

**SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH ETHNO-
RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT: A STUDY OF LIKBK IN
LAWNGTLAI, MIZORAM**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH ETHNO-
RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT: A STUDY OF LIKBK IN
LAWNGTLAI, MIZORAM**

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in Sociology of Mizoram University, Aizawl



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Certificate

This is to certify the thesis entitled “**SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH ETHNO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT: A STUDY OF LIKBK IN LAWNGTLAI, MIZORAM**” submitted by **ZARZOZUALI** (MZU/Ph.D. D/1771 of 27.08.2021) for the award of the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY, is a research work, done under my supervision and guidance. The thesis, submitted by her has not formed the basis of the award to the scholar for any degree or any other similar title and it has not yet been submitted as a dissertation or thesis in any university. I also certify that the thesis represents objective study and independent work of the scholar.

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DECLARATION
Mizoram University
September 2024

I, **ZARZOZUALI**, 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 Sociology**.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym	Details
AGIL	Adaptation, Goal Attainment, Integration and Latency
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
ART	Anti-Retroviral Therapy
ATI	Aizawl Training Institute
BCM	Baptist Church of Mizoram
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BMS	Baptist Missionary Society
CBQR	Community-Based Qualitative Research
CCA	Certificate in Computer Application
CEC	Christian Education Committee
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DCA	Diploma in Computer
ECM	Evangelical Church of Maraland
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IKK	Isua Krista Kohhran
IKKL	Isua Krista Kohhran Lairam
IKKLHP	Isua Krista Kohhran Lairam Hmeichhe Pawl
IKKLNP	Isua Krista Kohhran Lairam Nu Pawl
IKKLTP	Isua Krista Kohhran Lairam Thalai Pawl
KII	Key Informant Interview
LADC	Lai Autonomous District Council
LAHAS	Lairam Higher Academy of Science
LBK	Lairam Baptist Kohhran
LCAC	Lairam Child Adoption Centre
LCMC	Lairam Christian Medical Centre
LOP	Lairam Offset Press
LRC	Lairam Rescue Centre
LSA	Lai Student Association
LWDP	Lairam Women Development Project
LWDS	Lairam Women Development Society
MBSE	Mizoram Board of School Education
MDC	Member of District Council
MHIP	Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl
MNF	Mizo National Front
MPF	Mizoram People's Forum
NVES	New Vision English School
OST	Oral Substitution Therapy
PBK	Pawiram Baptist Kohhran

PCI	Presbyterian Church of India
PLRC	Pawi-Lakher Regional Council
SMO's	Social Movement Organisations
TNT	Thutak Nunpuitu Team
UPC	United Pentecostal Church
WVS	World Values Survey
YLA	Young Lai Association
ZKHC	Zoram Kohhran Hruaitu Committee

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Introduction**
- 1.2 Conceptualising Religion and its Related Concepts**
- 1.3 Christian World**
- 1.4 Religious Profile of India**
- 1.5 A Brief Religious Profile of Mizoram**
- 1.6 Lawngtlai: The Field Area**
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- 1.8 The Lai People**
- 1.9 LIKBK: Its Origin**
- 1.10 Background of the Study**
- 1.11 Statement of the Problem**
- 1.12 An Overview**

CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is primarily focused on providing a comprehensive overview of the concept of Christian religion and its relationship with ethnicity and social movement so as to enhance a clear conceptual notion for the proposed study entitled ‘Socio-Cultural Transformation Through Ethno-Religious Movement: A Study of The Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran (LIKBK) in Lawngtlai, Mizoram’. The chapter traverses through the religious landscapes globally, in India, North-East India, Mizoram, and ultimately focusing on Lawngtlai district as the designated area of study. The religious profile of the state is given due importance in this chapter touching upon the history of the arrival of Christianity in Mizoram and arguments pertaining to the consequences towards the traditional social institutions of the *Mizos* in general and the *Lai* people in particular are duly addressed. It also highlights a brief introduction of the ‘*Lai* people’ residing as the majority ethnic tribe in the southern part of Mizoram, Lawngtlai. Systematic critical analyses of the advent and impact of Christianity and colonialism upon the *Lai* society have been discussed so as to support the ‘background of the study’ and ‘statement of the problem’ respectively. The chaotic and helpless pre-conditions of the *Lai* society that had unavoidably led to the birth of LIKBK have also been accentuated. The terms ‘*Lushai*’ and ‘*Mizos*’ will be used interchangeably meaning one and the same. Similarly, the terms ‘*Pawi*’ and ‘*Lai*’ are synonymous and used alternately here. To protect the privacy of individuals and uphold confidentiality, pseudonyms have been employed to anonymise all quotes featured in this study.

1.2 Conceptualising Religion and its Related Concepts

Human beings, often described as social creatures, exhibit not only biological, economic, and social needs but also a profound religious and spiritual dimension. Beyond the satisfaction of their physical requirements, individuals harbour an innate quest for understanding the ‘meaning of life’ (Kant, 2000), a contemplation that has set humankind apart from other species for centuries. This intrinsic inclination towards

religion remains a pervasive and enduring aspect of human existence, transcending diverse societies from ancient times to the contemporary era. (Mc Givern et al., 2011: 472-473). In this context, Comte's Law of Three Stages (1975) offers a comprehensive narrative of the evolution of human mental development and intelligence, particularly concerning notions of God and religion. The initial stage, known as the 'Theological Stage,' revolves around the attribution of divine or supernatural creation to personified-deities. Within this theological stage, distinct phases emerge, including 'Fetishism,' 'Polytheism,' and 'Monotheism.' Fetishism marks the primitive stage where inanimate objects like trees and stones are believed to house living entities, leading to their worship. Polytheism, the subsequent stage, reflects a growing scepticism among people regarding previous divine explanations, prompting the identification of various gods, such as the god of fire or the god of air. Finally, in the stage of 'Monotheism,' individuals adopt a more advanced approach to understanding and seeking God, embracing the belief in a singular theistic God responsible for the creation and existence of the universe. (Comte, 1975; Kant, 1998:15)

The subsequent stage, known as the 'Metaphysical Stage,' serves as an extension of the preceding theological stage. This phase involves the exploration and interpretation of God through impersonal abstract concepts, wherein individuals attempt to elucidate the nature of God through abstract notions, moving away from concrete, personified depictions. The following stage, the 'Positive Stage,' aligns with the scientific approach, emphasising the predominance of observation over imagination. In this Positive stage, Comte talks of 'Religion of Humanity' wherein the traditional religious priests no longer ruled over the people but by the 'Sociologist-priests' and the concept of God is replaced by love, altruism etc. (Comte, 1975). However, in our contemporary context, even within the modern sophisticated scientific stage, there persists a significant inclination among people toward invisible God and religion.

Considering the fact that religion is instinctive to man and its inseparable nature from human society; be it a traditional society or the modern society, it occupies a central place in the discipline of sociology. However, it is not an easy task to give a satisfactory definition of religion as Patrick. H. Mc Namara has rightly pointed out that '*Try to define religion and you invite an argument*' (2017:235). The principal difficulty is that

many people take the word to mean their own religion, regarding all other forms as non-religion, irreligion, superstitious and anti-religion. John Ayto in the Dictionary of Word Origins said that:

... religion is Latin's 'religio' originally meant 'obligation' or 'bond'. It was probably derived from the verb 'religare', 'tie back, tie tight'... It developed the specialised sense 'bond between human beings and the gods', and from the 5th century, it came to be used for 'monastic life'... religious practices', emerged from this, but the words standard modern meaning did not develop until as recently as the 16th century. (1993:248)

The definition of Ayto, while detailed in explaining the origin of the term and its complex connection with the human mind, does not fully capture the comprehensive nature of religion. It overlooks the social significance and broader implications of religion in human society. Given Sociology's primary focus on sociological significance, there is a need to formulate a socially accepted definition of the relationship between religion and society. One approach of defining religion is to examine it in terms of the 'functions' or the 'useful contributions' it provides for both society and individuals. Emile Durkheim defines religion as 'a force of cohesion' saying that religion is '*a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden...beliefs and practices which unite unto one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.*' (Durkheim, 1912:345-347). Correspondingly, Malinowski defines religion as 'meeting the psychological needs' saying that:

Religion is a mode of action as well as system of belief and sociological phenomenon as well as personal experience... is not born out of speculation or reflection, still less out of illusionary apprehension, but rather, out of the real tragedies of human life, out of the conflict between human plans and realities. (Malinowski, 1931:11-13)

Other approaches are based upon substantive definitions; that is, they are more concerned with the 'content of religion', rather than its 'function' or 'purpose'. Robertson (1970: 47) regards religion as '*a significant object of inter-civilisational*

encounters, and indeed as a force shaping a newly emergent, heterogeneous global culture.' Edward Sapir, an American Anthropologist have also defined it as '*The essence of religion consists in man's never-ceasing attempt to discover a road to spiritual serenity across the perplexities and dangers of daily life.*' (1921:6). Followingly, Paul Radin defines as:

...it consists of two parts: the first an easily definable, if not precisely specific feeling and the second criteria acts, customs, beliefs and conceptions associated with this feeling. The belief most inextricably connected with the specific feeling is a belief in spirits outside of man, conceived as more powerful than man and as controlling all those elements in life upon which he lay most stress. (Hoebe & Radin, 1937:111-115)

Anthony Wallace gives importance to the study of myth in relation to religion saying that religion '*is a set of rituals, rationalised by myth, which mobilises supernatural powers for the purpose of achieving or preventing transformations of state in man and nature.*' (1966: 231).

Contemporary religious Anthropologist, on the other side, have contended that comprehending another culture necessitates an examination of the prevalent religion in that culture. To grasp the term 'religion' fully, one must be cognisant of the distinct sets of values, ideals, customs, and ethical principles associated with it. They argued that it is not possible to understand another culture without looking at the appropriate religion practiced there. Following this junction, Clifford Geertz, perhaps gave the most quotable and accepted definition of religion saying that:

A system of symbols which act to: Establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by; Formulating conceptions of a general order of existence; and Clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that; The moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (Geertz 1973; Schilbrack, 2005:429-452)

Karl Marx, from the lens of the social conflict approach saw religion as false consciousness that helps in maintaining status quo and as a source of social control whereby he famously argued that religion '*is the opiate of the masses intended to*

complete the exploitation of the proletariat or the working class.' (Marx, 1970: 131) There are considerable evidences to support Marxist thought on religion as a source of pacifier of the underprivileged class. For instance, the caste system of traditional India was justified by divine rights wherein religion serves as the root cause for inequality and social stratification. (Pedersen, 2015:354-357). Speaking of inequality, religion may also be argued as the source of promoter of gender inequality. As such, Feminist Theory of Religion tends to see religion as a 'product of patriarchy'. They see religion as serving those of the interest of men. For instance, Armstrong (2009:87) argued that: *'None of the major religions has been particularly good to women. They have usually become male affair and women have been relegated to a marginalised position'*. Hence, religion can be seen as a fundamental source of conflict and inequality that could potentially lead to social movements.

Bird (1999:123-144) establishes a significant link between religion and ethnicity, particularly in the context of ethnic mobilisation and movement. He outlines five key reasons why minority ethnic groups often exhibit higher levels of religiosity. Firstly, he contends that many ethnic groups *'originate in societies with high levels of religiosity.'* Secondly, in situations where people are part of a minority group, religion can serve as the basis for community solidarity, offering a point of contact in a new country and providing resources such as marriage partners and social welfare. Bird emphasises that maintaining religious commitment is a means of preserving other aspects of cultural identity, including language, art, marriage patterns, and culinary traditions. Additionally, he notes the role of family pressure in sustaining religious commitment through socialisation processes. Lastly, Bird suggests that disadvantaged minority groups, often working-class, may hold strong religious beliefs as a way of coping with oppression, expressing their position in the social structure. In contrast, Bruce (1988) acknowledges Bird's proposition that minority ethnic groups are more inclined to participate in religious activities than the ethnic majority. However, Bruce argues that this inclination is predominantly driven by social factors. According to him, the vibrancy of religion is primarily a response to the social circumstances of minority ethnic groups rather than a manifestation of genuine religious commitment. Bruce identifies the strength of minority ethnic religions as stemming from either 'cultural

defence,’ where an ethnic group uses religion to protect its sense of identity and maintain ethnic pride, or ‘cultural transition,’ where religion serves as a coping mechanism for an ethnic group navigating the challenges of migration.

The aforementioned definitions and discussions highlight that religion is intricately linked to both society and the individual level. It centers around humanity's belief in supernatural forces and mythology. It encompasses concrete experiences intertwined with emotions, particularly fear, awe, or reverence. Religion also functions as a potent and purposeful social institution, and at the same time may also contribute towards social change, control, social conflict, social stratification, differentiation and at times may ultimately lead to social movement as well. Its universality and pervasiveness emphasise its crucial role in comprehending society and culture comprehensively. Therefore, it has become an enthralling task for researchers to reevaluate and reexamine the role of religion in a society, considering the various factors discussed above that may either favour or unfavourably impact its dynamics.

1.3 Christian World

Approximately, 85% of the global population associates with a religious belief. The predominant religion is Christianity, with an estimated 2.38 billion followers worldwide, making it the most widely embraced faith. Islam, practiced by over 1.91 billion individuals, holds the second position. Projections suggest that by 2050, Islam is expected to nearly equal Christianity in terms of global adherence as shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: World’s Major Religious Profile

Religion	Population	Percentage
Christianity	2.38 billion	33.39
Islam	1.91 billion	24.38
Hinduism	1.16 billion	15.94
Buddhism	507 million	7.35
Folk Religion	430 million	5.79
Other Religion	61 million	1.2
Judaism	14.6 million	0.2
Unaffiliated	1.19 billion	12.35

Source: CIA (United States) World Fact Book, 2021(world population review. com accessed on 20.09.2022)

The above table's measurements and projections for 'other religions' is categorised into two groups. The first category, 'folk religions,' encompasses traditional African religions, Chinese folk religions, and indigenous faiths like Native American and Australian aboriginal religions. The second category, 'other religions,' comprises smaller belief systems such as Shintoism, Taoism, Sikhism, and Jainism. In certain countries, traditional Chinese religions, including Confucianism and Taoism, are observed, notably in China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. Ethnic and indigenous religions find adherence in various nations, with notable instances in Guinea-Bissau and Haiti, where approximately 50% of the population follows these belief systems. Other countries practicing ethnic and indigenous religions include Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan, and Togo. The presence of the unaffiliated or atheist is prominent in countries like Estonia, the Czech Republic, China, and Japan, where over three-quarters of the population abstains from religious practices. Additionally, other nations with a high percentage of unaffiliated or atheist citizens encompass China, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Japan, Denmark, France, Hong Kong, Macau, Norway, Sweden, and Vietnam. (CIA World Fact Book, 2021)

1.4 Religious Profile of India

According to the Census of India in 2011, Hinduism is identified as the predominant religion, constituting approximately 79.8% of the population. Islam follows as the second-largest religion, representing 14.23% of the population. Other significant religious groups in India include Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.72%), Buddhists (0.71%), and Jains (0.37%). Individuals who claimed no religious affiliation are officially categorised under 'other' in the Census, accounting for 0.9% of the population. In the 2011 Census of India, approximately 0.9% of Indians fell into the 'No religion' category. Among them, around 8 million (80 lakhs) people claimed not to belong to any of the six largest religious groups. Surprisingly, a very small number, about 30,000 Indians, identified themselves as atheists. India is often acknowledged as a 'land of religious diversity,' wherein various religious groups and sects freely practice their faith, aligning with the Constitutional definition of India as a 'secular state.' Notably, major religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism originated in this diverse land. A remarkable facet of India's religious landscape is its hosting of the

largest number of Zoroastrian adherents, a community typically associated with its native Persia. The extent of India's religious diversity is effectively captured and quantified in Table 1.2, illustrating the numerical representation of the nation's diverse religious fabric.

Table 1.2: India's Religious Profile

Religion	Population (2011)	%	Growth % (2001-2011)
Hindus	966,257,353	79.8%	16.8%
Muslims	172,245,158	14.2%	24.6%
Christians	27,819,588	2.3%	15.5%
Sikhs	20,833,116	1.72%	8.4%
Buddhists	8,442,972	0.37%	6.1%
Jains	4,451,753	0.67%	5.4%
Other religions	7,937,734	0.24%	n/a
Not stated	2,867,303	100%	n/a
Total	1,210,854,977		

Source: 2011 Census of India

As of the completion of this demographic analysis, the 2021 Census in India had been postponed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the findings may not be accessible for several years. However, in 2015, the Pew Research Centre released demographic predictions for the world's main religious groups that extended until 2050. According to these estimations, India had an expected population of around 1.4 billion (140 crores) people by the year 2030 and the number will keep on escalating in the following years. Unless demographic trends change significantly, it is expected that Muslims will continue to expand as a share of the Indian population during the next decade, while Hindus will remain the vast majority. According to forecasts for 2050, Hindus will make up approximately 77% of the Indian population, Muslims 18%, and Christians 2%. Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains have lower fertility rates than the national average, indicating that their population proportion may drop. Among India's major religious groups, Muslims have the highest fertility rate at 4.4, followed by Hindus at 2.1 and Jains at 1.2. (Pew Research Centre, 2015)

Between late 2019 and early 2020, the Pew Research Centre conducted a comprehensive religion survey across India, interviewing approximately 30,000 adults in 17 languages. According to the poll, people from various religious backgrounds in

India believe they have the freedom to practice their faith. Religious tolerance is regarded as a basic component of the nation's identity, with the majority of major religious organisations believing that respecting all religions is essential to being 'really Indian'. These shared values coexist with a number of views that cross religious boundaries. For example, while 77% of Hindus in India believe in *karma*, an equal number of Muslims do as well. Furthermore, a considerable portion of Christians (32%) and the majority of Hindus (81%) believe in the Ganges River's purifying influence, which is a core tenet of Hinduism. In northern India, 12% of Hindus, 10% of Sikhs, and 37% of Muslims practise Sufism, a mystical religion intimately related to Islam. Furthermore, the majority of Indians from various religious backgrounds emphasise the value of respecting elders in their religion. (Pew Research Centre Report, 2019-2020)

The Pew Research Centre's findings further suggest that despite sharing common ideals and religious beliefs, and living in the same nation under the same Constitution, members of India's major religious communities frequently believe they have little in common. The majority of Hindus (66%) consider themselves to be significantly distinct from Muslims, while most Muslims (64%) agree. Approximately two-thirds of Jains and roughly half of Sikhs believe to share many similarities with Hindus. However, in general, people from India's major religious sects see themselves as substantially different from others (Pew Research Centre Report, 2019-2020).

This perception of difference is evident in various aspects such as marriage choices, neighbourhood preferences, and more. The Pew Research Centre's findings indicate that approximately two-thirds of Hindus in India express a desire to prevent interreligious marriages involving Hindu women (67%) or Hindu men (65%). Similarly, a significant majority of Muslims share this sentiment: 80% believe it is very important to prevent Muslim women from marrying outside their religion, and 76% hold the same view regarding Muslim men. Regarding choice of neighbours, 45% of Hindus are open to having neighbours of all other religions, including Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, or Jains. However, an identical percentage (45%) are unwilling to accept followers from at least one of these groups. This includes more than one-third of Hindus (36%) who do not want a Muslim neighbour. Among Jains,

a majority (61%) express an unwillingness to have neighbors from at least one of these groups, with 54% stating they would not accept a Muslim neighbor. (The PEW Research Centre Report, 2019-2020). Thus, the Indian concept of religious tolerance does not always imply the merger of different communities. Unlike some countries, where the goal is to create a 'melting pot' of many religious identities, many Indians appear to prefer a nation more comparable to a patchwork quilt, with strong boundaries between different groups.

1.5 Religious Profile of Mizoram

The State of Mizoram is located in the northeastern part of India, situated between 92.15° East to 93.29° East longitude and 21.58° North to 24.35° North latitude. The State spans a total area of 21,087 sq. km, characterised by challenging terrain, with over 80% being hilly. The State's population, as per the 2011 Census of India, is 10,97,206, with a total decadal growth rate of 23.48%. Mizoram boasts a remarkably well-educated population, recording a literacy rate of 91.33% according to the 2011 Census of India. It is noteworthy that Mizoram, despite having the second-highest literacy rate in India, can be characterised as a 'highly literate agrarian economy' (Economic Survey of Mizoram, 2021-2022: 55).

Mizoram is characterised by its religious diversity, with the majority of the population being Christians (see Table 1.3), particularly in the northern hills where the Mizoram Presbyterian Church is dominant (NIC, 2011 Census https://mizoram.nic.in/about/popu_by-reli.htm). The majority of 87% of *Mizos* are Christians in various denominations, predominantly Presbyterian, which was established by the Welsh missionary Rev. D.E. Jones starting in 1894. By the time India gained independence from the British empire, some 80% of *Lusei* tribe people had converted to Christianity (Nunthara, 2022: 59-63) The southern hills, on the other hand, have a significant Baptist follower. (Nunthara, 2022: 59-63).

Table 1.3. Religious Profile of Mizoram

Religion	Persons	Percentage	Males	Females
Hindu	30,136	2.75	20,013	10,123
Muslims	14,832	1.35	9550	5282
Christians	956,331	87.16	476,464	479,867
Sikhs	286	0.03	216	70

Buddhist	93,411	8.51	47,970	45,441
Jain	376	0.03	208	168
Not stated	1026	0.09	516	510

Source: Census of India, 2011

One notable aspect of Mizoram's religious landscape is the presence of a significant Theravada Buddhist population, constituting 8.51% of the population (Census of India, 2011). These Buddhists primarily reside in the Chakma Autonomous Region in the southern part of Mizoram, making them the largest religious minority in the region. Additionally, Hindus make up 2.75% of the population, according to the 2011 Census of India. The *Chakmas* and the *Tanchangya* have practiced Buddhism since the mid-eighteenth century, contributing to the religious diversity of Mizoram. (Chawngkunga, 1983:11-12)

Table 1.4: List of Churches / Denominations in Mizoram

Name of Denominations	Total Members	Male	Female	No of Local Church/Corp/ Parish
Presbyterian Church of India (PCI)	618,854	300,279	318,575	1,130
Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM)	173,952	86,534	87,418	651
Salvation Army	62,645	31,215	31,430	282
Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) (Noth East India)	85,663	42,377	43,286	571
UPC (Mizoram)	72,407	36,300	36,107	584
Seventh Day Adventist	18,979	9,808	9,171	288
Evangelical Church of Maraland (ECM)	47,151	23,182	23,969	92
Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran	36,049	17,704	18,345	118
Roman Catholic	22,416	10,880	11,536	161
Isua Krista Kohhran (IKK)	10,650	5,278	5,372	88
Total	1,148,766	563,557	585,209	3,965

Source: Secretaries, Mizoram Synod, BCM, Salvation Army, UPC(NE), UPC (Miz), Seventh Day Adventist, ECM, LIKBK, Catholic, IKK (General Headquarters), Mizoram Statistical Handbook, 2022, p.217)

Reverend William Williams, the first missionary, upon receiving permission for missionary entry from Mr. A. Porteous, the Superintendent of the *Lushai* Hills in 1893, the Arthington Aborigines Mission promptly assigned two missionaries to the *Lushai* Hills (Lianzuala, 2013:91-95). In 1893, Robert Arthington of the Arthington

Aborigines Mission financed two missionaries to Aizawl, F. W Savidge, and J H. Lorrain, who arrived at *Sairang* on January 11, 1894, and camped at Aizawl on January 13 (Lloyd, 1991:20-22; Lalthansanga,2020:84). After four years, they were recalled to England as Arthington believed that the main job was to teach a few people to read so that such native individuals would further carry out the work of evangelism to their fellow tribes (Dena, 1988: 44) and thus, the two pioneer missionaries left on December 31, 1897 after which they formed their own organisation which they called ‘The Assam Frontier Pioneer Mission’ and began their work among the *Abor* people.

However, the first missionary who had actually landed among the *Mizos* and introduced the gospel was a Welsh Presbyterian Missionary named Rev. William Williams (Hminga, 1987:47). He reached Mizoram on March 15, 1891, coming all the way from Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Ever since his visit to the ‘*Sylhet* goal’, William Williams was very much interested in the *Mizo* people where several Mizo chiefs were held captives in *Sylhet* (Lloyd, 1991:17). He thus resolved to pay them a visit.

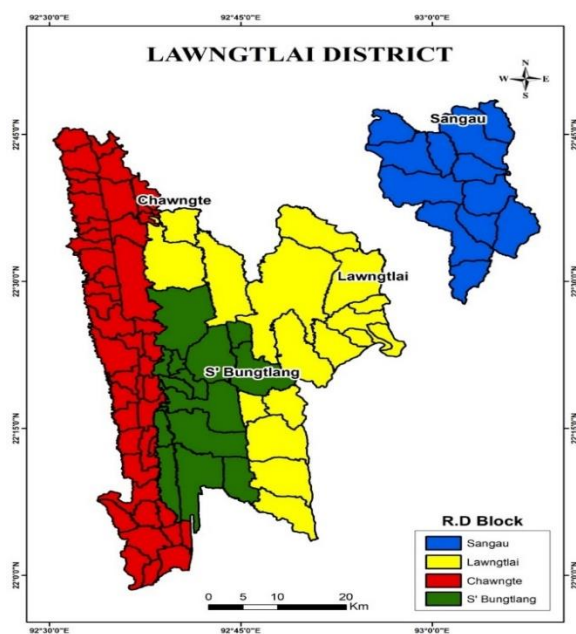
The arrival of William Williams in Mizoram on March 15th is officially recognised as the Missionary Day by the Presbyterian Church in Mizoram, as declared in its 89th General Assembly of the Synod Executive Committee (SEC) in 2012 (Lalhmingmawia, 2018). This declaration designating March 15th as the ‘True Missionary Day’ has sparked ongoing debates heretofore. Nevertheless, J.H. Lorraine and F.W. Savidge of the Baptist pursuance were the first persons who had actually settled down in Mizoram to preach the Gospel regardless of the fact that Rev. William Williams will unfailingly be commemorated by the Mizo people as the first missionary who took the initial endeavours to preach Gospel in Mizoram; and it is noteworthy that the first church in Mizoram was a Baptist Church established at *Sethlun* in *Lunglei*, which continues to hold significant reverence among the *Mizos*.

1.6 Lawngtlai: The Field Area

Lawngtlai district is situated in the extreme corner of southern part of Mizoram, sharing international borders with Bangladesh to the west and Myanmar to the south. It is surrounded by *Lunglei* District to the north and *Saiha* District to the east. The *Thega* (*Kawrpui* River) largely demarcates the western boundary with Bangladesh,

while the *Kaladan* River forms the eastern boundary with *Saiha* District. Covering an area of 2557.10 km² (Census of India, 2011), the district features mountainous and hilly terrain, with a narrow strip of low-lying riverine plain along the western side of the *Chamdur* Valley. Approximately, one-third of the total population in Lawngtlai district depends primarily on agriculture, predominantly following traditional shifting cultivation methods. Notably, the economic condition of the district is considered the least favourable among the districts in Mizoram. According to the 2011 Census, Lawngtlai district has a population of 117,894, ranking it 611th out of a total of 640 districts in India. The district has a population density of 46 inhabitants per square kilometer (120/sq kms). Approximately 17.67% of the population lives in urban areas. Scheduled Tribes make up 95.30% of the population. According to the 2011 Census of India, 39.28% of the population speaks Chakma, 23.24% speaks Mizo, and 20.96% speaks Tripuri as their first language. While Lai is the dominant tribe in Lawngtlai District, the percentage of Lai-speaking people is relatively low at 20.96%. This can be attributed to the assimilation of Lai language by the *Mizo* or *Duhlian* language since the pre-Christian era (Hrangzuala, 2000:37-39).

Figure 1.1: Map of Lawngtlai, the Study Area



Source: Author

Lawngtlai was officially declared a district on September 18, 1998, and it serves as the headquarters of the Lai Autonomous District Council. The Lai people, constituting one of the largest ethnic groups among the *Zo*-ethnic groups, are associated with different names such as '*Pawi*' in Mizoram, '*Chin*' in Myanmar, and '*Shendus*' in Bangladesh. The *Pawi (Lai)* union central headquarters has listed 840 sub-tribes and clans under the Lai tribes. The term '*Lai*' was adopted by the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) in 1998 in place of '*Pawi*' (Doungel, 2010:8-9). However, many Lais residing outside the Lai Autonomous District Council area prefer to be referred to as '*Pawi*' instead of '*Lai*' (Bawitlung, 2012:4). Lawngtlai boasts the longest bridge in Mizoram, the '*Kawlchaw Bridge*' (285 meters), and the highest mountain in Mizoram, '*Phawngpui Tlang*' (Blue Mountain). (Lalmuankima, 1997:1-2)

1.7 Religious Profile of Lawngtlai

Out of the total population of 117,894, Christians make up 54.19% of Lawngtlai population as per the 2011 Census of India. A notable aspect of the religious profile in Lawngtlai is that Buddhism is the second-largest religion, playing a significant role in the electoral process of Lawngtlai, with 43.72% of the total population, as indicated in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5: Religious Population of Lawngtlai

Population	117,894
Hindu	1.1%
Muslim	0.44%
Christian	54.19%
Sikh	0.04%
Buddhist	43.72%
Jain	0.10%

Source: 2011 Census of India

Table 1.6 provides a breakdown of Christian Churches in Lawngtlai, showcasing various denominations and their respective memberships. The dominant church in Lawngtlai is currently the *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran* (LIKBK), established on 23rd, May 1970. However, the first Assembly Meeting was initiated on 27th November 1999, which was thus officially accepted as the date of birth of the LIKBK

(Chinzah, 2019:188). Notably, LIKBK is an ethnic-based church exclusively for the Lai people. The church actively works to promote Lai identity, popularise Lai culture and attire, and conducts its services in the Lai language.

Table 1.6: Churches in Lawngtlai District

Name of Church	No of Church Members
LIKBK	30692
Baptist Church of Mizoram	26804
Presbyterian Church of India	6752
United Penticostal Church North- East	6006
United Penticostal Church, Mizoram	1619
Salvation Army	953
Seventh Day Adventist	380
Kohhran Thianghlim	67

Source: Mizoram Statistical Abstract, 2021

Table 1.6 highlights the religious demographics, indicating that, unlike the northern side of Mizoram where Presbyterians constitute the majority, the southern side, particularly in Lawngtlai district, presents a different religious landscape. In this southern region, Presbyterians are the minority, and the LIKBK (Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran), an ethnic-based church, dominates the religious scene. This dominant church, LIKBK, will be the main focus of the study in the following chapters, where its influence, role, and impact on the community will be explored in details.

1.8 The Lai People

The Lai people are indeed one of the ethnic groups in Mizoram. They are part of the larger Mizo ethnic group, which also include tribes like the *Lusei*, *Hmar*, *Ralte*, and others. The origin of the Lai people, like many other *Mizo* tribes, is believed to be in southern China, and they migrated to their current homeland in Mizoram (Mizoram District Gazetteers, 1989: 80). According to Lai genealogy and oral traditions, various communities within present-day Mizoram, such as the *Lai (Pawi)*, *Lusei*, *Paihte*, *Hmar*, *Ralte*, *Fanai*, and *Lakher*, among others, consider themselves descendants of

common ancestors. These communities often trace their lineage through myths, legends, and oral histories that emphasise shared origins and kinship ties (Bawitlung, 1997:57).

The assertion made by Luce (1960) provides a specific timeline and migration route for the early movements of the Lai people out of China. According to this perspective, the Lai people were the first among the *Mizo* tribes in terms of migration, moving out of China around 400 A.D (Laitanga, 1998:8-9) and settling initially in the *Hukong* valley in present-day Myanmar. Subsequently, they continued their southward migration, eventually reaching the Chindwin valley. Lehman (1980:18) noted that Lai settlements in this valley began around 750 AD. During their stay in this valley, they settled at two places now known as *Monywa* and *Shwebo* in Burma, as indicated by recent excavations that unearthed Lai materials like jars and plates from these locations. After residing in the Chin Hills of Myanmar for a considerable period, some Lai people began moving toward their present habitat in the last part of the 18th century (Bawitlung, 2012:8).

A more nuanced picture of their complex and multifaceted past and their detailed course of migration was provided by a prolific writer, *S.R. Chinzah* outlining a series of movements in four distinct batches, each led by different chiefs and accompanied by various clans and families: The first batch consisted of *Hlawncheu* chiefs departing from *Falam*, accompanied by *Tlanglau*, *Bawm*, *Pang*, and *Miria* tribes. The second batch, originating from *Chawngthi*, included tribes like *Phunhnawma*, *Tlangchhan*, *Bawilawma*, *Thinte*, and *Zabiaka Fanchun*. The third batch comprised *Chinzah* chiefs and others from two villages called *Lungzarh* and *Khuafo*, accompanied by *Fanchun*, *Bawihlung*, *Hnialum*, *Mualchin*, *Zinhlawng* tribes, and more. The fourth and final batch involved *Hlawnhhing* chiefs from *Thlantlang*. These migrations occurred over a period spanning roughly from 1750 to 1850 (Chinzah, 2003:26-27). The majority of chiefs and their followers moved into the southern part of the present-day land, while the group under *Chinzah* chiefs settled in the middle part of Lawngtlai. This account provides specific details regarding the leadership, group composition, and settlement patterns of the Lai people as they migrated into their present habitat.

The Lai people, residing in the Lai Autonomous District Council in the southern part of Mizoram, were traditionally referred to as '*Pawi*' by other Mizo tribes. However, they identified themselves as '*Lai*' and considered the term '*Pawi*' derogatory (Bawitlung, 2012:4). The Lai Autonomous District Council officially adopted the term '*Lai*' in 1988 to replace '*Pawi*,' which the Lais found it offensive. Dr. Vumson Suantak clearly asserted that the term '*Pawi*' is a name given by the *Paihtes* and the *Luseis*, referring to those who tied their hair on the top of their foreheads known as '*Hrumzial*' (1988:48). The typical Lai man dressing up in Lai attire with the hair knotted on the forehead is shown below in picture 1. Mr. *Hengmanga*, the former renowned Historical Research Officer and a prolific writer had also claimed that, '*The Lai were recognised from their hair style that is knotting on their foreheads. However, this typical hair style does not signify the term Lai*' (Hengmanga, 1987:5). Hrangzuala had also mentioned that while conducting his research based at *Patel* in Manipur, a man by the name Mr. *Mongpham Maring*, a government contractor told him that, the *Maring* people, who keep the same hairstyle of knotting their hair on top of their forehead were also similarly called as '*Pawi -Maring*'. (Hrangzuala, 2000:21). Gierson had also said that the name '*Poi*' (*Pawi*) is found in many authorities and refers to tribes wearing their hair in a knot on top of their head (1976:55). Therefore, in light of this confusing nomenclature, a safe conclusion may be drawn that in the olden days, the term '*Pawi*' was a name given not only to the Lai people but to every tribe who knotted their hair at the top of the forehead.

Picture 1.1: A typical Lai knotting hair on top forehead known as '*Hrumzial*'



Source: Courtesy of Mr. Zothanpuia (6.10.2023)

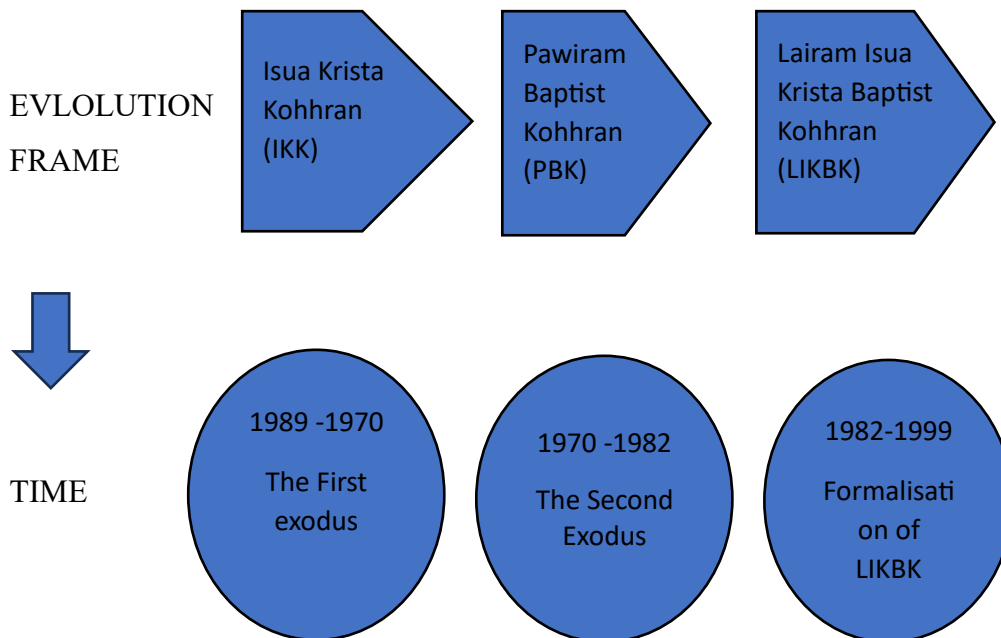
The Regional Council came into existence on 23rd, April 1953, following the enactment of the Assam District (Constitution of the District Council) 1953. With

Mizoram's transition into a Union Territory in 1972, the *Pawi-Lakher* Regional Council (PLRC) underwent further division, resulting in the formation of three distinct Regional Councils: the Pawi Regional Council, the *Lakher* Regional Council, and the Chakma Regional Council. Subsequent to Mizoram's upgradation to Union Territory status, the three Regional Councils were subsequently elevated to Autonomous District Councils. This transition occurred concurrently with the renaming of the Mizo District as Mizoram and was facilitated by the enactment of the North East Areas (Reorganisation) 1971 and the Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Act, 1971. Henceforth, three autonomous districts emerged from the dissolution of the *Pawi-Lakher* Regional Council, namely, the *Pawi* Autonomous District Council, the *Lakher* Autonomous District Council, and the Chakma Autonomous District Council. Notably, the Pawi Autonomous District Council underwent a name change in 1988 and was retitled as the Lai Autonomous District Council. (Doungel, 2010: 8-10).

1.9 LIKBK

The Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran (LIKBK) is the dominant church in Lawngtlai, amounting to 30692 church members as shown in Table 1.6. The LIKBK took its birth on the 27th November 1999. The establishment of the Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran (LIKBK) was not an overnight occurrence but the result of over two decades of dedicated efforts by the Lai people. This process began with the founding of their first ethnic church, *Isua Krista Kohhran* (IKK), in 1970 at *Bualpui NG* Village, an event often referred to as the '*first Exodus*' (Lalpehhlua, 2022, p. v). Subsequently, in 1982, the second ethnic church, *Pawiram Baptist Kohhran* (PBK), was established in Lawngtlai town, known as the '*second Exodus*' (Lalpehhlua, 2022, p. v) as shown in Figure 1.2. Through peaceful dialogue and negotiations between these two churches, the LIKBK was officially formed on November 27, 1999. This history underscores the significant and sustained efforts required to unify the Lai people's religious institutions. The terms '*first Exodus*' and '*second Exodus*' highlight the transformative nature of these events in the community's spiritual journey. The eventual formation of LIKBK represents a culmination of persistent endeavours and collaborative negotiations, marking a significant milestone in the religious and cultural identity of the Lai people.

