths. He further pointed out that role played by the YMA in uplifting and concern for the underprivileged in the society need to be re-considered, and call for more active participation at the community activity among the youth especially at the deceased house, like voluntary participation in digging the grave, wake, and other necessary practices. The article reflected that the existing cultural practices and tradition has been replaced by western practices which would result in the waning of Mizo culture in the ensuing years.⁵⁸⁴

In an article at *Meichher* written by Thanpui Pa, entitled '*Chhiatni Thatni*' reflected the changing characteristic of *Mizo Tlawmngaihna* exhibited mostly at '*Chhiatni*' (a Mizo term for misfortune or to meet with misfortune of losing someone by death). As traditional Mizo custom and practices surrounding death has its foundation on *tlawngaihna*, the author stated that those ethos were gradually waning and cannot be maintained or preserve as did in the traditional form. This is due to the changes in economy especially the mode of production and changing lifestyle and outlook in the contemporary period. *Ralna* were given to the deceased family in cash and flowers and *puan tuam*, *taking photographs*, *funeral ceremony*, *wake etc.* has been undergoing changes in recent years.⁵⁸⁵ In 2003 Lalthara had wrote an article

⁵⁸³ Vanlalruaia, 'Kan Khawhar Hla Ril Lamah Let Ang', *Meichher*, Bu 696, December, 2015, pp.28-30

⁵⁸⁴ F.Laltanpuaia, 'YMA Kalphung Hi', *Meichher*, Bu 228, February 1997, pp.20-22.

⁵⁸⁵ Thanpui Pa, 'Chhiatni That Ni', *Meichher*, Bu 647, November 2011, pp.4-6.

relating to the present practices surrounding deaths which he felt needed to be re-considered according to the changes in the society.⁵⁸⁶

The rapid growth of technology, especially electronic mass media, television mobile phones and the internet in the contemporary period has also been instrumental in changing the death ethos among the Mizos. It is a Mizo custom to inform close relatives from other villages, in such situation youths had gathered and travelled long distances to pass on the information to the deceased families at far off villages, known as *zualko*. In the last few decades, media and social network platforms gradually began to influence people's way of perceiving and coping with death and dying. It is a recent change with the coming of Television and other electronic mass media such as phone and a more recent smart phone that the *zualko* tradition was done away in the contemporary period. If the deceased family wishes the notices of death disseminated, it has been done through Television network along with details of the deceased and funeral program was news flashed on a local cable Television network through ticker tape announcement. A death announcement or the death notice on social media is a more recent development by making use of variety of artistic or communicative media which has become very popular. It is a Mizo ritual practice that a traditional gong was carried around the village or locality by volunteers among the youth and was banged or beaten with a stick, which produced a loud sound. The sound of the gong thus symbolized that death occurred in a village or locality.

But in the contemporary period, this has been replaced by a local public addressed system owned by YMA, where death was announced through a Public Announcement system, where the detail information of the deceased was announced. For example the uses of android application like whatsapp, Facebook and instagram by individual and by the YMA to convey the incident of death in the locality where detail information of the deceased like the photos, location of the house of the deceased through Google maps etc were posted on social media as a platform for

⁵⁸⁶ Lalthara, 'Chhiatni Thatni A Kan Sawngbawl Dan Siamthat Tulte'*Meichher*, Bu 546, June, 2003, pp.5-10.

information. This has led to the creation of public culture of mediatized death. It can help to comprehend the notion of social community and human relation. Social media constitute a new social space where the topic of death, loss and mourning are increasingly encountered and negotiated. With the rise of new media technologies death, loss and mourning are mediated an experienced or realized through imaginative or sympathetic participation in the experience of another.

Mizo always buried the dead since the pre-colonial times as highlighted in details in the previous chapters. The voluntary digging of graves by youth from a certain villages or locality is what is called *thlan laih*. It has always been one of the most important demonstrations of *hnatlang* where Mizo *tlawmngaihna* was exhibited by those youths who took part in the digging. Participation in the *thlan laih* has been regarded as an assertion of membership of the community and will be given when one's demise come up to. A local Cemetery or graveyard is a matter of concern with the rise of urban population especially in Aizawl and those populated city. Aizawl the state capital has been facing a problem a result of crowding, cemeteries has been shifted to suburb areas which became more and more difficult and time constrains for the youths to perform *thlan laih hnatlang* (voluntary digging of grave) amidst the busy work schedule.

In 1990 a symposium was convened by the Presbyterian Church which tends to focus on the topic of cremation and the confession of faith. In short, the paper studied in this symposium were quite open to negotiation where the Christian idea of resurrection is not seen as contradicted by the way the human body was disposed after death. But many of the participants in the discussion felt that present practice of burial most suited the Christian teachings and support the existing practice of burial.⁵⁸⁷ Towards the 1990s many people had come up with the idea of cremation over burial. In 1992 the Presbyterian Church, the largest denomination had placed the matter to be negotiated at the annual Synod meeting in which the meeting

⁵⁸⁷*Mitthi Hal Leh Kohhran Thurin Chungchang Inrawnkawmna*, Mizoram Synod Social Front Committee, November 17, 1990. (ATC Archive, Durtlang).

resolved to setup a study team and the team accordingly made a recommendation to the SEC the apex body. The study has been extended to 15 denominations in the state. The study stated that there are diverse opinions on the cremation issue, from individual to individual and different churches. Generally cremation was common among the Protestant church. The study found that there was no contradiction between the Biblical faith or eschatological teaching and disposal of the dead body in general, whether be it cremation. But many of those denominations that opposed cremation simply based from the Judaeo-Christian tradition not from Biblical teachings. Notwithstanding the fact that the study group found no contradiction between Christian teachings and cremation, it had recommended that the introduction of cremation among the Mizo community would severely impact on the Mizo social practices surrounding death or traditional rituals and customs, therefore the study group recommended that it would be rational not to introduce cremation for the time being.⁵⁸⁸

The increasing socio-economic activity and increasing employment in private sector undertakings etc in the contemporary period had greatly impacted on the everyday lifestyle of the people, especially in the urban centre like Aizawl. Thus, many localities had abandoned the *thlan laih hnatlang* (voluntary digging of grave) due to the above mentioned circumstances, and in place a labor was hired to do the task rather than the volunteers. At some localities where *thlan laih hnatlang* is still in practice due to convenience not because of someone died, the YMA on some holiday or morning hour would convene a *hnatlang* and two to three grave were prepared in advance.

It has been a practice since the olden days that a charity or gifts in kind was given to the deceased family as everyday work was halted for more than a week. Thus, in olden days it is a tradition to collect a log of woods and a heap of rice for the deceased family, with intent to suffice for their sustenance during their mourning period. In urban areas like Aizawl and other villages the traditional practices is not

⁵⁸⁸*Inhal Chungchang* (cremation issue) recommendation submitted to the ATF Faculty, Unpublished, 1993. (ATC Archive, Durtlang).

relevant in many ways. As the practice is differ from locality to locality and from villages to villages there cannot be a common tradition. But there is a recent change in some localities in Aizawl that a bag of rice or some vegetables or food articles were often gave by the YMA. Among the recent practice, a number of Coffins were prepared before hand by the YMA, which was a taboo in olden days. In some localities to meet the financial requirements at the time of death and its related customs, some YMA branch collect a fund in cash and made a separated head in the annual budget.

The growing urbanization and pressure for land especially in Aizawl has been a recent development, which has impacted on Cemetery or Burials. Since the colonial period cemetery or burial has not been the purview of the government and there were no laws or guidelines been enacted as to whom the administration of the cemetery would rest upon. Since the coming of the missionaries till the 1930s Christian communities dwelling in the vicinity of Aizawl has been practiced Christian burial and were administered by a committee of church elders Notwithstanding the fact that the government insist on having a local graveyard or cemetery to every village chiefs in the 1930s, it had became a local purview. It was only when YMA was established and had opened its unit and function as a fully fledged organization in the Post-Colonial period and started institutionalized the community oriented *Chhiatni Thatni* in Mizo society, the local units become involved and took the purview of maintaining and looking after the local graveyard. After the attainment of the District Council many local Village Council were also taking charge of their respective local graveyard. Recently there has been a rising criticism against the existing custom relating to deaths, stating that the state government should regulate certain set of rules, guidelines and take up necessary mortuary ritual instead of the civil society. Since the colonial period the YMA provided structure to the practice of death in the locality, it not only set down rules, it has also organized itself to facilitate burial and mourning in a locality.⁵⁸⁹ Some social activist now voiced against the existing custom as being an old-fashioned where

⁵⁸⁹ Joy Pachuau, *Being Mizo*, p.208.

YMA is often criticized of being exercising their authority wherein most of the rules and customs were considered old, traditional and archaic, un-revised convention and practices were regarded as incompatible in the contemporary society.⁵⁹⁰ Recently a burial innovation has been introduced by Chaltlang Branch YMA, a locality from Aizawl funded by Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation Department, known as '*Thlan Chhawrdawh*'. It is a large concrete structure with a ledge or shelf like design having a multiple storey which can house 163 dead bodies. This new kind of interment has become the first and a breakthrough which revolutionize burial culture in Mizoram. Evidently, then, the forces of globalization and technological change have helped fashion alternative cultural landscapes within which the Mizos are on their course of re-inventing their relations to death and the dying process. That these dynamics could be simultaneously 'modern' and deeply 'historical' attests to Mizo's extensive and multi-faceted engagement with death over the course of the last centuries.