Figure 1.2: A Visual Representation of the Evolution of the Lai Religion (LIKBK)



Source: Author's Conceptualisation

One interesting issue of LIKBK is that it is an ethnic-based church exclusively meant for the Lai people. The LIKBK takes special efforts to propagate Lai identity, to popularise the Lai culture and dresses and also conducts the church service in Lai language. Besides teaching Christian doctrines, they propagate the following teachings like:

- "Preservation of Lai culture
- To work for development of '*Lairam*' (land of the Lai people) and '*Laifa*' (the Lai people)
- Protection of '*Laifa*' (*the Lai people*) against assimilation and exploitation." (LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws, 2020:5- Translated)

Fear of assimilation was one of the main reasons for the formation of LIKBK. The Lais before the advent of Christianity had their own unique culture and a well-defined customary laws and practices. The village administration was in the hands of the chiefs and his *Upas* (elders). In course of time, with the advent of the Baptist Missionary

Society on 13th March, 1903 at *Serkawn* and the subsequent arrival of Reginald. A. Lorraine on September 26, 1907 at *Serkawr*, *Saiha* and by firmly establishing the *Lakher* Pioneer Missionary, a drastic change and development had taken place in the southern part of Mizoram in which the impact was also strongly felt by the Lais. In short, all the Lai traditional culture has become 'Christianised'. Dr Vanlalringa Bawitlung has rightly remarked as "After the British advent together with the coming of the Christianity.... drastically changed the customary practices of the Lai people whichever is deemed against Christian doctrines and practices are replaced by Christian Culture." (Bawitlung, 2012:59)

Prior to the British colonial power that was installed in India and Burma, the Lai people had high-developed cultural standard. With colourful song and dances, they established social standard and values. In fact, they were well-organised society with customs, ceremonies and festivals. However, the coming of the British opened a new era of social degeneration. As a result of condemnation of tribal world, many culture of high value lie buried today. Christianity therefore is another factor that had degenerated some Lai culture and traditions. While Christianity had become an instrument to develop the *Lushei* and the *Mara* language a written form, the Lai language was left out. Moreover, education and gospel were imparted only through the *Mara* and *Lushei* Languages, therefore, the Lai language has slowly been drifted away. Christianity has brought education and development of literature in Mizoram which was a great blessing for all the people in Mizoram. However, it put the Lai people at a very critical situation that for the Lai, to become a Christian or to get education means to surrender their own identity, culture and language. (Hrangzuala, 2000:43)

Therefore, the Lais in order to preserve and promote their unique 'Lai identity' felt the need to have a separate church exclusively meant for the upliftment of the Lai people as early as the year 1953, that is, the year when the Lai had attained an autonomy, that is Regional Council. (Chinzah,2019:27). They firmly believed that there is a hope to revive the waning Lai culture by forming an independent church exclusively meant for the Lai people. Finally, the LIKBK has officially come into being on the 23rd, May,1970. Ever since the formation of LIKBK, the LIKBK has been tirelessly taking up active role for the Lai people functioning under several Departments and

Committees like The General Administration, Finance committee, Pastoral Committee, Mission Department, Medical Board, Christian Education Committee, *Lairam* Social Mission Committee and Communication Committee. Some of the worth-mentioning works undertaken are the establishment of motherless home, *Lairam* Adoption Centre, *Lairam* bookroom and stationery, *Lairam* Rescue Centre, widow ministry, *Lairam* Higher Academy of Science (LAHAS), Lai Bible and Lai Hymn book (*Khrihfa* Hla Bu). The LIKBK has also taken up tasks like environment protection by working along with the Environment Forest and Climate Change Department, LADC. It also takes up Comprehensive Livelihood Department Project, *Lairam* Women Development Society (LWDS), HIV/AIDS awareness campaign and Blood donation.

1.10 Background of the Study

Following the adoption of the South *Lushai* Hills by the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) as their mission field, the BMS requested J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge to return to Mizoram and thus resumed their work in the South *Lushai* Hills under the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS), establishing themselves in Fort *Lunglei* from March 13, 1903 (Lawmsanga, 2010: 87). Upon their arrival, Savidge and Lorrain assumed responsibility for the mission and the blossoming Christian community in southern Mizoram. Simultaneously, the Presbyterian missionaries redirected their efforts towards the northern region of Mizoram and handed over the southern Mizoram to the BCM reluctantly (Sangkhuma, 1995:9). This marked the commencement of the distinct history of the Baptist Church in southern Mizoram (BCM Communication Department, 2022). Four years subsequent to the return of J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge to *Serkawn* under the sponsorship of the Baptist Church of Mizoram, another significant missionary endeavour unfolded. J.H. Lorrain's sibling, Reginald A. Lorrain, in tandem with his spouse, embarked on a transformative mission on November 26, 1907, establishing a permanent residence for themselves and their family. Their permanent settlement in '*Serkawr*,' an enclave predominantly inhabited by the *Mara* people, marked a departure from the typical trajectory of early missionaries who often returned to their places of origin (Chinzah, 2019:12). Remarkably, R.A. Lorrain devoted thirty-seven years of unwavering service to the *Mara* community, ultimately

passing away in *Maraland* itself on February 1, 1944. His dedicated spouse, Mrs. Moud Louise Ullander, continued to serve the mission faithfully until she, too, rested in eternal peace on May 32, 1960 in *Maraland* and not heading back to London.

R.A. Lorrain, akin to his brother, harboured an unwavering passion for propagating the Gospel in the uncharted realms of the world since his high school days. His initial aspiration was directed toward Africa or Latin America for evangelistic endeavours. However, upon perusing the letter from his brother, his heart became singularly focused on Mizoram and, more specifically, the *Mara* people. Despite facing rejection from missionary societies such as the BMS and Arthington Trust, which deemed reaching such a distant and diminutive settlement as futile, Lorrain remained undeterred. Undaunted, he, along with his spiritual compatriots, established the *Lakher* Pioneer Missionary on February 11, 1905. (Cho, n.d:12-13).

In summary, the Baptist Church of Mizoram played a pioneering role in various fields such as education, literature, mission, and ministry, with a specific emphasis on women's ministry in southern Mizoram. Key contributions include the reduction of the Mizo language into a written form by Baptist missionaries Rev. Lorrian and Rev. F.W. Savidge, the production of the *Serkawn* Graded Reader for elementary school literature, the establishment of the first Christian college, the Higher and Technical Institute of Mizoram, in 2007, and the initiation of cross-cultural missions to the *Brus* and *Chakmas* in 1939. The Baptist Church of Mizoram also took the lead wheel in creating the Department of Youth and the Men's Department within its organisational structure. Notably, it became the first and only church in Mizoram to ordain women, exemplified by Dr. R.L. *Hnuni*, who was entrusted with the role of Principal in its theological college, the Academy of Integrated Christian Studies. (BCM Communication Department, 2022). The Christian missionaries played a profound role in shaping the way of life for the *Mara* tribe in *Maraland* too. The establishment of the Mission School on August 24, 1908, marked a crucial milestone, with the *Mara* language being documented upon the founding of the Mission Station in *Saikao* (*Serkawr*) Village. The advent of Christianity brought about a transformative impact on the *Mara* people, influencing them to adopt a more 'standardised lifestyle' under the tenets of Christian faith and values (Solo, et al, 2023: 976). In their efforts to lead

the *Mara* towards Christianity, the missionaries implemented a new educational system in the school, employing Christian teachings as the foundational method. R.A. Lorrain aptly described the school as the ‘backbone of the Mission,’ (Lorrain, 1998: 260) expressing hope in reaching every tribe across the *Mara* area and winning souls for Christ through education. He completed translation of the New-Testament in 1927 (Zakonia, 2011:206). Unfortunately, R.A. Lorrain passed away on February 1st, 1944, before he could finish the translation. The work was then taken up by the succeeding missionaries and after dedicated efforts spanning forty-nine years, the complete *Mara* Bible was unveiled on February 25, 1973, at *Siaha Vaihpi* Local Church (Beithie, 1997: 8). In short, the missionaries employed diverse methods, including education, Bible study, catechism, sewing and stitching, medical practices, and social reform measures, to spread the Gospel among the primitive Mara tribe. Despite R.A. Lorrain's limited medical knowledge—acquired from a year's course at Livingston Medical College, London—he gained the trust and hearts of many in the Mara community through his healing and medical work (Sanga, 2016:75). To disseminate the gospel, he introduced the first printing press to *Maraland* in 1908, producing numerous pamphlets and booklets (Hlychho, 2009: 245). Additionally, R.A. Lorraine initiated the Evangelical Church of *Maraland* in 1907, leading to the entire population's conversion to Christianity by the end of 1959. (Beicho, 2014:151)

Looking at the pioneering works of the two batches of missionary, F.W. Savidge and J.H.Lorrain, and R.A. Lorrain, who settled permanently at *Lunglei* and *Siaha* respectively, regrettably, Christianity in Lawngtlai arrived considerably later in comparison to neighboring tribes. Moreover, the melancholier part was that no white missionary was assigned for the Lai people, unlike the southern part of Mizoram such as *Lunglei* and *Siaha*, as was discussed in the above paragraphs, where the missionaries firmly and permanently established themselves, thereby actively contributed to metamorphic change and development for their assigned areas. Whereas other regions of Mizoram were acquainted with the Christian gospel as early as 1893 with the courtesy of the pioneering efforts of William Williams, the formal documentation of Christians in Lawngtlai dates back only to the year 1912 (Chinzah, 2019:15). Reverend Dr. L.H. *Lalpekhlua*, a member of the research team affiliated with LIKBK instituted

in 2009, asserted that a significant historical landmark in the ecclesiastical landscape of Lai district occurred with the establishment of the inaugural Baptist church in *Mampui* village (formerly recognized as *Khamchungpuk* village) in 1910. It is noteworthy that the earliest documented mention of a Christian presence in this locale dates back to 1912 (Lalpekhlu, 2022:5).

Nonetheless, an alternative hypothesis suggests that *Ralulha Chinzah*, recognised as an itinerant evangelist, purportedly established residency in *Lungtian* village in 1909. However, owing to complaints filed against him, he supposedly departed from the village in 1911 (Lalpekhlu, 2022:5). Following an extensive examination, the study team brought to attention a significant finding derived from the BCM Church Member Register no. 1-3094 (1903-1915) sourced from The BCM Archive. According to official records, the initial three individuals from *Mampui* Village—*Khawdina* (aged 28), *Darchana* (aged 16), and *Vana* (aged 13)—were baptised by J.H. Lorraine in the year 1913. Additionally, within the Register, it was documented that an individual named *Sakeia* had officially declared his affiliation as a Christian in 1910 while residing in *Serkawn, Lunglei*. (Lalpekhlu, 2022:7). Consequently, the study team arrived at the conclusion that due to the absence of a designated missionary dedicated to the Lai people, it is challenging to pinpoint the precise year of Christianity's introduction. It is posited that the itinerant evangelist *Thangbawnga*, despite being unsalaried, likely played a pivotal role in disseminating the gospel to *Mampui* village initially. Subsequently, individuals like *Khawdina* and *Sakeia* may have further propagated the Christian message within the community. (Lalpekhlu, 2022:9)

Following *Mampui* Village, the subsequent reference to early Christians is noted in *Chawnhu* Village (Lalpekhlu, 2022:7). According to the official records housed within the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) Archive, Mr. *Thanzika*, aged 24, underwent baptism on March 22nd, 1913, in *Serkawn* under the ministry of Reverend J.H. Lorrain. His conversion to the Christian faith is documented as occurring in 1912. It is noteworthy to mention that Mr. *Thanzika* hailed not directly from *Chawnhu* Village but rather from *Thaltlang* Village. Nonetheless, he permanently settled down in *Chawnhu* Village, assuming the role of a pastor therein. (Lalpekhlu, 2022:7).

In summary, it is disheartening to acknowledge that Christianity made its ingress into the *Lairam* (Lai areas) only after fifteen years subsequent to the initial arrival of Christian missionaries in Mizoram. The inception of Christian Gospel in the Lai areas is tentatively traced back to the period spanning between 1909 and 1912. Notably, the genesis of the first Christian Church can be attributed to *Mampui* Village in 1910, signifying a significant milestone. Remarkably, the village also saw the establishment of the first school, underscoring the intertwined nature of education and religious development within the community. (Chinzah, 2019:16). However, some itinerant evangelist must have entered the Lai area before the mentioned year (Lalpekhlua, 2022:4). Approximately by the year 1945, the dissemination of the gospel had already reached the Lai areas and their peripheral villages. Nevertheless, it was not until around 1950 that Christian churches were formally established across these villages. This indicates that it took a span of 41 years since the initial introduction of Christianity into the Lai areas for each village to establish a full-fledged Christian church (Chinzah, 2019:17).

1.11 Statement of the Problem

A comprehensive examination of the historical development of Christianity and the missionary demands a nuanced analysis and arguments that delves into both the adverse and beneficial repercussions. This exploration is imperative to establish a contextual backdrop, unravelling the intricate impact on the Lai people in particular. Furthermore, it is essential to scrutinise how the indigenous communities navigated and responded to these transformative shifts in their deeply ingrained cultural tapestry. The arrival of Christianity in the southern part of Mizoram, particularly among the Lai people, led to profound changes in their traditional culture and practices. Before the introduction of Christianity, the Lais had a distinct culture with well-defined customary laws and practices. Village administration was under the control of the chief and his elder, known as '*Upa*'. With the establishment of the Baptist Missionary Society in March 1903 at *Serkawn*, *Lunglei* and the subsequent arrival of Reginald A. Lorraine in September 1907 at *Serkawr*, *Saiha*, along with the *Lakher* Pioneer Missionary, detrimental changes occurred in the region. The impact of Christianity was strongly felt, and the traditional culture of the Lai people underwent a process of

‘Christianisation.’ Elements deemed incompatible with Christian doctrines and practices were replaced by Christian culture. In essence, the influence of Christianity played a key role in reshaping the cultural landscape of the Lai people, aligning it with Christian values and beliefs. (Bawitlung, 2012:59) Moreover, some of the unique traditional dances like ‘*Ruakkhatlak*’ (Bamboo Dance), ‘*Conglaizawn*’ (ceremonial dance performed near the dead body) and ‘*Sarlamkai*’ (war victory dance) have now lost their significance and are replaced by church activities. The Lai Customary Law pertaining to marriage and divorce has now been replaced by the Church Laws and Constitution. The traditional social control mechanisms, too have been replaced by the church to a great extent. In this way, the ‘*Lai nunze mawi*’ (the typical Lai way of life) has been dismally replaced by the ‘Christian way of life’.

The British ruthlessly invaded the land of the Lai people in 1889 and started occupation in 1891. After colonial intervention, the ruling chiefs were recognised as ‘*de facto* rulers’ under the British administration (Bawitlung, 2012:14). Therefore, the Lai chiefs who once were enjoying the absolute power to exercise the laws in their own lawfully land could not accept that foreign ruler were overtaking their traditional power. (Bawitlung, 2012:14). The splitting of the *Lushai* Hills and their subsequent consolidation into a single unit disrupted the cohesion of the Lai people inhabiting both the northern and southern regions of Mizoram (Hrangzuala, 2000:38). The fragmentation of the Lai tribes had been made more acute as a consequence of the Government of India's resolution to divide the Chin Hills and the *Lushai* Hills, assigning them to Burma and India, respectively. Due to the division and demarcation of boundaries, the Lai people gradually lost their unique identity and unity, resulting in the never-ending debate pertaining to accepted common nomenclature among the various *Zo*-ethnic tribes. This may be attributed to such division wherein some Lai people are not even aware of their origin or ethnic affiliations till today (Hrangzuala, 2000:40).

Since no missionary was assigned for the Lai people, Christianity was brought to the Lai people by the *Lusei* (*Mizo*) community using the *Mizo* language as a medium of imparting gospel, and considering that the Lai people lacked their own distinct script, they quickly integrated into the *Mizo* linguistic sphere and this contributed to the

gradual drifting away from the Lai language. As such, the current language profile of the Lai district presents a regretful picture showcasing that the Lai people have lost touch with their original language; only 20.96 % are able to speak the Lai language (2011 Census of India). This regretful scenario had been articulated by John (62), one prominent church-elder of LIKBK as:

Had the white missionary's compassionate heart beaten in rhythm with ours, sharing the gospel's hope, education's light, health education's wisdom, and reducing our unique language into a written script, our tale would have unfolded differently. We, the Lai people, would have blossomed under their guidance, our minds enriched, our bodies healed, our spirits lifted, and our language preserved. We would have stood tall, shoulder to shoulder with our neighboring tribes, our progress unbridled, and our cultural identity intact. Alas! fate had other plans, and now we lag behind, our language assimilated, our potential yet to be unfurled. (Interview with John, Church Elder, LIKBK, at Lungzarhtum Village, Lawngtlai on 2nd ·10 2023)

In order to make the situation worse, the *Serkawn* Baptist Church administered over the land of the Lai people in such a way that they were so neglected by the central Church. A sad story had been narrated by Mary (45) from *Bualpui* NG village saying that:

Whenever we made a plea to the Serkawn Church, they usually turned a deaf ear towards us. We demanded a separate Executive Secretary (ES) to administer the Lai areas (Chhimtuipui area) as the administrative areas under 'Phawngpui Division' was way too large to be single handed by one person, which was outrightly rejected. (Personal Interview with Mary on 13th August 2023, 12:30-1:20 PM, *Bualpui* NG, Lawngtlai)

The Parent Church, BCM was not supportive to their appeal for sending missionary to the Lai brethren residing in the neighbouring Burma which was flatly declined. This action deeply wounded the feelings of the Lai community. Therefore, in order to make their mission successful, they were left with no choice but to be separated from the mother church and establish their own ethnic based Church. (Interview with James on

5th. 7. 2023, 11:00 AM at Lawngtlai, Bethel Locality). Thus, the LIKBK has officially come into being on the 27th November 1999 as an earnest attempt to revive the Lai ethnic culture.

1.12 An Overview

When examining the specific religious profile of India, Mizoram, and the Lai society, the intricate relationship between religion and ethnicity becomes evident. In these societies, religion is not only a matter of personal faith but also a crucial component of cultural identity and social organisation. The deep-rooted connections between religious beliefs and ethnic identity can either foster social harmony or exacerbate divisions, depending on the broader socio-political context. Given these complexities, the birth of LIKBK as outlined in statement of the problem, underscores the necessity of a nuanced approach to understanding religion's role in society. The organisation's formation reflects the ongoing struggle to reconcile the positive and negative aspects of religious influence. Therefore, a thorough review of existing literature on religion is vital to further explore these themes and provide a well-rounded sociological analysis in the next chapter. This comprehensive examination will help illuminate the diverse ways in which religion shapes human experience, offering insights into its potential to either support social well-being or contribute to conflict and inequality. By critically engaging with various scholarly perspectives, the next chapter aims to deepen the understanding of the multifaceted nature of religion and its profound impact on society.

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

To situate the present study, 'Socio-Cultural Transformation Through Ethno-Religious Movement: A Study of LIKBK in *Lawngtlai, Mizoram*', within the broader academic discourse, this chapter conducts a three-pronged literature review, encompassing theoretical perspectives, thematic analyses, and methodological critiques. This review aims to distill the current understanding of ethno-religious movements and their impact on socio-cultural transformation, while also identifying areas of research lacunae that this study seeks to address.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives

The following theories of religion are reviewed under four perspectives; the Functional, Conflict, Neo-Marxist, and Critical Theories. In addition, Theories of Social Movement have also been reviewed so as to relate the present ethno-religious movement under study, that is, the *Lairam Isua Krista Kohhran Baptist Kohhran* (LIKBK) in such a manner as to which theory best explains the movement under study and may thus aid in exploring the possible reasons for the emergence of social movement in society. This theoretical review of literature on social movement has been done under the Revitalisation approach, the Strain Theory, Symbolic Interactionism, and the present contemporary theories of social movement such as Resource Mobilization Theory, Particularist School and New Social Movement approaches.

2.2.1 Functional Perspective

To gain a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between religion and society, this study firstly draws on the functionalist theory as a framework for analysing the dynamics of this relationship, and as a foundation for developing a theoretical basis for the examination of the Lai people's experiences (LIKBK). Under functional theory, Emile Durkheim: 'Religion as a Social Fact', Bronislaw Malinowski: 'Religion and Psychological Function', Talcott Parsons: 'Religion and Social Order', Robert Bellah:

‘Civil Religion’, Niklas Luhmann: ‘Religion as Function’ and Clifford Geertz: ‘Religion as a Cultural System’ are included.

Emile Durkheim: ‘Religion as a Social Fact’

In "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life" (1912), Emile Durkheim defines religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices centred on sacred things, uniting adherents in a moral community. He identifies three fundamental elements: sacred objects, beliefs and practices distinct from the profane, and a moral community. Durkheim argues that worshipping God is, in effect, worshipping society, emphasising collective worship and conscience as essential for social order, control, solidarity, and cooperation. By sacralising social duties and obligations, religion directs human action and strengthens social bonds, recognising individuals' dependence on the social group.

Bronislaw Malinowski: ‘Religion and Psychological Function’

Malinowski's (1931) thesis on religion is based on the study of a small, non-literate societies of the *Trobriand* Islanders in New Guinea. Like Durkheim, Malinowski sees religion as reinforcing social norms and values and promoting social solidarity. However, he sees religion functions mainly on the individual's psychological level in times of emotional stress that may disrupts social solidarity. He observes that religious beliefs and rituals help individuals cope with life's disruptions, such as death and uncertainty, by offering a sense of control and confidence.

Talcott Parsons: ‘Religion and Social Order’

Parsons (1970) views human behavior as guided by social norms, with religion playing a crucial role as a cultural sub-system. For Talcott Parsons, religion is one sub-system among his ‘AGIL’ scheme. Religious beliefs provide general guidelines for action, generating specific norms for role performance. This functional prerequisite ensures social order and stability. Parsons also sees religion as a coping mechanism for unexpected events and uncertainties, such as premature death or uncertain endeavors. In these situations, religion helps individuals adjust and restore normal life, maintaining social stability amidst tension and frustration.

Robert Bellah: ‘Civil Religion’

In the 1960s, Robert Bellah introduced the concept of ‘civil religion,’ which refers to a belief system that serves traditional religious functions without necessarily involving a deity. In his article ‘Civil Religion in America’ (1967), Bellah argues that civil religion was supplanting traditional religion. Examples of civil religions include Americanism, free market, Nazism, Marxism, and nationalism, which all promise a path to a better life (Furseth and Repstad, 2006:104). Bellah notes that American civil religion has a moral dimension, holding society accountable to a higher order. He has also highlighted its potential for both unity and division.

Niklas Luhmann- ‘Religion as Function’

Luhmann's (1979) systems theory analyses trust, risk, and power in modern societies. He posits that trust is essential in complex societies, but risk-taking is also necessary. To mitigate risk, we rely on powerful individuals or organisations, and religion plays a crucial role in this context. Religion addresses questions raised by other systems, such as art and science, and reduces insecurity. However, Luhmann notes that religion is becoming increasingly privatised, leading to a decline in its public influence. He distinguishes between religion's ‘function’ (sacred communication about the transcendent) and ‘performance’ (applying religious principles to secular problems). Through performance, religion demonstrates its relevance to other aspects of life. Luhmann sees religion as having minimal influence on other systems, but suggests finding ways to make religion more relevant outside the religious realm. (Luhmann,1979; Furseth and Repstad, 2006:53).

Clifford Geertz: ‘Religion as A Cultural System’

Geertz (1973) gives an impressive definition of religion in his study of ‘Javan culture’ as a cultural system that ‘uses symbols to shape moods and motivations; creates conceptions of existence and makes them seem factual; influences daily life, making motivations and moods feel realistic. (Geertz, 1973; Husnul, 2009:45). Being an interpretive anthropologist, he attempts to understand cultural systems, including religion, kinship, and power dynamics. He believes culture consists of shared meaning structures that shape human behavior. Geertz argues that anthropological studies of

religion were stagnant and proposed a new approach that emphasises the cultural dimension of religious analysis. He has applied this approach for understanding various aspects of social reality like kinship, ideology, social change, distribution of power.

Émile Durkheim, Bronisław Malinowski, Talcott Parsons, Robert Bellah, and Niklas Luhmann each offered distinct perspectives on religion. Durkheim viewed religion as a social institution that reinforces collective conscience and social solidarity, emphasising the social functions of religious rituals and symbols. Malinowski, with a functionalist approach, saw religion primarily as a means to alleviate individual anxiety and uncertainty, particularly through ritual practices. Parsons, another functionalist, integrated Durkheim's ideas, positing that religion contributes to the stability of social systems by promoting value consensus and moral integration. Bellah introduced the concept of 'civil religion,' arguing that societies, particularly the United States, have a non-denominational faith that supports social cohesion and political values. Luhmann approached religion from a systems theory perspective, viewing it as a communication system that helps society manage complexity by providing meaning and reducing uncertainty. Comparing these views, Durkheim and Parsons focused on the social functions and integrative role of religion, while Malinowski and Luhmann emphasised its psychological and systemic aspects, respectively. Bellah had bridged these by highlighting religion's role in supporting national identity and societal values. All see religion as crucial to social cohesion but differ in the mechanisms they emphasised.

2.2.2 Conflict Theories

Unlike functionalist theory, conflict theory sees religion as a means of oppression and control, rather than a source of social unity and harmony. This perspective is reflected in the works of Karl Marx, who views religion as 'The Opium of The People', a tool to pacify and manipulate the masses; Friedrich Engels, who argues in 'Christianity and Social Change' that religion perpetuates social inequality and legitimises the ruling class's authority; Neo-Marxist theorists, Antonio Gramsci and Otto Maduro, who develops the concept of 'Hegemony' and 'The Relative Autonomy of Religion'

respectively, highlighting religion's role in maintaining dominant ideologies and power structures.

Karl Marx: 'The Opium of The People'

Marx (1996) views religion as an illusion that pacifies the oppressed, masking the pain of exploitation and oppression. He sees it as a tool of the ruling class, perpetuating false consciousness and maintaining the status quo. Religion, in Marx's view- offers a promise of eternal bliss, making suffering more tolerable; rationalises poverty and injustice, promising rewards in the afterlife; fosters hope in supernatural intervention, distracting from earthly solutions. Marx believes religion hinders social change and revolution, immobilising the proletariat's energy and trapping them in a vicious cycle of passive submission. He famously calls religion the 'opium of the people,' an addictive drug that distorts reality and maintains the existing power structure.

Friedrich Engels: 'Christianity and Social Change'

Friedrich Engels, unlike Marx, saw religion's potential for driving radical change. He argued that when conventional routes for change are blocked, religion can become a powerful tool for challenging the status quo. Engels noted that rulers often permit mass religious participation, creating a platform for dissent. Religious leaders, aware of exploitation and oppression, can mobilise against injustice and occupy a sacred position, making them less vulnerable to repression. He cited primitive Christianity, a religion of the oppressed, as an example, and pointed to the Salvation Army's early days in England, where they declared the poor to be the elect, fighting capitalism in a religious manner, posing a threat to their wealthy backers (Lowy, 1998:86).

2.2.3 Neo –Marxist Theory of 'hegemony': Antonio Gramsci

Gramsci (1996), a neo-Marxist thinker, expanded on Marx's analysis by emphasising the role of ideologies and culture in the class struggle. He introduced the concept of 'hegemony', where a dominant ideology shapes society through a mix of coercion and persuasion, gaining mass consent. Gramsci recognised the Catholic Church's historical influence in maintaining the status quo, but also saw potential for religious norms to be used by the working class to challenge dominant ideologies and promote their

interests. His theory of hegemony highlights the importance of ideas and culture in shaping society, offering a nuanced understanding of power dynamics and ideology's role in social relations. As Bates (1975:352) summarised, "man is not ruled by force alone, but also by 'ideas'".

Otto Maduro – 'The Relative Autonomy of Religion'

Maduro (1982), a neo-Marxist, has diverged from Marx's view that religion solely serves as a conservative force, instead emphasising its potential for radical social change. He argues that religion possesses 'relative autonomy' from the bourgeois economic system, enabling it to challenge dominant power structures. Maduro believes that religion can be a catalyst for social revolution, particularly in societies where it remains a dominant institution. He suggests that the oppressed may turn to the church as a last resort, finding allies among clergy who can give voice to their suffering and grievances, raise awareness about their exploitation and collaborate on a plan of action to confront their oppressors. In this context, religion or church can become a force for 'social liberation', rather than solely perpetuating the status quo.

Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Antonio Gramsci, and Otto Maduro each had critical views on religion, often focusing on its relationship with power and society. Marx famously described religion as the 'opium of the people,' seeing it as a tool used by the ruling class to maintain social control by providing an illusory comfort to the oppressed, thereby hindering revolutionary change. Engels, closely aligned with Marx, viewed religion similarly as a reflection of the material conditions and power structures, but also recognised its role in historical movements. Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, introduced the concept of cultural hegemony, arguing that religion is part of the ideological superstructure that the ruling class had made use-of to dominate the cultural and intellectual life, shaping societal values to maintain their control. Otto Maduro, a liberation theologian, diverged somewhat by recognising the potential of religion as a source of revolutionary change, arguing that in certain contexts, particularly in Latin America, religion could inspire and mobilise oppressed groups against their exploiters. Comparing these perspectives, Marx, Engels, and Gramsci focus on the role of religion in maintaining the status quo and perpetuating class

structures, while Maduro highlights its potential as a force for social justice and change. All acknowledge the power of religion but differ on whether it inherently supports or can subvert dominant power structures.

2.2.4 Critical Theories

Under critical perspectives, the theories of Pierre Bourdieu: 'Religion as A Symbolic Violence' and Jurgen Habermas: 'Public Sphere and Communicative Action' have been reviewed.

Pierre Bourdieu: 'Religion as A Symbolic Violence'

Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of religion (1986) employs concepts like habitus, capital, and field to understand religious practices and power dynamics. In the religious field, prophets and priests compete for legitimacy and followers, adjusting their message to suit diverse lay interests, constituting a form of symbolic violence. Bourdieu argues that individuals experiencing downward social mobility often adopt traditional religions to reclaim their former social status. His concepts of 'doxa' and 'orthodoxy' offer insights into religious power dynamics, where 'doxa' refers to unquestioned knowledge that perpetuates dominant relationships, and 'orthodoxy' involves defending these beliefs to maintain power structures. This helps analyse how religious power is exercised and maintained through the perpetuation of unquestioned beliefs and traditional knowledge.

Jurgen Habermas: 'Public Sphere and Communicative Action'

Habermas' (1962) 'dual structure of society' comprises the 'system' and 'life-world', with religion playing a vital role in the latter, providing a sense of belonging, addressing cognitive and existential needs, and fostering communicative competence. However, modernisation has impacted traditional religion, separating it from science and eroding its role in shaping values. Nevertheless, Habermas' 'Theory of Communicative Action' highlights religion's potential in facilitating mutual understanding, with religion based on the 'linguistification of the sacred', where God is seen as a communicative structure (Sharlamanov and Javonski, 2014:366). Habermas has revised his initial view of religion as a source of morality that would

become obsolete, now recognising its capacity to articulate moral values and its potential as a political tool in the public sphere, acknowledging its continued relevance in modern society.

Pierre Bourdieu and Jürgen Habermas both offer sophisticated analyses of religion, emphasising its role in social and communicative processes, though from different theoretical perspectives. Bourdieu, a sociologist known for his theory of practice, views religion as part of the symbolic capital within a society, where religious institutions and leaders can use religious beliefs and rituals to maintain social hierarchies and legitimise their authority. He emphasises how religious practices contribute to the reproduction of social structures through habitus and field dynamics. Habermas, a critical theorist, addresses religion in the context of his broader theory of communicative action, seeing it as a repository of moral and ethical resources that can contribute to rational discourse in the public sphere. He argues for the inclusion of religious perspectives in democratic deliberation, provided they are translated into secular terms that can be universally understood. Comparing these views, Bourdieu focuses on the power dynamics and social reproduction aspects of religion, while Habermas highlights its potential to enrich public discourse and moral reasoning within a democratic society. Both recognise the significant influence of religion but differ on whether it primarily reinforces social structures (Bourdieu) or contributes to communicative rationality and democratic engagement (Habermas).

2.3 Theories on Social Movement

Since the proposed study aims to study the LIKBK as an ethno-religious movement, various theories on social movement have been reviewed accordingly, which have been categorised into three groups: (a) The traditional theory of social movement before 1960's (b) those contemporary theories after 1960's and (c) Indian thinkers on social movement. By examining these theories, the study aims to better comprehend the complexities of LIKBK as an ethno-religious movement.

2.3.1 The traditional theory of social movement before 1960's

The traditional theory of social movement before 1960's includes Anthony.F.C. Wallace: 'Theory of Revitalization', Smelser: 'Strain Theory' and Herbert George Blumer: 'Collective Behaviour'.

Anthony.F.C. Wallace: 'Theory of Revitalization'

Wallace's 'Revitalization Movements' (1966) explains how cultures transform through successful movements, driven by charismatic leadership, religious factors, and/or politics (Kehoe, 1989: 265). The theory outlines four phases: adaptation, increased personal stress, cultural distortion, and revitalization, aiming to offer 'instant relief' and 'reorganise the culture' for a better way of life (Wallace, 1956). Revitalization movements occur during times of stress and widespread disillusionment with existing cultural beliefs, reformulating and adapting the cultural pattern to better meet the group's needs, ultimately leading to cultural transformation and routinisation. This theory helps understand significant cultural shifts, like the emergence of new religions or social movements, which often occur during times of stress and disillusionment with existing beliefs.

Smelser: 'Strain Theory'

Smelser's 'Strain Theory' (1962) explains social movements as a response to structural strain, which affects norms, values, and mobility. Six prerequisites are necessary for collective behaviour (Arthur, 2009: 5-6) - Structural conduciveness (societal organisation enabling collective behaviour); Structural strains (poverty, discrimination, uncertainty); Generalised belief (ideology identifying the problem and justifying action); Precipitating factors (dramatic events triggering action); Mobilisation (leadership and group cohesion); Social control (effective leadership, police power, media, and political authority). These factors interact to shape collective behaviour, with social control mechanisms potentially restraining or exacerbating the behaviour. The structural functional framework is heavily present in Smelser's examination on the origins of social movements. Smelser views strain as something that jeopardises the interactions between system components, ultimately causing the system to fail.

Herbert George Blumer: 'Collective Behaviour'

The Chicago School's collective behaviour approach, rooted in Symbolic Interaction Theory, emphasises the social psychological aspects of human behaviour (Turner, 1982:6; Morris and Herring, 1984:11). This perspective asserts that social structures rely on subjective meanings created through continuous social interactions, focusing on how individuals create meanings that shape human activity (Coser, 1977:575). Collective behaviour analysis, developed by Blumer (1951), views societies as consisting of institutionalised behaviour and collective behaviour, with social movements emerging from unrest and dissatisfaction (McPhail, 1989:411). The stages of collective behaviour formation include exciting events, milling behaviour, emergence of a common object, fostering of common impulses, and elementary collective behaviour, enabling people to construct their own sense of community through reciprocal activities.

Anthony F.C. Wallace, Neil Smelser, and Herbert George Blumer each provide distinct frameworks for understanding social change and collective phenomena, particularly focusing on periods of stress and transformation within societies. Wallace's 'Theory of Revitalization' examines how societies respond to significant stress or crisis through a process that includes a period of cultural distortion followed by the emergence of a new, revitalised cultural system, often led by a charismatic leader or new ideology. Smelser's 'Strain Theory' focuses on how structural strains within society, such as social inequality or rapid change, create pressures that can lead to collective behavior and social movements as individuals seek to alleviate the resultant stress. Blumer's 'Collective Behavior' theory looks at the ways in which individuals come together to form collective entities, emphasising the importance of social interactions and shared meanings in the development of social movements and mass behaviour. Comparing these perspectives, Wallace and Smelser both emphasise the role of societal stress or strain in precipitating change, but Wallace focuses more on cultural transformation, while Smelser highlights structural pressures. Blumer, on the other hand, centers on the processes of social interaction and the formation of collective meanings, offering a more micro-sociological approach compared to the more macro-sociological focus

of Wallace and Smelser. All three address how societies respond to crisis and change, but they differ in their emphasis on cultural, structural, and interactional dynamics.

2.3.2 The Contemporary Theories of Social Movement After 1960's includes: Mac Carthy and Zald: 'Resource Mobilization Theory', Charles Tilly: 'People's participation in public politics', Alain Touraine: 'Control of Historicity' and Alberto Melucci: 'Appropriation of Collective Identity'.

Mac Carthy And Zald: 'Resource Mobilization Theory'

Mac Carthy and Zald (1977) challenged the 'Theory of Relative Deprivation' and introduced the 'Resource Mobilization Theory', emphasising that a shared ideology and collective strategy, achieved by addressing grievances, are crucial for sustained collective mobilisation. They argued that a social movement's success depends on its ability to mobilise resources, such as strong organisational capability, astute leadership, and superlative communication facilities (Pichardo, 1988:99), within the political opportunity structure. Their 'organisational-entrepreneurial model' defines a social movement as a collection of attitudes and beliefs advocating for social change, suggesting that latent movements are always present in cultures (Morris and Herring, 1984:8). Social movements are essentially 'preference structures' (Mc Carthy and Zald, 1977: 1218; Morris and Herring, 1984:8), aimed at achieving social transformation by addressing specific grievances and bringing about change.

Charles Tilly: 'People's Participation in Public Politics'

Tilly's (1973) 'political process' theory posits that social movements emerge from the core politics of a population, defining them as "a sustained series of interactions between powerholders and representatives of an unrepresented constituency" (Tilly, 1973:12; Morris and Herring, 1984:9). According to Tilly, social movements emerged in the 19th century due to the 'nationalisation of politics' and the formation of 'special interest groups', leading to the exclusion of marginalised groups from institutionalised power structures. In response, these groups formed social movements, employing disorderly tactics like strikes, rallies, and protests to challenge national power structures and achieve their political goals, distinguishing them from institutionalised counterparts (Morris and Herring, 1984:10)

Alaine Touraine: 'Control of Historicity'

Touraine (1981) defines social movements as organised collective actions by a class of people challenging their class opponents to gain control over shaping society's future, or 'historicity'. He emphasises the importance of social action and movements in driving social change, particularly in post-industrial society where knowledge and technology enable society to consciously shape its development (Scott, 1990:33). However, this capacity is contested by dominant and popular classes, leading to the emergence of New Social Movements focused on self-management and social transformation (Buechler, 2013:5). For Touraine, 'historicity' refers to the conflict over fundamental values and belief systems, rather than seeking state power, and class conflict is a struggle over symbolic representation and meaning, rather than solely economic resources.

Alberto Melucci: 'Appropriation of Collective Identity'

Melucci (1996), an Italian sociologist, was one of the first to describe contemporary movements as new social movements. He argues that the key distinction between traditional and new social movements lies in the issue of collective identity. New social movements offer supporters a sense of identity and belonging, which is rooted in three factors: the transition to post-industrial society, the rise of the new middle class, and the transformation of social identities from latent to visible (Flynn, n.d:93). Melucci identifies three dimensions of collective identity construction: cognitive processes defining means and ends, networks of active relationships, and emotional investment. (Melucci,1996:7; Scholl,2014:5) He sees the appropriation of identity as central to understanding new social movements, which are characterised by the blurring of public and private spheres, the overlap of deviance and social movement, a focus on identity rather than the political system, solidarity among group members, direct participation, and a rejection of representation. (Melucci,1980:219-220)

John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, Charles Tilly, Alain Touraine, and Alberto Melucci each offer influential theories on social movements, emphasising different mechanisms and aspects of collective action. McCarthy and Zald's 'Resource Mobilization Theory' posits that the success of social movements depends on the

effective acquisition and utilisation of resources, including money, labour, and media attention, highlighting the strategic and organisational aspects of social movements. Charles Tilly focuses on 'People's Participation in Public Politics,' emphasising the importance of contentious politics and the role of collective action in bringing about social change, with a focus on the interactions between social movements and political opportunities. Alain Touraine's concept of 'Control of Historicity' explores how social movements aim to influence and control the course of historical development, asserting that movements are crucial actors in the ongoing struggle over cultural and societal directions. Alberto Melucci's theory of the 'Appropriation of Collective Identity' highlights the formation and maintenance of collective identities within social movements, emphasising the importance of shared meanings and experiences in sustaining collective action. Comparing these perspectives, McCarthy and Zald emphasise resource management and strategic organisation, Tilly focuses on political processes and opportunities, Touraine centers on historical and cultural influence, and Melucci underscores the creation of collective identities. While all address the dynamics of social movements, they differ in their focus on resources, political interaction, historical control, and identity formation.

2.3.3 Indian Thinkers on Social Movement

Indian social movement thinkers, who have provided an insightful understanding towards conceptual and theoretical frameworks towards the study of social movement has also been considered. Some of the most prominent advocates of social movements studies in India like P.N.Mukherji, T.K.Oommen, MSA Rao, Rajendra Singh and D.N Dhanagare, their main standpoints and contributions are discussed as follows:

P.N.Mukherji

Mukherji's (2010) theoretical approach to studying social movements emphasises conflict, structure, and change, with essential conditionalities including ideology, organisation, leadership, and categorisation based on the type of change sought (Mukherji,2010:126-127). He distinguishes between accumulative (gradual), alterative (systemic), and transformative (revolutionary) changes, leading to quasi-social, alterative, and transformative movements (Mukherji,1977:43). Mukherji

introduces a praxiological component, considering institutional, non-institutional, or combined strategies for achieving movement goals, enabling the tracking of social movement development and historical significance. He proposes five asymmetries (discrimination, exploitation, oppression, gender discrimination, and eco-environmental asymmetry) as a theoretical framework, illustrating their interconnected contradictions through the analysis of the Maoist movement (Mukherji, 2010: 134-140).