In the previous chapter we have highlighted that in the pre-colonial Mizo society, funerals were held in with the assistance of people in the local community and families who help transport and bury, in a process that converted the physical relationship with the deceased into a psychological relationship. Holding a funeral was a mutual help, social exchange of duty and responsibility essential to individuals and families left behind-performed to promote survival within the group. The society developed a system to ensure the survival of humans as social animals based on mutual relationship built over long period of time with the same community. Through historical changes over a period, contemporary society is gradually undermining this system. Holding a funeral in a modern society is a becoming a complicated process with the increase in specialization and dependence on medical science. Community based social-relationship and participation started declining and thus witnessing the decline in collective funerary behavior and re-invention of rituals. Since the Influence of the Church and the YMA as an institution governing the death culture and legitimizing death rituals and custom is still very strong, at the

⁵⁹⁰ Ruatfela Nu, 'Sawrkar Kutah Mitthi leh Thlanmual A Awm Tur A Ni,' <https://www.exploremizoram.com/2021/05/sawrkar-kutah-mitthi-leh-thanmual-awm.html>

same time an analysis have shown that contemporary developments in the field of death attitudes and rituals suggests that there is a tendency of moving towards the model of the western secular attitudes to death.

Conclusion

An analysis of death & dying in contemporary Mizoram witnessed a number of changes in the way people are coming to think about death and it's surrounding ritual practices. The period has saw changes in health infrastructure, medical progress, a shift in the type of diseases causing morbidity and condition that have caused death, differentials in patterns of death, mortality rate and life expectancy, changes in political, socio-economy, new communicative technology, urbanization and changing lifestyle and cultural conditions in a globalized world. All these have acknowledged a gradual shift of emphasis in cultural and religious tradition. The old custom and religious funeral tradition has been undergoing gradual changes and the hospitals & medical institutions have gradually established its influence upon the tradition and customs surrounding death. Due to several developments in the field of medical sciences and technology as well socio-economic, urbanization and changing lifestyle in contemporary period; notwithstanding the fact that the two old institution i.e. the church and YMA were regulating religious and cultural norms regarding funeral and death rituals, a hospital and medical institutions gradually becoming an alternative death institution which provide a more secular and individual attitude towards death among the Mizos.

Death foregrounds the most important social and cultural values that humans live their lives by, including those values that humans acknowledge and express. By taking into account how death is perceived, managed, marked, and memorialized across cultures and spaces for the death and dying, all these have symbolic meaning in each society in which they are living. The thesis is an attempt to answer the underlying question of what death & dying meant to the 'Mizos' throughout their history. To explore the meaning of death in the past and the present, the thesis addressed the Mizo death ways from pre-colonial tradition as a background and gazed through the colonial period till the contemporary period.

The traditional concept of death and the afterlife, the core practices of *sakhua*, the belief in the existence of a multitude of benevolent and malevolent spirits, taboos and the accompanying sacrifices and striving to go to *pialral* (heaven) by performing certain prescribed sacrifices and rituals, following several steps to attain *thangchhuah* constituted the pre-colonial belief system. Mizo belief system thus viewed from the perspective of ritual performance at death functioned to reaffirm societal bonds and the social structure itself. Death channelized the accompanying emotional reactions into culturally elaborated frames and placed them under social control. The traditional Mizo death rituals functioned as a means to promote the solidarity of the families and clans and member of the village. In the common display and performance of rituals, individuals signal their commitment to each other and to the society itself. Rite of incorporation such as drinking zu (rice beer) at the deceased house, *thlaichhiah* and the funeral feast served as a symbol in creating a continuous social bond between the member of the clan or a specific tribe.

The clothing, the dresses, material buried along with the corpse, and performance of rituals like the firing of guns and chiming gongs symbolized the status of the deceased and indicate his or her role in society. The different process of treating the corpse, dress etc was seen in the *Pasaltha*, *Thangchhuah Pa*, and the Chiefs. These differences in the process of treating death reflected social, political, and economic hierarchical structure while performing death rituals in the pre-colonial Mizo society. Death rituals were also greatly affected by the nature of how a

person died, the idea of good and bad deaths played a significant role in prescribing rituals. For unusual deaths like *sarhi* (accidents) *raicheh* (died of a mother at childbirth) and *hlamzuih* (when a child died shortly after birth) have a few different rituals which were very less expensive and sometimes without a ceremony and rituals.

When looking at the nature of traditional Mizo death rituals, death rituals often served as an establishment of social identity through the rite of passage, where death rituals exhibited a state of separation, transition, and incorporation. Thus, a thorough analysis of Mizo death rituals reveals that the rites of passage at death were useful in the establishment of social identity. The death of a person in the society brought social disorder under such circumstances death rituals have become tools for reconstructing the social order and identity. Being a close-knit society, rituals surrounding death involved clan or group participation, this has affected the network of social relations binding individuals in an orderly life. The bereaved are segregated, physically and socially for a certain prescribed period from the living and normal social life is suspended for a prescribed period of mourning, and their activities are hemmed in by taboos. Nine weeks or about three months after the burial they would perform '*inthian* or *inthen*' ritual and after this, they have stopped their mourning and incorporated back into normal life.

Apart from the concept of *Pialral* and *Mitthi Khua*, Mizos have also developed a kind of rebirth where the soul returns to the earth in the form of a hornet after a lapse of time transformed into water and evaporates in the form of dew, dewdrop falls on a man, that man will beget a child who will be a reincarnation of the deceased. The theory of rebounding conquest or rebounding violence describes the ordinary facts of life in terms of people being born, maturing, and then dying. Most human cultures however are unhappy with this simple progression. Through ritual forms, they take living people and in a symbolic sense cause them to die and be reborn as new kinds of individuals. Mizo have also such a kind of concept regarding the cycle of life, this has greatly shaped the way ritual was prescribed and how death was conceptualized.

Another important ritual practice that was a clear reflection of the Mizo perception of death and the afterlife was the practice of *kuang ur*, a ritual performed inclusively by those *thangchhuah* and the chiefs. This ceremony and ritual is in line with the general theory of death ritual formulated by Rober Hertz as death is not seen as an event but as a process. When respiration stops, the body receives a temporal burial. In the practice of *Kuang ur* the decomposition of the corpse in a hearth which took place for about at least 3 months a transition period between the initial disposal and the final burial provides the time for the decomposition of the body, the purification of the bones, the journey to the soul and the liberation of the mourners. During this period the link between the living and the dead continues which was guided through a prescribed ritual. The burdensome ritual prescribed to the Chiefs and the *Thangchhuah* had a clear reflection of who were great men in the society, the rites of the Chiefs and *thangchhuah* are special because they are part of a political drama in which the villagers or the clan members have a stake. Therefore the funereal of a special person in a Mizo society was an event that reverberated with far-reaching political and cosmological implications. This was also further elaborated in the type of burials prescribed according to the status in the society, *thangchhuah* and the chiefs were given special importance, and the *Pasaltha* (warriors) were often given a special burial. The practice of erecting memorials was also made inclusively to the Chiefs and generally not by a commoner. Generally among the different Mizo clans, only a distinct person in the society, like the Chiefs, *thangchhuah* and sometimes a *pasaltha* warrior erect *lungdawh* or memorials. Thus, it is ascertain that the pivot in Mizo belief system lies in the worship of *sakhua*, where the climax was to achieve in the afterlife in *pialral* by excelling in the worship of *sakhua* which involves sumptuous sacrifice and feasting, and success in hunting and have feasted the community. This act involves the implication of traditional moral ethics, public feasting, uplifting the downtrodden, these entire acts regulate and sustain the social life of the community, benefiting the societal needs and were given special status even in the ritual performance at death and were believed to attain the coveted *pialral* (abode of the dead) in the traditional belief system.

A clearer picture and meaning of death in traditional Mizo society can be observed by viewing death as a social product where the society or culture gave some meaning to locate some problem of death in the construction of reality through rituals. The whole process of construction of knowledge on the nature of death is permeated by the epistemological imperative of anthropomorphizing. In short, the Mizo concept of death, dying and rituals centered on anthropomorphic features like the concept of death, the fear of the spirit, ancestor worship, the abode *mitthi khua* and *pialral* which is a construct of the society's and culture's image. Death and its surrounding rituals in the process of construction take an institutionalized form. In the context of the Mizos, kin and clan-based social and cultural institution (belief systems) were held responsible for constructing the death concept and its surrounding rituals. This institution drew legitimacy from the anthropomorphic features of Mizo death concept, as this concept promises the fulfillment of the people's broken natural desire for a more or less broken continuation of existence in a completely different form.