T.K.Oommen

Oommen (2010) outlines three approaches to studying social movements: historical, psychological, and sociological. He emphasises the need for a theoretical understanding of society to analyse social movements sociologically. Oommen reviews the development of social movement theories, drawing on Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, and highlights Marx's systematic approach to social change through collective class movements. Oommen categorises social movements in 20th-century India into three phases and three ideal-types: charismatic, organisational, and ideological, noting that all three components are necessary for a social movement to emerge. Oommen has outlined the sequential evolution of social movements in twentieth-century India using two criterias for categorising them: types of collectivities (biological, primordial, and civil) and nature of goals (symbolic and instrumental) (Oommen, 2010: 16–17). These are the colonial phase of a globalising India (1900–1947), the nation-building era (1947–89), and the current phase (1990–present). Regardless of whatever movement component emerges first, the other two components must follow if the movement is to become a social movement (Oommen, 2010: 34–38).

MSA Rao

M. S. A. Rao (1978) has pioneered the compilation of social movement research in two edited volumes, featuring diverse scholars' work. Rao defines social movements as organised collective efforts driven by an ideology, aiming to change the social system partially or entirely. He distinguishes social movements from social processes, such as mobility and development, which involve imitation or emulation. Social

movements focus on protest and conflict, emphasising contradiction and change, whereas social processes emphasise agreement and consensus. Rao's work highlights the complexity of social movements and their role in shaping society. Social movements, said Rao, can be classified into three types: transformative (seeking fundamental change), redemptive (focusing on personal transformation), and reformative (aiming for incremental change).

Rajendra Singh

Singh (2001) categorises the theoretical tradition of movement studies into three categories: classical, neo-classical, and new social movement (NSM). The classical tradition encompasses studies on collective behaviour, riots, and rebel groups by Western social psychologists and historians. The neo-classical tradition refers to Marxist and functionalist studies of old social movements. In contrast, NSMs, emerged in Europe and America, focus on civil society's consciousness, community self-defence, and local politics, rejecting the Marxist paradigm of class conflict. NSMs prioritize the social sphere, aiming to reorganise state, society, and economy, and create a public forum for democratic discourse on individual and collective autonomy, freedom, identity, and orientation. Examples of NSMs include protests against nuclear weapons, environmentalism, peace, civil liberties, identity, freedom, and personal dignity, characterised by multiple structures. (Singh, 2001; Sahu, 2013: xxxii).

D.N Dhanagare

D. N. Dhanagare (1983) is of the view that historical method has a comparatively greater appeal among sociologists. Dhanagare's contribution to the theoretical discourse on peasant movement in Indian Sociology is worth mentioning. He has highlighted ideology, leadership, nature of protest and grass-roots participation in the various peasant movements in India. Based on the study of *Tebhaga*, *Telengana*, *Moplah*, *Bardoli*, *Oudh Kishan Mahasabha* and left-wing peasant movements, Dhanagare offers a comparative analysis of Indian peasantry and its class character. His typology of agrarian social movements is nativistic and restorative movements; religious/millenarian movements; and social banditry, mass insurrections, terrorism and liberal reformist agitations.

P.N. Mukherji, T.K. Oommen, M.S.A. Rao, Rajendra Singh, and D.N. Dhanagare offer diverse yet complementary perspectives on social movements, particularly within the Indian context. Mukherji emphasises the role of cultural symbols and narratives in mobilizing people, while Oommen focuses on how movements intersect with issues of identity, such as caste, ethnicity, and religion. Rao examines the socio-economic conditions driving agrarian movements and rural protests, highlighting their impact on rural society. Singh analyses social movements through the lens of modernisation and societal change, investigating how they contribute to the transformation of traditional structures. Dhanagare emphasises socio-economic inequality and justice, viewing movements as responses to economic exploitation and social injustice, especially among marginalised groups. While Mukherji and Oommen highlight cultural and identity aspects, Rao and Dhanagare focus on economic and justice-related dimensions, with Singh providing a broader developmental context, together offering a multifaceted understanding of social movements.

The above analysis of the available theories of social movement shows that there are differences among these theoretical frameworks in terms of the focus and articulation of issues. However, these differences are worth exploring in the sense that theories are complementary, each contributing to an integrated comprehensive theory for the analysis of social movements. Therefore, the question confronted here is which theory can best explain the movements under study and whether there is any possibility of building a synthesised theoretical framework specially for the study of LIKBK. Moreover, after careful analysis of the nature and characteristics of collective mobilisation of the above existing literatures, it has become evident that there is a need for a fresh perspective on the relationship between religion, ethnicity and social movement giving due consideration to its reformative element. Some scholars raised an issue regarding the categorisation of social movement advocating that religious movement is a separate category of social movement, however, it may be noted that there can be no exclusive reform movement nor ethnic movement and may at times overlaps each other. For instance, the *Zeliangrong* movement may also be regarded as ethnic movement and at the same time as a reform movement as well since its main purpose was to revive their old culture. Therefore, all social movement may not solely

be ethnic movement or religious nor reform movements and may at times reflects a combined characteristic of all reformative, religious and ethnic elements.

2.4 Thematic Review: This section brings together the previously available studies related to role of church in socio-economic and political transformations, ethno-religious reform movement and its impact on the society. All the literatures under review are carefully chosen and categorised so as to meet ‘the specific objectives of the study’. The following review of literatures are broadly classified into six themes, that is, Religion and its influence on Culture, Ethnicity and ethnic movement, economy, politics, reform movement, and gender studies as follows:

2.4.1 Christianity and Its Impact on Culture

Jumbe (2024) posits that communities around the world, particularly in many developing regions, continue to face challenges related to living conditions, hunger, wars, and conflicts. This paper examines the role of Christians and churches in comprehensively transforming lives and societies. Utilising a qualitative methodology that includes secondary data, observations, and interviews, the study explores a holistic approach encompassing spiritual, social, and physical dimensions. It posits that transformation relies on promoting Christian beliefs, combating poverty, and advancing socio-economic development and conflict resolution within communities.

Igwe and Igwilo (2023) have analysed the impact of Christianity towards the *Ezinifite* town in Africa and thus conclude that although Christianity and modernity have successfully eradicated certain negative aspects of traditional *Ezinifite* culture, they have not contributed to the enhancement or promotion of the local culture. The educational system introduced by these influences was strategically designed to serve their own interests. It is now imperative for contemporary educated Christians to ensure that the positive aspects of *Ezinifite* culture are revived and integrated into the educational curriculum.

Iliya (2022) examines the transformative impact of missionaries on various aspects of Nigerian life. It highlights how cultural assimilation facilitated by missionaries played a pivotal role in transforming and influencing traditional Nigerian cultures, liberating people from numerous harmful practices. The Western missionary approach to

Christian missions introduced civilisation to Nigeria, paving the way for the advent of Western education, medical services, and various social amenities. This led to the development of African Christianity, African theology, the indigenisation of Christianity, and inculturation/contextual theology.

Makokha, et.al (2020) has assessed the role played by the Churches in Kenya towards the moral development of children in a Church-sponsored schools in Kenya. Kenya still faces a myriad of challenges including rampant corruption, anticipated examination fraud, widespread infidelity in marriage, cases of drunkenness among the youths. In view of this, the Church thus ensures that its programs are relevant enough to create a morally upright society. (2020:14).

Satyanarayana (2020) highlights the significant contribution of Protestant missionaries to the *Dalit-Bahujans* communities in Telangana, South India, transforming their traditional culture towards a new 'Dalit Christian Culture' through conversion to Christianity in the late 19th century. The conversion led to notable changes among the Dalits, particularly the *Malas*, who gained 'self-respect, confidence, dignity, and justice' (2020:293), thereby building a 'distinct community' with a 'distinct culture' through the tireless efforts of Christian missionaries.

Scholars like Lawmsanga (2010) and Clinton (2019) have critically examined the impact of Christianity on native cultures, arguing that newly converted Christians have often condemned their traditional practices as "pagan" and "profane", leading to a loss of cultural heritage. While Christianity brought liberation from unjust social structures, it also introduced a negative perception of traditional religion and culture (Lawmsanga, 2010:1). Clinton (2019:29) notes that Christianity's introduction marked the beginning of "religious pluralism", highlighting the example of the Igbo nation in Nigeria, where sacred animals were previously forbidden to hunt, but Christian teachings deem all creation "pure and clean" for human use, illustrating the complex and often destructive impact of colonialism and mission enterprise on indigenous cultures.

The review of literature suggests that religion, particularly through the activities of churches and missionaries, have played a transformative role in the traditional cultures of host tribes globally- across Asia, Africa, and the Americas and so on. This

transformation has had dual impacts, bringing both positive and negative effects on the host cultures. Some scholars advocate for the integration of traditional cultural practices into the Christian curriculum for native churches, recognising the nuanced influence of religious intervention. Thus, the church acts as a double-edged sword, capable of fostering beneficial cultural integration and development, while also potentially undermining and disrupting indigenous cultural traditions. This dual nature underscores the need for a sensitive and balanced approach in religious missions to respect and preserve native cultural identities.

2.4.2 Religion and Ethnic Movement

Akande (2024) argues that ethnic and religious differences often underpin inter-group conflicts in Africa. However, some countries with diverse ethnic and religious populations maintain harmonious inter-group relations. He explores the complex dynamics influencing these outcomes, focusing on the connections between macro-level drivers of violence and individual participation in inter-group conflict. The cases of the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and the city of *Jos* in Nigeria offer valuable insights into this relationship.

Triandafyllidou (2024) explores the surge of religious nationalism in Central Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, marked by populist, nativist, and authoritarian tendencies. The study examines the intricate relationship between nationalism and religion, considering historical, regional, and global factors that shape this dynamic. Through a critical literature review, the paper analyses the entanglements between state, religion, national identity, and faith, arguing that both internal and external factors must be considered to understand this evolving relationship.

Jayaram (2022) contends that ethnicity is vital in shaping diaspora communities, exemplified by the Indian diaspora in Trinidad. He traces their evolving ethnic identity, from 'Indians in Trinidad' to 'Indo-Trinidadians', highlighting their resistance to racism and efforts to assert their identity through cultural resilience. The study explores the emergence of leadership, organisations, and media that facilitated ethnic mobilisation, as well as solidarity within the community, particularly during the labour movement.

Smith (1991), a prominent primordialist, developed the 'ethno-symbolist theory', which posits that 'ethnies' (named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories, cultures, and territory) are the foundation for nation formation. He categorises 'ethnies' into 'aristocratic' and 'vertical demotic' types and distinguishes them from nations by noting that 'ethnies' have a historical and symbolic link to their territory, whereas nations have a physical and actual link. Smith argues that nations are a recent development, centred around four tenets, including unique identity, national loyalty, and the importance of national symbols, customs, and ceremonies. He emphasises the ubiquity of nationalism, describing it as a global phenomenon rooted in historical collective life, where modern nationalists construct nations from salvaged elements of the past, highlighting the evolving nature of ethnicity.

Gellner (1983) argues that modern 'identity formation' is shaped by state institutions, particularly education, which has become a key tool and symbol of state power. He divides world history into three phases: hunting-gathering, agrarian, and industrial. The transition to industrial society brings rapid modernisation, replacing traditional social structures with 'literate culture' and necessitating standardised public education. This transformation generates new conflicts between old and new city dwellers over resources, potentially leading to ethnic conflict if cultural gaps persist. To address this, Gellner advocates for building a 'culturally homogenous society' to achieve the ideal of a mobile, literate high culture, a fundamental constituent of industrial society (Erdem, 2017: 27-28).

Hobsbawm (1983), a British Marxist historian, argues in his works that many ethnic and national groups have modern and intentional origins, rather than being primordial. He views nationalism as an 'invented tradition' created by elites to maintain their power during times of social change (Hobsbawm, 1983; Erdem, 2017: 24). Hobsbawm distinguishes between two types of invention: adapting old traditions to new conditions and creating new ones for new purposes. He identifies three phases of nationalism: the first (1870-1918) saw the emergence of nationalism, the second (1918-1950) was its peak, and the third (late 20th century) was marked by divisive and separatist nationalism. Hobsbawm believes that early nationalisms were emancipatory, while later ones led to conflict. (Hobsbawm, 1990; Erdem, 2017: 26).

Reetz (1993) has analysed pre-independence ethnic and religious movements in colonial India, arguing that regionalisation of politics along ethnic and religious lines fueled the nationalist movement. Major nationalist forces like the Indian National Congress and Muslim League were comprised of regional groups defined by ethnicity and religion. Early movements like the Indian Association, *Madras Mahajan Sabha*, and Bombay Presidency Association developed along ethnic lines. The Swadeshi, Civil Disobedience, and *Khalifat* Movements revealed strong regional and ethno-religious features. The Congress mobilised public opinion through ethno-linguistic identities, while autonomous regional movements like the Sikhs and Pathans emerged in response to colonial capitalist transformation and religious concerns.

Syiemlieh (2013) chronicles the rise of Christianity in Meghalaya and the indigenous tribes' responses, highlighting the emergence of the Seng Khasi movement as a counter to Christianity's growth. Christianity's introduction of new rules and morals undermined traditional Khasi beliefs, prompting resistance among non-Christian Khasis. In response, the Seng Khasi religion was founded in 1899 to preserve Khasi culture and prevent further conversions, based on three tenets: knowing God through humanity, understanding one's clan, and earning righteously.

Bijukumar (2013) examines ethnicity in North-East India through the lens of social exclusion. He argues that various movements, such as the *Naga*, *Mizo*, and *Bodo* movements, emerged due to a 'fear of exclusion' (2013:24). The formation of rebel consciousness and ethnic identity assertion are linked to the perceived hegemony of the Indian state and the influx of 'outsiders' from Bangladesh, Nepal, and other states, leading to land dispossession and cultural threats, thereby fuelling ethnic movements (2013:27).

Mahadevran (1974) examines the *Zeliangrong* Movement led by *Jadonang* and *Rani Gaidinliu*, which aimed to revive traditional *Zeliangrong* religion amidst Christianisation and unite ethnic tribes (*Zemeis*, *Liangmei*, and *Rongmeis/Kabui*). The movement peaked between 1930-32 but lost momentum after *Jadonang's* death, transforming into a socio-religious reform movement called '*Hereka*' under *Gaidinliu's* leadership. The British colonial rule's oppressive impact on indigenous social and

political structures, and forced land displacement, were the primary drivers of the movement.

Guite (2020) explores the intersection of national and religious identity among the *Mizo* people, particularly in the context of the *Mizo* insurgency. He has noted that religious nationalism played a significant role in shaping *Mizo* identity, as nationalist sentiments merged with religious beliefs and affiliations. This blend of nationalism and religion is not a new phenomenon for the *Mizo* people, who had a strong national consciousness even before British colonisation. The *Mizo* National Movement gained momentum around India's independence, with the Mizo National Front (MNF) rebelling against the Indian government to preserve their cultural, traditional, linguistic, and religious heritage, which they saw as integral to their identity.

The above reviewed-literatures highlights that religion can be a significant catalyst for ethnic movements at international, national, and local levels. In the specific context of Northeast India, where the present study is situated, this dynamic is evident in movements such as the *Zeliangrong* Movement among the Nagas, the *Sanamahi* Movement in Manipur, and the *Seng Khasi* Movement in Meghalaya. These examples demonstrate how Christianity can serve as a source and impetus for ethnic movements, influencing social and cultural identities and mobilising communities. This underscores the complex role of religion in shaping ethnic dynamics, fostering both unity and distinction among various groups within the region.

2.4.3 Church and Socio-Economic Transformation

Olokan and Aluko (2024) argue that while numerous studies have explored the impact of pandemics and epidemics on society, the specific impact of COVID-19 on religious institutions and communities remains understudied. They, thus, attempt to fill this knowledge gap by investigating the effects of the pandemic on the Christ Apostolic Church in Nigeria. The study reveals that public health measures, such as movement restrictions, significantly impacted church administration, community service, and finances, leading to a decline in tithe and offering payments, and subsequently affecting welfare, religious outreach, and public health initiatives. This research

contributes to the scarce literature on the intersection of religion and public health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hemmet (2024), in his study of the '*Vatican-Al-Azhar* Dialogues' exemplifies successful interfaith collaboration, surpassing ideological differences to prioritise shared principles. This pioneering partnership facilitates productive dialogue, yielding favorable outcomes in Muslim-Christian relations, socio-economic empowerment, and poverty reduction. By emphasising commonalities over differences, the dialogues foster authentic communication, creating a paradigm for healthy discourse among diverse religious groups, and promoting inclusive social transformation.

Opuni-Darko's (2024) dissertation explores the complex relationship between the Church and marketplace in Ghana, identifying collaborative strategies for sustainable socio-economic development. The study examines the Church's evolving economic role, including microfinance, vocational training, and entrepreneurial ventures, and their significant impact on various sectors. It also analyses how religious teachings shape economic behaviours and public-private partnerships, highlighting challenges and opportunities for holistic development.

Basara and Misati (2022) conducted a study on the Church's role in Kenya's education sector development, highlighting its historical foundation and significant contributions to physical infrastructure, holistic education, and religious education. The Church has partnered with the Ministry of Education to implement policies and provide supervision, promoting positive values and spirituality. The study concludes that the Church continues to play a vital role in education provision and expansion, collaborating with key stakeholders to shape Kenya's education sector.

Vanlalchhawna (2021) examines the socio-economic changes in the Lushai Hills during British colonial rule, revealing a steady increase in population, revenue, and infrastructure development. The colonial era introduced new agricultural practices, expanded healthcare facilities, and saw significant growth in education and literacy rates under missionary guidance. However, the study argues that this education was tailored to serve colonial interests, providing manpower for their purposes, rather than benefiting the local population.

Soundararajan (2020) views the Churches in South India as ‘transformed and transforming communities’ that prioritises doing God's will by serving, healing, and transforming their members. He characterises the South Indian Church as a ‘sub-altern church’ since it primarily comprises *Dalits* and marginalised sections of society. The Church's ultimate mission, according to Soundararajan, is to stand in solidarity with these oppressed subaltern communities, helping them break free from oppressive structures and work towards a new, liberated world.

Bourdieu (1986) pioneers the concept of social capital, viewing it as a personal asset derived from social position and rank, enabling individuals to influence groups and mobilise resources. Social capital is linked to class, stratification, and symbolic power, perpetuating inequalities in access to resources. Bourdieu's ‘conceptualisation of social capital’ is grounded on the understanding that capital is not just economically based and that social interactions need to take into account ‘capital and profit in all their forms’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 241). In contrast, Zohmingmawia (2017) finds that in Mizoram, religion plays a significant role in social capital, with the Church providing opportunities for associational life and social services through organisations like *Kristian Thalai Pawl* (KTP, youth-wing) and *Kohhran Hmeichhia* (women-wing). These groups contribute to civic life, fostering social capital.

The above discussions highlight the exclusive role of the church and Christianity, that extends significantly to various socio-economic aspects. The practice of tithing contributes economically by funding church-led initiatives and community support programs. Churches often spearhead socio-economic empowerment and poverty reduction efforts through educational programs, vocational training, and microfinance schemes, helping to uplift marginalised communities. In fostering healthy discourse among diverse religious groups, the church promotes social cohesion and mutual understanding. The relationship between the church and the marketplace is robust, with churches often involved in developing the education sector, improving infrastructure such as roads and communication facilities, and supporting the growth of industries like shopkeeping and cottage industries. These initiatives not only promote child development by providing better educational and recreational facilities but also empower marginalised individuals to challenge and overcome their

circumstances. Additionally, the church plays a crucial role in building social capital, creating networks of support and trust that enhance communal resilience and collective well-being.

2.4.4 Religion and Its Role in Politics

Roluahpuia's (2024) work highlights the significant and multifaceted role of religion in tribal politics, shaping the political imagination of tribal communities. The article explores how religion influences tribal political dynamics, demonstrating a deep intertwinement with religious influences since the colonial period and continuing into post-independent India. The complex interaction between tribal politics and religion is examined, including the integration of religious concepts into political ideologies and conflicts arising from the manipulation and interpretation of religious beliefs for political purposes, often involving violence. The Mizo movement for independence in northeast India is cited as an example, where religion was intricately linked with issues of identity, nationalism, and violence.

Fauzan, et.al, (2024) asserts that even after the 2014 Indonesia's *Medan* presidential election, won by *Jokowi-Jusuf Kalla*, sentiments based on religion and ethnicity persisted. The strengthening of ethnic and religious politics continued at both national and municipal levels during the political transition. Similar issues—religious concerns, ethnic identity politics, and local candidate preferences—have been evident in the Governor elections of 2008, 2013, and 2018 in North Sumatra.

Datta. et.al., (2023) discusses the period between 2014 and 2022, where the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) sought to expand its influence in India's north-eastern states, including *Mizoram*, *Meghalaya*, and *Nagaland*, where Christianity is prevalent. However, the party faced strong resistance from the Church, which wields significant control over the region's religious, social, and political landscape. This article examines the political struggle between the BJP and the Church during this period, delving into the underlying ideological debates and competing narratives.

Haokip (2018) highlights the significant contribution of the Church in maintaining peace and normalcy in *Mizoram* during the turbulent period of the *Mizo National Front* (MNF) Insurgency Movement (1966-1986). The Church's intervention led to the

formation of the Christian Peace Mission (1966) and later, the *Zoram Kohhran Hruaitu Committee (ZKHC)* in 1982, comprising various Churches in Mizoram. The ZKHC, later renamed the Mizoram Church Leader Committee, played a crucial role in restoring peace through its Peace Delegation Members, who appealed to both MNF leaders and government officials for peace talks.

Zomuanthanga (2018) underscores the Church's significant contributions to Mizoram's social and political landscape, performing three crucial functions: religious, political, and social. The Church fosters spiritual growth, influences the Mizo National Front's militancy movement, and promotes morality in politics. It also provides social guidelines, ensures social control, and promotes equality, brotherhood, peace, and aid during natural calamities. Through its multifaceted role, the Church has become a driving force for peace and development in Mizoram, permeating the fabric of Mizo society.

Lalremruata (2019) discusses the impact of colonialism on *Mizo* traditional beliefs and practices, highlighting the changes brought about by Christian colonists in the political structure. In traditional *Mizo* society, chieftainship and *Zawlbuk* (traditional dormitory) were key political institutions that shaped socio-political life. However, the British abolished chieftainship in 1954, and the emergence of missionaries and day schooling led to the decline of *Zawlbuk*. Meanwhile, education in missionary schools fostered political consciousness among the *Mizo*. Thus, religion had a direct impact on traditional political institutions and identity consciousness among the educated *Mizo* population, transforming their political landscape.

Kapadia (2019) examines the conversion of *Dalit* women to Pentecostalism in Chennai, framing it as a political movement that challenges both caste and gender hegemony. Drawing on Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Kapadia argues that this movement constitutes a significant form of resistance against authoritarian populism and fascist tendencies in India.

The above deliberations bring to light that Church is seen as a complex and multifaceted institution that plays a significant role in shaping political dynamics and social structures in tribal communities. The church significantly influences tribal

political dynamics, with political preferences often aligning along ethnic and religious lines. Religious leaders play a crucial role in maintaining normalcy and peace during ethnic tensions, leveraging their influence to promote morality in politics. However, the church's involvement in politics can also lead to the formation of vote banks, potentially perpetuating partisan divisions. Moreover, Christianity challenges the caste system and stratification, promoting egalitarian values that can disrupt traditional social hierarchies. Overall, the church's engagement in tribal politics is complex, with both positive and negative consequences, necessitating a nuanced understanding of its impact on political dynamics and social structures.

2.4.5 Religion and Reform Movement

Zeng (2024) explores how Martin Luther's Reformation ideology of religious freedom has influenced the conversion of new Chinese immigrants to Christianity at the Martin Luther Church in Bangkok. The study finds that Luther's advocacy of religious freedom has positively impacted this trend, with many immigrants drawn to the faith due to its emphasis on individual freedom and autonomy. However, challenges remain, including integrating Christian beliefs with traditional Chinese culture, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding and sustainable faith development.

Kholiludin and Adzkiya (2023) examine how Protestant leaders in Indonesia have responded to Islamism as a reform movement. The findings indicate that Christianity views Islamism as a political threat, prompting reactions aimed at establishing boundaries and reinforcing identities. Christians' responses include seeking state support, forming alliances with moderate groups, engaging in introspection, emphasising national duty, and establishing educational institutions. The study suggests that the Christian response to Islamism is a competition for cultural dominance, with both groups asserting their influence through different means.

Lumintang and Daliman (2023) have employed a qualitative content analysis approach to explore the interconnectedness of reformed theology and church reformation, revealing that these concepts are inextricably linked as part of God's sovereign and unchanging plan. Through this analysis, the authors demonstrate that reformed theology and church reformation are ongoing processes that will continue unabated,

driven by God's divine agenda. The study aims to inspire and empower theologians and church leaders in the 21st century to embrace their role as instruments of church reformation, fueled by the principles of reformed theology, and to recognise the enduring significance of these movements in shaping the church's future.

Kumar (2016) argues that the Indian socio-religious reform movement, inspired by Christian missionaries, has been instrumental in promoting social justice and creating a more equitable society. Pioneers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and subsequent reformers, including Swami Dayanand Saraswathi and Swami Vivekananda, challenged social evils like Sati, dowry, and child marriage, advocating for social legislation to address these issues. Collaborating with British rulers, they played a significant role in India's independence struggle, with social justice remaining a vital aspect of their agenda.

Pachau (2020) highlights the Salvation Army's reformatory role in Mizoram, tracing its origins back to 1865 when William Booth founded the organisation in London. In Mizoram, the Salvation Army has provided vital social welfare assistance, tackling social ills like prostitution, gambling, and drunkenness, and offering support during famines through grain depots, schools, and industrial training centers. Since 1920, the organisation has also established orphanages, homes for the blind, and practiced 'self-denial' to aid the needy, continuing its charitable work to this day.

Scupin (2021) conducts a comprehensive study on the role of Muslim intellectuals in reforming Islam in Thailand, categorising the reform phases into two stages: the Public Sphere and the Contemporary Public Sphere. He identifies two main factions within the Islamic reform movement: the traditionalist '*kaum tua*' group and the modernist '*Khana kau*' group. Despite their differences, both groups have condemned militant Islamic discourse, advocate for the abolition of polygamy, and promote 'universal humanism' to reform the Islamic community.

Singh's thesis (2014) examines the socio-religious movements among the *Meiteis* of Manipur, specifically the *Sanamahi* and Meitei Christian movements. He attributes their emergence to external factors, including Hindu and British colonialism, which disrupted the region's social and cultural fabric. The *Sanamahi* movement, emerging

in the late 1930s, aims to preserve *Meitei* indigenous culture, while the *Meitei* Christian movement, gaining momentum after 1960, rejects non-Christian *Meitei* orthodoxies and responds to Hinduism and Christianity. The *Sanamahi* movement is notably anti-Brahmin and anti-Hinduism, whereas the *Meitei* Christian movement is shaped by external influences.

The above review of literatures thus reveal that religion has played a significant role in various reform movements throughout history. For instance, Luther's concept of religious freedom sparked a wave of reform in Christianity. In response to social issues, Christian groups sought state support, formed alliances with moderate groups, engaged in introspection, emphasised national duty, and established educational institutions. Similarly, socio-religious reform movements in Hinduism and other religions have addressed issues like child marriage, education, suffrage, marriage law, and polygamy, promoting social justice. During times of crisis, such as famines, religious organisations have set up grain depots, schools, and industrial training centers, and established village banking systems, land colonies, and rehabilitation programs for criminal tribes. Religion has also played a crucial role in resisting colonialism, including both Hindu colonialism and British colonialism, demonstrating its power to drive social change and reform.

2.4.6 Religious Institution and Gender Studies

Nuthalapati (2024) argues that though the Christian faith upholds justice, equality, and human dignity, however the experiences of Christian women who suffer domestic violence contradict these values. The church, as an institution, perpetuates patriarchy and gender discrimination, perpetuating harm. Research in Andhra and Telangana congregations reveals how women's lives are controlled and violated by their partners and the church, causing physical and psychological suffering.

Joseph (2024) asserts that Catholic nuns in India face various challenges rooted in patriarchy, gender roles, and ecclesial norms, they, however, have also emerged as a powerful force in the Church and society through their dedication and diverse work. Drawing on Christian Social Democracy and philosopher Giorgio Agamben's concept

of 'ethos of effectiveness,' he argues that Catholic nuns can be agents of transformation, driving positive change while navigating institutional constraints.

Chirongoma and Moyo (2023) examine the exclusion of young Zimbabwean women from leadership positions in various sectors, despite the National Gender Policy's goal of achieving gender equality. Through interviews with young Christian women, the research identifies factors hindering their participation in leadership, including cultural and religious norms, and advocates for policy transformations to embrace and empower them to take up key leadership roles.

Ikyernum (2023) highlights that despite women holding various positions such as pastors, founders, and bishops, women still face obstacles like male dominance, domestic responsibilities, bereavement, and cultural biases. Therefore, the study speculates that women in Pentecostal leadership positions cultivate tolerance and perseverance to overcome these hurdles, strike a balance between domestic and church commitments, and seek divine strength and wisdom to navigate cultural norms and patriarchal structures.

Vanlalthanpuii's article (2019), 'Women and Church Politics,' examines the Mizoram Presbyterian Church and reveals that the church's historical narrative has systematically marginalised women's contributions, with the exception of the 'handful of rice project.' Moreover, while women collect and convert rice into money, male church authorities control its usage, perpetuating gender inequality. The study also critiques the exclusion of women from decision-making processes by church elders and the underutilisation of women theology graduates, highlighting the need for greater gender inclusivity in church leadership.

Lalhmingpuii and Namchoom's study (2014) argue that modern education has empowered women to take on active roles in the Church, with women preachers, evangelists, and Bible women playing significant roles in the early years of Christianity. Nevertheless, a decline in women's roles has occurred over time, with the position of Bible women no longer existing and women being barred from ordination as Church elders in the Presbyterian Church, relegating them to assisting roles in Church affairs.

Religion has a complex and often contradictory role in addressing gender violence and promoting gender equality. While religion can provide a moral framework for challenging patriarchy and gender-based violence, it can also perpetuate and reinforce harmful gender stereotypes and power dynamics. In the Indian context of Christianity, Catholic nuns face numerous challenges rooted in patriarchy, gender roles, and ecclesial norms, including limited leadership opportunities despite outnumbering men in churches, exclusion from decision-making processes, and underutilisation of women theology graduates. Furthermore, women are often excluded from positions of authority such as pastors and church elder ordinations, highlighting the need for religious institutions to acknowledge and address their complicity in perpetuating gender inequality and violence.

After a thorough examination of the existing review of literatures on the topics related to the study of ethno-religious movement and the several roles played by the church in the society, it can thus be affirmed that sociological analysis on ethnicity and reform movement are scanty especially in the context of *Mizoram* and in India's north east as well. Moreover, a sociological analysis of church itself is not available in the history of Mizoram's academic literature. Except for the studies on ethno-religious movement of *Seng Khasi* movement in Meghalaya, *Zeliangrong* Movement among the Nagas and Singh's (2014) study of *Sanamahi* Movement and *Meitei* Christian Movement in Manipur, movements pertaining towards pure religious reformism are rare in spite of the fact that there are numerous studies on ethnic-related movements in Mizoram and north east India areas.

2.5 Methodological Review

Reviews that concentrate on research method rather than the research outcomes known as methodological review have been used in a variety of field to improve research practice. While there have been numerous reviews on the study related to religion and ethnic movement, care has been taken to concentrate on what are considered to be the most comprehensive review to date which have been generally made used in the study of ethno-religious movement, which are discussed as follows:

Siddique (2020) employs ethnographic methodology to investigate the Islamic reform movement in Bangladesh and the UK, specifically focusing on the *Tablighi Jamaat*.

He has conducted participant observation, immersing himself in the group's daily activities during events like *Ijtema*, *Gasht*, and *Chilla*. Notably, he spent 40 days with a *Tablighi Jamaat* team in northern Bangladesh, actively participating in their *Dawah* activities and engaging in informal discussions, gaining insight into the socioeconomic backgrounds and individual perspectives of the followers. This experience has enabled him to identify potential interviewees for in-depth interviews, providing a more nuanced understanding of the *Tablighi Jamaat's* beliefs and practices.

Kariuki's (2018) study employs Community-Based Qualitative Research (CBQR) methodology, which allows the researcher to immerse himself in the community and establish a constructive connection with the participants. This approach has enabled the collection of diverse data forms, including secondary data in the background study and primary data in the case study. CBQR facilitated community ownership of the research, ensuring that the community's voices and perspectives were central to the study. By prioritising participants' viewpoints and reflections, the study assembles trust and fosters a collaborative relationship with the community partner, providing valuable insights and guidance for future research endeavors.

Huang's (2016) PhD thesis explores whether religion promotes social capital and integration in Britain, a secularising society with unique immigration patterns. Building on US-based research (Putnam, 2000; Wuthnow, 2002), this study investigates the relationship between religious involvement and integration in Britain, using Citizenship Survey data and advanced statistical techniques (Structural Equation Modelling and Heckman Selection Model). The thesis examines the sociocultural characteristics of religious involvement, its link to social capital, and its impact on cultural (identity bridging) and civic/economic (status bridging) integration, contributing to the existing knowledge in this field.

Klingorova (2015) employs Pearson's Correlation Coefficient (r) to investigate the relationship between religiosity and gender inequality in various social spheres, examining whether religiosity has an impact on the status of women in society. The correlation analysis assesses the association between religiosity and gender inequality indicators, regardless of specific religions, using SPSS software. With a significance

level of $p < 0.01$, the study explores the quantitative relationship between religiosity and gender inequality in social, economic, and political domains, providing insights into the influence of religiosity on gender equality.

Santiago (2014) has conducted a study on Adventist church schools in Puerto Rico, using the 'Advance PR study' dataset. The sample is divided into two groups: 704 Baptist Adventist youth for analysing denominational loyalty, and 1,080 Adventist and non-Adventist youth for examining Christian commitment and religious behaviour. The study includes 34 independent variables, three dependent variables (religiosity, measured by denominational loyalty, Christian commitment, and religious behaviour), and five control variables (gender, age, family status, years lived in the US, and number of moves). The research investigates the effects of independent variables on religiosity, evaluating each variable's individual impact, collective influence, and predictive power, while controlling for demographic factors

Syiemlieh (2013) draws mainly upon the historical method for her study of the Sheng Khasi Movement in her article, 'Christianity in *Khasi* Culture: A Study of the Relationship Between Christianity and Traditional Khasi Culture with Special Reference of the Seng Khasi Movement from 1899 to 1993'. Her historical research involves a critical examination of historical records, both primary and secondary sources with a view to reconstruct the past events. It includes both historiography – the written reconstruction of the past events- and the historical method which demand the critical examination of all historical records.

Lawmsanga's (2010) study, 'Christian Mission with Special Reference to The Presbyterian Church of *Mizoram*,' employs a dual methodology, combining postcolonial and synthetic approaches. The postcolonial approach is used to critically examine the impact of colonisation on Mizo culture and society, seeking to uncover suppressed voices and oppositional readings. This approach encompasses historical, critical, and political dimensions, aiming to re-read theology through the lenses of identity, hybridity, and diaspora. Lawmsanga applies heritagist, resistant, and dissident readings to investigate post-colonial *Mizo* culture. Additionally, the synthetic model is used to explore how culture enriches the Gospel's meaning. By integrating theological,

postcolonial, and synthetic approaches, Lawmsanga's study investigates changes in *Mizo* culture in the post-colonial context, seeking to develop a new theology emerging from the interaction between the Gospel and *Mizo* culture.

Jodhka's (2010) research on *Dalit* movements in Punjab and Maharashtra employs qualitative methods to investigate leadership, participation, and ideology. The study relies on qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews with informants, group interviews, and non-participant observation in both settings. The majority of respondents are community members. The research also includes case studies of community-established development institutions, with a focus on three institutions in Punjab and three in Maharashtra. Fieldwork has spanned eight months (September 2008 to April 2009), with 30 days spent in each location. Interviews are recorded with informed consent, providing rich insights into the *Dalit* movements in both states.

Manvir's (2009) MPhil thesis examines the role of *Gurudwaras* in community development in the UK, presenting ethnographic studies of six *Gurudwaras* in Bradford and Southall. Similarly, Hoon (2016) has employed participant observation to investigate the 'Seven Spheres Movement' among Christians in Indonesia. Over a decade, Hoon has actively participated in various Christian events, such as concerts, conferences, worship services, and theological seminars, establishing a strong rapport with the community and gaining recognition as an ecumenical Christian, thereby enhancing his research's credibility and access.

Gibbs (1999) has conducted a study on the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK) using a case study approach, relying primarily on secondary sources. The case studies involve in-depth reviews of existing literature, enabling the identification of the specific role of churches in advocating for particular issues. While the study acknowledges the limitations of relying solely on secondary literature, it is intended as the first phase of a larger research project, with field-based research planned for a later stage.

From the preceding methodological reviews, it may also be seen that most of the studies pertaining to ethno-religious studies have made extensive use of ethnographic, comparative, and historical methods. A qualitative and quantitative survey method

employing questionnaires, case study method, KII and FGD have also been largely utilised for the study of religious institutions. Moreover, participant observation has tremendously aided the researcher. Finally, it has thus come to light that theological approach has also been largely employed in the study of ethno-religious issues.

2.6. Research Gap and Rationale for The Study

When it comes to the study of the role of Church, it has thus become apparent that no specified studies on the role of church and its impact towards culture and socio-economic transformation has been found especially in the context of Mizoram even though studies on the impact of Christianity have been plentiful. Amongst the few literatures, most of the studies are undertaken from the theological perspective. It has thus become a challenging task to sociologically analyse and formulate research questions like; what is the role of church in Lai society? To what extent does the church control the Lai social structures like economy, polity and culture? What role does church play in socio economic development? Is LIKBK an ethno-religious movement? What role does the LIKBK play towards socio economic transformation in the Lai society? All these relevant questions are thus addressed after careful consideration of the research gap that has been detected in the existing literatures as follows:

1. All the available literatures that have been reviewed were mostly from the developed countries and mainland India and only a few studies are seen in North-east or in the Mizo context which have their particularities.
2. Amongst the few literatures available in the Mizo context, studies have been done mostly from other disciplines and not from sociological perspective.
3. Moreover, the study area chosen for the study, that is, '*Lawngtlai*' with a flourishing dominant majority denomination called LIKBK has hardly been academically explored from any discipline and are found left out in the academic literature.
4. A sense of social transformation brought about by LIKBK as a form of non-assimilatory ethno-religious movement in the Lai dominated population in *Lawngtlai* is yet to be explored.

5. The past studies conducted on religion in Mizoram are ecclesiastical in their approach. The missing sociological perspective needs to be carved out.
6. Since most of the studies that had been undertaken in the past on the study of 'Religion' were conducted on the theological perspectives, it has thus become very crucial and challenging to study 'LIKBK as an ethno-religious movement' from the sociological perspective as it is so deeply rooted in the society, affecting all the aspects of society like polity, economy, culture, identity and also acts as an important agency of bringing about a series of social transformation in the *Lai* society. Therefore, by taking up this initiative, the study hopes to enrich the existing sociological literature on religion in the *Mizo* context by taking *Lawngtlai* district as its main area of study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the systematic approach, techniques, procedures, and processes employed by the researcher to conduct investigations, gather data, analyse information, and draw conclusions in a structured and rigorous manner. It encompasses the structured framework within which research is conducted, guiding the researcher through the various stages of the research processes.