The advent of the British and the colonization of the Lushai Hills in the last decade of the 19th Century brought tremendous transformation and changes in almost every sphere of the life of tribes inhabiting the then Lushai Hills. The main purpose of the annexation of the Lushai Hills was securing peace, law, and order whereas missionaries' contact was to convert the Mizo tribe from their previous belief system. Thus, apart from the influence made by the colonial administrator, Christian missionaries contributed a tremendous impact in transforming the worldviews, and belief systems of the Mizo tribe. Influenced by the fervent evangelical awakening in the 19th Century Europe, the pioneer missionaries in the Lushai Hills adopted a new style of preaching that abandoned dense theological discussion and debate instead favored an approach that sought a strong emotional response aimed at conversion to evangelical Christianity. Thus, revivalist evangelicalism stressed an awareness of death and eternity which had an important role in evangelical conversion. They viewed death not as a threat but rather as a gateway into promised eternal life. Death was thus the object of evangelical hope, sinners were warned of dying and entering eternity without Christ, and the corollary was that believers could be consoled with

the hope of dying as Christians. Therefore, the subject of death, grief, bereavement, and the afterlife played a central part in the dialogue between the missionaries and their converts. Comfort and transcendent hope were to be relished in the Christian heaven. Many of the early converts were lured by the new interpretation of *Pialral* (Christian heaven) as the messages of the missionaries were assembled for the Mizo responding to their 'religious' aspirations and goals. Therefore the notion of Christian good death in the early colonial period was also heavily influenced by British evangelical theology which required piety and life-long preparation, as well fortitude in the face of physical suffering. Death takes place in a Christian home, surrounded by a loving family and the dying person making explicit farewells to the family members, comforted by the assurance of a future family reunion in heaven.

Mizo attitude toward death and their perception of dying were to a great extent shaped by the prevailing social-economic condition and lives of the early Mizo Christians. In the early stages of colonialism resistance to Christianity from the Mizo Chiefs led to the persecution of the converts, in such conditions of fear, and physical torture, and had faced even expulsion from the village. Colonial India during this period was the home of famine and epidemic; the Mizo also faced several recurring famines and epidemics often swept the Hills. Apart from prevailing diseases, *Mautam* in 1911-1912, the 1918 Influenza epidemic severely struck the Mizos and took many lives, the *Thingtam* Famine in 1929 followed by extensive rain causing heavy landslides destroyed many rice and barns. For the early Mizo converts life in this world was harsh and this compelled them to look forward to the evangelical hope located in the Evangelical Christian eschatology. Thus, the social-economic and health conditions of the Mizos in the colonial period were unfavorable. But whenever they faced adversity and misfortune, the subsequent result was the rekindling of *harhna* (revival movement) with a theological theme that led many people to adopt a negative attitude towards the present life and things of the world and focus their hope on the Christian afterlife. The life of the people was at stake, physical hunger, poor health condition, and their vulnerability to death made the Mizos attuned to the gospel.

The imposition of western cultures and religion on the Mizos had greatly impinged on the death concept and its surrounding rituals. Since traditional beliefs are abandoned and replaced by Christianity, many of the traditional death rituals, ceremonies, and customs were incorporated into the practice of the new religion. The *harhna* (revival movements) were an important cultural movement as they made use of Mizo culture for the expression of the *harhna* (revival movement). As a result, a new genre '*Lengkhawm Zai*' became popular in 1919; a large portion of the theme is associated with themes of death and is predominantly used at the *khawhar in* (house of the bereavement) known as *khawhar zai*. Most of the *khawhar zai* song sung at the *khawhar in* till today was composed between 1919 and the 1940s. Mizos thus developed evangelical songs of hope that retrospectively acknowledge the significance of music and lamentation practices of the past that shaped and formulates the Mizo Christian attitude towards death and the afterlife within the Mizo Christian context. Early composers deviated their views from the past world views and turn toward future-oriented longing for heaven. Local expression of Christian practice could not die out in the process of the Mizos engagement with the new religion. This paved way for the re-invention of ritual practice *khawhar zai/hla* into a Christian themewhich survived till today.

Right from the early colonial period, the Church has exercised a legitimate authority in prescribing the death ethos of the Mizo Christians. With the process of Christianization, many traditional death rituals were gradually abandoned, and any practices or customs which were associated with the traditional belief system, and which seem incompatible with Christian teachings were rejected. For instance, the introduction of *Sap thlanmual* (Christian burials) by the missionaries in the mission center at Mission veng in the first decade of the 20th Century has gradually become more and more popular as the Christian population grew. But in the early period of colonization, funerals especially burials has become the locus of tension and controversy between adherents of traditional belief systems and the converted Christians. The choice to bury one's kin in a newly erected cemetery under the Christina rites represented the final commitment and tension often arose in which Christians often met with much opposition. For the Christian missionaries and their

congregations, traditional Mizo funerals and burial represented the most visible sign of heathenism which they sought to combat by enforcing an austere culture of death among their fellow converts. Finally, in 1930 the government had ordered every village chief to introduce separate burials. The intervention of the colonial administration soon resulted in the crumbling of the traditional regime of the dead. This transformation in the regime of burial is made legitimate through the supreme power of the Superintendent. Apart from the Church's intention of establishing a new Christian moral code, alternative explanation emphasizes the growing scientific evidence for the danger posed to public health by improper burials.

The Presbyterian Church in 1927 prohibited performances of Mizo *Thlaichhiah* ritual as it has a connection to sacrificial purposes for the dead. Soon followed by the ban of *zawlbuk*, the missionaries felt that something new should be introduced to fill the vacuum to prevent further decline of the Mizo *tlawmngaihna* as well the Mizo culture. With the birth of YLA which later became YMA established in 1935, this cultural institution brought into life many traditional rituals surrounding death and was also taking shape under the influence of Christianity. At the same time, traditional elements which were attuned to the new religion were also retained. Many of the Mizo customs and rituals surrounding death like *Khawhar lenpui*, *khawhar in riah*, *in ral*, *thlan laih* etc were revived and reformulated into a more Christian oriented, by fusing Mizo *tlawmngaihna* and the constant help and care from the Christian ethos.

Thus, increased socio-cultural changes due to colonialism affecting the ideas and practices of death include increased ideological and physical control by the colonial government and its right hand the Christian church over the local ritual practice. Studies have reflected the broad influence of the missionaries and the colonial government on the way people negotiate their indigenous funerals and burials for the self-proclaimed 'civilized' and 'sanitized' mortuary rites. With the growth of codified formal religious tradition, the authority of the church was becoming strong and with the missionaries' recommendation a new institution Christian-based institution the YMA had taken up the task of regulating customs

regarding death in the society. Thus, the Church and the YMA have become the two institutions that have the authority and a legitimate body for creating a broad cosmological canvas underlying funerals and burials.

From the analysis of historical records, a certain aspect of the disease, pattern of morbidity, and fatality in the colonial period is discernible. Challenged by the alien environment and the certain new diseases, colonial authorities and the Christian mission in the then Lushai Hills faced them by introducing western medical health care. Medical intervention was sporadic and highlighted the limitations of the concept of limited interest in healthcare. The study reveals that the mortality rate was severely high which was primarily owing to the burgeoning disease mortality, and epidemics, supplemental to recurring famine. It has been observed that infant mortality was also severely high throughout the colonial period. Communicable diseases such as cholera, smallpox, dysentery, and diarrhea were the chief cause of mortality. Deaths from malaria and fever were also very common during the colonial period.

Taking inference from epidemiological transition theory, focusing on the shift in disease patterns and cause of deaths, studies have shown that the early colonial period reflected the first two stages of transition; the age of pestilence and famine and the age of receding pandemics. The age of pestilence and famine was considered an extension of the pre-modern pattern of health and disease. The unpredictable and uncontrollable major causes of death in the context of the Mizos include epidemics, famine, etc. Other causes of death include parasitic and contagious diseases and malnutrition effects on children and tuberculosis, perpetual infection. Infant mortality and child mortality is very high; females are more vulnerable to infectious diseases and also die due to complication associated with childbirth. Life expectancy at birth is variable and ranges from 20 to 40 years. The colonial period also exhibit the characteristics of the age of receding pandemic, witnessing fewer peaks and fluctuations in death rates, although mortality continued to be high, infant and child mortality remains elevated. As this stage progresses, improvements are first gained in the maternal and adolescent mortality for females. Later infant and child mortality

rates fall, in part due to increased health of females of childbearing ages. Life expectancy steadily increased from 20 to 55 years. The early colonial period was the age of famine and pestilence till the 1930s, and from the 1930s gradual improvements can be seen and exhibited more like that of the receding pandemics.

The post-independence period witnessed a gradual decline in the death rate, in 1949 it dropped to 10.27 which was the lowest ever recorded since the colonial period. Again in 1951, it declined to a single digit at the rate of 8.23 per 1000 population. Compared with other districts, public health in the Lushai Hills district as per the 1951 census has been very good. Medical facilities provided by the government and partly by the Christian missions are more adequate than in other districts. Jeepable road constructed due to the Second World War connected Aizawl was considerably improved and literacy has also been improved. The number of widows fell dramatically in 1951 as compared to 1941 this somehow points to a rapid decline in mortality rate during the decade of 1941-1951. All these factors, socio-economic, medical, educational, the thin density of population and the improvements in the overall health of the population associated with the decline in mortality rate, a gradual shift in the causes of death and diseases are gradually taking place in the post-independence period.

Due to the changes brought by colonialism and Christianity in every sphere of the life of the Mizos, a sense of political activism slowly began to take root in the 1920s but was soon suppressed, but after two decades has passed a political party was established in 1946. During this period they soon started to express and gave voice to the different demands and seek their involvement in the administration. After independence, the idea of separation from the Indian Union in the Mizo District under the Assam government loomed largely. This was materialized in the form of an armed revolutionary movement led by the Mizo Nationalist Army against the Indian government from 1966 till the attainment of peace in 1986 commonly known as *Rambuai Lai* (Troubled Years). This movement led to chaos in the Mizo Hills, followed by groundless law and order and confusion in the society. The church

cannot serve its purport, human lives lost their dignity, many people lost their lives unattended and uncared, and had died unnoticed.