3.2 Research Design

The proposed study represents an exploratory cum descriptive research design. It employs ‘ethnographic-cum-historical’ approach for the collection, measurement and analysis of data since the proposed study attempts to study and reconstruct the past culture in order to relate it to the present social reality. Additionally, the researcher has been living with the Lai community for more than fifteen years or so in the study area, for which the researcher had the advantage of gathering a first-hand information through the natural settings for a prolonged period of time and thus, the research is naturally ethnographic in its approach. Besides, in some religious function, the researcher took part in it whereas in some few gatherings like observance of ‘*Lai Night*’, the researcher chose to stay passive so as not to intrude the participants under study. Therefore, the researcher made use of both a ‘participant observation’ whereas on few occasions, chose to be a ‘passive observer’ in order to extract the true facts under study. Since the chosen topic for investigation, that is, the LIKBK is something novel in the world of research and has not so far been under investigation in an in-depth manner, an ‘exploratory design’ is adopted to study the field view for analysis, interpretation and for drawing conclusion. It utilises both the primary as well as the secondary exploratory methods. For primary exploratory methods of investigation, data was gathered through observations and interviews. For secondary exploratory method, the researcher collected data through case studies, existing literatures and online sources. In order to validate and gain maximum picture of the findings, the researcher then combined elements of both the qualitative as well as the quantitative

methods of research design. For instance, the researcher, in order to study the LIKBK's church members' opinions pertaining to their choices of life partner, marriage practices, attitudes towards certain cultural aspects like ethnic feelings, sentiments, social norms and values, and attitudes towards women's participation in the Church activities etc. employed the quantitative method whereas in order to learn about 'the why' or the reasons of such preference, a qualitative method was simultaneously employed along with the quantitative method. The study therefore presents mixed method mainly the 'explanatory sequential mixed method' wherein quantitative data collection and analysis was done firstly followed by qualitative data collection. In short, firstly, the researcher attempted to quantify the choices, attitudes of the respondents and a detailed explanation about their feelings and sentiments and the reasons for such choices or attitudes were measured qualitatively in order to gain maximum insight into the subjects.

3.3 Universe and Sample

In order to obtain an insight of the interplay between religion and society in Lawngtlai, the universe of the proposed study is the LIKBK population which has amounted to 30692 (as of 2021 General Assembly Records). Lawngtlai was declared as a district on the 18th September, 1998. It is the districts headquarter of the Lai Autonomous District Council. The 'Lai' predominantly occupied Lawngtlai District with a cover area of 25557.10 km². The chosen universe for the study is LIKBK Church since it is the dominant church in the whole of the district which takes special efforts to promote and preserve the Lai culture apart from practicing and teaching Christian doctrines. Surprisingly, majority Presbyterians of Mizoram are a minority there. Therefore, the study of LIKBK, the Lai ethnic based church is indispensable in order to depict a clear picture of the influential role of such a flourishing denomination in Lawngtlai.

Out of the total population, 379 samples are selected by using Formula of Determining Sample size available at CUEMATH (<https://www.cuemath.com/sample-size-formula/>). To calculate sample size, first sample size is calculated from the infinite (unknown) population using the table value and then adjusting it to the required size

by calculating through known population. The sample size calculation method as used is given below:

Using sample size formula for infinite population, $S = Z^2 \times P \times (1-P) / M^2$ (1-P) M2
having 95% level of confidence with Z score = 1.96, P = 0.5 and M = 0.05 such that

$$S = (1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times (1-0.5) / 0.05^2 (1-0.5) 0.05^2$$

$$= 3.8416 \times 0.25 / 0.0025$$

$S = 384.16$ (The sample size for the infinite population is 384.16)

Now the sample size is adjusted for the required population with total known population = 30692

Adjusted Sample size = $S / 1 + [(S-1)/\text{population}]$

$$= 384.16 / 1 + [(384.16-1)/30692]$$

$$= 384.16 / 1.01248403493$$

$$= 379 \text{ [Here, confidence level is 95\%]}$$

To select 379 sample from different sub-groups, Stratified Random Sampling Formula:

$n_h = (N_h / N) \times n$ is used as below:

Table 3.1: Sample Size Calculation

Stratified sample (n General body)	$\frac{379}{30692} \times 14856 = 183$
Stratified sample (n Pastors)	$\frac{379}{30692} \times 43 = 1$
Stratified sample (n Church Elders)	$\frac{379}{30692} \times 711 = 8$
Stratified sample (n Women wing)	$\frac{379}{30692} \times 5741 = 71$
Stratified sample (n Youth wing)	$\frac{379}{30692} \times 7520 = 93$
Stratified sample (n Men wing)	$\frac{379}{30692} \times 1814 = 22$
Stratified sample (n women Theologian)	$\frac{379}{30692} \times 7 = 1$

Source: CUEMATH (<https://www.cuemath.com/sample-size-formula/>)

Table 3.2: Calculated Samples from the Total LIKKBK Population in Lawngtlai

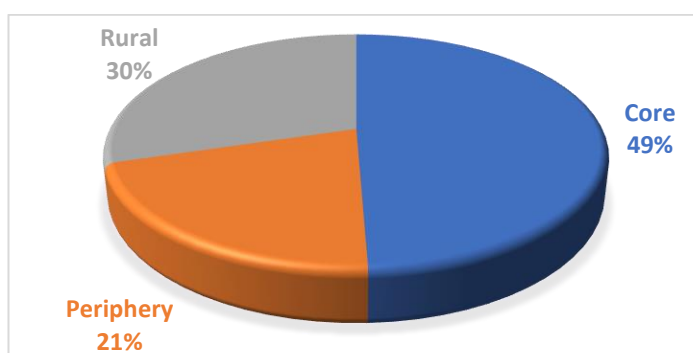
LIKKBK	Groups	Population	Formula	Sample
	General Body	14856	$379/30692 \times 14856 = 183$	183

LIKBK Sub-members	Pastors	43	$379/30692 \times 43 = 1$	1
	Church Elders	711	$379/30692 \times 711 = 8$	8
	LIKBKHP (women wing)	5741	$379/30692 \times 5741 = 71$	71
	LIKBKTP (youth wing)	7520	$379/30692 \times 7520 = 93$	93
	LIKBKMP (men wing)	1814	$379/30692 \times 1814 = 22$	22
	Women Theologians	7	$379/30692 \times 7 = 1$	1
Total		30692	379 (N)	379

Source: Extracted from LIKBK General Assembly Report, 2021, p.67.

To discern potential disparities in opinions among respondents residing in various locales, individuals were classified into core, rural, and periphery categories. Furthermore, to investigate distinctions in viewpoints between those with different levels of education, participants were subdivided into graduates and non-graduates, as depicted in the Figures 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4. Most participants are from the core location viz, the core locality of Lawngtlai town, followed by participants from rural areas and the periphery (the outskirts locality of the town). Additionally, respondents are also categorised according to their income as depicted in Table 3.5.

Figure 3.1 Classification of Participants' Residents



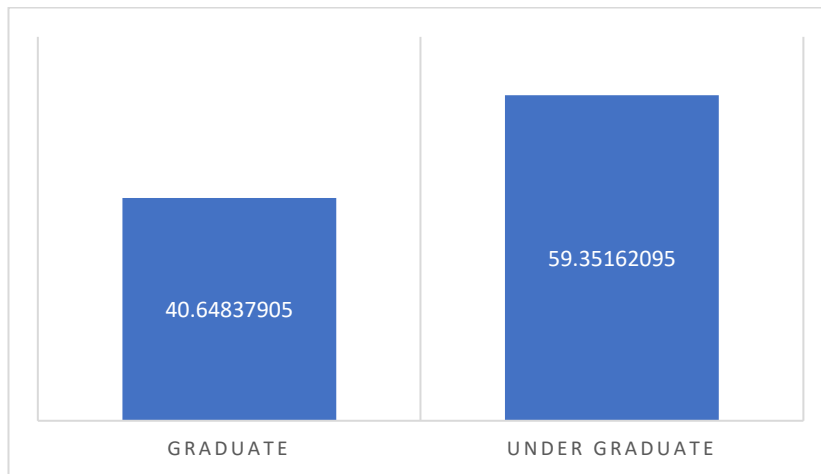
Source: Author's Field Survey

Core population 198 (49 percent)

Periphery 84 (21 percent)

Rural 119 (30 percent)

Figure 3.2 Classification Based on Educational Attainment (Graduate is Considered Skilled, and Undergraduate as Unskilled)

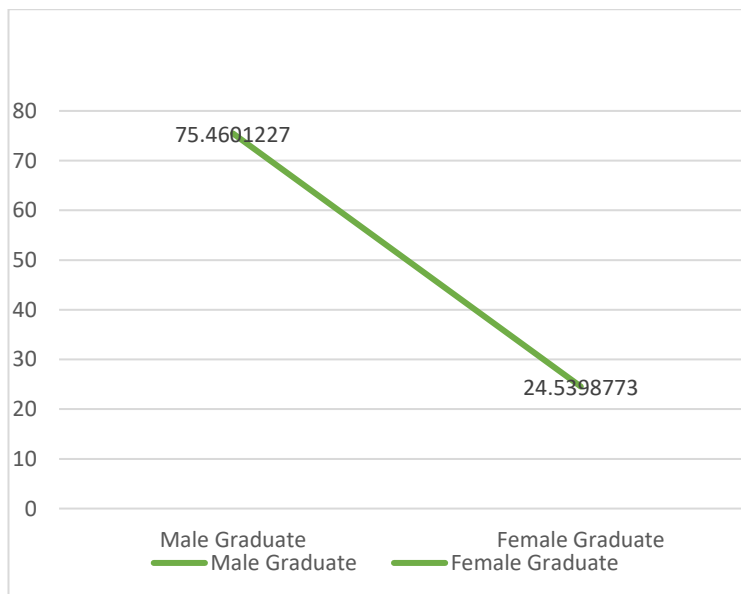


Source: Author's Field Survey

Graduate 163 (41 percent)

Undergraduate 238 (59 percent)

Figure 3.3 Classification of Skilled Participants Based on Gender

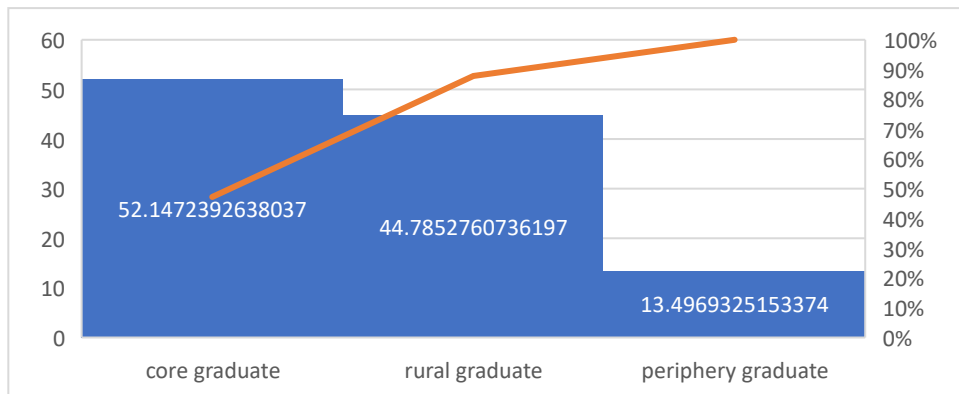


Source: Author's Field Survey

Male graduate 123 (75 percent)

Female Graduate 40 (25 percent)

Figure 3.4 Classification of Skilled Participants Based on Residence



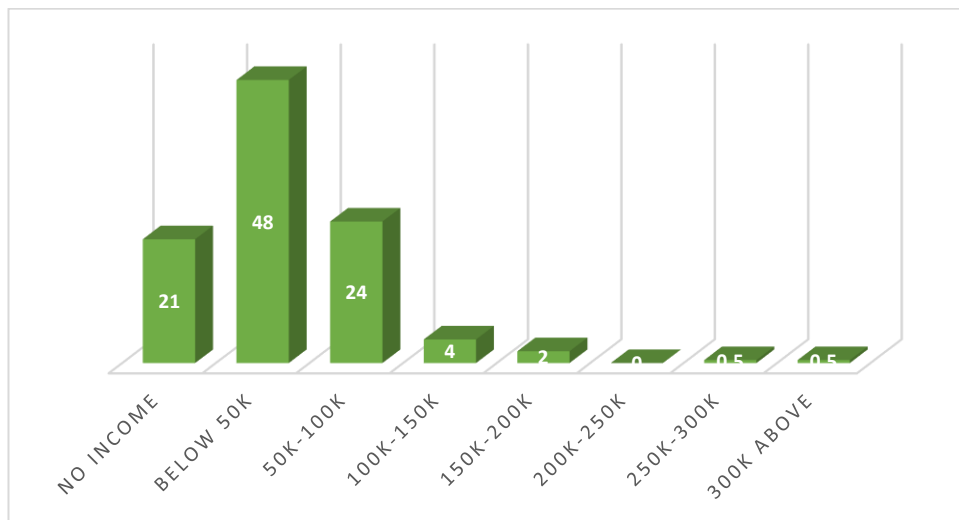
Source: Author's Field Survey

Core graduate 88 (47 percent) Male – 65, Female – 23

Periphery 22 (41 percent) Male – 16, Female – 6

Rural graduate 73 (41 percent) Male – 62, Female – 11

Figure 3.5 Classification of Respondents Based on Income



Source: Author's Field Data

3.4 Selection of Three Analytical Levels (Micro, Meso, and Macro) for Investigating the LIKBK Movement

Hartman (2017) opines that the division between macro level perspectives on society and culture, the meso level of organisations and groups, and the micro level of individual identity, motives and cognitional are indispensable for social investigation. This premise implies that certain subjects are more effectively analysed within a particular level, whereas others are conducive to exploration across all three levels. In line of this statement, Serpa and Ferreira (2018) had advocated that social analysis

should be – *placed on a sociological perspective that is focused on the theoretical pluralism of Sociology. The pluralism seeks to articulate macro-social dynamics with local processes, allowing the linkage between systems and actors, between structures and practices.* The level of inquiry chosen could influence the questions posed by a social worker regarding the subject, or a social scientist might approach the topic from various perspectives depending on the level of inquiry utilised. As such, 'micro-level research' investigates individuals and their one-on-one interactions, 'meso-level research' examines social groups, and 'macro-level research' scrutinises social institutions and policies. Coming to the closer home of the area of study, Singh (2014) in Manipur had also employed case studies at three levels; the macro level analyses of two religious' movements among the Meiteis in Manipur - the 'Sanamahi Movement' and the 'Meitei Christian Movement', the meso level analysis of the 'Social Movement Organisations' (SMO's) and the micro level analysis of 'individual cases'.

Accordingly, the current study utilised the three analytical levels, namely the macro, meso, and micro levels, to analyse the LIKBK movement. At the micro level, the study focused on the institution of LIKBK as the most powerful agency of the Lai District that has brought significant socio-economic developments through the ethno-religious movement that dedicates all its effort for the reformation and upliftment of the Lai culture and the Lai people. At the meso level, the study was focused on the various sub-groups of the LIKBK such as 'the pastor wing', 'the church-elder wing', 'the deacon wing', 'the women wing', 'the youth wing', 'the men wing' and 'the women theologian wing'. This meso level analyses of each subgroup proved to be very effective for the understanding of the role of each subgroup and their contributions towards the LIKBK movement. At the micro level, individual case studies were conducted among the five women theologians and the office workers (mainly coordinators of selected departments) of the LIKBK. In-depth interviews were conducted for each case study, proving highly beneficial and successful in identifying specific women-centric needs and grievances. Additionally, office workers expressed various requirements and aspirations for future incorporation to ensure the smooth functioning of LIKBK.

3.5 Formulation of Interview Schedule

The next step that was taken after sampling was the formulation of interview schedule. An interview schedule over a questionnaire was preferred because it offers significant flexibility to the interviewer. Furthermore, using an interview schedule is advantageous, especially when addressing sensitive topics like ethnicity. It allows for questions to be asked, and if needed, the interviewee can qualify or modify their answers. The interviewer can also carefully observe the individual during the session, noting the emotions attached to their responses, instances when they seem evasive, and areas where they are most vocal. During the interview process, the subject's behaviors can be observed, providing valuable insights into their emotional state and complex. This information can be immensely helpful for offering individual guidance and support.

After extracting and operationalising several key points from the review of literatures, interview schedule was thus developed so as to meet the objectives of the study. The total interview scheduled encompasses of hundred and nine (109) questions including both open- ended and close- ended questions. The closed-ended questions comprised of nominal, ordinal, two points Likert's scale and five-point Likert's scale including dichotomous questions. The questions were designed in order to enable the researcher to analyse the data both quantitatively and qualitatively.

3.6 Time Frame of the Study

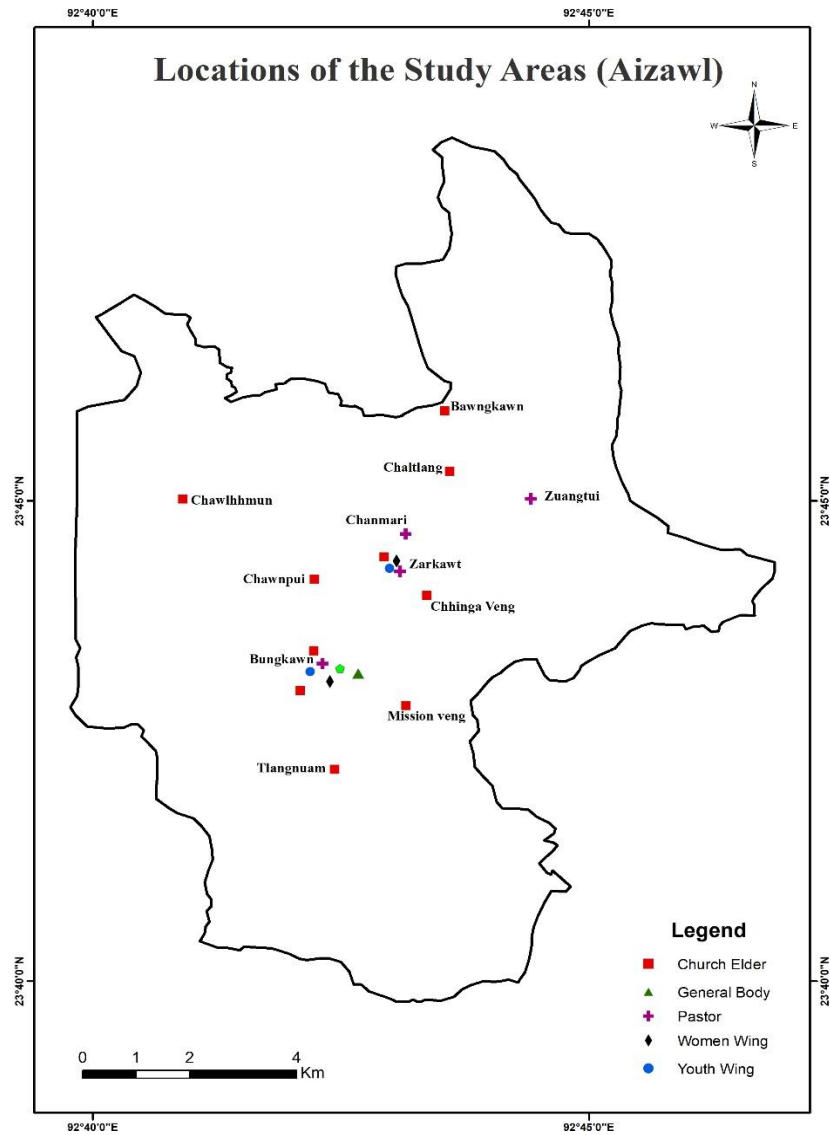
Examining continuous movement poses its unique challenges, particularly in determining the appropriate time frame for research, especially in endeavours with defined temporal constraints such as doctoral studies. Studies for the LIKBK movement spans from May 23, 1970, to the present day. This specific date may hold significance as it marks the establishment of the first Lai ethnic-based church, *Isua Krista Kohhran* (IKK), in *Bualpui NG* village. This event occurred on November 27, 1999, through the amalgamation of two churches: *Isua Krista Kohhran* (IKK) and *Pawiram Baptist Kohhran* (PBK), later known as *Lairam Baptist Kohhran* (LBK). Ever since 1999, with the birth of LIKBK, the two churches had been tirelessly working to safeguard and revive the Lai culture and the Lai people under one banner.

This study has also encompassed an examination of the socio-religious and cultural factors that influenced the establishment of 'LIKBK'. This includes tracing the historical narrative of Christianity's introduction to Mizoram, particularly its impact among the Lai community. Excluding the time dedicated to preparing and finalising the research design, the researcher conducted approximately ten (10) months of intensive fieldwork, spanning from October 4, 2022, to the middle of 2023, which also included the duration allocated for the pilot study.

3.7 Selection and Division of Sites for Fieldwork

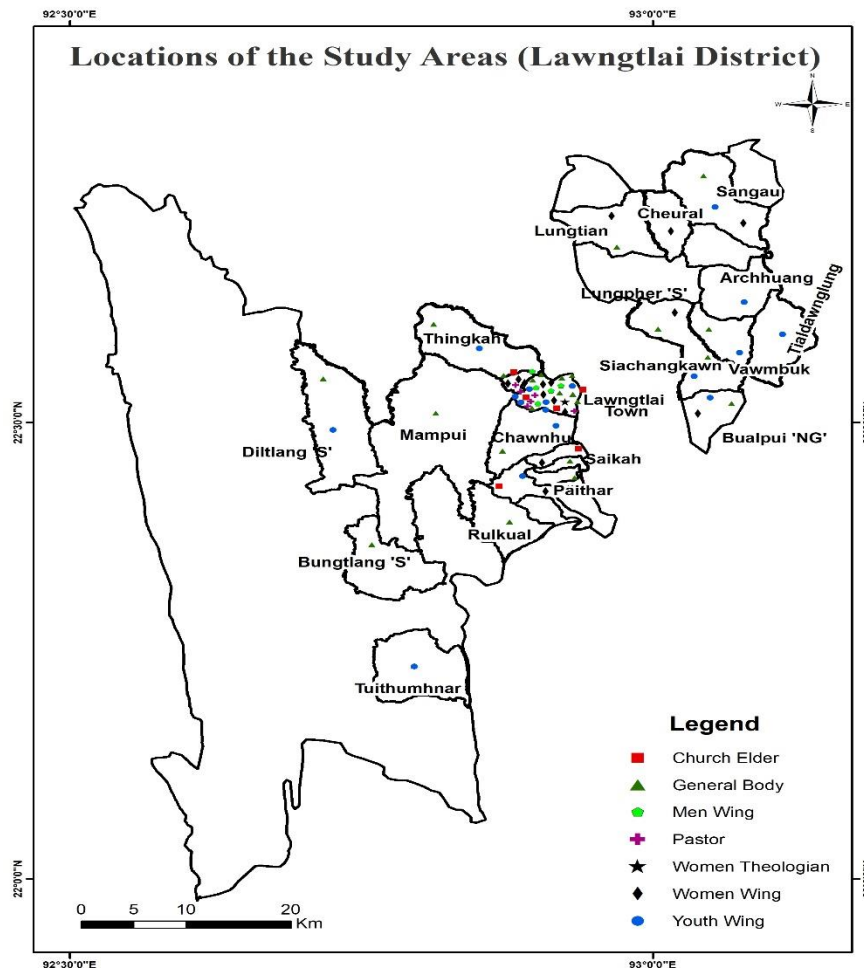
The LIKBK spreads through the length and breadth of Lawngtlai district including four Churches in *Aizawl* district, namely, Elim Church (*Bungkawn* locality), Emmanuel Church (*Lower Zarkawt* locality), Gilgal Church (*Zuangtui* locality) and *Sihhmui* Local Church. As per the 2021 General Assembly Meeting Minute, there are one hundred and eighteen (118) churches altogether. For the sake of convenience and to facilitate the researcher's work, the field areas were categorised into three units: Core (Urban), Periphery, and Rural. Care had been taken to see that the samples collected represent the three units in a proportionate manner (see Figure 3.1). The four Churches in *Aizawl* had also been duly covered in the course of the fieldwork. One advantageous aspect of the *Aizawl* fieldwork was that all the chosen field locations were easily accessible and manageable to navigate.

Figure 3.6: Locations of Aizawl Study Areas



Source: Author

Figure 3.7: Locations of Lawngtlai Study Areas



Source: Author

3.8 Principle of Inclusion and Exclusion

For the purpose of the study, the dominant church of Lawngtlai District, LIKBK has been chosen as it is the largest church in Lawngtlai amounting to 30692 members and has been taking the most active role towards the upliftment of the Lai people. The study examined various sub-groups within LIKBK separately, including pastors, church elders, the women's wing, the youth wing, the men's wing, and women theologians. However, the study excluded other religious groups such as the Presbyterians, Buddhists, Muslims, and Baptist Church, as they constitute minor numbers and do not hold significant influence in Lai society or the Lai reform movement. The town area of Lawngtlai was accorded significant importance in the

study due to its status as the headquarters of LIKBK. Moreover, many of the crucial activities within the movement are initiated in the town before being disseminated to the peripheries and villages. Due importance had been given to ‘*Bualpui NG*’ village for the reason that the first ethnic based movement took its birth in this said village.

The literature reviews incorporated international and national journals relevant to the proposed research topic. Special attention was given to include recent publications in the literature review. However, there may be rare cases where certain publications were excluded due to factors such as being unknown, unavailable, or inaccessible. Preaching stations are also established outside the State of Mizoram, including locations such as Shillong and Delhi, overseen by appointed chaplains. While these preaching stations were contacted for the study, communication primarily occurred through the appointed chaplains. Telephonic interviews were conducted accordingly. However, extensive fieldwork was not undertaken, as it was determined that these areas have minimal effects on the movement.

3.9 Sources and Classification of Data

Primary data was collected mainly through the method of interview schedule, secondly, telephonic interview, personal observation, oral histories, taking notes, audio recordings and observations. Interview schedule was administered to Pastors, church elders, church youths and women and men wing of the LIKBK, eminent social leaders and church leaders. Case studies of selected relevant individuals were undertaken among the selected office staffs of LIKBK and LIKBK women theologians. While selecting LIKBK’s office staffs for case studies, care had been taken to select key persons holding significant position in each Departments under the LIKBK office. Coordinators of various departments like ‘Communications Department’, ‘Social Mission Department’, persons in -charge of LIKBK Handloom, Library and Bookroom, *Lairam* Motherless Home, *Lairam* Rescue Centre, *Lairam* Christian Medical Centre, LAHAS Science School and New Vision English School (NVES), *Lairam* Adoption Centre, Chaplains of Hospital, *Lairam* Girl’s Hostel, Shillong Hostel and Delhi Hostel were thoroughly interviewed. Selecting these key individuals for the case study has proven highly beneficial, as they have been exceptionally cooperative

in responding to inquiries to the fullest extent possible. They were instrumental in elucidating how the LIKBK is tirelessly working towards reforming Lai culture and identity. For KII schedule, five members each from the Village Council Members and MDC (Member of District Council) of LADC (Lai Autonomous District Council) were interviewed and proved to be very informative as well. Given that the selected individuals possess profound insight into the political backdrop of Lai society, their involvement proved highly effective, particularly in acquiring information regarding the political dimensions of the LIKBK movement and the extent of LIKBK's influence on present political affairs within the Lai community. For the case studies, structured questions were administered whereas for KII, unstructured questions were administered for convenience's sake and to make the interview sessions more flexible.

The secondary sources of obtaining data for this research were of colonial accounts, missionary reports, published and unpublished theses and articles, newspapers, relevant internet and social media sites, televisions, pamphlets, magazines, census records, diaries, meeting minutes of the church, LIKBK's Annual General assembly Reports, Books and Souvenirs, Government records, Statistical Handbook published by Government of Mizoram, Government Archives and Gazette notifications had also proved to be very handy. In general, the researcher relied predominantly on primary, first-hand data, as studies related to LIKBK have been scarce and hardly been available.

3.10 Operationalisation of Concepts

Defining concepts universally with a single, common definition is often not feasible due to the diverse perspectives, contexts, and interpretations associated with them. Indeed, a single term can carry different connotations for each research study, and even a singular concept may be perceived in diverse ways by different researchers. As such, it becomes necessary to establish a 'working definition' tailored to the specific research, aiming to prevent misconceptions and misinterpretations. This involves breaking down complex concepts into simpler, more common language for clarity and understanding. Accordingly, for the purpose of this research, the following concepts are taken and operationalised as follows:

3.10.1 Religion: The term ‘religion’ can be understood from several approaches. However, for the purpose of this study, religion is viewed from two angles, that is, the supporting arguments and opposing arguments against the role of religion. The supporting arguments for religion highlight its positive impact on society, such as its role in fostering social transformation, promoting reform, and contributing to social progress. The opposing arguments scrutinise the negative aspects of religion, including its potential as a source of social conflict and movement. This study primarily focuses on Christianity.

3.10.2 Society: In this study, ‘society’ refers specifically to the Lai society, as the projected study concentrates on examining the relationship between religion and the Lai society within the framework of Lai society itself. The study primarily focused on the critical analysis of the impact of Christianity towards the Lai culture.

3.10.3 LIKBK: The *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran* (LIKBK) holds a dominant position within Lawngtlai District, serving as the predominant church in the area. The LIKBK is an ethnic-based church, and the study fundamentally centers on examining its dominant role within the Lai society. In the context of the research, the LIKBK is perceived as a highly effective ethno-religious movement specifically tailored for the Lai people.

3.10.4 Ethno-Religious Movement: For one of the objectives of the study, the LIKBK is pictured as a significant ethno-religious reform movement of the Lai people in Lawngtlai. Besides preaching Christian doctrines, the LIKBK takes special efforts to protect, preserve and promote the Lai identity and their diminishing culture.

3.10.5 Socio-Cultural Transformation: ‘Transformation’ generally refers to a significant change or alteration in something, often involving a shift in form, nature, character, or structure. It implies a process of fundamental and often profound change. However, within the parameters of this research, the term ‘transformation’ is operationalised as the useful contribution that the LIKBK has brought about in the Lai society.

3.10.6 BCM: The Baptist Church of Mizoram serves as the parent church from which the LIKBK has emerged. The study delved into the primary reasons behind LIKBK's

divergence from the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM), leading to the establishment of a distinct and separate church entity. It examined the extent to which the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) may have contributed to the emergence of LIKBK through its actions or policies.

3.10.7 The First Exodus: The First Exodus was operationalised as the initial stage of the development of the movement of LIKBK. The year of the formation of the *Isua Krista Kohhran* (IKK), that is, 1970 is operationalised as the first exodus of the movement or the first stage of the movement. *Isua Krista Kohhran* is the first Lai ethnic based church. In fact, it is the parent church that had taken its birth at *Bualpui NG* village in 1970 prior to the formation of LIKBK.

3.10.8 The Second Exodus: The Second Exodus signifies the year of the establishment of *Pawiram Baptist Kohhran* (PBK). The PBK is the second ethnic based church that took its birth at Lawngtlai town on 7th. January.1982. The name was subsequently changed to '*Lairam Baptist Kohhran*' (LBK). Accordingly, the PBK is visualised as the second phase of the LIKBK movement for the study.

3.10.9 Isua Krista Kohhran Lairam (IKKL): Following the amalgamation of the two churches, the IKK and the LBK, a new congregation named '*Isua Krista Kohhran Lairam*' (IKKL) was then established in *New Saiha* town on November 27th, 1999. The name IKKL was later changed into LIKBK with the church's affiliations secured from Asia Baptist Federation (ABF) and Baptist World Alliance (BWA). In the context of the research, this era is conceptualised as the final stage of the movement where the movement in the name of LIKBK had taken its final shape.

3.10.10 Sub-groups: The term 'sub-groups' here refers to the various wings operating under LIKBK, including the Pastor Wing, the Church Elder Wing, the Women's Wing, the Deacon Wing, the Men's Wing, the Youth Wing, and the Women Theologian Wing. Each of these well-organised wings were independently examined to determine their respective contributions to socio-economic development.

3.11 Research Experience

Throughout the protracted period of approximately three years, spanning from November 1, 2021, to June 2024, the researcher embarked on an arduous yet enriching journey of conducting fieldwork, collecting and analysing data, and ultimately, articulating the findings in a comprehensive manuscript. The actual fieldwork, which constituted the core of the research, was conducted between March 2022 and December 2023, yielding a vast array of data that required meticulous rearrangement and coding during the subsequent months. The write-up of the findings, a task of considerable complexity, was accomplished between January 2024 and June 2024. Throughout this extensive period, the researcher encountered numerous challenges, overcame obstacles, and experienced moments of profound insight and enjoyment, ultimately culminating in the acquisition of novel knowledge and a deeper understanding of the research subject matter. The researcher's perseverance and dedication to the project were instrumental in navigating the ebbs and flows of the research journey, ultimately yielding a substantial contribution to the academic community.

The researcher's extensive experience of over seventeen years, residing and serving among the Lai people in Lawngtlai district of Mizoram, has fostered a profound affinity and motivation to investigate this ethnic group as the focal point of her study. Immersed in the Lai community, the researcher has developed a deep appreciation for their distinctive culture, language, and remarkable sense of loyalty and affection towards their ethnic identity. This has culminated in a fascination with the emergence of the *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran* (LIKBK) church, a phenomenon that warrants scholarly exploration. Leveraging her unique positionality, the researcher has accessed ground-zero information, engaging in participant observation that enables an ethnographic methodology. This approach permits an intimate understanding of the Lai people's experiences, practices, and beliefs, yielding a rich tapestry of data that will illuminate the research findings. By situating herself within the field, the researcher has cultivated a nuanced comprehension of the Lai community's dynamics, poised to contribute meaningfully to the academic discourse on this captivating topic.

Prior to the main study, a pilot study was conducted among a purposeful sample of ten individuals, carefully selected to represent diverse perspectives and experiences within the Lai community. This pilot study included representatives from various stakeholders, such as pastors, retired pastors, church elders, deacons, women and youth leaders, and men's wing members. The selection of pilot study participants was deliberate and strategic, aiming to elicit rich and nuanced insights into the Lai culture, the impact of British colonisation and Christianity on the community, the factors leading to the emergence of the ethnic-based LIK BK church, and the socioeconomic, cultural, and political reforms and impacts the church has had on the Lai community at large. By conducting this pilot study, the researcher sought to refine the research instrument, ensure data quality, and maximise the validity of the findings. Following the pilot study, the researcher refined the interview schedule by rephrasing, rearranging, and remodeling certain questions to align with the specific objectives of the study. This iterative process enabled the researcher to enhance the validity and reliability of the data collection tool, ensuring a more effective and efficient data collection process. The pilot study thus served as a valuable precursor to the main study, providing the researcher with invaluable insights and practical tips for navigating the fieldwork. With the refined interview schedule in hand, the researcher proceeded to conduct the actual fieldwork between approximately ten (10) months of intensive fieldwork, spanning from October 4, 2022, to the middle of 2023, which also included the duration allocated for the pilot study.

During this time, the researcher rigorously applied the readjusted interview schedule to collect data from the participants, yielding a rich and robust dataset that would subsequently be analysed and interpreted to address the research questions and objectives.

During the fieldwork, the researcher encountered numerous challenges that tested her resolve and perseverance. The geographical inaccessibility of remote villages, coupled with the lack of reliable transportation, posed significant obstacles. The researcher had to navigate treacherous terrain, often on foot, due to muddy roads that rendered vehicles inoperable during the rainy season. Despite these hardships, the researcher remained steadfast in her pursuit of data collection, recognising that every challenging

experience was a valuable learning opportunity. Moreover, the researcher faced the additional challenge of scheduling interviews with respondents who led busy lives, juggling office work, agricultural responsibilities, and domestic duties. This necessitated frequent rescheduling of appointments, which consumed considerable time and effort. However, the researcher remained patient and persistent, reminding herself of the importance of her research goals. Notwithstanding these difficulties, the researcher was heartened by the willingness and cooperation of all respondents throughout the interview process. Their enthusiasm and engagement mitigated the challenges faced, making the fieldwork experience ultimately rewarding and fruitful. The researcher's determination and resilience in the face of adversity yielded a rich and valuable dataset, a testament to her unwavering commitment to her research objectives.

A particularly noteworthy aspect of the research experience was the privilege of being invited into the private spaces of the LIKBK women theologians, who shared their intimate struggles, dreams, and grievances with the researcher. Despite being equally qualified and dedicated to their studies, they faced gender-based discrimination within their church community, being denied appointments as pastors or church elders, unlike their male counterparts. This personal invitation was a testament to the researcher's ability to build trust and rapport with the participants, fostered by her 17-year tenure as a government servant within the Lai community. Her proficiency in the local language and cultural understanding enabled her to connect with the community on a deeper level, transcending mere researcher-participant dynamics. This unique access granted the researcher invaluable insights into the lived experiences of these women theologians, providing a rich and nuanced understanding of their challenges and resilience. The researcher's acceptance as a member of the tribe, rather than an outsider, was a humbling experience that underscored the importance of cultural sensitivity and community engagement in research. In addition, in a few exceptional cases, telephonic interviews were conducted, some of which extended beyond an hour. The researcher is grateful that despite the prolonged duration, all respondents remained highly cooperative and engaged, showing no signs of fatigue or boredom. Their unwavering interest and enthusiasm throughout the interviews were truly appreciated, facilitating

the collection of rich and valuable data. The researcher's ability to build rapport and maintain participant engagement over the phone was a notable achievement, ensuring the success of these exceptional interviews.

Throughout the research journey, the researcher has acquired invaluable insights and lessons, notwithstanding the challenges encountered. Foremost among these is the paramount importance of ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of respondents, an ethical consideration that was meticulously upheld throughout the study. Additionally, the researcher too, recognised the significance of promptly documenting key points immediately after fieldwork, a practice that proved instrumental in capturing nuanced insights and facilitating data analysis. When employing a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, extreme care must be exercised in designing interview schedules. This involves repeatedly assessing whether the questions align with the research objectives, thereby ensuring the generation of data amenable to analysis. Furthermore, the researcher discovered the value of engaging with elderly individuals, regardless of their literacy level, as a rich source of firsthand information, particularly when exploring historical aspects of the Lai culture. Their knowledge and perspectives proved invaluable in reconstructing the past and understanding the origins of the LIKBK Church. What struck the researcher as particularly remarkable was the extensive knowledge displayed by all respondents, both young and old, regarding their history and cultural heritage. Their unwavering determination to preserve their unique culture in the face of rapid acculturation and assimilation was truly impressive, and a testament to the resilience of their community. This experience has not only deepened the researcher's appreciation for the importance of cultural preservation but also underscored the significance of rigorous academic inquiry in illuminating the experiences and perspectives of marginalised communities.

3.12 Analysis of Data

The data so collected were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. For quantitative analysis, following the framework of Busenitz et al. (2000), Fogel (2001) and Manolova et al. (2008), Pou and Mishra (2013) who used Five-point and two-point Likert scales to measure the opinions of the *Poumai Naga* villagers on various elements of five

institutional dimensions, respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement on a five-point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree or oppose (agree, disagree, neutral, oppose and strongly oppose), and two-point Likert scale with 'yes' or 'no' against each statement. Additionally, Tonayan et al. (2010) also used the Likert scale and methods of multiple imputations of missing values to solve the missing data problem in the sample survey data. Following these above statements, the interview schedule was designed including open-ended and close-ended questions, with a mixture of nominal, ordinal, Likert scales, and dichotomous questions. Additionally, statistical tools percentages, and frequency have been incorporated in investigating the Lai culture before and after the advent of Christianity, the role of the LIKBK as an ethno-religious movement, and socio-economic and political transformations by the LIKBK in the Lai society.

Initially, a 'qualitative analysis' was conducted, starting with a 'Content analysis' of secondary data sources. These sources included documents, government records, colonial accounts, and newspaper articles. A systematic and objective approach to data analysis was carried out by categorising, coding, and quantifying specific words, themes, and concepts within the texts. This process aimed to identify patterns, frequencies, and relationships within the contexts. Secondly, a 'narrative analysis tool' was employed to gain insights into the respondents' ways of narrating incidents and stories. The researcher thus analysed the structure, contents and meaning of these narratives from case studies and interviews conducted in order to gain insights into how individuals make sense of their experiences, construct identities and communicate their perspectives. The researchers also delved into the plot, settings, characters and themes within the narratives by examining how the interviewees constructed meanings, conveyed sentiments, depicted lived experiences, and situated themselves within the story.

3.13 Research Question

Considering the impacts of Christianity on the Mizo culture as a whole and the Lai culture in particular from the previous chapter on statement of the problem, a big question does arise on whether 'religion do better or more harm for the society or does it bring unity or division?' This has been the subject of intense debate for centuries.

The study of religion, therefore, becomes indispensable in order to learn more about how different aspects of human life- politics, science, literature, art, law, economic- have been continuing to be shaped by changing religious notion of good and evil, salvation and punishment, unity and diversity and so on. It has thus, become the challenging task of a researcher to analyse the role of Religion in relation to society, be it positive or negative role. In other words, does the Church serve as a dual force, either dividing or integrating? All these dilemmas and confusions and the question of identity have put the Lai people in an awkward position wherein the people started to develop a strong urge to revive and reform their traditional culture along with the line of Christian teachings. Is this the very core reason for the birth of ethnic-churches in Mizoram such as *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran* (LIKBK) which is the chosen study-area located in the southern Mizoram of Lawngtlai? Or has the LIKBK Movement been successful in bringing about socio-economic reforms within the society? The study thus attempted to systematically answer these intriguing questions through an in-depth sociological analysis employing relevant sociological theories as well as combining such statements through extensive fieldwork.

3.14 Ethical Considerations in the Research Conducted

During the research process, the researcher made every effort to ensure compliance with all rules, regulations, and ethical codes of conduct. However, it is possible that despite their best intentions, the researcher may have inadvertently overlooked certain ethical considerations. Nevertheless, the researcher endeavored to uphold ethical standards throughout the study. Given that the research topic pertains to ethnicity issues, which are highly sensitive in today's world, the researcher proceeded with meticulous care and caution. Therefore, the study strictly adhered to the following research ethics and norms observed and followed in the field of social science research:

1. The researcher made every effort to avoid any misleading or false information and abstained from all forms of bias while collecting primary data. In this context, bias specifically refers to denominational and ethnic biases that could potentially lead to misinterpretation of the data.

2. The researcher ensured the avoidance of data fabrication or falsification. All data collected, whether through direct fieldwork or secondary sources, originated from authentic sources with proper citations.
3. The researcher made a conscious effort to avoid exaggerating the aims and objectives of the study. Instead, the researcher approached the study in a natural manner, adhering to realistic settings and expectations.
4. Assurance of confidentiality was provided to all respondents participating in the research. Furthermore, all pictures and photographs taken during the research were done with prior consent from individuals and institutions involved.
5. The researcher made special efforts to build rapport with all the respondents. As the researcher had been living with the Lai people under study for a prolonged period and was able to communicate with them in their language, rapport building was not a concern, and no communication gaps were observed. In fact, the interviewees were very cooperative and openly shared their true feelings with the researcher, which greatly facilitated the accuracy of the findings.
6. The researcher maintained punctuality, transparency, and honesty with all respondents throughout the study.
7. The researcher ensured that all respondents understood that the purpose of the study was purely academic in nature.
8. The interview sessions, including the scheduling of dates, times, and locations, were arranged according to the convenience of the respondents. While this approach extended the time span of the fieldwork, it proved to be fruitful in ensuring the participation and cooperation of the respondents.
9. The respondents were fully informed about the purpose of the interview, and prior consent from each respondent was obtained. In fact, when informing them that the purpose of the study was to academically examine the LIKBK, they were very cooperative and expressed enthusiasm.
10. The cooperation and consent of the respondents and their families were prioritised, and no forceful means were utilised to avoid any potential complications thereafter.

3.15 Limitations of the Study

The primary focus of the study is on the *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Church* (LIKBK), examining it primarily through the conceptual framework of portraying LIKBK as an ethno-religious movement that has evolved over time into a formal religious institution. Hence, given its thematic specificity, the study may not offer a comprehensive representation of the broader religious landscape across the entire district. Nevertheless, it should be noted that due to LIKBK's status as the predominant church in Lawngtlai district, boasting the largest membership compared to other denominations, the study does indeed capture significant aspects of the religious landscape in Lawngtlai and it did represent the salient features of the religious profile of Lawngtlai. However, no study is perfect, no matter how elegant its design maybe. Just as any other research, this research may have its own limitations:

1. The scope of the research was limited to the district of Lawngtlai, which means that the findings may not provide a comprehensive representation of the study of religion across the entirety of Mizoram. Furthermore, the research specifically focuses on the *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran* (LIKBK) and its prominent influence within Lai society.
2. The study predominantly took place in Lawngtlai town areas the capital of the district where the central office of the LIKBK is located and it also encompassed various rural villages where LIKBK churches are actively engaged in the reform works for the Lai society. Certainly, the study also considered preaching stations located outside Mizoram, such as in Shillong, Delhi, and Kolkata. However, the researcher initially conducted telephonic interviews with individuals associated with these stations. Subsequently, when these individuals happened to visit Aizawl and Lawngtlai, the researcher arranged in-person meetings by scheduling appointments within their tight travel itineraries.
3. Given the dominance of Christianity within the district, the study predominantly focuses on Christianity and its influence on Lai culture and

identity. Consequently, the exploration of minor religious denominations may be limited.

4. Other minor religious communities like the Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists could not be taken into account in order to study their mutual influences and interactions in the context of Lawngtlai since they are minor religious group and do not take active role in the process of bringing about changes in the social structure of the society.

3.16 Chapterisation Schemes

1. Introduction.
2. Review of literature.
3. Methodology.
4. The Lai culture during the pre and post advent of Christianity.
5. The LIKBK as an ethno-religious reform movement.
6. The socio-economic and political transformations in the Lai society.
7. The role of sub-members of LIKBK in social transformation of Lai Society.
8. Summary and conclusion.

CHAPTER IV
THE PRE AND POST CHRISTIANITY LAI CULTURE

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Lai Cultural Norms, Values and Christianity

4.3 Changing Lai Marriage System and Practices

4.4 Customary Divorce Settlement in Post-Christian Era

4.5 Christianity and Changing Status of Lai Women

4.6 Christianity and Changes in Lai Funeral Practices

4.7 Family Bonds, ‘Social Ties’ and ‘We Feeling’

4.8 Lai Traditional Dress and Dance in Post-Christian Era

4.9 Christianity and Assimilation of Lai Language

4.10 An Overview

CHAPTER IV

THE PRE AND POST CHRISTIANITY LAI CULTURE

4.1 Introduction

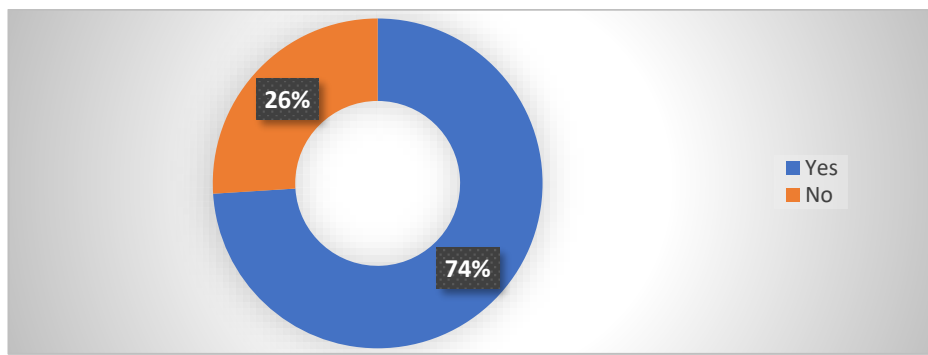
This chapter offers a critical examination of the comprehensive portrayal of Christianity, highlighting its dual function: both constructive and destructive, in relation to the preservation and alteration of Lai culture; it contends that the half-hearted attention of the pioneer Christian Missionaries have served as the primary catalysts for the assimilation of Lai culture which has thus paved the way for the emergence of LIKBK. The changes and alterations that have been brought about in the various cultural aspects like norms, values, social ties, marriage and divorce, customary laws, status of women, funeral practices, nature of family and communal bonds, issues of cultural assimilation pertaining to Lai traditional dress, dance and Lai language, have been thoroughly covered in this chapter. After analysing both the constructive and destructive changes brought about by Christianity in the Lai culture, the study thus concludes that the ‘Hegemonic Christianity’ instigates dual processes of change- westernisation and modernisation.

4.2 Lai Cultural Norms, Values and Christianity

Bierstedt (1938: 204-216) suggests that cultural norm can be understood as a guiding rule or standard shaping our behaviour within social contexts. He elaborates that norm serves as cultural specification directing our conduct within society. Similarly, Parsons (1951) contends that individual actions are influenced by norms, which can be internalised through diverse factors. Examining Christianity in this context, it is evaluated whether it serves as the benchmark for internalising standardised behaviour within Lai culture. It is observed that majority of the participants (74 percent, 295 respondents) agree that Christianity is the main factor that has brought decline in the norms and values of the Lai culture. (Figure 4.1). As previously noted in Chapter 1, Christianity in Lawngtlai arrived considerably later in comparison to neighbouring tribes residing in the northern division of Mizoram. Whereas other regions of Mizoram

were acquainted with the Christian gospel as early as 1893 with the courtesy of the pioneering efforts of William Williams, the formal documentation of Christians in Lawngtlai dates back only to the year 1912 (Chinzah, 2019:15). Moreover, with the arrival of the British colonist upon the land of the Lai people in 1889 (Bawitlung, 2012:14), radical changes had been inflicted in the typical Lai Culture. In line with these arguments, the study firstly, delves into the changes in the cultural norms and values experienced by the Lai culture with the coming of Christianity.

Figure 4.1: Respondents' Percentage in Relation to Christianity, Social Norms and Values



Source: Fieldwork

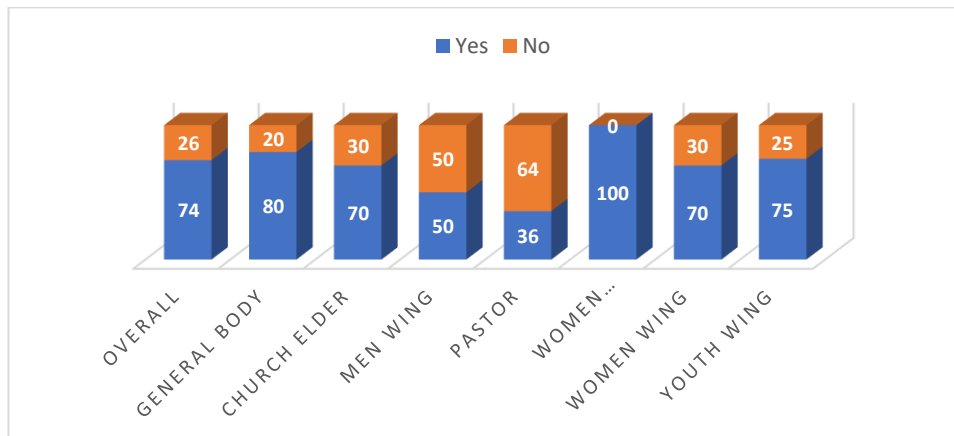
Most of the participants argue in line with Parsons' (1951) statement saying that Christianity is the main factor for bringing about changes through the internalisation of Christian cultural values and norms. However, these changes may not always be favourable for the society. Specific changes that have been mentioned by the participants may be summed up through one participant's quote as:

In the Christian era, traditional norms such as respect for elders have dwindled, especially among educated youths, marking one of the most regrettable consequences of Christianity's influence.' (Lalthakima). Furthermore, echoing this sentiment, another respondent has argued that, *'Certain aspects of our cherished Lai way of life have undergone alterations due to Christianity. In the era predating Christianity, there was a deep-seated reverence for parents, and responding with harsh or disrespectful words was viewed as a curse. However, in modern times, this level of reverence for parents appears to have declined.* (Hmangaihzauva)

However, in the sub-categorisation of respondents, significant numbers of pastor (64%) and men wing (50%) do not agree as such. (Figure 4.2). Upon careful investigations for the reasons why considerable percentages from men wing and pastors, who are the sternest upholders of Christian values amongst all the sub groups, are having such an opinion, it may be answered through the following Pastor's statement, who however has agreed that traditional norms have been declining, nevertheless, Christian norms, that is, the better version of the traditional norms have positively replaced the Lai Cultural norms as:

I don't think cultural norms and values had declined with the advent of Christianity. However, I do agree that the Christian norms have replaced our cultural norms, but, let me say that cultural norms like 'respect for elders', 'love for neighbours and family' are similarly taught by the Christian norms. Therefore, I don't find much difference. (John)

Figure 4.2: Classification of participants based on the sub-group



Source: Fieldwork

The question on whether Christian norms has positively changed the traditional norm have been reacted by one respondent asserting that: *'We tend to lose honesty after becoming Christianity. In the olden days, instances of robbery were hardly heard of wherein nobody made it as a habit to lock their houses to prevent robbery. Therefore, the present Christian era witnesses a decline in social norms and values.'* (Muanzuali). Moreover, the most boasted and highly acclaimed culture of all the Zo-ethnic tribes, that is, *'tlawmngaihna'* (a self- sacrificing nature for other's good) has also been

tainted as was mentioned by one respondent as: *'Yes, I totally agree that cultural norms and values have been declining after embracing Christianity because norms and values like self-altruism (tlawmngaihna), honesty and the like have been slowly eroding with the coming of Christianity.'* (K. Lalfakmawii)

Drawing from Ingen., et.al (2015) who made an observation of the Dutch society and asserted that social norms and values has been declining with the advent of Christianity wherein both positive and negative changes had been witnessed, the study may likewise, be resolved that all the traditional social norms and values have been declining with the advent of Christianity wherein the 'Christian norms' have been gradually replacing the cherished cultural norms either by replacing them or by altering the structure of social norms and values. It may however, be noted that the traditional norms are not completely wiped out of the structure, rather, changes and alteration are seen.

4.3 Changing Lai Marriage System and Practices

Marriage practices refer to the customs, traditions, and laws surrounding the union of two people in a committed relationship, recognised by their community, society, or government. These practices vary across cultures and may include - religious or spiritual ceremonies, legal registration, exchange of vows or rings, celebration with family and friends, cultural or traditional rituals, legal rights and responsibilities. (Murdock, 1949; Mykhalniuk, 2021). Likewise, the Lai people had a unique marriage practices in the ancient times. In the Lai traditional marriage customs, marriage proposal and arrangement were typically overseen by a *'Bialamkaltu'* (*Palai*/mediator), often chosen from within the family circle in ancient times. These intermediaries exercised great care in selecting suitable life partners, ensuring that the chosen bride and her family met certain criteria. They avoided individuals and families afflicted by undesirable traits and circumstances, such as *'hnamnei'* (*'khawhring'* in Mizo), a covetous spirit known for causing severe stomach cramps unless its demands were met. Additionally, they steered clear of descendants of individuals with criminal backgrounds, like murderers, thieves, or habitual liars. They also sought to avoid unions with families who had experienced unnatural deaths, such as sudden or accidental demises referred to as *'sarthi.'* Moreover, they refrained from considering

women from families associated with adultery or slavery ('*Bawi*' or '*sal*'). (Kompa, 2018:210).

Following the introduction of Christianity, monogamy became the prevailing form of marriage among the Lai community. However, in ancient times, polygamy was practiced by chiefs and noble men. While a man was permitted to have multiple wives, only the children of one specific wife, known as the '*Nutak*,' were entitled to inheritance rights. To designate his preferred wife, a husband underwent a ceremonial ritual called '*Arnak*' with her, ensuring that she became his primary or favored spouse, and their offspring would inherit his property. The other wives were referred to as '*Nuchhun*,' and their children had no claim to their father's assets. (The Pawi- Lakher Autonomous Region Inheritance of Property Act, 1959; Vanlalringa, 2012:28).

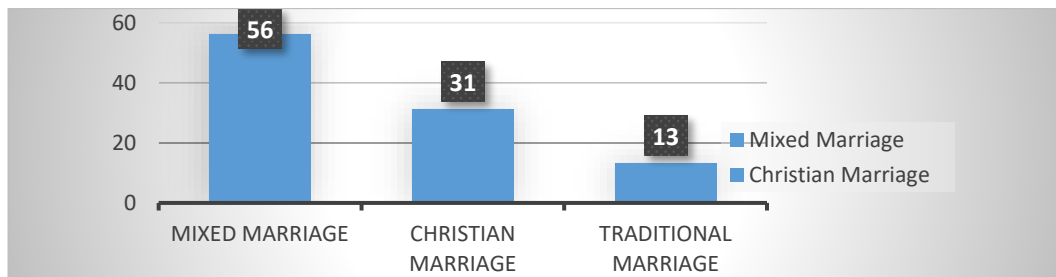
The prevalent form of marriage among the Lai community is known as *Taitipur*, which involves the mediation of a '*Bialamkaltu*'. In this arrangement, the bride's maternal grandfather, referred to as '*Pucing*', often hosts a large feast for the entire community, typically involving the slaughter of four or more pigs. As a customary response, the bridegroom reciprocates this gesture by slaughtering pigs of similar or sometimes even greater in size and number, a practice known as '*delh*'. However, this custom was primarily observed among the affluent members of society till today. Another form of marriage is known as '*Rawlti*' or elopement which remains prevalent commonly in tribal communities. This type of marriage occurs when the parents from both sides oppose the union. In such cases, the mediator may facilitate the marriage by visiting the girl's house with a gift known as '*Hmaitlam*'. This offering, usually provided by the boy's parents, is typically valued at no less than one thousand rupees (₹1000) in today's time and serves as a token of apology for any offense caused to the girl's parents. It is important to note that this gift is separate from the bride's price. In the past, the bride-price varied among different clans, and there was no fixed amount. For instance, the daughter of a chief might command a higher bride-price, often in the form of a pair of mithun (known as *se nupa*), while commoners' bride-prices tended to be lower. This tradition still persists today, with bride-prices continuing to differ from clan to clan. To establish a standardised system, the Lai Autonomous District Council implemented fixed marriage prices outlined in the *Lai Hnam* Draft Bill of 2009, which was redrafted

in 2020 (Lai Customary Law and Practices, ‘*Lai Hnam Dan*’, 2020) which remain in effect till today. These prices are as follows:

- A. *Manpui/Mantung* (Main price): (a) *Phunthawh Ruangdir* - ₹. 1000.00 (b) *Phunthawh Bel* - Small jar
- B. *Pu Man* (Marriage price for the maternal uncle): ₹ 1000.00
- C. *Mantang/Manhrang* (subordinate price): (a) *Pa man* (Marriage price for the bride’s father’s brother) - ₹ 500.00 (b) *Ta man* (Marriage price for the bride’s brother or her maternal or paternal cousin) - ₹. 500.00 (c) *Nu man* (Marriage price given to the girl’s mother’s sister) - ₹. 300.00 (d) *Ni man* (Marriage price given to the sister of the girl’s father) - ₹. 300.00
- D. *Mantesep* (additional prices): (a) *Kawi man* (Marriage price given to the best friend of the bride’s father or grandfather) - ₹. 100.00 (b) *Maw man* (Marriage price given to the girl’s best friend) - ₹. 150.00 (c) *Tang phah puan* (Traditional cloth given to the sister of the bride’s father) - 1-piece (d) *Charsut phawi man* (Price given to the bride’s unmarried sister) - ₹. 200.00 (e) *Upa chaw* (Price given to a mentor in fixing and distributing the bride-price) - ₹. 200.00

The Lai people has been deviated to a considerable extent when it comes to marriage practices after the advent of Christianity wherein the typical practice of Lai marriage has been partially supplanted by the Christian institution of Church marriage, blending it with some traditional form of marriage practices. This choice of mixed marriage is still the first preference (56%, 223 persons) as shown in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: Respondents’ Percentage on Choice between Mixed, Christian and Traditional Marriages



Source: Fieldwork

Mixed Form of Marriage (A Blend of Traditional Form of Marriage and Modern Christian Marriage)

The main reasons for choosing the mixed form of marriage have been attributed to the still lingering of traditional culture in the minds of the Lai people that they could not completely detach from as was mentioned in the quotes:

In the present era, we commonly follow modern Christian marriage customs, although some aspects of the traditional Lai marriage system, notably the notion of bride price, persist. However, the bride price is now typically less extravagant compared to earlier times, typically ranging around Rs. 5000/- or more, with variations in specific amounts among different clans. Clan members come together to collectively decide the suitable bride price for a particular circumstance. Hence, there remains a fusion of Christian marriage practices with elements of traditional Lai marriage. (Lalhmunmawii)

Modern Christian Marriage

However, 31% of participants with a frequency of 133 prefers the Christian Marriage. The reasons for choosing the Lai traditional marriage as mentioned below truly depict the typical Lai marriage practices which makes them unique from all other tribes in Mizoram. The transition from the Lai traditional marriage system to the modern Christian marriage system marks a significant cultural shift from a highly stratified, class-based selection of life partners to a more egalitarian and free approach. Historically, the Lai system mandated that individuals marry within their social class, reinforcing rigid societal divisions. In contrast, the modern Christian era, influenced by Christian values of equality and individual choice, allows greater freedom in selecting life partners irrespective of social status. This change promotes social equality and personal autonomy, highlighting the positive impact of Christian principles on marriage practices and societal norms as was mentioned by one respondent as:

I am inclined towards the modern Christian marriage as the Lai traditional marriage system was marked by a highly stratified system in selecting life partners, where individuals from the chief clan were expected to marry within

the same clan, while those considered as slaves were obligated to marry only within the slave class. In the modern Christian era, we enjoy greater freedom in choosing life partners, and this positive change is attributed to Christianity.”
(M. Lalkhama)

In the pre-Christian era, families were extremely cautious in selecting life partners, ensuring that the chosen bride or bridegroom's lineage was free from 'khawhring' (possessed by a greedy evil spirit), murder, robbery, or unnatural deaths (Sarathi) as was mentioned by another respondent as:

In the pre- Christian era, every family were very cautious when it came to selection of a life partner. They would see to it that the descendants of the chosen bride or bridegroom were free from 'khawhring' (Hnamnei or possessed by a greedy evil spirit), murder case, robbery or persons who died due to sudden and unnatural death (Sarathi). Christianity has changed this rigid marriage system and we are no longer as cautious as before.”
(Hmangaihzauva)

This meticulous scrutiny aimed to maintain social and moral purity within the community. However, with the advent of Christianity, these rigid criteria have significantly relaxed. The Christian influence has shifted the focus towards individual choice and the intrinsic worth of the person, reducing the emphasis on ancestral background and allowing for greater freedom in marriage decisions. This evolution reflects a broader move towards personal autonomy and away from traditional superstitions and rigid social norms.

Another respondent has also narrated a helpless picture when it comes to adhering towards Christian marriage as:

We are left with little choice when it comes to choosing between Christian Marriage or Lai traditional Marriage system because after becoming Christians, all the cultural norms have been replaced by Christian norms. Therefore, being a Christian, even though I am Lai, I need to follow the Christian norms of marriage so as to avoid societal judgement. Nowadays, even couple who are engaged in pre-marital relationship always see to it that

they take vows in the Church regardless of their qualification to do so.
(Fanchun)

The shift to Christianity has effectively supplanted traditional Lai marriage norms with Christian practices, leaving little choice for individuals in terms of adhering to cultural customs. As a result, Lai Christians must follow Christian marriage norms to avoid societal judgment. This societal pressure is so strong that even couples engaged in pre-marital relationships ensure they take their vows in the Church, emphasising the dominant influence of Christian values and the need to conform to these norms for social acceptance.

A Christian Church marriage, with God and the Church as witnesses, is perceived to strengthen and enhance the durability of the union compared to traditional Lai customary marriage, as was mentioned by one religious person as:

In today's world, we normally practice a Christian Church marriage as God and the Church being the witness of the Marriage. I feel that this church marriage makes the marriage stronger and more durable as compared to Lai customary marriage. (M. Lalthuamlia)

The preference for modern Christian marriage over traditional Lai marriage is influenced by its cost-effectiveness and the reduction of socioeconomic disparities in marriage ceremonies and mate selection. Unlike the traditional Lai system, which often involved elaborate and expensive rituals that highlighted the gap between the rich and the poor, Christian marriages offer a simpler and more inclusive approach. This relative relaxation in both the financial burden and social stratification makes modern Christian marriages more accessible and appealing to a broader range of people, promoting equality and reducing financial strain, as was rightly mentioned as:

I prefer the modern Christian marriage because it is less expensive and the gap between the rich and poor in terms of marriage ceremony and mate selection is relatively relaxed as compared to the traditional Lai marriage. (Lalthakima)

The shift from traditional Lai marriage customs to modern Christian marriage practices has brought about significant cultural and social changes. Traditionally, Lai marriages

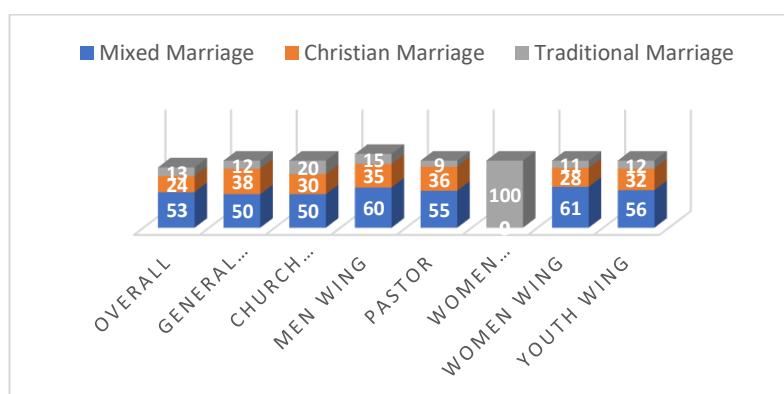
were characterised by rigid social stratification, meticulous scrutiny of lineage, and elaborate, costly ceremonies. With the advent of Christianity, these norms have been replaced by more egalitarian and less expensive practices, emphasising individual choice and equality before God. This transition has reduced the socioeconomic disparities associated with marriage and promoted stronger, more enduring unions by placing the Church and God as central witnesses. Consequently, many Lai individuals now prefer Christian marriages for their inclusivity, affordability, and alignment with contemporary value.

Traditional Customary Marriage

Interestingly, 13% with a frequency of 52 have chosen the traditional marriage system over the Christian marriage or the Mixed form of marriage. One notable quote as mentioned by a typical Lai man, expressing his high sentiments over the Lai tribe is presented as: *‘As a Lai tribe, I still prefer the traditional Lai marriage system over the Christian marriage as I don’t fancy wearing a western dress in the Church wedding and even in my marriage ceremony, me and my wife, we were wearing the typical Lai attire. It would be beneficial if the LIKBK initiates a church guideline promoting the use of Lai attire during weddings.’* (L. Siamhleikima)

Additionally, it is found that from the sub-group division of the respondents, the women theologians (100%) opt relatively higher among the other sub-group for traditional form of marriage. (see Figure 4.4)

Figure 4.4: Classification of participants based on the sub-group



Source: Fieldwork

The main reason for choosing this traditional form of marriage, despite being an educated women theologian, has been mentioned by one respondent as:

I am still favouring the traditional Lai marriage practice of sending mediator to the parents asking for the bride's hand and giving bride- price as per the customary law. As an educated woman. I feel that we should strictly adhere to the Lai traditional marriage system, as this practice signifies that woman are still highly respected in our society (C. Lalrawngbawli)

Upon careful observation of the church-elder group, it is also noticed that the percentage of undergraduate (UG) church elders belonging to rural areas opted for traditional form of marriage are relatively high in numbers as against the other criteria of division.

The main reason for choosing the traditional form of marriage as mentioned by one church-elder, belonging to a typical Lai village in Sangau was that:

I still find value in the traditional Lai marriage system. Among the Lai people, we continue the practice of presenting a bride price called 'Phunthawh' as the principal amount. In situations where there's an elopement, we provide 'Hmaitlam' to the bride's parents as a form of compensation for any perceived defamation to the girl and her family. In rare cases where the 'Hmaitlam' is not accepted, the marriage cannot proceed. The role of the maternal uncle ('Pucing') remains significant, and a designated mediator is dispatched by the groom's parents to seek the bride's hand in marriage. The maternal uncle may set specific demands for the bride price, and on occasion, he might even sacrifice three or more big pigs to feed the entire community. If this occurs, the groom's side is expected to match this gesture by slaughtering an equivalent or a greater number of pigs known as 'Delh.' These customary practices persist today, especially among affluent families that makes our Lai culture unique. (Lalawmpuia)

Therefore, the study concludes that when it comes to marriage, the Lai people still follow a mixed form of marriage, that is, a blend of the traditional custom bound marriage and modern church marriage. Besides, the payment of bride price and the

role of mediator (*palai/bialamkaltu*) are still strictly adhered to even which Christianity cannot alter much even though a church marriage is considered a must in today's world. Nevertheless, marriage is no longer as expensive as it was in the pre-Christian era.

4.4 Customary Divorce Settlement in Post-Christian Era

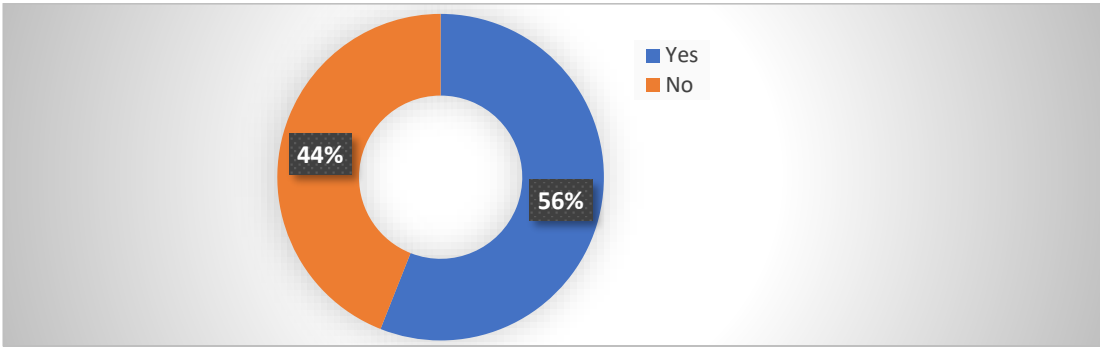
The tribal communities in North East India, including the Lai people, have their own distinct customary laws governing divorce, which are shaped by their unique cultural practices and traditions. These laws are protected by the Indian Constitution, which recognises and respects the diversity of tribal customs and traditions, promoting legal pluralism (Tombing, 2017). The Lai people have their own drafted customary law, which explicitly outlines their divorce laws, showcasing the community's autonomy in managing their personal laws. Divorce customary law among tribals varies depending on the specific tribal community and region. Lloyd (1991:158), a Welsh missionary avowed that the chief apprehension of the early Christian Church in Mizoram in regard to marriage was the high prevalence of quick and uncomplicated divorce in which the men divorced their wives at ease. Even the South Lushai Hills were not free from such 'easy divorce' which impelled J.H. Lorraine, the southern Missionary pioneer to make a petition to the government for imposing fine of ₹60 payable to the church which was however regarded as uncalled for by the government. (Lorrain, 1910; Ralte, 2023:150). The church thus took the initiative of drafting regulations of marriage and divorce rules which was requisite to all the Mizo Christians.

Among the Lai, '*Inmak*' represents the most prevalent form of divorce, wherein the husband settles all marriage-related payments, and the wife reclaims her dowry, known as '*thilchhawm*'. '*Sumchhuah*' denotes a divorce initiated by the wife, where she returns the entire bride-price due to her strong desire to end the marriage. '*Sumlaitan*' signifies a divorce based on mutual agreement, with the marriage price being evenly divided between the husband and wife. In cases of adultery by the wife, she is labeled as '*uire*' and is obligated to return the entire bride-price, while custody of the children typically remains with the husband. If the wife becomes mentally incapacitated, the husband must endure for a minimum of three years; failing recovery within this timeframe

permits divorce through '*Peksachang*', resulting in the forfeiture of the marriage price. Conversely, if the husband becomes mentally incapacitated and the wife initiates divorce before three years, it constitutes '*sumchhuah*', requiring the return of the bride-price. Lai customary law also allows the wife to seek divorce due to the husband's impotence for a period exceeding six months, referred to as '*nukaitheilo*'. Lastly, '*chhuping*' denotes a divorce initiated by the wife due to the inability to consummate the marriage for over six months. (Vanlalringa, 2012:42).

Taking into account the aforementioned statements, the study endeavors to explore the impact of Christianity on the Lai Customary Law of Divorce System. Findings from the study indicate that significant majority of respondents (56%, 225 persons, as illustrated in Figure 4.5) express positive sentiments regarding the changes instigated by Christian teachings. However, men-wing from the periphery (64%) and rural areas (100%), who are mostly undergraduates (56%) do not agree that divorce system have undergone much changes with the coming of Christianity (See Table 4.2).

Figure 4.5: Overall Respondents’ Percentage in Support or Against Changes in The Lai Customary Law Divorce Settlement in The Post-Christian Era



Source: Field Data

In line with Lloyd’s (1991:158) and Ralte’s (2023:150) arguments that highlighted a positive change brought about by Christianity in the divorce settlement, the study similarly reveals that 56% (225 persons) of the respondents argue that Christianity had brought about positive changes in the Lai divorce system, wherein one Pastor had validated this argument as follows:

Divorce settlement has undergone changes with the coming of Christianity. The church frequently assists troubled marriages, offering guidance in accordance with the Biblical teachings. If reconciliation proves unattainable within a specified period (as stipulated in the church's Constitution), the Church may grant permission for individuals to remarry. In case of adultery, the offender may face disciplinary action or excommunication from the Church, while the innocent partner is granted the freedom to pursue remarriage at their discretion. (Rev John)

Besides the above point, another positive impact of Christianity on divorce settlement, which has now equally favoured the mother with that of the father, had also been mentioned by one prominent local historian as:

In ancient times, the Lai Customary Law typically favored fathers in matters concerning divorce and child custody. However, in the present Christian era, women now have the opportunity to obtain custody of their children as well, based on mutual agreement. Besides, women are no longer left empty-handed when it comes to settling matters of divorce. (Mr. Bawihlung)

Christianity, with its core teachings of compassionate understanding and forgiveness as exemplified by Christ, has positively influenced marital affairs by promoting empathy, selflessness, and reconciliation, as was mentioned by a women wing leader as:

Christianity has given rise to a greater sense of compassionate understanding and forgiveness in our society, all in the name of Christ. These principles have automatically affected the marital affairs in a positive manner. (Mrs. Zoramsangi)

These principles encourage spouses to support one another, resolve conflicts amicably, and uphold mutual respect and dignity, thereby fostering stronger, more harmonious, and enduring marriages.

Contrary to the above statement, a notable proportion of 44% (176 individuals), primarily consisting of uneducated men-wing from rural (100%) areas as shown in

Table 4.1, contend that Christianity has not substantially altered Lai divorce settlements.

Table 4.1: Men Wing's Opinions Towards Lai Divorce Settlements

Preference	Core	Rural	Periphery	Graduate	UG
	Nos (%)	Nos (%)	Nos (%)	Nos (%)	Nos (%)
Yes	7 (78)	0 (0)	4 (36)	3 (75)	8 (44)
No	2 (22)	7 (100)	7 (64)	1 (25)	10 (56)
Total	9 (100)	7 (100)	11 (100)	4 (100)	18 (100)

Source: Field data

This indicates that factors such as locality and educational attainment significantly influence adherence to Lai customary divorce laws. Ngurthanpuii and Geetha (2017:1086) support this viewpoint, aligning with the main argument of the men-wing. They argue that the introduction of modern education by Christian missionaries has led to the assertion of individual rights and freedoms, resulting in a diminished regard for the institutions of marriage and divorce compared to previous eras. Upon careful in-depth interviews conducted among the respondents, several key points emerged regarding their arguments for the perceived lack of significant changes brought about by Christianity in the Lai divorce system as follows:

Of course, divorce practice has undergone changes with the coming of Christianity. However, some of the divorce customary law like 'Mantung hlan let' (returning the principal bride-price) is still practised in today's time. (Regi, Lungzarhtum Village)

Besides the still lingering practice of 'Mantung Hlanlet', the study also reveals that the Lai Customary Laws regarding to divorce are still in practice as was mentioned by one Siachangkawn Village respondent from men-wing as:

Even after embracing Christianity for this long, I don't find much differences when it comes to divorce settlement because we still follow the Lai customary laws of divorce like 'sumchhuah' (returning back the bride-price by the wife's family) and 'inmak' (when a husband expels the wife from his house, the wife can take back her dowry). Therefore, Christianity does not alter our Lai divorce settlement. (Jeremy)

The Lai people are still inclined to follow the customary laws pertaining to divorce. However, it is observed that even though there are no prescribed rules of divorce, the Church does excommunicate members on some specified reasonable ground if the partners are found offending such rules, and the 'Remarriage License' is required to be obtained for remarriage and as such, it may be said that the process of divorce has become more complicated with the arrival of Christianity. However, the Lai people still strictly adheres to some basic traditional rules of divorce as was mentioned by another men-wing leader as:

Christianity does not have a prescribed rule of divorce and we still follow the Lai customary divorce law. However, Christianity does alter the divorce rules to some extent. (Vanlalfakmawia)

Therefore, Christianity has not much altered the Lai Customary Law. Even though slight changes have been seen in the Lai Customary, however, they still follow the Lai Customary Marriage practices like '*Hmaitlam*' (giving money to the bride's family as a gesture of apology when the lovers eloped due to disapproval by the family), '*tang phah*' (the practice of giving cloth to the husband's aunt) and '*phunthawh*' (the principal bride-price given to the bride's family without which the groom's future children will not be able to take the father's name). The study also indicates that there is variation in terms of locality, that is, rural vrs urban when it comes to divorce settlement, whereby the rural population still adhere to the Lai Customary Divorce Law as against the urban settlement.

4.5 Christianity and Changing Status of Lai Women

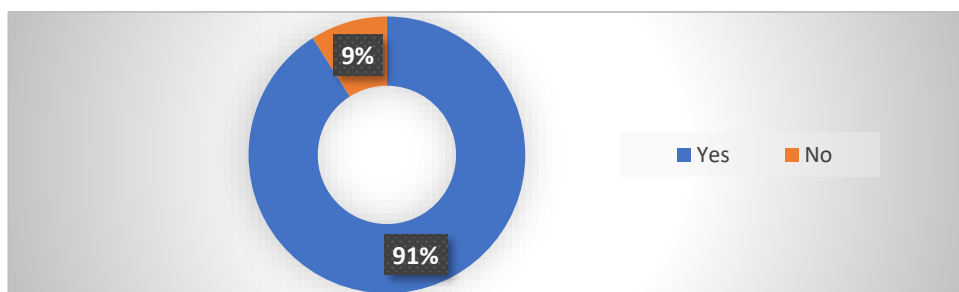
Christianity's impact on the status of women has been complex, with both positive and negative effects, including challenging patriarchal norms and promoting gender equality, encouraging education and economic empowerment, providing a sense of dignity and worth, gender roles and restricting women's autonomy. In the context of Mizoram, several such studies have also been initiated (Chakraborty, 2008; Lalhmingpuii and Namchoom, 2014; Vanlalthanpuii, 2019). Given the significant impact of Christianity on the Lai society, it is particularly intriguing to investigate the evolving status of women within this context, making it a compelling research

endeavor to explore how Christianity has influenced the roles, rights, and empowerment of women in Lai society.

Similar to other tribes in Mizoram, the ancient Lai community adhered to a traditional patriarchal structure where women had limited influence in various spheres such as social, political, economic, religious, and familial matters. This was primarily due to the absence of Christian missionaries in Lai areas, unlike in *Maras* and *Lunglei* areas, where missionaries like J.H. Lorraine, F.W. Savidge, and R.A. Lorraine played significant roles in establishing mission schools in *Serkawn (Lunglei)* and *Serkawr (Saiha)* (Chinzah, 2022:240). The introduction of the Montessori Method of Education by Miss Edith Chapman proved influential in reshaping the educational landscape. In Lawngtlai, Miss Chapman established an experimental school for girls in 1939 at *Chawnhu* and *Cheural* villages, offering classes from Nursery to Class III, which unfortunately closed down in 1941 (Chinzah, 2022:240). The Lai community experienced a delay in educational development due to its remote location from *Serkawn*. However, with the establishment of the Lai Autonomous District Council on April 29th, 1972, and the inauguration of the first English medium school by Mrs. *Ngurnunsangi Chinzah*, the Lai community has made significant strides in education, consequently impacting the status of Lai women positively. Furthermore, the formation of a powerful women's organization, the Lai Women Association (LWA), has contributed to the gradual consolidation of women's status within the community.

Angom (2020:59) posited that following the introduction of the new faith, women experienced increased empowerment and were considered equal to men. There was a shift away from the perception that domestic chores were solely the responsibility of women. Furthermore, the dynamics within married couples evolved from a hierarchical structure to one of equal partnership. Building upon this perspective, an analysis of the status of Lai women suggests that 91% of the respondents expressed agreement that Christianity serves as the primary catalyst for advancing the status of Lai women (refer to Figure 4.6).