A comprehensive analysis of death from the perspective of death and dying has brought new meaning and perception of death and dying during the *rambuai* as well it gives us a new dimension of looking at the *rambuai* history. The nationalist has employed death as a means of legitimizing revolutionary nationalism by developing 'martyr' discourse and ritual discursive practices. This was reinforced by injecting religion as the base for their cause or action. Therefore the idea and emotion that surrounded the death of MNA into martyrdom were expressed in popular discourse and the sacrifice of one's own life for an 'imagined nation' confers a kind of abstract immortality. The rituals and mourning culture practiced by the MNA during the *rambuai* reframed death in elevated terms. The care, recovery, and reburial of the Army's fallen bodies have become the most important Nationalists' political agenda and convey a deep political symbol during the *rambuai* and the post-*rambuai* politics. The commemoration has also become an important subject of an investigation when it comes to 'death' which was highly influenced by the process of reconstructing the past, in the form of collective memory which was often shaped by present needs and contexts. Here, *Remna Ni* (A Day of Peace Settlement), *Martar te Ni* (Martyr's Day), the construction of *Martar te Thlanmual* (Martyr's Cemetery), has become an institution that disciplined the culture of mourning and imposed the image of heroic death and validate the construction of 'Martyrdom'. The kind of institutionalization and celebration and all the regulated rites reconstructed the memory of *rambuai* is an action that is political in itself and a means of seeking political legitimacy.

It was because of the martyr narration, peace narration, and political repression, that the death of civilians has often not been expressed or produced in the *rambuai* narration. The greatest numbers of victims in the *rambuai* were civilians who had faced military repression, human rights abuses, population displacement or grouping, fear, and mistrust. In such conditions, all civilians were vulnerable to death. It has been reported that between 1966 and 1970, around 400 lives were taken

by the Indian army; out of this around 100 were the MNA. It has been recorded that 2166 innocent people perished during the *rambuai*, an accurate number would have been more than this number as political repression has silenced the voices of many civilians. Apart from the violent deaths of civilians inflicted by both the party, the grouping of villages severely impacted the lives of the civilians from 1967 to 1970. Due to severe poverty, the condition of the masses was worsened in the grouping centers, unemployment rose, agricultural activities cannot be continued, and inadequate government supply of food resulted in malnutrition which leads to the death of numerous children and old age groups. A further investigation of the cases suggests that among the cause of death Beriberi was common in the grouping centers. Even though many had survived the grouping centers, starvation and malnutrition in the grouping centers were affecting the health condition of the masses in the preceding years which in turn added to morbidity and soon caused fatality after several years. During these years, 13000 people were served by 1 doctor; the medical facility was well defined by the number of people served by one doctor. The population growth rate suffered a serious setback during the decade 1961-71; the growth rate fell by 9.3 percent. The decadal growth rate during 1961-71 was only 24.93 percent which showed a declining trend in terms of percentage. Among the different factors pointed out *rambuai* had seemed to affect population growth to a great extent. The *rambuai* involved horrific violence and terrible bloodshed and killing, many civilians perished on an unprecedented scale due to famine, malnutrition, and hunger far beyond anything that the Mizos had experienced before the outbreak.

With the end of *rambuai*, Mizoram became a fully fledged state in 1987, this status offered a new era of peace and development. The growth of the modernization of health services took a new turn under the state government in the form of infrastructural and human resource development. It gradually underwent improvement of health care facilities and community health services which remained highly neglected due to the *rambuai* disturbances for a long two decades. Several policy initiatives and development schemes have been started by the government, state domestic product and per capita income increased significantly over the years,

and the economy is being transformed from agricultural to the service sector. The state soon topped the rank of human development index and literacy rate in the country. Urban centers increased in the 2001 census, infant mortality rate also declined dramatically as compared to the pre-statehood era and the all-Indian average. Rapid progress in infrastructure facilities particularly roads, education, telecommunication, information technology, and health during the three decades of the post-statehood period had a profound effect on the lives of the Mizos.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a broad increase in world income and a poverty reduction. The link between income and health in poor countries is thought to be strong. The analysis of the trend in National State Domestic Product (NSDP), Per-Capita Income, Life expectancy rate, and Infant Mortality Rate in Mizoram in the post-liberalization period from 1991 shows that the growth in NSDP and Life Expectancy was more significant after the liberalization period. Since an increase in life expectancy in the post-liberalization period can be felt, this result has a direct correlation with the overall socio-economic and health improvements in post-1991.