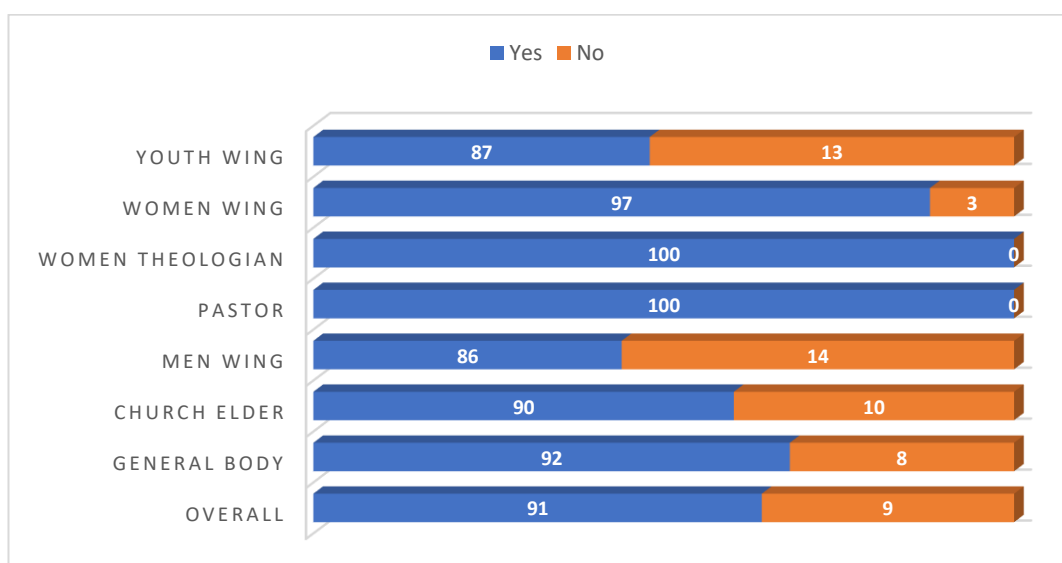
Figure 4.6: Overall Respondents' Opinion on Christianity and Changes in the Social Status of Lai Women



Source: Field Data

The classification of respondents into subgroups (See Figure 4.7) all yielded consistent responses, indicating a widespread agreement regarding the significant role of Christianity in the upliftment of women, whereby respondents commonly acknowledged Christianity's positive impact on improving the status of women.

Figure 4.7: Sub-Groups' Opinion on Christianity and Changes in the Social Status of Lai Women



Source: Field Data

In course of the fieldwork conducted, rare pictures of the despicable traditional status of women and the subsequent changes that have been taking place in the present Christian era have been truly revealed which are quoted as follows:

One of the notable outcomes of Christianity for women is the change in treatment for those who commit adultery, whereby one women-wing member asserted that:

In the past, these women faced humiliating punishments, including being forced to parade naked to their natal home, a practice justified even by Lai customary law. However, such disgraceful punishments are no longer practiced after the adoption of Christianity. (Lalthanpuii, women-wing member)

Besides the marked difference when it comes to the punishment of adultery, Christianity has significantly impacted the treatment of women, particularly concerning those who bear illegitimate children. A female theologian highlighted this change, stating:

I fully concur that Christianity has altered the position of women. In the era following Christianity's influence, women who bear illegitimate children (known as 'Lak fa' in the Lai language) are no longer ostracised by society. Rather, we express empathy towards them. (Mrs. Lalnuni).

This shift represents a move towards greater compassion and acceptance, contrasting with earlier societal norms that were more punitive and exclusionary towards these women. Besides, the advent of Christianity brought significant changes to the status of women, particularly in dispelling baseless superstitions and accusations, as one church-elder had appreciatively mentioned that:

In ancient times, beautiful women were sometimes unjustly accused of being possessed by the malevolent spirit known as 'Hnamnei' out of jealousy. Those accused faced societal ostracism, even in the context of mate selection. However, in the Christian era, women are no longer subjected to such baseless accusations. (M. Lala, Tuithumhnar village)

Besides baseless accusation of women as 'hnamnei', women in ancient times were also subjected to various religious discrimination, as was mentioned by one informative church-elder from Bualpui NG village as:

Before Christianity, the Lai community held a communal worship known as 'Khawhrum biak', where the shaman would lead the proceedings, and women

were prohibited from participating. It was believed that women lacked religious identity and were expected to adopt their husband's identity submissively. However, with the advent of Christianity, women now hold a central position in the Church and are often more productive than men. (Lalnundanga, church-elder)

In addition to women being subjected to religious disabilities, the study has also detected that women in the past were made to bear the evils of polygamous husband, as mentioned by a leader of men-wing that:

An advantageous result of Christianity is the shift from the traditional practice of polygamy among chiefs and affluent men in the past. Embracing Christian principles has led to the perception of polygamy as a significant and shameful transgression. As of today, even if a man does engage in such misconduct, he may choose to conceal any contrary behavior from the public eye. (J. Lalhnuna, Chanmary locality)

Some respondents have highlighted the transformative impact of modern education, emphasising its role in fostering equal opportunities for women in various domains such as employment, politics, economic empowerment, and leadership roles within the church. One respondent expressed appreciation for Christianity's promotion of women's education saying that:

In my view, Christianity's most constructive contribution lies in its promotion of women's education. This initiative has empowered women to assume significant roles not only within households and religious institutions but also across diverse sectors of society, thereby offering them equal opportunities, particularly in governmental job opportunities (Sangcheri, women-wing leader).

Corresponding to the above point, one respondent has also argued that women have now being given greater responsibility in religious affairs saying that: ‘*Women have assumed leadership roles in bolstering the church's finances. They exhibit greater expertise and proficiency in generating income compared to their male counterparts within the church community*’. (Malsawmzuala, men-wing). Changes in gender-related

roles have also been witnessed due to Christian teachings that incorporates equality as mentioned by respondents that: *‘Yes, Christianity, advocating equality between male and female creation without hierarchical roles, has led to women becoming more innovative than men in business and income generation. A significant portion of women in today's Christian era now serve as the primary earners for their families, assuming the role of main financial supporters. They exhibit greater expertise in earning and saving money compared to men, with women even outnumbering men in the marketplace.’* (Ngunneihzuala, church-elder)

Christianity has also aided them to assert their rights wherein one respondent opines that: *‘After embracing Christianity, women have been granted equal access to education alongside men, leading to a profound awakening of their rights. Furthermore, there has been a noticeable decrease in violence against women, as it contradicts the teachings of the Bible, which Christian norms uphold as being opposed to such violence.’* (Fanchun, Chanmary locality). Opportunities for further assertion of women rights has thus been strongly undertaken by the Lai women saying that: *‘Due to the teachings of Christianity on the equality of men and women, women have gained full empowerment. In our community, we now witness capable women serving as members of the Village Council (VC). Furthermore, influential women-centered NGOs such as MHIP (Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl) and LWA (Lai Women Association) are actively operating to safeguard and advance the rights of Lai women.’* (Mawii, women -wing Secretary, Bualpui NG)

Following Angom (2020) assumption that Christianity had lessened the gap between the status of men and women, Christianity has, undoubtedly altered the status of Lai women, particularly in the realm of education. However, this transformation remains limited when considering issues of equal opportunities in politics and religious institutions. It is noteworthy that women still encounter barriers to assuming leadership roles in these domains. Despite their pivotal role as primary earners for church treasuries, prestigious positions such as church elder and pastor continue to elude women within religious institutions. Additionally, when it comes to Lai Customary Law of inheritance, women are still sidelined as was rightly mentioned by one respondent as: *‘I don't believe Christianity has altered inheritance laws to favor the*

female line. This sentiment is echoed even within our Vuangtu tribe (a sub-tribe of Lai) where females are still not given priority over males in terms of property inheritance. It remains customary for the youngest son ('fahniang') to typically inherit ancestral property to this day.' (Thawnga, Bualpui NG village)

4.6 Christianity and Changes in Lai Funeral Practices

Funeral practices among tribals in India, including the Lai people, have undergone significant changes with the advent of Christianity. Traditional tribal funeral practices typically involved burial grounds, belief in the continued existence of ancestors in the spiritual realm, mourning periods and the like. (Poyil, n.d; Vitebsky, 2016). With the arrival of Christianity, many of these practices have undergone significant changes, including burial in cemeteries, changes in rituals, modified mourning practices, and discontinuation of ancestor offerings. (Thanzawna, 2018). As such, this research aims to investigate the transformations in funeral practices among the Lai community resulting from the introduction of Christianity, seeking to understand the shifts in their traditional burial customs, rituals, and beliefs.

The ancient Lai people distinguished between two types of death: '*pulthi*' for natural death and '*sarhi*' for sudden unexpected death. They held a belief in '*zinghmuh*' a paradise for the deceased. Those who died a natural death were thought to be escorted by a guide called '*Tuarthlua*' on their journey to '*zinghmuh*' where they would be received by gatekeepers known as '*sanu*.' Warriors, hunters, and men with multiple spouses were accorded higher status even in the afterlife. Conversely, those who met an unnatural death were barred from entering '*mithi khua*' directly and instead remained outside for a month, enduring hunger, as it was taboo to offer them food and water. (Kompa, 2018:444-471)

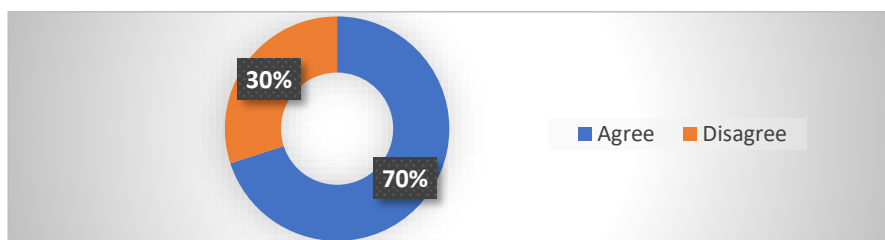
Similar to marriage, death was a costly event in Lai society. The deceased person's family typically provided abundant food, including pigs, mithun, chickens, and alcohol, to feed all mourners, including relatives from neighbouring villages. The length of the mourning period varied from village to village and depended largely on the deceased person's wealth. Typically, ordinary family mourned for three to seven days. During their settlement in the *Hakha* region, the first day was often marked by a

grand feast called '*ruaknghah sa*,' where all mourners were treated to large pigs and alcohol. Additionally, a ritual known as '*chhuat tihfai*' was conducted. This practice signified that families who could afford such ceremonies did not place the deceased body on the ground but elevated it on a specially crafted mat called '*theng*'. The wealthy family had the liberty to retain the deceased body for as long as they desire, a period known as '*ruangnghah*.' During these days of mourning, they slaughtered pigs, bulls, buffaloes, cows, and mithun. Additionally, they conducted rituals such as '*mithi thlaichhiah*' and '*sa-serh*.' These rituals included a special feast reserved for selected well-wishers of the family, accompanied by grand musical performances featuring gongs, gun salutes, and dances around the deceased body, known as '*cawnglaizawn*' and '*sarlamkai*'. (Kompa, 2018:458-459).

However, in the present Christian era, such expensive traditional death practice is done away with. All the death ceremonies are now commonly performed by the Church wherein the death ceremonies are performed by the Pastors, the church members and the community as a whole. The Young Lai Association (YLA) has now taken up the lead role of digging the graves common to all. The dead body is never mourned for more than an overnight. In light with this statement, the study thus attempts to find out on whether there is still kind of stratification in funeral practices or had Christianity completely wiped away such differentiation.

The finding discloses that 70% of the respondents (See Figure 4.8) agree that Christianity has lessened the gap between the rich and the poor in funeral practices. However, overall, 30% belonging especially from the periphery (see Figure 4.9) still don't agree as such.

Figure 4.8: Overall Participants' Response on Christianity in Reducing the Gap Between Rich and Poor in Funeral Practices



Source: Field Data

The following comments put forward by the respondents have also portrayed the true stratified pictures of the traditional funeral practices wherein differentiation on the nature of death was highly considered which is quoted as:

In the past, the Lai people categorised deaths into various types, including 'Pul Thi' for natural deaths, 'Sar Thi' for sudden and accidental deaths, 'Nausen Thla Tlinglo' for neonatal deaths, 'Misilo' for deaths due to leprosy, and 'Nulai Kungkhieh' for deaths deemed predestined by nature. The community attached significance to the causes and circumstances of death, with unnatural deaths often leading to social ostracism and a lack of condolences. However, with the spread of Christianity, these distinctions in perceptions of death have faded, and all deaths are now treated with equal respect and consideration. (Hmunga, South Lungpher village).

In line with the above statement that depicts a highly stratified funeral practice in nature of the causes of death, another respondent has asserted that:

In the olden days, 'sarathi' meaning sudden and unexpected death due to drowning in water, accidental falls from trees and cliffs, wild animal's attack, death due to severe fighting etc. were regarded somewhat as a curse and people felt hesitant to be near the dead body. Proper burial place was not assigned for such death; a separate burial place was designated for such people known as 'Sar thlan' and were at times forbidden to carry the dead body inside the village and even a memorial stone was never erected for such death. All these notions have changed with the coming of Christianity. (Hminga, Chanmari Locality)

A wide disparity in term of economic condition has also been detected through the respondent's quote saying that:

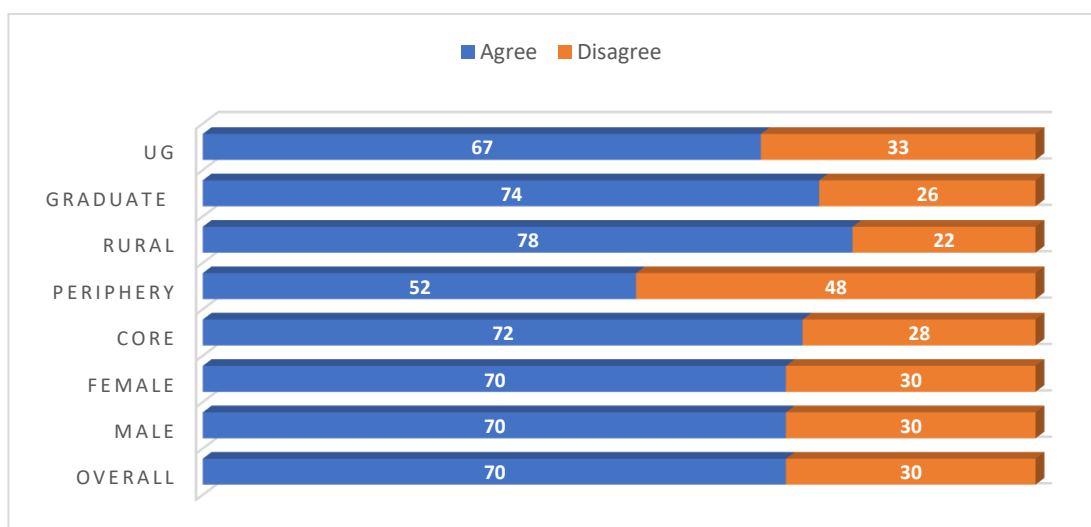
Christianity had significantly lessened the gap between the rich and the poor in funeral practices. In the ancient times, the Laos had different types of tombs such as 'thlanpui, (for the well-off persons), 'Thlan ker' (for the common people with a natural death), 'Thlan Chhia' (for sudden and unnatural deaths like stillbirths, suicide by hanging) and all these unnautural dead body were buried before the first flush of morning. (Bawiha, Sangau village).

Differentiation in manner of death rituals has also been narrated which is quoted as: *'A dead body of the affluent family were kept elevated from the ground known as 'Vazunn bu' and a traditional dance dedicated for the dead 'Conglai zawnh' was performed circling around the dead body. On the contrary, the dead body of the poor family were simply laid on the ground. (Chhuana, Bazar locality).* Additionally, the duration of the rituals had also been largely dictated by the economic standing of the family as another respondent stated that: *'In the pre-Christian era, the death of an affluent individual was accompanied by an extended mourning period, while the poor had few mourners, if any.'* (Sanga, Vengpui locality)

Respondents have given comments on the positive changes in the funeral practices mainly by expressing that the dead funeral is no longer expensive and has become free of alcohol saying that: *'In former times, it was customary to consume alcohol as part of the mourning process, which could sometimes lead to mockery, especially for families facing financial hardship. However, Christianity has brought about a positive change in this regard.'* (Hranga, Cheural Village). One respondent has also expressed a noticeable shift towards a more compassionate approach to dealing with death after embracing Christianity saying that: *'Be it a natural or unnatural death, the Church and the community handle the dead body and their family with deep condolences and compassions so much so that the whole community usually pools contributions in cash and kind ('ralna') in order to ease the burden of the bereaved family.'* (C. Laltlanmawia, Rulkual Village)

Contrary to the above statements, the main complaint put forward by the periphery respondents (see Figure 4.9), who still don't believe that Christianity has lessened the gap between the rich and the poor is that: *'Despite efforts by the Church and the Young Lai Association (YLA) to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor through standardised funeral practices, there remains a disparity in attendance between the funerals of affluent individuals and those of less financially privileged families. Typically, the number of attendees at the funeral ceremonies of wealthier individuals tends to be higher compared to the gatherings for less affluent families.'* (Mr. Reginald, Aizawl)

Figure 4.9: Classification of participants based on gender, residents and educational attainment



Source: Field Data

Looking at the above Figure 4.9 that highlights that a significant response of 48% periphery residents still don't agree that Christianity has lessened the gap between the rich and the poor, one periphery respondent has avowed that: *'The number of funeral attendees in the 'Khawhmawr' (outskirt of the town) is still lower as compared to the main town, maybe due to transportation constraint; provided that the dead family are not affluent'* (Sanga, Thingkah locality)

In conclusion, it may be affirmed that Christianity has played a significant role in narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor, particularly in the context of funeral ceremonies. Through the establishment of a common code for conducting funeral rites by the Church and the Young Lai Association (YLA), the financial burden associated with these ceremonies has been significantly reduced. The common procedure followed by YLA in death event which are more or less similar to all locality is articulated as: *'In the event of a death, the Young Lai Association (YLA) ensures that every deceased individual and their family receive fair treatment. In our locality, such as College Veng, the YLA commonly allocates an amount ranging from ₹ 8000 to 10000 for each funeral. This allocation covers various expenses including the cost of the coffin, tomb excavation, tea distribution, and preparation of chicken porridge. However, it is noteworthy that if the deceased individual hailed from a wealthier family with a larger social circle, the associated costs of the funeral may be higher compared*

to those for a less affluent family.’ (Lalrina, College Veng locality). However, as was argued by some respondents mainly from periphery, there may be rare instances where attendees at the funeral may be lesser in number due to location and distance issues, like periphery location where people cannot afford to attend such funeral as in the main town.

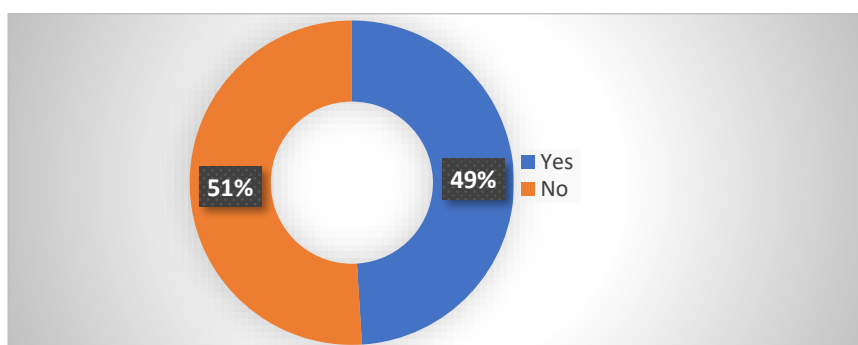
4.7 Family Bonds, Social Ties and We Feeling

In the pre-Christian era, society was marked by strong family bonds, social ties, and a sense of ‘we feeling’ that was deeply rooted in their traditional beliefs and practices. Their communal way of life was characterised by shared responsibilities, collective decision-making, and mutual support (Durkheim, 1912; Redfield, 1953; Geertz, 1973; Dollahite, 2016). However, with the advent of Christianity, these social dynamics underwent significant changes. The emphasis on individual salvation and the rejection of traditional beliefs and practices led to a decline in communal sharing and collective identity, replacing it with a more individualistic and nuclear family-centric approach (Bellah, 1985; Smith, 2005; Browning, 2007). This shift eroded the traditional support systems and sense of community, leading to a breakdown in social ties and a redefinition of family bonds.

Just like all the other tribal settlements, the nature of family bond in the pre-Christian era among the Lai was marked by close affinities where the father was considered the family head. Wherein family was the first unit of social control and socialisation with the absence of formal educational and social control mechanisms, family served all those functions. All the inheritance rules and descent were traced through the line of male and it was a typical patrilineal society. (Bawitlung, 2021:12). Not only between the immediate family, but the relationship that was built through marriage between two friends, ‘*kawi*’ (bridegroom’s best man) and ‘*maw*’ (bride’s best friend) were forever binding, even among their future siblings, they still maintain a close family bond. (Interview with F. Lalkaisanga, Bazar Veng on 12. 6. 2023). Besides, two families belonging to the same sub-tribe, say family of *Chinzah* sub-tribe, *Zathang* sub-tribe etc, are still regarded as a very close family.

Family disintegration in the post- Christian era has been one of the main concerns of social and religious researchers since the past four decades or so. (Vorster, 2008; Gills,1997; Browning ,2001) undertook a detailed study of the changing family patterns in western societies and expressed alarming concern on the high prevalence of family breakdown through divorce, out of wedlock births, underaged pregnancies, abortions etc. Likewise, this study focuses on changing pattern of family bonds in the post- Christian era and on whether Christianity is responsible or not for such changes. However, the study concludes that Christianity is not responsible for such changes wherein 51% (201 respondents, see Figure 4.10) of the respondents are of the opinion that family bond is stronger in the post-Christian era.

Figure 4.10: Overall Respondents’ Opinion on Nature of Family Bonds in The Pre and Post Christian Era



Source: Field Data

Nevertheless, note should be taken that the respondents who argued that family bond was stronger in the pre-Christian era also amounts to 49% (200 respondents). Therefore, the difference between persons who opted for pre- Christian era and post-Christian era is relatively less (amounting to only 2% differences).

Notably, the study further detected that the church-elder group belonging to basically the rural areas are the chief exponent of this notion where 100% of them said that family bonds have been weakened in the post-Christian era, on the question ‘Do you think that family bond is stronger in the post- Christian era?’ (See Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Church Elder Sub-Groups’ Opinions on the Nature of Family Bond

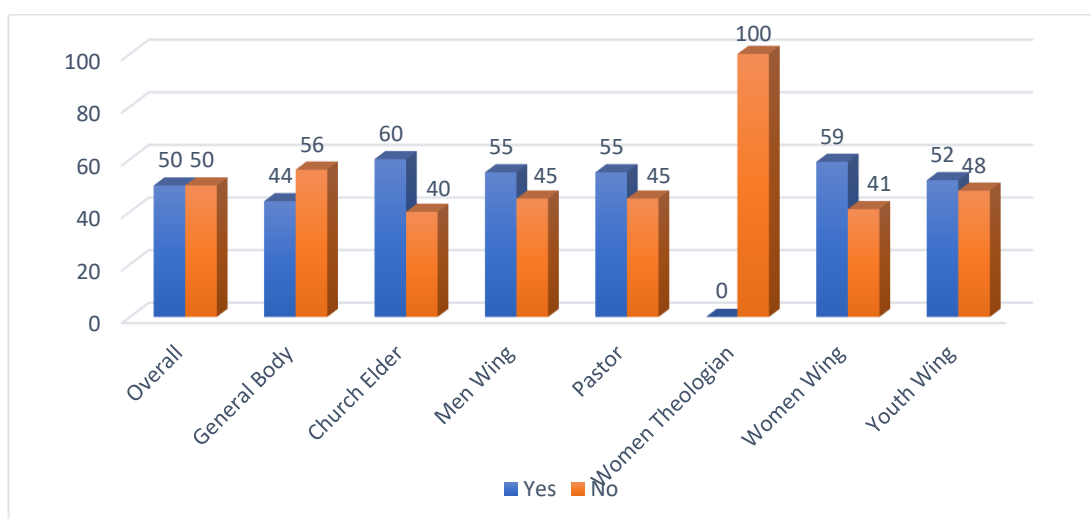
Preference	Core	Periphery	Rural	Graduate	UG
	Nos(%)	Nos (%)	Nos (%)	Nos (%)	Nos (%)

Yes	8 (87)	4 (67)	0 (0)	4 (80)	8 (53)
No	1 (13)	2 (33)	5 (100)	1 (20)	7 (47)
Total	9 (100)	6 (100)	5 (100)	5 (100)	15 (100)

Source: Field data

On the contrary, respondents arguing that family bond has become more stronger in the post Christian era mainly belong to the General Body Group (56%, See Figure 4.11)

Figure 4.11: Classification of Participants Based on the Sub-Group on Their Opinion Towards Family Bond



Source: Field Data

Interestingly, the Lai family bonds still remain intact till today as they are deeply intertwined with politics serving as vote banks. One outstanding argument has been put forward by one rural church-elder respondent asserting that:

Till today, the resilience of family ties remains strong within the Lai community, surpassing that of other tribes in Mizoram. Beyond maintaining strong connections within immediate family units, individuals within the same clan are also regarded as integral members of the extended family. Within the democratic state structure, families and clans retain considerable influence as a significant 'vote bank.' The size of the family directly correlates with its impact as a cohesive voting bloc in democratic processes. This highlights the enduring significance of familial and clan bonds within the social and political fabric of the Lai community. (Manga, Paithar Village).

Respondents who are of the opinion that family bond was stronger in the pre-Christian era put forward their main arguments proclaiming that family bond has become weaker due to western influence like individualism saying that: *'Family bond has become weaker after embracing Christianity. In an attempt to emulate western lifestyles, children no longer adhere to parental control and prefer to stay isolated from their parent's influence and even after getting married, they quickly opt for nuclear family.'* (S. Laltlanhlui, Rulkual Village). One respondent articulated that materialism is the main factor of family ties in today's world which is quoted as: *'In the time before Christianity, not only immediate family members but also those from the same clan were considered true relatives. However, nowadays, I sense that we only view members of similar clans as family if they are well-off.'* (Thapuii, Tuithumhnar Village). Additionally, another church-elder respondent has also argued that:

I believe that family bonds were stronger in the pre-Christian era. In ancient times, when travelers visited other villages and required accommodation, they would approach families from the same clan. This would establish a lasting connection between the descendants of these clans, who regarded each other as genuine members of an extended family. These families would unite during important life events, such as marriages, deaths, and various celebrations. However, this sense of unity and connection has now diminished. (Siama, Siachangkawn Village)

On the contrary, religion as a potent instrument for establishing a strong family bond has also been mentioned by a core resident respondent as:

After embracing Christianity, we find ourselves on solid ground, equipped with the full armour of God. We prioritise building our families on a sturdy foundation rooted in Christian values, resulting in a decline in family conflicts. Being a resident in the core area, we don't have time for neighbours like the rural place, and, we tend to be more concentrated on our own family. (Bawli, Chanmari locality)

Contrary to the findings of (Vorster, 2008; Gill, 1997; Browning, 2001), it may be said that the Lai family bond is still robust. Despite the emergence of nuclear families, individualism, and materialism in the post-Christian era, as mentioned by respondents,

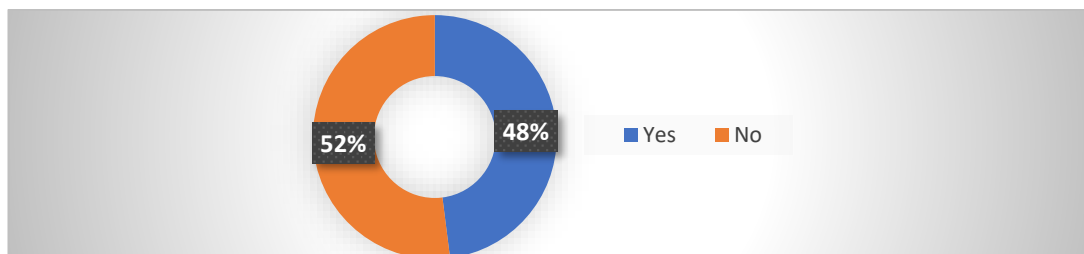
it may be concluded that family bonds have not been significantly weakened. This is evidenced by the 51% of respondents, who argued that Christianity plays a crucial role in guiding its followers to establish a firm foundation for marriage and family based on its core principles. Besides, it is interesting to note that the Lai family circle and their bonds are made sure that it is intact till today due to political consideration as family unit is the main deciding factor in election serving as a powerful vote bank.

Social Ties and We- Feeling

Following Sumner's examination of the concepts of 'in-group' and 'out-group' in his seminal work 'Folkways' (1906), wherein he associated the 'in-group' primarily with 'ethnocentrism', the ancient Lai social group can be characterised in a similar manner. Sumner defines 'ethnocentrism' as a sense of pride and superiority, wherein individuals believe their own 'in-group tribe' to be superior to others, fostering a strong sense of 'we-feeling' marked by high group cohesion, mutual love, and affection. Additionally, Maurice's (2022) study of African culture underscores the role of religion in fostering social cohesion and development within societies. He emphasises that religion serves as the foundation for social cohesion, with shared norms, values, and beliefs leading to cooperation among society members, thus creating opportunities for societal advancement and development.

In line with Sumner' (1906) and Maurice' (2022) statements, the Lai group cohesion has been studied and the finding similarly reveals that Christianity is the new key factor that strongly determines the group cohesion and strong social ties. The overall respondents amounting to 52% (See Figure 4.12) posited that Christianity strengthens social ties and we feelings. In support of this statement, the author has marked one quote as: *'Thanks to Christianity, we have embraced a fresh set of principles emphasising love for our neighbors and even our enemies. Within the same denominations, the level of love and support we extend to one another is truly remarkable.'* (Lalnunthara, church-elder)

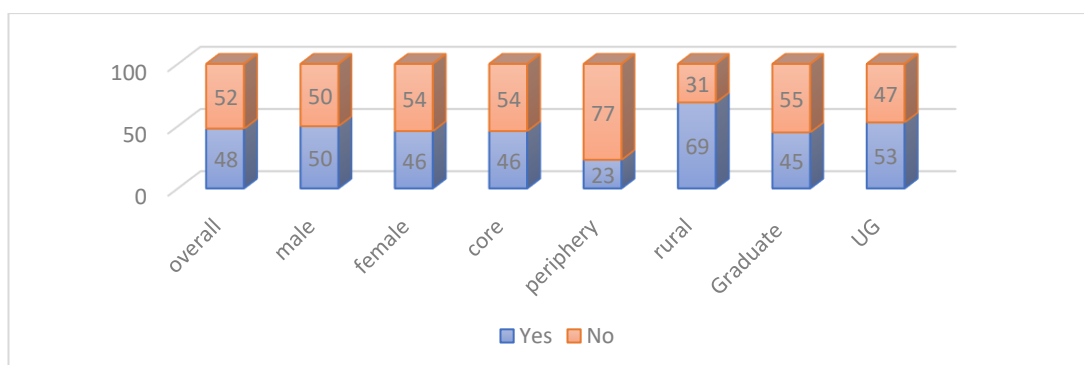
Figure 4.12: Overall Respondents' Percentage on Christianity and Changes in 'Social Ties' and 'We Feeling'



Source: Field Data

However, the sub-groups study remarkably reveals that the rural population of (69%, see Figure 4.13) does not agree to this statement. Instead, they are of the opinion that Christianity has weakened the Lai group cohesion.

Figure 4.13: Classification of Participants Based on Gender, Residents and Educational Attainment in Relation To 'Social Ties' and 'We Feeling'



Source: Field Data

Further investigation reveals that among the rural population, the women wing (see Table 4.3) and the Church elders (See Table 4.4) are the groups that show high percentages who hold the opinion that Christianity has weakened the group cohesion.

Table 4.3: Percentage of Women Wing Who Agree That Christianity Has Weakened Group Cohesion

Preference	Overall	Core	Periphery	Rural	Graduate	UG
	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)
Yes	47 (66)	27 (63)	4 (40)	16 (89)	5 (63)	42 (67)
No	24 (34)	16 (37)	6 (60)	2 (11)	3 (37)	21 (33)
Total	71 (100)	43	10 (100)	18 (100)	8 (100)	63 (100)

Source: Field data

Table 4.4: Percentage of Church-Elder Who Agree That Christianity Has Weakened Group Cohesion

Preference	Overall	Core	Periphery	Rural	Graduate	UG
	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)
Yes	12(60)	5 (56)	1 (17)	3 (67)	3 (67)	5 (40)
No	8(40)	4 (44)	5 (83)	2 (33)	2 (33)	10 (60)
Total	20 (100)	9 (100)	6 (100)	5 (100)	5 (100)	15 (100)

Source: Field data

A sad story had been narrated by one Church-elder respondent from *Lungzarhtum* village, saying that the communal helping hand had gone with the advent of Christianity:

I agree that Christianity has weakened social bonds and the sense of 'we-feeling' among the Lai people. In the past, it was customary for villagers to come together to assist a family in building a new house. This communal effort ensured that construction was completed swiftly, often within three days. However, such practices have declined in the post-Christian era. (Hmingchuana)

Besides the weakening sense of 'we-feeling,' the act of sharing and giving seems to have lost its centrality in the post Christian era as an old lady from women-wing respondent had narrated that:

When a hunter successfully killed wild animals in the past, it was customary to share and celebrate the bounty with the entire neighborhood, ensuring equal distribution among all segments of society, including widows and widowers. This tradition was locally referred to as 'Hangzam'. (Manthangi, Lungtian village)

Despite some rural residents arguing that Christianity has weakened the Lai social cohesion, majority of the respondents (52%, 208 persons, See Figure 4.8) holds the opinion that Christianity promotes social cohesion, it may be safely concluded by using Emile Durkheim's (1893) description of social cohesion as a strong collective consciousness brought about by strong religious ideas of right and wrong. Therefore, the Lai social cohesion is grounded on religion and particularly on Christianity.

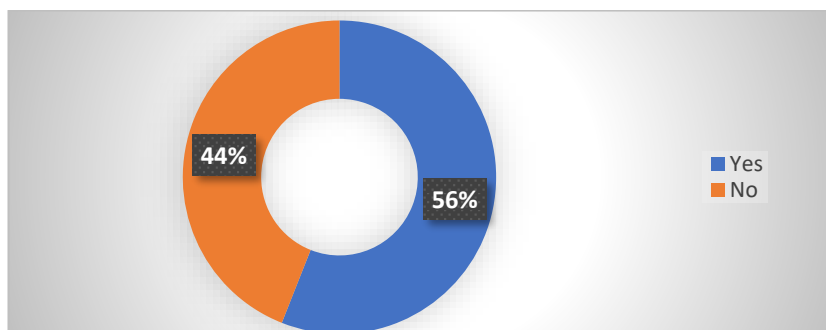
4.8 Lai Traditional Dress and Dance in Post-Christian Era

With the advent of Christianity, tribal traditional dress underwent significant changes. Tribal communities, such as the Lai people, abandoned their elaborate and symbolic traditional attire, adopting Western-style clothing and modest dresses that conformed to Christian modesty standards. The traditional dresses, often adorned with tribal motifs and colors, were seen as ‘heathen’ or ‘pagan’ and were replaced by western style of clothing, reflecting the shift from tribal identity to Christian beliefs. This change not only altered the visual representation of tribal identity but also erased cultural significance and meaning embedded in traditional dress. (Kapoor and Singh, 2015; Rai, 1963; Vidyarthi, 1966). In line with this statement, the present study explores on the changes in the Lai traditional dresses with the coming of Christianity.

The Lai people have been one of the most prosperous and culturally advanced tribes for generations in the past. (Bawitlung, 2021:7). Even today, the traditional attire for Lai women, known as '*Hnika*', remains highly coveted by other tribes for its distinctive and visually striking designs. Conversely, the traditional attire for men, termed '*Lai Pa Anki*', has its own significance. Chhuanawma (2003) claimed that the Lai community has maintained their vibrant hand-woven garments since their time in Central China prior to migrating to their current location. According to him, the Lai shawl, referred to as '*Chawnghnak*', was crafted with premium silk materials and was already being worn and woven by the Lai people during their tenure in China. Interestingly, it is noted that while the Lai people adorned themselves with ‘brass bangles’, ‘necklaces’, '*Hnika*', '*Thi-Hni*' (*Hnika* adorned with necklaces), '*kawlhni*', and '*chawnghnakpuan*', their neighbours in North Mizoram were still unfamiliar with the art of weaving and were only clad in '*siapsuap*' (<https://www.ladc.mizoram.gov.in/> May.13.2003). Nevertheless, this exquisite Lai attire has nearly become obsolete, prompting this research to investigate whether Christianity is accountable for its decline.

The finding through the fieldwork indicates that 56% (See Figure 4.12) of the respondents agreed that the Lai dress has been outmoded due to Christianity.

Figure 4.14: Overall Respondents' Opinion on Role of Christianity Towards Obsolescence of Lai Traditional Attire



Source: Field Data

Among them, men-wing from the rural are the chief exponents with 100% saying that Christianity is the main factor for the disappearance of Lai traditional dress. (See Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Men Wings' Responses in Relation to Christianity and Disappearance of Lai Traditional Dress

Preference	Core	Rural	Periphery	Graduate	UG
	Nos(%)	Nos (%)	Nos (%)	Nos (%)	Nos (%)
Yes	3 (33)	2 (100)	6 (55)	1 (25)	10 (56)
No	6 (67)	0 (0)	5 (45)	3 (75)	8 (44)
Total	9 (100)	2 (100)	11 (100)	4 (100)	18 (100)

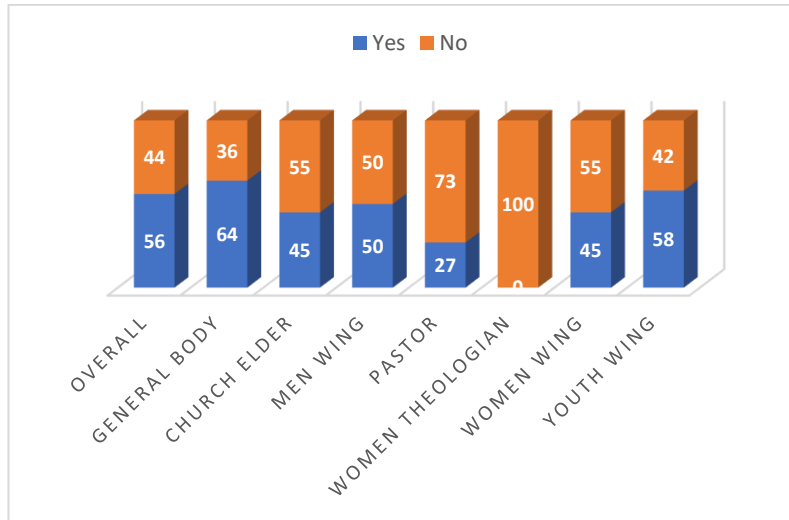
Source: Field data

In line with this argument, one respondent has said that: *I agree that Christianity has influenced the alteration of Lai dressing customs by introducing a Christian dress code that aligns with Western styles. (Thawngliana, Bualpui NG village).* Another respondent had also claimed the reformatory role of religion towards popularisation of Lai dress saying that:

When Christianity conquered our land, our traditional Lai attire was nearly phased out, rapidly supplanted by Christian or Western clothing. Thankfully, the LIKBK has played a crucial role in invigorating the traditional Lai dress. (Chhinga, Vawmbuk village)

Interestingly, among pastor wing, 73% (See Figure 4.15) do not agree that Christianity is the factor for the gradual disappearance of Lai dress.

Figure 4.15: Classification of participants based on the sub-group



Source: Field Data

However, they all agree that the Lai dress is slowly losing its significance but not due to Christianity but put the fault on other factors like modernisation, westernisation and due to unavailability and expensiveness of the Lai dress saying that:

I cannot solely attribute the decline in the popularity of the Lai dress to Christianity. Modernisation, particularly the mass production of affordable and convenient clothing, plays a significant role. However, since the establishment of LIKBK, there has been a revival of interest in Lai dress. Nowadays, every household takes pride in owning and wearing Lai traditional attire. (Ngura, LIKBK Pastor)

The above quote highlights that the Lai dress, previously, was prohibitively expensive, making it unaffordable for the common people. This factor contributed to the limited popularity of the Lai dress, and it was not necessarily due to Christianity. As such, some respondents were expressing their high appreciation towards the LIKBK's earnest effort to revive the Lai traditional attire as follows:

After giving a renewed effort by the LIKBK to popularise our Lai dress by establishing Lairam Handloom, the price has become reasonable. It has been appreciated even by the Mizo people. Nowadays, the Thenzawl handlooms have also been weaving the Lai dress with keen interests. If we don't preserve

it, we may lose it again in the hands of the Mizo tribes who had previously appropriated even most of the traditional Lai dances. (Hranga, LIKBK Pastor)

Drawing from Nagarwal and Kumar (2022) who studied the impact of westernisation on the Indian dress code, and also referring to Angom's (2020) statement that Christianity is the main offender for the gradual disappearance of the traditional dress of the least advanced cultures, we may safely conclude that Christianity coupled with westernisation are the main factors for the gradual unpopularity of the Lai dress. Moreover, the Lai-occupied area in Mizoram, due to Colonialism and the demarcation of international boundaries during colonialism and even after India's Independence with their Lai brethren from Chin Hills, have been gradually losing their identity and uniqueness. The situation became worse with the region being untouched by early Christian missionary. Since Christianity was introduced to the Lai people by the *Lusei* tribe, (Interview with Mr. *H. Zonuna* on 7.10.2022, 1:16 PM-3:00 PM, *Chanmary*, L IV, Lawngtlai.), the Lai people has thus become gradually assimilated by the *Lusei* culture with their *Mizo (Lusei)* version of Christianity, wherein the process, the Lai dress had become outmoded. However, with the renewed efforts given by the LIKBK to popularise the Lai dress, and also by establishing a '*Lairam Handloom*' by the LIKBK, it has now been popularised and every household can now afford to own the Lai dress due to its easy and cheap availability. (Interview with Mrs. *Vanlalmangaihchhungi*, Lairam Handloom Instructress on 17th. 1.2024, 11:00AM-12:30 PM, Bazar locality, Lawngtlai). Even though Christianity has outmoded the Lai traditional dress for the last one or two decades or so. However, nowadays, the Lai traditional dress has been given a renewed importance by the LIKBK, the YLA and the LADC then follow suit. The initiative was taken primarily by the LIKBK.

Traditional Dance

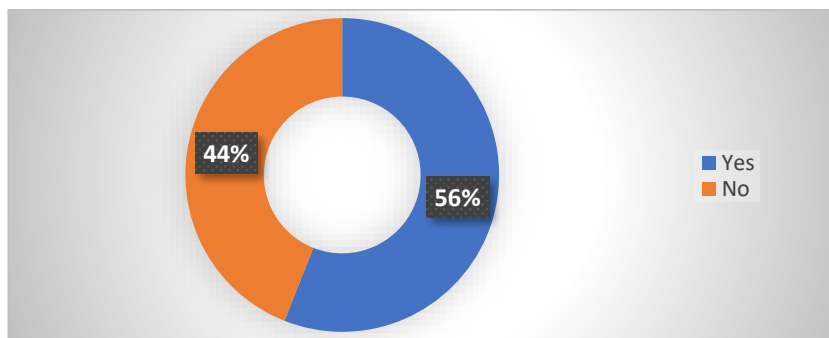
The arrival of Christianity significantly impacted tribal traditional dances, as many were deemed 'heathen' or 'pagan' and subsequently suppressed or lost. Tribal communities, like the Lai people, were discouraged from performing their traditional dances, which were often integral to their spiritual beliefs and practices. Instead, they were encouraged to adopt European-style hymns and chants, leading to a decline in traditional dance forms. The few dances that survived were adapted to conform to

Christian values, losing their original meaning and cultural significance. This shift not only affected the artistic expression of tribal communities but also eroded their cultural identities and spiritual practices. (Ekka, 2013; Patel, 2017; Behera, 2019)

Prior to the introduction of Christianity and colonial rule in the Lai region, The Lai people, being one of the eldest and most established tribes ever since their settlement in the China region, possessed a diverse array of distinctive traditional dances. It has been deeply integrated into various aspects of life, serving as a means of expression and communication during both sorrowful and joyous occasions. In the past, specific dances were designated for different events, each with its own significance and narrative, reflecting the rich and colorful culture of the Lai people. One such dance, '*Ruakkhatlak*,' was traditionally performed by young women in the village during instances of stillbirth. It was believed that through this dance, they could guide the departed soul safely to '*Mithi-Khua*', the paradise for deceased souls, ensuring a smooth journey without encountering any hurdles. '*Chawnglaizawn*' was another significant dance performed during times of mourning, particularly following the passing of village chiefs or esteemed individuals. Trusted servants would execute this dance near the deceased, pledging their unwavering loyalty and fidelity to their late leader or master, promising to serve them even in the afterlife. '*Sarlamkai*' is a martial dance associated with celebrating victories in warfare or raids. Participants would demonstrate their triumph by parading the severed heads of enemies, accompanied by weapons such as swords and guns, around the village in a warlike dance, symbolising their prowess and success in battle. The most renowned among Lai folk dances is '*Pawhlohlam*,' commonly performed during festivals and sacrificial ceremonies. This dance involves both men and women standing alternately in circles, holding onto each other's shoulders and waists, creating a rhythmic and coordinated movement. Accompanied by the beat of drums and gongs, '*Pawhlohlam*' embodies the spirit of community and celebration, uniting participants in joyous revelry. Over time, the Lai people have experienced a gradual decline in their traditional dances, particularly following the adoption of Christianity. This study seeks to investigate the extent to which Christianity may be accountable for this phenomenon.

Majority of the respondents (56%, 224 persons, see Figure 4.16) agreed that Christianity is the main reason for the disappearance of Lai Traditional dance.

Figure 4.16: Overall Respondents' Opinion on Role of Christianity in Undermining the Lai Traditional Dance



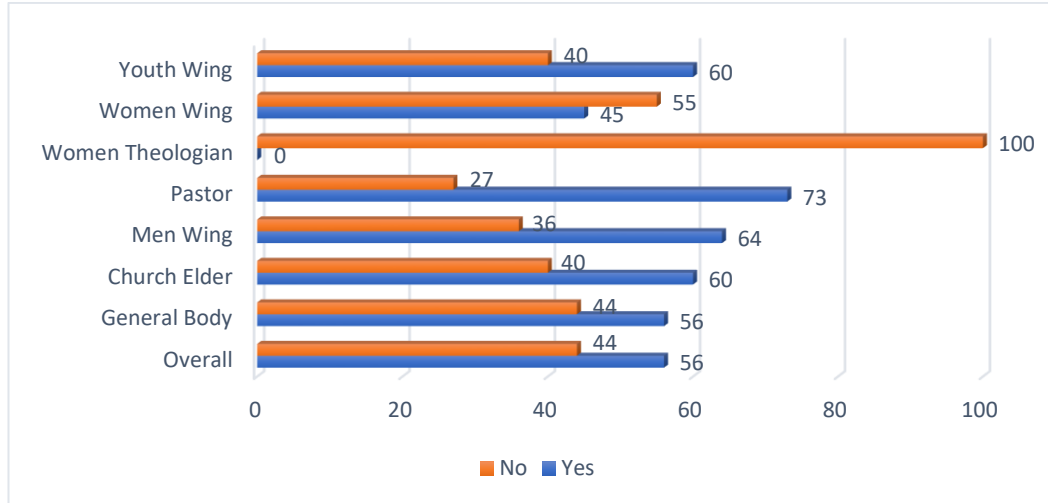
Source: Field Data

Taking a closer look at Figure 4.17, it is surprising that 73 % of Pastor category, are arguing that Christianity is the main perpetrator for the disappearance of Lai traditional dance. The primary factors cited by majority of Pastor respondents as to how and why Christianity has undermined traditional dance are attributed to alcohol consumption (*Zu*) and westernisation, as highlighted below:

Yes, the Lai traditional dances have been undermined by the Christian teachings as they were mostly associated with alcohol. For instance, dances like 'Ruakhatlak' (bamboo dance performed on the occasion of stillbirths) and 'Conglaizawn' (dance performed in circle by the youths near the dead body) were no longer in practice. Besides, our present generation has become so westernised that they no longer give importance to such kind of dances and thus, we are slowly drifting away from our culture. (Laia, LIKBK Pastor)

Therefore, with the Christian Missionary's proclamation of alcohol '*zu*' as a sin, many traditional Lai dances, which were once performed in both sorrowful and joyous events, have fallen out of practice. This shift has led to a loss of connection with these dances, as they were closely associated with the consumption of alcohol. In this way, Christianity has made the Lai people to gradually lost their cultural roots.

Figure 4.17: Sub-Groups' Opinion on Role of Christianity in Undermining the Lai Traditional Dance



Source: Field Data

However, more surprisingly, 87% of women wing (See Table 4.6) belonging to graduate category and 90% from core residence are of the opinion that Christianity is not to blame. Here, it is detected that there are variations in terms of residents (rural vs. periphery) and educational qualification (graduates vs undergraduates) in relation to their opinions.

Table 4.6: Women Wing's Opinion on Christianity in Undermining the Lai Traditional Dance

Preference	Periphery	Core	Rural	Graduate	UG
	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)
Yes	16 (37)	1 (10)	15 (72)	1 (13)	31 (49)
No	27 (63)	9 (90)	3 (28)	7 (87)	32 (51)
Total	43 (100)	10 (100)	18 (100)	8 (100)	63 (100)

Source: Field Data

Some of the educated, graduates are imputing the *Lusei (Mizo)* tribe, and not Christianity for usurping all the traditional dances which had their roots in the Lai culture saying that:

Lai original dances like 'Sarlamkai', 'Khualam', and 'Rawkhatlak' (Cheraw) have now been appropriated by the Lusei (Mizo) tribe by officially claiming that they are the Mizo Dances by the Art and Culture Department, Government of Mizoram. Besides, we, the urban settlers, unlike the rural residents, don't

give much importance to our traditional roots, and this is the core reason for the disappearance of Lai traditional dance. (Rualkungi)

Speaking of traditional roots, it is interesting to note that many of the Mizo traditional dances have their roots in Lai traditional dances, including '*cheraw*' (bamboo dance), '*Sarlamkai*' (dance performed in war victory), and '*Khuallam*' (dance performed to welcome guests). Despite this influence, the Lai community still maintains some original dances such as *Darlamkai*, *Rallulak lam*, *Pipu Lam*, *Pipu Thai*, and *Pangpar Lam*. (Interview with T. Thangzuala Vanchhawg, Bualpui NG Village on 6.10.2023)

Following Lalhminghlui and Robin (2020:112), who conducted an exclusive study on the various Mizo dances and thus argued that Christianity's declaration of alcohol as a sin was the main reason for doing away with the Mizo traditional dances, the study likewise asserts that such statement is also applicable for concluding as the 'how' and 'why' the Lai people have lost touch with their traditional dance. Moreover, a process of Park's 'Unidirectional Acculturation Theory' (1928) has also been noticed wherein the *Lusei* and the *Lai* tribes have now commonly shared such dances though the roots of most of the dances were located in the Lai society. In this context, one respondent has convincingly asserted that: '*The Lai extremist often argued that the Lusei had pilfered all the original Lai traditional dance. However, I feel that we all are closely related and we commonly share even all the traditional dances.*' (Thara, Church elder). Nevertheless, it is gratifying that the LIKBK is making renewed endeavors to rejuvenate these invaluable Lai dances.

4.9 Christianity and Assimilation of Lai Language

The spread of Christianity among tribal communities has often led to the assimilation of their languages, as missionaries and converts prioritised European languages and scripture over indigenous tongues. As a result, many tribal languages were suppressed, and their use was discouraged in favor of dominant languages like English, Spanish, or Portuguese. This linguistic assimilation has contributed to language shift, language loss, and cultural erasure, as tribal communities were forced to abandon their linguistic and cultural identities. The assimilation of tribal languages has also led to the loss of traditional stories, myths, and cultural knowledge, which were deeply tied to the

language and cultural practices of the community. (Elwin, 1964; Chaudhuri, 2013; Kapyur and Singh, 2015; Xaxa, 2015). This research aims to investigate the impact of Christianity on the Lai language, exploring how the language has been assimilated and influenced by Christianisation, and to what extent the language has undergone changes as a result of religious conversion and cultural shift.

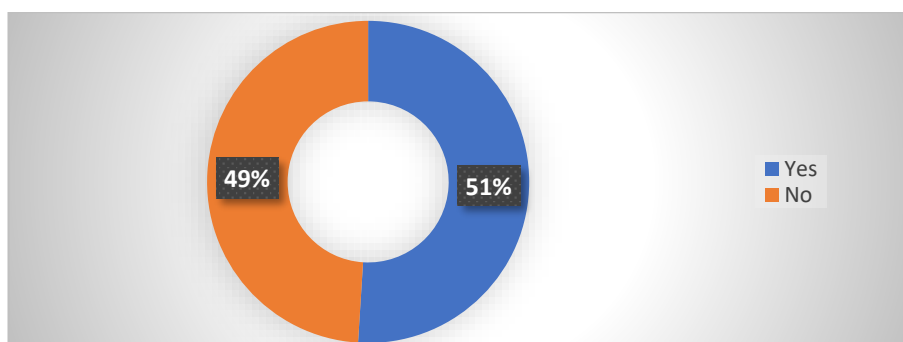
The current language spoken by few villages within the Lai Autonomous District Council in Lawngtlai is known as *Halkha Lai Lingua* or *Halkha* language (Lahnim, 2015:3). The inhabitants residing in the administrative boundaries of the Lai Autonomous District Council migrated from the Chin Hills in Burma during the period between 1800-1900 AD (Lahnim, 2015:3). Given that the Lai people are descendants of the *Hakhas* and neighboring regions, it is understandable that the present Lai language spoken within the Lai Autonomous District Council area originated from *Hakha's* lineage. The Lai language is not confined solely to the Lai Autonomous District Council of Lawngtlai; rather, it enjoys widespread usage in the triangular expanse encompassing *Hakha*, *Lawngtlai*, and *Cox's Bazar* (Lahnim, 2015:10). Its roots can be traced back to around 200 BC, solidifying around 750 A.D when the Lai people resided along the banks of the Chindwin River. The language was first documented in writing by Macnabb in 1891, with the creation of the Lai alphabet by Arthur and Laura Carson in 1899. Many researchers assert that the Lai language holds the distinction of being the oldest language among the Central Chin languages (Zirliantluanga, 2015:14). Lai languages boast a wealth of vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and phrases. Several languages, including *Duhlian tawng* (*Mizo tawng*) and *Mara* language, have their roots from the Lai language. Even the prevalent language of Mizoram today, the *Duhlian* language, relies significantly on the Lai language in its literary works (Chhuanawma, 2005:27; Zirliantluanga, 2015:14).

Considering the above statement highlighting the distinctiveness of the Lai language, it is concerning to note that only 20.96 % (2011 Census) of the overall population in the LADC can speak Lai language. Furthermore, this Lai speaking populace is predominantly concentrated in a handful of villages such as *Pangkhuah*, *Sangau*, *Vawmbuk*, *Archhuang*, and *Tialdawngilung*. Additionally, the traditional Lai language has undergone a lamentable loss of its original essence, being increasingly supplanted

by *Khuafo* language, which is a fusion of *Lusei* and *Lai* languages. Moreover, this *Khuafo* language has also been spoken by few people only as of today. Therefore, it presents a challenging endeavor for a researcher to ascertain the cause behind the decline of the Lai language; whether it is to be attributed to Christianity or other contributing factors.

As per the findings from the fieldwork, it has been noted that 51% (203 persons) agreed that Christianity is the main reason for the disappearance of Lai language. (See Figure 4.18).

Figure 4.18: Overall Respondents' Opinion on Christianity and Assimilation of Lai Language



Source: Field Data

Among the respondents, surprisingly, 100% of church elders belonging to the rural areas are the main exponents of the said statement. (See Table 4.7).

Table 4.7: Church Elder's Opinion on Christianity and Assimilation of Lai Language

Preference	Core	Periphery	Rural	Graduate	UG
	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)
NO	5 (56)	4 (67)	0 (0)	3 (60)	6 (40)
Yes	4 (44)	2 (33)	5 (100)	2 (40)	9 (60)
Total	9 (100)	6 (100)	5 (100)	5 (100)	15 (100)

Source: Field Data

The main reasons why they attribute Christianity is that Christianity was not introduced to them directly by the White Missionary themselves but by *Lusei* Christians thereby no missionary had developed the Lai alphabet making them

gradually lost their language. In support of this statement, the respondents' arguments are quoted as follows:

Definitely yes, the early Christians played a significant role in the decline of the Lai language. They failed to make any efforts to develop the Lai script, unlike their counterparts who developed separate scripts for the Lusei and Mara languages. Instead, they forcefully introduced the Gospel and modern education to us through the Mizo medium. Consequently, we were left with little choice but to learn the Mizo language. In order to embrace Christianity and access education, we had to sacrifice our linguistic identity. Witnessing the gradual disappearance of the Lai language without being able to prevent it was a deeply saddening experience. (Hranga, Tuithumhnar village)

Besides not developing a separate script for the Lai people, the fact that no white missionary was assigned for the Lai people, and this has been attributed as one of the main reasons for the disappearance of Lai language as stated by one respondent as:

Indeed, the early Baptist Christian missionaries bear responsibility for the decline of the Lai language. Primarily, no foreign missionaries, whether English or Welsh, took the initiative to introduce Christianity to the Lai people. They delegated this task to the Lusei Christians to preach and enlighten us. Furthermore, they neglected to study our language or develop our alphabet or script. Consequently, we were compelled to study and worship in the Duhlian language, leading to the partial disappearance of the Lai language among our people. (Zonuna. Church Elder).

Contrary to the above arguments, it is remarkable to discover that the Men Wing, mainly from the periphery and core under the category of graduates do not agree that Christianity is the main culprit. Here, it is detected that there are variations on the bases of residence (core, periphery and rural) and educational status.

Some educated respondents are imputing the assimilative nature of the more advanced Lusei tribe saying that:

The decline of our Lai language cannot be solely attributed on Christianity; but rather, to the more advanced Lusei tribe. They received education earlier

than us and, being educated, gained higher visibility in promoting their culture through activities like writing books and documentation. As a result, the Duhlian language gained popularity sooner than the Lai language. Due to their advanced education, they assimilated us into their culture. (Ngaiha, Thingkah, periphery resident)

Whereas, one educated, core respondent, who is well-versed with the Lai history blamed the course of migration of the Lai people as the main reason and not Christianity as:

Christianity cannot be solely made liable for the disappearance of the Lai language; rather, it was influenced by our migration patterns, particularly from Chhinlung to our current habitat. During this migration, inter-tribe marriages occurred between the Chinzah and Sailo chief tribes, leading to the emergence of a blended language called 'Khuafo Tawng,' combining elements of Lai and Mizo languages. Over time, this contributed to the gradual decline of the original Lai language, replaced by Khuafo. Additionally, interactions with other tribes, such as the Fanai, further influenced the mixing of languages. However, descendants of Lai people who migrated directly from Halkha, Thantlang, Vawmbuk, and Hultilung still retain the original Lai language, albeit in fewer numbers. These descendants primarily reside in villages like Pangkhua, Sangau, Vawmbuk, Archhuang, and Tialdawngilung. Thus, since ancient times, the original Lai language speakers have been outnumbered by those speaking Khuafo, contributing to its greater popularity. (Thara, College Veng)

Besides, there are some respondents who responsibly take the blame themselves saying that that they are not aware enough nor give enough efforts to preserve their language saying that:

The decline of the Lai language cannot be solely attributed to Christianity; instead, we must acknowledge our own role in devaluing our language. Unlike the Maras, who maintains the use of Mara language even in Aizawl, we, Lai people often feels hesitant to speak our language beyond our community. This

reluctance significantly contributes to the gradual erosion of our language.”
(C. Lalthangzauva, men-wing).

In line with the above viewpoint, another respondent also asserted that: *‘I wish to emphasise that the primary reason for the decline of the Lai language is that the youth of the current generation feel reluctant to speak it by mistakenly associating it with the Burmese language’.* (Lalthapuii, Bualpui NG village). Additionally, one rural respondent had also mentioned that:

I don’t blame the Christian missionary for the disappearance of Lai language. It is due to the fact that people residing in the district capital of Lawngtlai do not popularise the Lai language. Since they are living in close proximity with the Mizo tribes and as such, they hold high opinion towards them. Unlike us villagers, the district capital has such notion, it thus has cascading effect on the villages. Nonetheless, the LIKBK is trying their best to revive our language.
(Khuma, Pangkhua village)

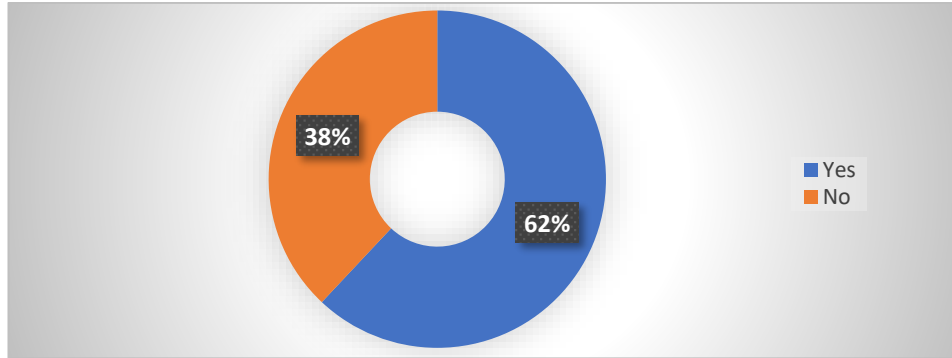
Drawing from Moran’s (2020) argument who critically examined the missionary work carried out upon the ‘Dakota American Natives’ wherein he argued that English culture was forcefully introduced upon the Dakota natives which had ultimately led to the complete assimilation of the native culture, the study of the issues of assimilation of the Lai language may be basically attributed to the *Lusei* missionary who introduced gospel to the Lai people through Mizo medium and not Lai language. The root cause however, being the white-missionary’s discriminative policy that failed to assign any missionary to the Lai people. This has thus tragically led to the complete assimilation of Lai language by the *Lusei* language. Quoting one respondent in this line: *‘The most unfortunate incidence for the Lais was that Christianity had been introduced to us through the Mizo medium by the Mizo people and not by the white- people themselves. Had the White Missionaries but come to us directly, our stories would have been different and we would potentially lead to higher levels of education and literacy among our community.’* (Ngunneihzuala, church-elder).

Dialogues on Baptist Christian Missionaries' Responsibility for the Problem of Assimilation

Christian missionaries played a pivotal role in developing written forms for languages like *Lushei* and *Mara*, but unfortunately, the Lai language was overlooked in this process. The emphasis on education and spreading the gospel in *Mara* and *Lushei* languages likely contributed to the gradual decline of the Lai language. While Christianity has brought positive aspects such as education and the development of literature to Mizoram, it posed crucial challenges for the preservation of Lai identity, culture, and language; the root cause being no separate script for the Lai language was developed by the missionaries. The current language profile of the Lai district presents a regretful picture showcasing that the Lai people have lost touch with their original language wherein hardly 20.96 % of the Lai people are able to speak the Lai language. (Census of India, 2011). These typical Lai speaking people are located in few villages like *Lungzarhtum*, *Pangkhua*, *Sangau*, *Vawmbuk* and *Archhuang* situated mostly in the Eastern belt (*tuichhak*) of the region. Besides, Christianity was brought to the Lai people by the *Lusei* community using the Mizo language as a medium, and considering that the Lai people lacked their own distinct script, they quickly integrated into the Mizo linguistic sphere. This assimilation occurred because Mizo had been made as the primary mode of communication since the missionary period in Mizoram. In fact, all the earlier writings and records, the hymn book, Bible translation of the New Testament (1916) and catechism, the first Lushai-English dictionary (1898) initiated by the missionaries, F.W. Savidge and J.H. Lorraine were initiated only through the Mizo language, and thus, the Lai language could not made it through the test of time.

Considering the above statements, the study thus attempts to find out the public opinion as to what extent the missionaries were to be blamed or are there any other worth mentioning reasons for the assimilation issues faced by the Lai people. Subsequently, the study reveals that 62% from the overall respondents agrees that Christian missionaries are the root cause for the problem of assimilation faced by the Lai people. (See Figure 4.19).

Figure 4.19: Overall Respondents' Opinion on Baptist Christian Missionaries' Responsibility for the Problem of Assimilation



Source: Field Data

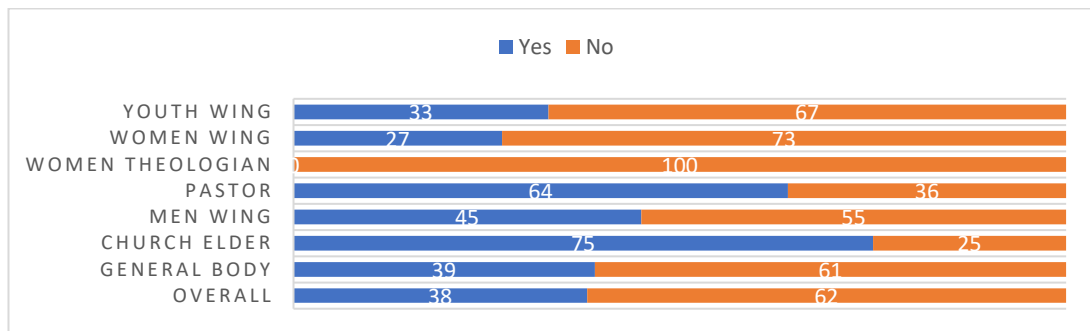
From the sub-group analysis, the church elders belonging to all categories (rural, urban and peripheries) and 100% of graduate church elders are the chief exponents of this statement. (See Figure 4.20 and Table 4.8). It is noteworthy that the church elder wing, being the most well-informed group about the Lai history, owing to their advanced age are the most resourceful persons while inquiring this particular question.

Table 4.8: Church Elder's Opinion on Baptist Christian Missionaries' Responsibility for the Problem of Assimilation

Preference	Core	Periphery	Rural	Graduate	UG
	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)
Yes	7 (78)	4 (67)	4 (80)	4 (100)	11 (67)
No	2 (22)	2 (33)	1 (20)	0 (0)	5 (33)
Total	9 (100)	6 (100)	5 (100)	4 (100)	16 (100)

Source: Field Data

Figure 4.20: Sub-Group's Opinion on Baptist Christian Missionaries' Responsibility for the Problem of Assimilation



Source: Field Data

However, 38% of overall respondents (153 persons, see Figure 4.19) appallingly does not hold the Christian missionaries responsible for the Lai problem of assimilation. Among such respondents, the women wing, the youth wing and women theologian are the chief exponents of this counterstatement argument. (See Figure 4.20).

Arguments Pertaining to the Responsibility of Christian Missionary Towards Assimilation

The respondents who hold the opinion that Christian missionaries were responsible for the issues of Lai assimilation mainly argued on issues of language and identity assimilations and the root cause being the missionary, who did not directly reach out to them to preach or educate the Lai people, and did not even bother to develop a separate script for the Lai people whereby one articulated church-elder respondent contended that:

The early Christian missionary did not give importance to the Lai unique culture nor our language. Language assimilation or disappearance of Lai language was the worst outcome of the work of the early British Christian missionary. Therefore, the Lai language which in the ancient times was the most original language amongst all the Zo-ethnic ethnic tribe has now slowly been disappearing. For instance, most of the 'Mizo tawng upa' (Mizo idioms and phrases) have their roots in the typical Lai language. Such was the state of the uniqueness of the Lai language. It is very sad to see that the Lai language is no longer in use even by the majority of the Lai. Had the British missionary but imparted gospel in Lai language, the story would have been different. (Thanghluna, Paithar Village)

Some respondents asserted that the issue of assimilation had exacerbated other problems such as underdevelopment in Lai society. One respondent even outrightly stated that: *'The Lai people only received the shadow of such missions and not the real impact. Therefore, I hold the missionaries responsible for the Lai people, not being able to compete till date with other districts in terms of educational and literature development.'* (Thangchhunga. Rulkual Village). In addition, one respondent had also sadly protested that: *'We, the Lais have neither Bible nor hymn book of our own. We*

are left with no choice but to use Mizo Bible and hymn book which have gradually lessened the use of our mother tongue.’ (Lianthanga, Chanmari locality)

The decision to embrace Christianity or pursue education often comes with the perceived need to abandon aspects of one's cultural and linguistic heritage. This tension highlights the complex interplay between religious conversion, cultural transformation, and the preservation of indigenous identities. In line with this statement, one prolific Pastor argued that *‘Christianity put the Lai people at a very critical situation that for the Lai, to become a Christian or to avail modern education means to surrender their own identity, culture and language.’* (Hrangzuala, 2000:43).

Arguments Towards the Missionary as Not Responsible for the Problem of Assimilation

It is noteworthy that while majority of the respondents holds missionary responsible for problem of assimilation, there are respondents as previously mentioned who do not hold the Christian missionary responsible for language assimilation, instead, they courteously blame themselves accepting that the Lai people are equally responsible notwithstanding the fact that the Christian missionaries were the root cause saying that:

I don't hold the missionaries responsible for the problem of language assimilation that we are currently encountering because the Lais residing within Lawngtlai district right from our ancestors did not speak typical Lai language, instead, Khuafu language was more popular. Since the Khuafu language is almost similar with the Mizo language, the missionaries might have a feeling that we did not require a separate missionary. Considering the problem of shortage of missionary, allocating a separate missionary would be an additional burden as they had already sent a separate missionary for the Lais who settled in mainland Burma. Besides, separate missionary was not sent to the Hmar and the Paihte in Mizoram and why should they send a separate missionary to the Lai? (Rintea, Youth -wing member, Diltlang South Village)

Another respondent has also accepted the fact that the Lai language has been undergoing a series of modifications and alterations owing to their course of migration which may be the root cause for the disappearance of the Lai language saying that:

I don't blame the early Missionaries for not developing a separate Lai script for us because the Lais, since the past spoke different and varied languages like 'Dawn Language', 'Halkha Language', 'Thlantlang Language' etc. Therefore, considering the linguistic diversity, it must be an uphill task for missionaries to develop an alphabet for us. (Zaii, women-wing Secretary, Lungpher South village)

Some respondents have also attributed the processes of modernisation and westernisation that has been felt strongly particularly by the educated younger generation as the main cause for the disappearance of Lai language wherein one respondent asserted that:

From my perspective, the challenges of assimilation experienced by the Lai people cannot be solely attributed to Christianity. Instead, these issues predominantly stem from educated individuals who have pursued further studies outside the Lai District. Some of these educated individuals have become so modernised that they hesitate to identify themselves as Lai and feel uncomfortable speaking the Lai language. This discomfort arises from a misconception that the Mizo language is more advanced, resulting in a sense of cultural distance and assimilation among educated members of the Lai community. (Chinzah, youth-wing member, Bethel locality)

Despite few respondents from the above statement who argued that the Christian missionaries are not to be blamed, it can be assumed that the primary factor contributing to the issue of Lai language assimilation, which has subsequently affected other domains such as literature, identity, and educational disadvantage, is primarily attributable to the discriminatory policies of early missionaries. As one respondent strongly articulated that, *'The missionaries' most discriminatory role towards us was their failure to recognise the uniqueness of our culture. They simply treated us as in common with the Lusei, and this has been the fundamental cause of assimilation.'* (Lala, Church Elder, Archhuang village). However, while missionaries may have been the initial catalyst, they cannot bear the sole responsibility, as other factors such as migration patterns, westernisation, and modernisation have also played momentous roles in undermining the Lai language and identity.

4.10 An Overview

This study undertakes a comprehensive examination of the impacts of Christianity on the Lai community, exploring its multifaceted impact on various aspects of Lai society, including cultural norms, marriage and family structures, gender roles, funeral practices, language, traditional authority, and social cohesion, with a view to elucidating the complex dynamics of religious conversion and cultural change. The following cultural shifts were identified as a result of investigating the influence of pre and post advent of Christianity on the Lai community:

Lai Social Norms and Values: Drawing from Ingen., et.al (2015) who made an observation of the Dutch society and asserted that social norms and values has been declining with the advent of Christianity wherein both positive and negative changes had been witnessed, the advent of Christianity has led to a significant decline or dilution in the traditional social norms and values of the Lai community. Christian norms and practices have replaced or modified the traditional ones, resulting in a loss of cultural identity and heritage.

Lai Marriage System: The Lai marriage system has undergone significant changes with the influence of Christianity. A mixed form of marriage has emerged, which combines elements of both Christian and Lai traditional marriage practices. This has resulted in a compromise of traditional cultural practices and customs.

Divorce Practices: In line with Lloyd's (1991:158) and Ralte's (2023:150) arguments that highlighted a positive change brought about by Christianity in the divorce settlement, the study similarly reveals that divorce practices have also been impacted by Christianity. While rural areas still adhere to the traditional Lai Customary Divorce Law, urban areas have adopted more modern and Westernized practices. This has resulted in a dichotomy between rural and urban areas.

Status of Lai Women: Following Angom's (2020) assumption that Christianity had lessened the gap between the status of men and women, Christianity has, undoubtedly altered the status of Lai women, particularly in the realm of education. Women are now more empowered and have greater access to opportunities. However, they still

face inequality and limited inheritance rights, indicating that there is still work to be done.

Funeral Practices: The finding echoes with the argument of (Poyil, n.d; Vitebsky, 2016) that Christianity has significantly impacted Lai funeral practices, reducing economic disparities and promoting a more egalitarian approach. This has resulted in a more inclusive and compassionate approach to funeral rites.

Family Bonds and Social Ties: Contrary to the findings of (Smith, 2005; Browning, 2007) who argued that Christianity had weakened the traditional support systems and sense of community, leading to a breakdown in social ties and a redefinition of family bonds, the findings indicate that the influence of Christianity has weakened traditional social ties only. While the Lai family bond remains intact, the sense of community and social cohesion has been eroded. However, it is noteworthy that the Lai people still fosters a relatively closer family bond as family and clan are still the crucial votebanks in matters of political elections.

Lai traditional Dress and Dance: Drawing from Nagarwal and Kumar (2022) who studied the impact of westernisation on the Indian dress code, and also referring to Angom's (2020) statement that Christianity is the main offender for the gradual disappearance of the traditional dress of the least advanced cultures, the Lai traditional dress has undergone been impacted by Christianity along with western dress.

Following arguments of (Ekka, 2013; Patel, 2017; Behera, 2019) positing that Christianity not only affected the artistic expression of tribal communities but also eroded their cultural identities and spiritual practices, and in line with Lalhminghlui and Robin (2020:112), who argued that Christianity's declaration of alcohol as a sin was the main reason for doing away with the Mizo traditional dances, the study likewise asserts that Christianity's declaration of alcohol as a sin has been responsible for the loss of Lai traditional dance, as most of the traditional dances were highly associated with alcohol.

Assimilation of Lai language: Drawing from Moran's (2020) argument who critically examined the missionary work carried out upon the 'Dakota American Natives' wherein he argued that English culture was forcefully introduced upon the Dakota

natives which had ultimately led to the complete assimilation of the native culture, the study of the issues of assimilation of the Lai language may be basically attributed to the *Lusei* missionary who introduced gospel to the Lai people through Mizo medium and not Lai language. The root cause however, being the white-missionary's discriminative policy that failed to assign any missionary to the Lai people.

Cultural Heritage and Assimilation: Christianity has led to assimilation issues, resulting in the near extinction of Lai language, dress, and dances. The Lai community is at risk of losing its cultural heritage and identity. However, the respondents are all thankful that the LIKBK has actively taken up the initiative to popularise the Lai culture.

Discriminatory Practices: In similar vein with the Post- Colonial Theorists (Guha, 1983; Chatterjee, 1986; Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994; Chakrabarty, 2000), who argued that Christian missionaries' half-hearted attention in tribal communities manifested as a superficial interest in converting tribals to Christianity, while neglecting to genuinely understand and respect their cultures, traditions, and beliefs, the missionaries' half-hearted attention to the Lai community's needs and concerns has contributed significantly to the assimilation problems faced by the community. This lack of attention has resulted in a lack of understanding and respect for Lai cultural practices and traditions.

In response to the cultural erosion and social changes instigated by Christian missionaries, the Lai community embarked on a concerted effort to revitalise their cultural heritage through the establishment of the LIKBK (Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran). This Church aims to earnestly revive and preserve Lai cultural practices, traditions, and values, which will be the primary focus of the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE LIKBK AS AN ETHNO-RELIGIOUS REFORM MOVEMENT

5.1 Introduction

5.2 The Validation of LIKBK as an Ethno-Religious Reform Movement

5.2.1 Regionalism

5.2.2 Ethno-Nationalism

5.2.3 The Centrality of Lai Sentiments

5.2.4 Reformed Response Against the British Hegemony

5.2.5 Reformed Response Against BCM Hegemony

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CHAPTER V

THE LIKBK AS AN ETHNO-RELIGIOUS REFORM MOVEMENT

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores into the validation of LIKBK, exploring its inception, objectives, and its significance in fostering a spiritual connection within the Lai community while preserving their cultural identity. The *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran* (LIKBK) stands as a unique ethno-religious movement dedicated to the Lai ethnic tribe, endeavoring to harmonise their worship practices with their cultural heritage. The church's primary goal being to preserve, protect, and promote Lai culture so as to prevent the Lai people from further assimilation issues. It examines the underlying reasons for its inception, the stages of the LIKBK movement, ideology and role of leadership, and the subsequent successful cultural reforms implemented by LIKBK, which have not only benefited its members but have also positively impacted the entire Lai community. The study sheds light as an indispensable institution crucial for safeguarding the identity of the Lai people, which could have otherwise faded in the hands of the more advanced tribes in Mizoram. Through its inception, growth, and implementation of reforms, LIKBK has emerged as a transformative force, addressing the socio-cultural challenges faced by the Lai people and fostering a renewed sense of identity, pride, and cohesion. By employing the classics of Marx, Gramsci and Melucci, the study concludes that the 'BCM Hegemony' serves as the main catalyst for the formation of LIKBK. In other words, this chapter offers a comprehensive portrayal of LIKBK as an ethno-religious movement thereby validating this statement with sociological theories the stages, the causes, the collective mobilisation, the goals and the reformatory outcomes of the LIKBK Movement, as outlined in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Representation of LIKBK Movement in Tabular Format

Causes	Stages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colonialism and Christianity Cultural Erosion of The Lai Literature and Language Assimilation Political Issues No Missionary assigned For the Lai 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Preliminary Stage (1889-1970) The Popular Stage (1970-1982) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Declaration of Independence by the South Vanlaiphai Area against BCM Pastorate - Declaration of Independence by the Phawngpui Area

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Baptist Church of Mizoram's (BCM) Hegemonic Control Over the Minority Lai people • The Revival Factor • Identity Issues and A sense Of Deprivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Declaration of Independence against the Lakher Pioneer Mission • The Formalisation Stage: (The formation of IKKL, 1999) • The Stage of Institutionalisation of the Movement (The Birth Of LIKKB, 2004)
Typology	Aims, Ideology and Leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The LIKKB as an Ethno-Religious Movement • The LIKKB as a reform movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To protect, promote and preserve the Lai culture from further assimilation • To set up Lai ethnic-based Church alter and evangelism movement • Charismatic leaders, the prophets and the Statesman
Outcomes	
<p style="text-align: center;">Reformative movement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity and Cultural Reformative Outcomes (Lai Ethnic Renaissance): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preservation and promotion of the Lai culture assimilation - Promotion of Lai Dress, Lai language, Lai Bible, Lai Hymn Book - Observance of Lai Night - Dispatching missionaries to the Lai brethren in the neighbouring states - LIKKB as an instrument for drawing closer the Lai brethren residing within and outside the states and countries. • Political Reformative Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mizoram People's Forum (MPF) - Free and fair election - Initiation of Lai dress and language in the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) • Socio economic Reformative Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment generation Establishment of Hospitals, Motherless home, Lairam Child adoption Centre, Deaddiction Centre, Lairam Handloom, Schools and Skill training Centres, Bookrooms, Girls Hostel, Guest House, Amos Operation for combating substance addiction, Poultry farming etc. 	

Source: Author

5.2 The Validation of LIKKB as an Ethno-Religious Movement

The Lai community, having achieved autonomy through the Regional Council in 1953, did not fail to recognise the importance of preserving and promoting their distinct 'Lai identity.' Consequently, they expressed the necessity for a separate church dedicated solely to the advancement of Lai people. (Chinzah, 2019:27). They held a strong belief in the potential to revitalise the vanishing Lai culture through the establishment of an independent church specifically dedicated to the Lai community. Finally, the LIKKB has officially come into being on the 27th, November, 1999. Ever since the formation of LIKKB, the LIKKB has been tirelessly assuming an active role for welfare of the Lai people.

5.2.1 Regionalism

Shils' Primordial Approach (1957) posited that individuals frequently exhibit a deep-seated attachment to the land they inhabit or the place of their origin, as well as to their religion and kinship ties. Barth (1969) argued that this 'strong primordial attachment' represents a foundational model for understanding ethnicity and ethnic movements, as it is often taken for granted within the discourse surrounding these phenomena. Applying this notion, the LIKBK movement resembles such elements of an ethnic movement. Since its inception, the LIKBK Movement has been characterised by regionalism and ethno-nationalism, which have played dominant roles in shaping its trajectory.