The period witnessed a shift in the type of diseases, causes of death and patterns of death, mortality rate, and life expectancy. The major causes of death have changed from infectious and parasitic diseases to chronic conditions such as heart diseases and stroke. Numerous factors have influenced the changing causes of death; including nutrition and diet, personal hygiene, changing lifestyle, habits, etc. A transition from the earlier pattern of the cause of death was witnessed in the contemporary period. A shift from communicable disease to Chronic was taking place in the contemporary period. In the previous decade, around between 2005 and 2006 malaria was the leading cause of death in Mizoram which was now gradually controlled due to government policy toward the eradication of malaria. A shift to Chronic was witnessed in 2012 when cancer ousted malaria to be the leading cause of death in Mizoram. During the last ten years (2010-2019), 43% of the total deaths were medically certified, and out of this certain Infectious and Parasitic Diseases were the leading cause of death, followed by Diseases of the Digestive System, Diseases of the Respiratory System, Disease of the Circulatory System and

Neoplasm (Cancer). Over the last 10 years, cancer and disease of the digestive system were the two fast-growing major causes of death. The disease of the digestive system has increased at a fast rate and has become the highest and cancer becomes the second major cause of death and the fastest cause of death during the last 10 years.

Studies have shown that a substantial increase in the incidence of non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, cancer, accidents, and alcohol and drug abuse increased from 2001 to 2002. The reason for this appears to be changed in lifestyle and growing modern social life. It can be assumed that a continuous decline of communicable diseases can be attributed to the pattern in advanced societies, as morbidity seems to have been dominated by diseases other than communicable diseases. This trend in India was also witnessed in the report of Burden of Disease India 2005 that non-communicable accounts for the second-largest share after communicable health conditions of the disease burden in India. A significant demographic change from receding pandemic was taking place in the contemporary period and a move to degenerative man-made diseases. Infectious and Parasitic illnesses which claimed many lives from the colonial period as dysentery, influenza, cholera, tuberculosis, typhoid, malaria, etc were replaced by heart diseases, cancer, and other non-communicable diseases in the contemporary period.

Like the west, the dominance of the medico-scientific framework of monitoring, interpreting, and responding to signs of death in contemporary Mizoram has been transforming how Mizos perceived the dying process, as most of the death and dying for instance has now usually been taking place in hospitals, with professionals that dependent on composure, rationality and detach commitment to saving the life of the patient. Medical advances allow increasing control over death; medical professional has been taking much of this control. The recent introduction of registration and certification of death through institutionalized bureaucracy has gradually impacted society's perception and attitude towards death. The advancement in medical science has been creating discourses resulting in knowledge production and occupies institutions and specific professional spaces. Apart from the existing

institution the Church and the YMA, hospitals and medical institutions along with physicians, nurses, patients, the dying person, deceased, kin, a certain condition ritualized activity now formed a new perception and spaces of death.

The contemporary period saw many changes in the practices and rituals surrounding death in the Mizo society. From its inception during the colonial period till date, the Church and the YMA are the two main institutions in the society that exercise their authority over the practices and customs regarding death. In the contemporary period starting from the late 1980s till the present day, due to the circumstances such as socio-cultural and economic changes in the society existing customs and death related ritual has gradually been changing. Changes in the form of alteration of the former practices or abandonment of existing customs and incorporation of the new ones were witnessed during this period. Cultural meanings and emotional forms provided by death that have been dominant in the culture have now gradually trembled. Ritual practices have become excessive and in some cases, it was practiced in misappropriation. The funereal service has become time-consuming as the urban population rose, employment increased and people were becoming busy, as collective mourning was since long the nature of Mizo funeral. This also led to diminishing social ties among relatives, neighbors, co-workers, and church members as indicated by fewer attendees in funerals as well death-related social activities. Despite the YMA, having been taking several steps to preserve and restore the existing tradition and find a way to manage the changes encountered by the society whether modernity, globalization, or technological changes, these forces gradually engendered a shift from collectivist culture toward individual culture. The rapid growth of technology, especially electronic mass media, television, mobile phones, and the internet has also been instrumental in changing the death ethos in contemporary Mizo society. In the face of growing urbanization, and increased economic activity a shift of emphasis in cultural and religious tradition has been acknowledged. The old custom and religious funeral traditions have been undergoing gradual changes and the hospital and medical institutions have established their influence on the tradition and customs surrounding death. Thus, hospital and medical institution have now become alternative death institutions that provide a more secular

and individual attitude towards death among the Mizos. The period witnessed a shift in the type of diseases, causes of death and patterns of death, mortality rate, and life expectancy.

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PUBLISHING HISTORY

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“Traditional Funeral Ceremony and Death Rituals of the Mizos” at the 36th Annual Conference of North East India History Association held at Mizoram University, Aizawl , 18-20 November, 2015.

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