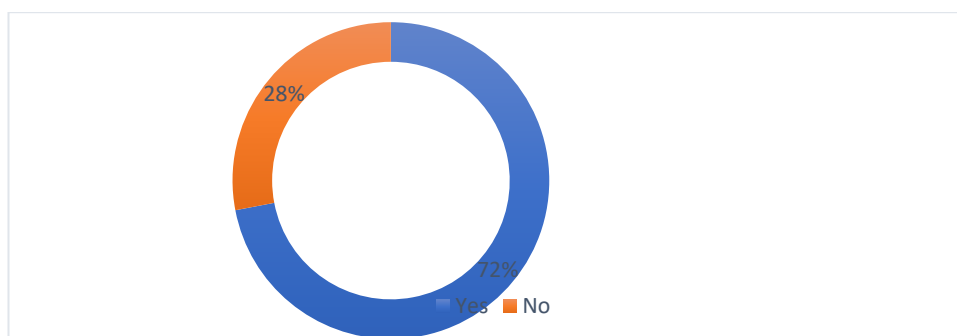
Regional movements in India reflect the aspirations of people within specific regions or states who seek special privileges, protections, and concessions from the central government. These movements can stem from both perceived grievances and real disparities. Since India gained independence, regional movements have emerged across the country, driven by various factors such as territorial disputes, ethnic identity issues, or economic backwardness in certain areas. Likewise, the Lai District in Lawngtlai is also coloured by the said arguments wherein the Lai people, since the pre-British era who had been occupying the land independently could not simply accept the fact that their land, *Lairam*, (meaning land of the Lai people) had been overpowered by foreign agents such as the British rule or the Independent India or the Mizoram state government.

Narain (1972) catalogues regionalism in India into three main types- 'Supra-State regionalism', 'Inter-State regionalism', and 'Intra-State regionalism'. 'Supra- State Regionalism' revolves around common interests shared by a group of states, leading to the formation of a political coalition aimed at either refuting similar alliances of other states or challenging the Union government. It is issue-specific and does not entail a permanent merger of state identities. Rivalries and tensions between states within the alliance can persist, as seen in conflicts over issues such as language or industrial development. 'Inter-State regionalism' occurs within the boundaries of individual states and involves the juxtaposition of one or more state identities against

others on specific issues that threaten their interests. Examples include disputes over river water distribution or border demarcation. ‘Intra-State regionalism’ involves a regional community within a state mobilizing against the state government in which they are situated. It aims to assert self-identity and promote self-development within the region. Intra-state regionalism often revolves around issues of cultural, political, and economic autonomy. The nature and types of the Lai regionalism may be categorised into the Narain’s third typology, the ‘intra-state regionalism’. Owing to their well-demarcated territory, distinct language and culture, and backwardness in comparison to other districts in Mizoram, the whole of the Lai district had been facilitated with the autonomous district council under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, known as ‘Lai Autonomous District Council’ (LADC) (formerly known as the *Pawi-Lakher* Regional Council). In this context, the study thus attempts to find out whether regionalism that had previously paved the way for the creation of LADC, is similarly linked to the creation of LIKBK.

The finding suggests that 72% of the respondents agree that regionalism is the deciding factor for the birth of LIKBK with a significant frequency of 289 person against the total respondents of 401. (Figure 5.1). However, an insignificant percentage of merely 28% are of the opinion that regionalism is not the reason for the birth of LIKBK, arguing that since the LIKBK churches are also established in Lai minority areas like *Aizawl* and *Lunglei* districts, regionalism cannot be the main factor for the birth of LIKBK.

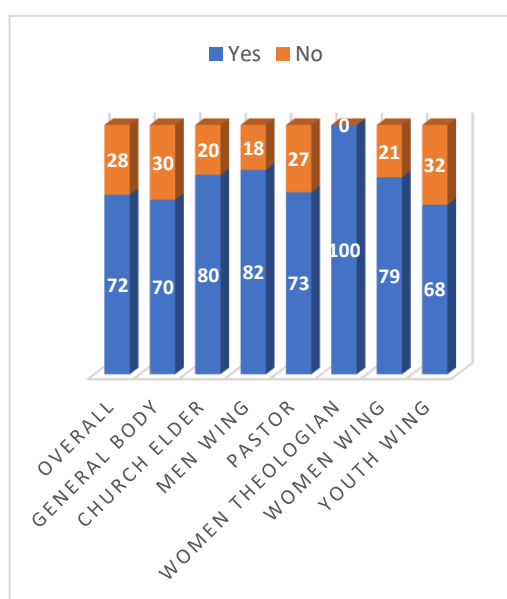
Figure 5.1: Opinions on Regionalism as a factor of the Birth of LIKBK



Source: Field Data

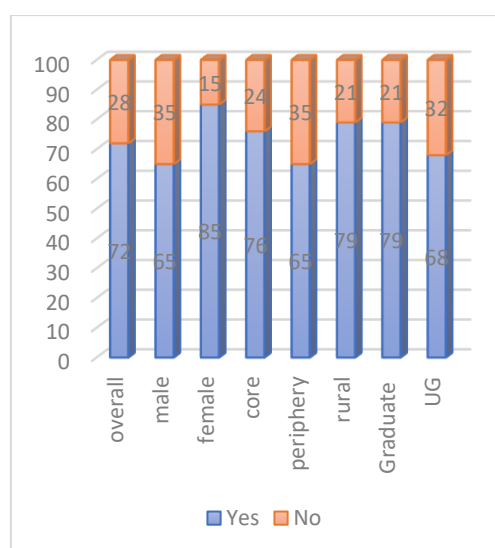
All the sub-group categories have also commonly agreed that regionalism triggered the emergence of LIKBK (Figure 5.2). Even the sub-categorisation of respondents on the bases of gender, education and residence have also signified similar finding. (Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.2: Sub-groups Responses on Regionalism and the Birth of LIKBK



Source: Field Data

Figure 5.3: Gender, Habitat and Educational Background Differences in Responses on Regionalism and the Birth of LIKBK



Source: Field Data

The main arguments put forward by the respondent in line with regionalism as the main factor for the birth of LIKBK reflect their desire to have greater autonomy and control over their own affairs within their shared territory, as was rightly stated by one respondent that: *'The establishment of LIKBK is closely linked to the fact that Lawngtlai, with its predominant Lai population and governance under the Autonomous District Council, created a favorable setting for its formation.'* (C. Zuali, youth-wing member, Vengpui Locality). Additionally, one articulated respondent has also justified this statement saying that: *'The LIKBK in its very inception was driven by worshipping God in our own identity, as mentioned in the Bible that in order to be Christian, one need to be a Jew.'* (Z.Tinthe, Church-elder)

The idea of nationalism has also been witnessed from the respondent's statement, signifying that the ideology of LIKBK have been equally supported by Lai people

residing outside the district. One enunciated respondent has mentioned that: *'The LIKBK's ideology goes beyond the territorial boundary. For instance, there are Churches in Lunglei and even in Aizawl where the Lai are the minority tribes in such districts. So, nationalism is the basic reason for the emergence of LIKBK.'* (R. Vanlalchaka, Deacon, Aizawl). In line with this statement, one respondent has further asserted that: *'The birth of LIKBK is shaped by the great awakening and great awareness that all the Laifa, no matter which state or countries, be it a nation or international boundaries we may belong, are all brothers and sisters representing one big homogenous family. It is beyond any territorial, regional, national or international boundaries.'* (Lai T.T, L3 locality)

The birth of LIKBK has also been attributed to political reason as was mentioned by one respondent that the LIKBK and LADC supplement each other that:

Yes, regionalism was one of the main reasons for the birth of LIKBK. The Laïs aim to assert their uniqueness as against other tribe so as to safeguard their political autonomy (Lai Autonomous District Council) and they need to try their best to preserve their territorial identity without which they may lost their political autonomy granted to them and this will badly affect the Laïs as this autonomy is the vital lifeline for the majority of the Lai population. the people. (V. Bawihlung, church Elder, L 3 locality).

Another respondent had also mentioned that the if not for LIKBK, the LADC would not be granted to them saying that: *'The LIKBK (formerly IKK) paved the way for the LADC to take its birth. The central government recognised the Lai uniqueness by acknowledging the ethnic based Church. If the ethnic based Church had not been preceedingly established, the Central Government would not have granted us LADC.'* (L. Lahnim. Women-wing leader, Chanmary locality)

However, few respondents, who are of the opinion that regionalism is not the deciding factor for the birth of LIKBK asserted that: *'I don't agree that regionalism is the pushing factor for the birth of LIKBK because even within the Lai district, we accommodate number of non-Laïs like the Bru, Chakma, Bawm, Rakhaine and even the refugees.'* (M. Lalnghaka, church-elder, Tuithumhna Village). A slightly varied viewpoint has been advocated by one respondent who holds the BCM responsible and not regionalism for the birth of LIKBK, saying that: *'Regionalism nor territorial*

affinity was not the reason why LIKBK took its birth. The main reason being the splitting up from the parent-church, Baptist Church of Mizoram was that while the Lai wanted to send missionary to the chin Hills, the BCM were against it. But then our missionary zeal did not just fade away but becoming stronger and stronger which inevitably led to the birth of LIKBK.’ (L. Vanlalrema, youth-wing member, Chanmary locality)

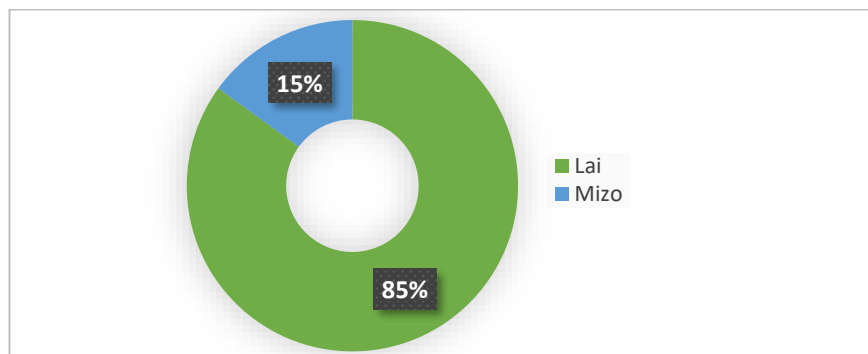
5.2.2 Ethno-Nationalism

Following Hobsbawm’ (1983) notion that nationalism itself can be seen as an ‘invented tradition’ utilised by elites to justify their authority and preserve their status in the face of societal changes and Anderson’s (1983) idea of ‘imagined community’, the study thus concludes that the Lai people’s invented perception of regionalism is the main factor for the birth of LIKBK thereby reflecting their profound desire to have greater autonomy and control over their own affairs not only within their shared territory, but cut across national and international borders, wherein we find a trend of the imagined idea of nation building. Additionally, the Lai people unfathomable attachment to their land has been lucidly expressed by one respondent saying that: *‘I thank God wholeheartedly for giving us a small portion of land exclusively for the Lai people, this has granted us common territorial identity without which the Lai tribes must have met its extinction long time back.’* (L. Lahnim, Pastor). Moreover, the finding suggests that the establishment of LIKBK is closely linked to the fact that Lawngtlai, with its predominantly Lai population and governance under the Autonomous District Council, created a favorable setting for its formation: *‘The main reason that facilitates the birth of LADC is regionalism and common territory, that has been bestowed upon the Lai people and so is the same reason for the birth of LIKBK in Lawngtlai district.’* (K. Lalfaki, youth-wing member, Bazar locality).

According to Pannikar (2011), ethno-nationalism encompasses both loyalty to a nation lacking its own state and loyalty to an ethnic group within a specific state, especially where the state is perceived as a nation-state. In ethno-nationalism, a group expresses loyalty to its nation, aspiring for absolute control over its political, economic, and social matters. This pursuit often signifies the desire for statehood by an ethnic community. Indeed, the study of the LIKBK movement reflects a similar pattern. The

Lai community has cultivated strong ethnic sentiments and takes pride in their identity as Lai individuals. Over time, this pride has evolved into a strong ethnic consciousness among the Lai people. The high level of Lai ethnic- consciousness has also been detected in the researcher's findings where significant number amounting to 85% (n= 350) of the respondents took pride in identifying themselves as Lai as against only 15% (n= 51) preferred to identify themselves as Mizo (Figure 5.4). A strong advocate for Lai identity stated: *'We have always been known as Lai since our ancestors' time, and not Mizo or Lusei. My identity is rooted in being Lai first and foremost. Hence, the Indian Constitution acknowledges our distinct culture by granting us autonomy through the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC), sharply distinguishing us from the Mizo tribe.'* (Laia, church-elder). However, few respondents who opt for being identified as Mizo stated that: *'Since all the tribes (Zo-ethnic tribes) residing in Mizoram trace our roots from the same ancestor, I don't find much difference in being identified as Mizo or Lai. I am ok with both'.* (Sanga, youth-wing)

Figure 5.4: Preference For Identification as Lai or Mizo



Source: Field Data

Moreover, the nomenclature of *Mizo* has not been accepted by majority of the Lai respondents and thus, the name '*Mizo*' had been conceived by them as 'only people belonging to the *Lusei* Tribe (Mizo language speaking people) (Table 5.2). In this context, one respondent had also mentioned that: *'I do not consider myself as Mizo, instead I prefer to be identified as Lai as was specifically mentioned in the Indian Constitution List of Scheduled Tribes where the Lai and Mizo are categorised in different list. Therefore, if I am not Lai, then what am I?'* (Interview with Zothanpuia Hauheng, 6.10.2023, 1:00PM-2:00PM, College Veng, Lawngtlai).

Table 5.2: What Constitutes Mizo?

What Constitutes Lai?	Percentage	Frequency
Only Lusei Tribe	51%	204
All Chhinlung Chhuak	31%	126
Only Mizo Speaking Group	9%	36
All persons Inhabiting Mizoram	7%	27
Anybody Who Identifies Themselves as Mizo	2%	8

Source: Field Data

The desire to have their own freedom of administration was felt very strong by the Lai people and moreover, since the Lai people are endowed with a special privilege of Autonomous District Council wherein they function more or less like a semi-state having their own judicial, executive and financial power under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution Of India (Doungel, 2016: 37), the idea to constitute an exclusive ethnic based Church is the ultimate answer in order to assert their ethnic identity. Besides, the Lai geographical area are well demarcated in the Southern part of Mizoram with a well-defined territory of their own, as such, the idea of regionalism has proved to be one of the deciding factor for the birth of LIKBK as was rightly mentioned by one respondent saying that: *'The almighty God has granted us an exclusive land exclusively for the Lai people and it is our divine calling to protect our land and the people; The LIKBK is the right answer for obligating the said task in which we can protect and assert our unique Lai identity.'* (Interview with T. Thangthuama, 6.10.2023, 1:30- 2:45 PM, Chawlhmun, Aizawl)

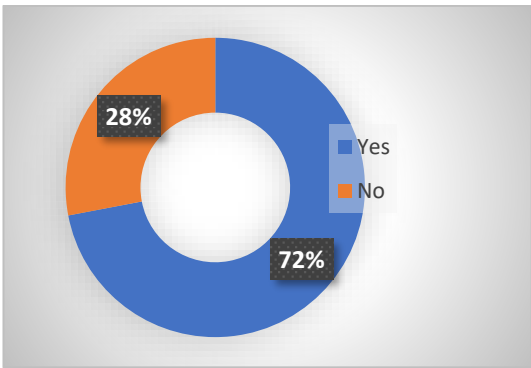
5.2.3 The Centrality of Lai Sentiments

Sumner (1906) was the first scholar who applied the term 'ethnocentrism' in the social science. He defines 'ethnocentrism' as the technical name for the view of things in which one group is the centre of everything, and all others are centre of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. He further characterises 'ethnocentrism' as often leading to pride, vanity, the belief in one's own group as superior and contempt for others. (1906:13). However, the term does not denote a negative connotation. (Hooghe, 2008). Edward Shils' Primordial Approach (1957) posited that individuals frequently exhibit a deep-seated attachment to the land they

inhabit or the place of their origin, as well as to their religion and kinship ties. Barth (1969) argued that this ‘strong primordial attachment’ represents a foundational model for understanding ethnicity and ethnic movements. The said three notions may be said as the building block for development of a strong ethnic sentiments whereby the Lai ethnic sentiments may be analysed as such. The Lai community has cultivated strong ethnic sentiments and takes pride in their identity as Lai individuals. Over time, this pride has evolved into a strong ethnic consciousness among the Lai people’ and thus ultimately led to the birth of LIKBK.

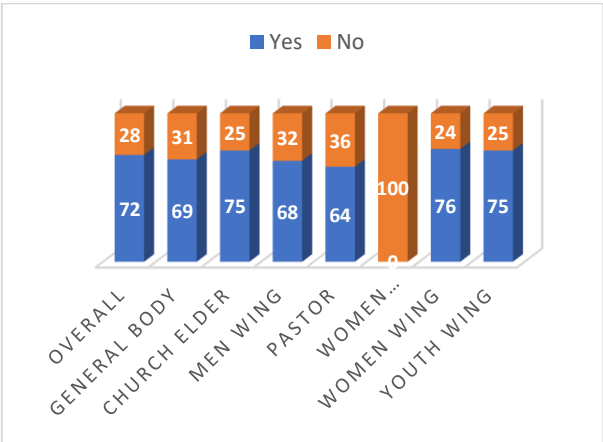
The research results demonstrate that a significant proportion of respondents, 72% (298 persons) (Figure 5.5), took great pride in identifying Lai ethnic sentiment as the key factor that gave rise to LIKBK, emphasising its importance in the movement's origin. However, the centrality of Lai sentiments have been rejected by few respondents amounting to 28% with a frequency of 112 persons, and especially the women theologians (100%) opine that Lai sentiment is not the main focus (Figure 5.6). Rather the greater blame is given to discriminatory practices by BCM and non-projections of their cultural rights and demands before *Serkawn* BCM. Their main point of argument is that: *‘I don’t think Lai sentiment is the central focal point for the establishment of LIKBK; but the main reason was Serkawn BCM’s negligence attitude towards us and not because of Lai sentiment.’* (Mary, woman theologian)

Figure 5.5: Opinion on Lai Sentiment in LIKBK's Emergence



Source: Field Data

Figure 5.6: Sub-groups’ Opinion on Lai Sentiment in LIKBK's Emergence



Source: Field Data

The renewed ethnic consciousness that had been awakened by the work of LIKBK has been concisely elucidated by a respondent saying that: *'Before the establishment of LIKBK, during my time in the Baptist Church, I didn't feel a strong sense of being Lai. However, after the birth of LIKBK, a profound love for my Lai identity developed within me. I now take pride in being Lai. Thanks to LIKBK, we have formed close connections with fellow Lais from America and Chin Hills, and we are actively collaborating on various church-related matters.'* (Lalramthliri, youth wing member, Bethel locality). Additionally, the centrality of Lai sentiments has also been witnessed in the drafted LIKBK Constitution which was described as: *'The Lai sentiment is central towards the emergence of LIKBK because the LIKBK Constitution also talks about the preservation of Lai culture. Besides, the Church conducts Church service occasionally in Lai language and observes Lai night as often as possible.'* (Vanlala, Deacon, Aizawl). One respondent has also eloquently expressed that the basic implication of the term 'Lairam' as: *"Certainly, the nomenclature 'LIKBK' inherently signifies 'Lairam,' denoting 'the territory of the Lai community'. The profound and enduring commitment to the welfare of the Lai people was palpably evident in the vision of the pioneers of LIKBK. Their aspiration was to worship and honour God in a manner consonant with our cultural identity, exemplified by the establishment of a distinctive Lai altar, all without compromising our cultural heritage."* (Lalramengmawia, Church-elder)

Drawing from Udeagha and Nwamah (2020) who argued that ethnic sentiment is the deciding factor for the formation of various ethnic religion in Nigeria, which pervades all other spheres of like the politics, economy and all other spheres of society, and also in line with Mate (2018) who studied the 'Tangkhal's' of Manipur who asserted their identity in order to promote and protect their strong ethnic sentiments through language, custom and culture by forming a separate movement; separate political organisation and denominations of their own faith, who further proclaimed that one noteworthy point here is the birth of the ethnic-based Church, that is, the *Tangkhal* Christian Association on 21st March, 1981. With the formation of this Church, the *Tangkhal*s now have the opportunity to come together under the banner of one denomination, worshipping in their own dialect, the study may also be concluded that Lai ethnic sentiments is the one of the main factors for the emergence of LIKBK

whereby the Lai people asserted their ethnic sentiments mainly through the establishment of an ethnic based Church.

5.2.4 Reformed Response Against the British Hegemony

Indeed, many ethnic movements can trace their origins to colonialism and the phenomenon of ‘cultural whitewashing’. (Next GenerAsian, 2021). Colonial powers often imposed their cultural, social, and political structures onto indigenous populations, leading to the suppression or erasure of indigenous identities, languages, and traditions. This process, sometimes referred to as ‘cultural whitewashing’ or ‘cultural assimilation’, can endanger resistance and foster the emergence of ethnic movements as marginalised groups seek to reclaim and preserve their unique cultural heritage and identity in the face of colonial dominance. Throughout history, colonisers have frequently attempted to impose their culture upon the native populations of the countries they controlled politically. This imposition of culture was particularly pronounced in third world countries under colonial rule, where the phenomenon of ‘whitewashing’ was prevalent. This cultural oppression often served as a catalyst for ethnic movements, which could manifest as either violent or non-violent resistance against colonial domination, as marginalised groups sought to reclaim and assert their cultural identities and rights. Reetz (1993) in his article entitled ‘Ethnic and Religious Identities in Colonial India (1920’s- 1930’s): A Conceptual Debate’ examined the ethnic and religious movements that emerged in pre-independence India. He contended that the nationalist movement's apex was characterised by an overarching ‘anti-colonial struggle.’ This suggests that the primary focus and culmination of various ethnic and religious movements during this period were directed towards opposing colonial rule in India.

Similar to other movements in colonial contexts, the LIKBK movement reflects a resistance against encroachment and external control. The British encroachment on Lai territory, starting in 1891 (Bawitlung, 2001:14), represented a significant intrusion for the Lai people, who had not previously experienced such overwhelming external power. This imposition was particularly challenging for Lai chiefs and the community

as a whole, leading to a rejection of the status quo and a desire to assert their autonomy and cultural identity.

5.2.5 Reformed Response Against BCM Hegemony

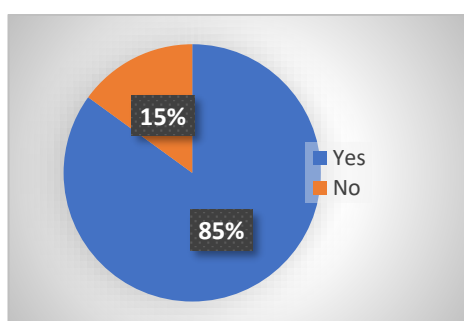
Subsequent to the Baptist Missionary Society's (BMS) adoption of the South Lushai Hills as their mission field, they called upon J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge to return to Mizoram. Consequently, they resumed their missionary endeavors in the South Lushai Hills, settling in *Fort Lunglei*, particularly in *Serkawn* village (referred to as Lemon Vale by the missionaries) starting from March 13, 1903 (Lawmsanga, 2012: 87). Upon their return, Savidge and Lorrain faced the daunting task of establishing a Christian community in the southern region. The BMS continued their missionary work in southern Mizoram for sixty-five years, with the final missionary from this group departing Mizoram in 1968. (BCM Communication Department, 2022). Surprisingly, it was only after fifteen years following the arrival of Christian missionaries in Mizoram that Christianity found its way into the *Lairam* (Lai areas). A significant turning point in the religious landscape of the Lai district occurred with the establishment of the inaugural Baptist church at *Mampui* village (formerly known as *Khamchungpuk* village) in 1910. It is noteworthy that the earliest documented mention of a Christian presence in this locale dates back to 1912 (Lalpekhluah, 2022:5). Official records indicate that the first three individuals from *Mampui* Village—*Khawdina* (aged 28), *Darchana* (aged 16), and Vana (aged 13) - were baptised by J.H. Lorraine in 1913 (Lalpekhluah.L.H, 2022:7).

Over time, a remarkable development occurred as the Lai community departed from the parent church, the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM). This schism led to the establishment of the first ethnic church known as IKK in 1970, commonly referred to as the first exodus. Subsequently, another Lai ethnic-based church was founded in 1982 under the name *Pawiram Baptist Kohhran* (PBK), known as the second exodus. Eventually, these two churches merged to form a unified entity known as *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran* (LIKBK) on November 27, 1999. Since the establishment of this ethnic church, the Lai people have been actively engaged in revitalising the diminishing Lai culture. The emergence of this ethnic-based church may have been

influenced by various factors, prompting the study to investigate the extent to which the BCM may have contributed to the reasons behind the Lai people's decision to establish their own ethnic church.

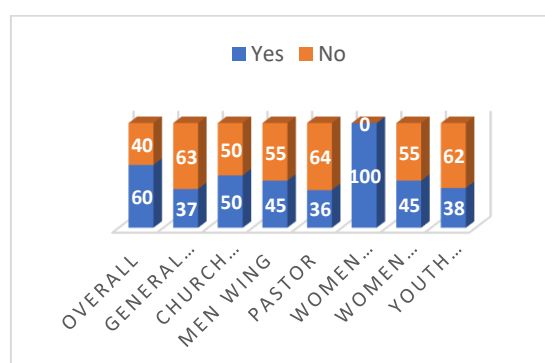
Upon asking the question on ‘Do you think the LIKBK has emerged as a reform response against the discriminatory treatment of the BCM?’ The findings reveal that overall, significant number of 85% participants, amounting to a frequency of 348 persons agree that the BCM’s discriminative policy served as the main reason for the birth of LIKBK due to a very strong in-group sentiment. (Figure 5.7). However, as per the finding, an insignificant number of 15% from the overall respondent (Figure 5.7) amounting to a frequency of only 62 persons, mainly from the Pastor wing (Figure 5.8) are of the view that the birth of LIKBK may not be attributed to the discriminatory practices of BCM. One Pastor went on to say that: ‘*The underlying reason for splitting against the Baptist Church was that we could not be truly connected with them as both the parties spoke different languages, had contrasting cultures and unique ways of doing things.*’ (Jerome, LIKBK Pastor). Following the methodology, all the respondents are categorised into seven sub-groups, namely- general body, church-elder, men-wing, Pastor, women-theologian, women-wing and youth-wing, so as to find out whether there is any variation in opinion among the various categories of respondents based on their social profile, as follows:

Figure 5.7: Emergence of LIKBK as a Reform Response



Source: Field Data

Figure 5.8: Sub-groups’ Opinion on the Emergence of LIKBK as a Reform Response



The above figure reveals that all the sub-groups commonly agreed that the BCM’s discriminative policy served as the main reason for the birth of LIKBK. However, a

significant number amounting to 64% of Pastors (Figure 5.8) are of the opinion that the BCM was not the main catalyst, saying that: *‘Since our neighbouring district Maraland had a well-established ethnic based church called Evengelical Church of Maraland. (ECM), the Lai district wanted to follow suit.’* (B. Biaka, LIKBK Pastor).

In line with Gramsci’ (1970) argument that emphasised hegemony as a type of leadership through culture in which one class dominates another by controlling ideology that serves only the interest of the ruling class, most of the participants’ statements suggest that it was due to the discriminative policy of the hegemonic BCM that the LIKBK came into being. Some of the remarkable quotes that highlight the discriminative policies of the BCM against the Lai people are quoted as:

I totally agree that the LIKBK has emerged mainly as a reform movement against the discriminatory treatment given by the early Baptist Christian. The early Christian Missionaries and the Baptist Church of Mizoram headquartered at Serkawn, Lunglei were always against the wishes and appeals made by the Lai people. The Lais were never selected to study the Church-sponsored specialised training courses like nurse, pastor and the like. (Thawngliana, church-elder).

This discrimination had even perpetuated in the field of accessing health care. One respondent narrated that: *‘Their discriminative policy against the Lai people could be sensed even in the hospital set up where the sick persons who came from a far-flung place with no inadequate access to proper roads were often denied a proper treatment.’* (Malsawma Chinzah). Besides, the Lai people, owing to their relative backwardness being situated at far south as against the other tribes, had often been ridiculed by the Church authority. One is quoted as:

Yes, the LIKBK truly is a reform movement against the discriminatory treatment of the Serkawn Baptist. I can still recall my late grandfather narrating an anecdote about his past experience where the Lai people who enthusiastically went as a delegate to the Assembly in Serkawn wearing nothing but a mere ‘loincloth’ became the laughing stock. He even said that

all their pleas and demands always went unnoticed. (Rema, youth- wing leader, Bualpui NG)

In line with Marx's (1867) 'economic exploitation' that ruthlessly exploited the proletariat's wages by the bourgeoisie who controls the means of production, the BCM may also be viewed as such, wherein the poor Lai people were obliged to submit their monthly *tithes* (one-tenth of income to Church) to *Serkawn* BCM, which is far off from the Lai dominated areas. One very articulated respondent had alleged that:

Early Baptist Church of Mizoram turned a deaf ear towards our plea to assign a designated missionary to the Chin Hills for preaching to our fellow Lai. Moreover, the early Baptist Church of Mizoram took all the revenue from the poor Lai people through the monthly tithe and did not have the heart to establish schools nor Hospital for us in return. There were third class treatments towards the Lai people and a very biased- stepmotherly treatment meted out to us just like the Cinderella story. (Lai T.T.)

Some of the respondents have also complained that all the grievances and pleas addressed by the Lai people were always regarded as uncalled for by the BCM analogous to a trend of Gramsci's (1970) notion of 'hegemony' in term of 'ideology'. The BCM always made sure that their ideology was binding and final. The Lai people claiming that they received a strong divine calling through the waves of revival experienced in *Chawnhu* and *Bualpui (NG)* villages respectively. The main theme of the first revival in *Chawnhu* village (1963) was that the people had felt a strong missionary zeal to reach out the people of 'Miria' in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Subsequently, in 1964, Chawnhu Pastor Bial Mission Board was established. However, the Parent Church, BCM had strongly directed to dissolve such Missionary Board as it was established without prior knowledge of the later. (Hrangzuala, 2022:114-115). Suppression, oppression, discrimination and exploitation loomed large to the utter dissatisfaction among Lai community which terminated in an alternative reform strategy.

Followingly, the spiritual revival in *Bualpui (NG)* village (1966) particularly resonated strongly with the younger generation. The main theme of the revival was to send a

missionary to their Lai brethren residing in Burma. There were several tribes like *Matu, Khumi, Dai, Miria, Doitu, Uppu* and other tribes who settled mainly at *Paletwa, Minpia, Matupui and Kampalet* Districts. The Lai people felt that it was their sole responsibility to enlighten such tribes saying that such missionary zeal had been shouldered upon them by God. Therefore, the final cause of discontentment had cropped up when the Lai people were swept by a strong revival spirit wherein, they were spiritually urged to send missionary to their Lai brethren in *Matupui* areas (Burma). They made an appeal to the *Serkawn* Baptist authority, which was outrightly rejected by the authority. Therefore, in order to make their mission successful, they were left with no choice but to be separated from the mother church and establish their own ethnic based Church. (Hrangzuala, 2022:116). One respondent has also added that:

When the Lai people were indwelled by the revival spirit, they felt a divine calling to preach the gospel to Matupui areas. However, this idea was rejected by the Serkawn Baptist Church. Despite the opposition, they proceeded to Matupui and even ended up in Akuhu prison. When some of them were held captives, they sought help from the Serkawn Baptist Church, but their plea was disregarded. The church conveyed that it was not their responsibility to assist in bailing out the prisoners since they had gone against their wishes. The individuals involved were left to face the consequences on their own. This had really hurt the Lai sentiments. Furthermore, our request to appoint Mr. Thangchungnunga as a separate Executive Secretary was outrightly rejected. (Vanpari, women-wing leader).

Besides, the BCM's ideology was marked by solid centralisation of power exercisable in the hands of the few as was rightly stated by one scholarly respondent as:

Yes, the LIKBK is truly a special reform movement for the Lai tribes. Even though, it has been a common practice of Christian Missionary to plant Churches among the native people and later on left them to let them stand on their own and to let them grow by their own accord and capabilities. However, the Baptist Church of Mizoram refused to recognise the existence of a separate

tribe called Lai who ought to worship God in their own accord. As a result, they did not like to give up their grip and control over the Lai people through the Church. When some Lai intellectuals requested their right to worship God under the banner of Lai tribe, some Baptist Church leaders within and outside the Lai community opposed it tooth and nails. As the desire to grow and worship God under the banner of Lai tribe did not die down despite the stiff opposition and hence the inevitable happened and finally culminated in to the emergence of LIKBK which incidentally is a rare type of Church formed by conglomeration of the two Churches, namely LBK and IKK. (Zonunmawia, church-elder).

Melucci (1996) sees ‘appropriation of identity’ as the key towards understanding of new social movement wherein ‘solidarity among the group’ best characterises the new social movement. Likewise, the issue of identity is central in the Lai people’ struggle for independence. This statement may be validated by one church-elder respondent’s assertion that:

The LIKBK is regarded as a true reform movement for the Lai people. It is noteworthy that even the establishment of IKK (Isua Krista Kohhran) was exclusively intended as a Lai (previously known as Pawih) ethnic-based church. However, the term ‘Pawih Church’ was not incorporated into the church's name due to the strong influence of the MNF Movement (Mizo National Front) during that period. This political context instilled fear among the Lai people, dissuading them from including the name ‘Pawih’ when naming the church. (T. Thangzuala Vanchhawg, Bualpui NG village)

Whereas, some respondents have claimed a divine calling as the main reason for the birth of LIKBK saying that: ‘*The LIKBK is divinely empowered to undertake the noble task of preserving Lai ethnicity and upholding Lai culture.*’ (H. Lala, LIKBK pastor). Additionally, it is also asserted that:

The immediate cause for the establishment of LIKBK is undoubtedly the neglect of the Lai by Serkawn Baptist Church. However, one might consider it as part of God's plan, as the separation led to the birth of LIKBK. Without LIKBK, the

Lai tribe might have vanished by now, and the opportunity to spread the gospel among our Lai brethren in Chin Hills and Matupui would not have been possible. (Lalthuthlunga, Church-elder, Tuithumhnar Village).

Other respondents have also attributed the political condition that necessitated the emergence of LIKBK as:

The reason for the birth of Lai tribe- based church, that is, LIKBK, was not primarily due to Serkawn Baptist Church but rather stemmed from the great ethnic awakening of Lai tribes which had even influenced political leaders like Mr. T. Hranghluta, Mr. Lalchunga Chinzah, Mr. A. Chhuana who took the leading role towards the emergence of Lai ethnic-based tribe called Pawiram Baptist Kohhran (PBK). This is the reason why the Church was mockingly being nicknamed as 'Politik Kohhran' (a political party-based Church) due to its close association with political movement. This PBK had later amalgamated with Isua Krista Kohhran (IKK) and thus led to the formation of LIKBK. (Hranga, LIKBK Pastor)

Drawing from Gramsci (1970) and Torres and Young (1992) who commonly argued on the inevitability of social movements due to hegemonic culture exhibited by the ruling class that takes partial considerations only for the ruling elites, Churches are structured establishments centered around religious contemplation, intricately connected to the creation of social, cultural, identity and political dominance, the study may likewise conclude that the Christian hegemony and in particular the 'BCM Hegemony' is the root cause for the emergence of an ethnic based church, that had eventually taken the shape of an ethno-religious movement.

5.2.6 Reformed Response Towards Preservation of Lai Culture

In order to come up with a working definition for the study of LIKBK Movement, Cultural Anthropologist, Aberle's (1966) categorisation of social movements, particularly focusing on what the movement wants to change and what aspect of change they seek, is indeed relevant for understanding the LIKBK Movement. Aberle's classification of social movements includes four types: alternative, redemptive, reformative, and revolutionary social movements. Reformative social movements aim

to change specific aspects of the social structure. Unlike revolutionary movements, which seek to fundamentally overhaul the entire system, reformative movements advocate for more targeted and incremental changes. These changes are often intended to benefit the entire population rather than a specific subgroup or class. In the context of the LIKBK Movement, its efforts to preserve Lai culture and assert ethnic identity could be seen as a reformative social movement seeking to enact specific changes within the broader societal structure to benefit the Lai community as a whole. Reformative social movements typically advocate for minor changes within the existing social, political, or economic system rather than seeking radical transformation. They often aim to influence those in power to enact new policies or laws that address specific issues or injustices within society. Likewise, the LIKBK is conceptualised as a religious reform movement which painstakingly put all its efforts to reform the Lai Culture which was almost wiped off the picture due to assimilative policy of the *Lushei/ Mizo* culture and Christianity, by making use of *Duhlian* language and not Lai language for the medium of imparting education and gospel. In this context, one respondent had passively expressed the main reason for the problem of assimilation faced by the Lai people as:

Yes, the early Christians were undoubtedly the main culprit for the disappearance of Lai language as they did make any efforts to develop the Lai script whereas they developed a separate script for the Lusei and the Mara. Gospel and modern education were forcefully introduced to us through Mizo medium. We were left with little choice but to learn the Mizo language. We, therefore needed to surrender our identity in order to become a Christian and to become educated. This had drastically made the Lai language disappeared; witnessing it's disappearance with our own eyes but could not do anything was such a sad scene.
(Interview with C. Hrangzuala on 25th.5.2023, 10:17- 11:00 AM at College Veng, Lawngtlai)

As mentioned on the previous chapter, the Lai culture had faced serious issues of cultural change and assimilation. The changes were primarily driven by the British hegemony and the Christian hegemony which had drastically altered the typical Lai culture, leading to almost complete loss of their cultural heritage. The British

intervention on the Lai territory started with the Chin- Lushai Hill Expedition of 1888-1889. Since then, the traditional authority structure had been totally transformed wherein the Lai chiefs were no longer powerful and were merely recognized as ‘de-facto’ rulers. The Chief, who previously ruled their subjects along with the prescribed Lai customary law had been drastically replaced by the more advanced law and order presided by the British. Despite Christianity arriving relatively late in Lai territory, with formal documentation of Christians in Lawngtlai dating back only to 1912 (Chinzah, 2019:15), the introduction of Christianity by *Lusei (Mizo)* Christians resulted in significant changes to Lai culture, with no effort made by white missionaries to preserve the Lai language in written form. As a result, Lai culture gradually merged in the realm of Mizo culture. Additionally, the neglect and discrimination of Lai territory by the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) at *Serkawn*, despite their commitment not to decentralise Lai territory, further exacerbated the situation. Hence, the formation of LIKBK was initiated as a sincere attempt to rejuvenate their diminishing culture.

The respondents have largely accepted that an ethnic based church is very crucial for the preservation of their own exclusive Lai culture. 93% (328 persons, Figure 5.9) from the total population agree that an ethnic based church is the only solution to preserve their culture from further assimilation. Out of the total participants, only 7% (28 persons, Figure 5.9) opine that ethnic based church is not necessary for the preservation of Lai culture since some of the church-members are seen to have been influenced by and assimilated into the wider *Lusei/ Mizo* culture and those of neighbouring ethnicities.

Figure 5.9: Necessity of an Ethnic Based Church

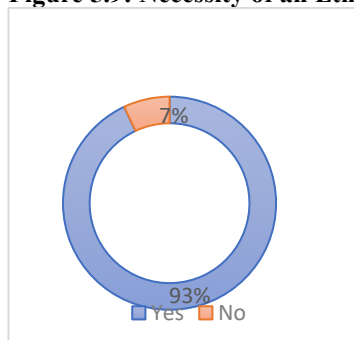
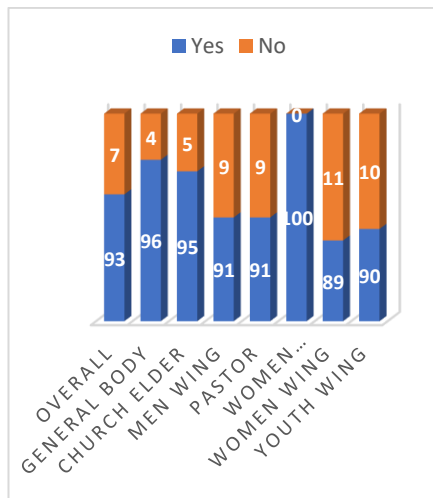


Figure 5.10: Necessity of Ethnic Based Church



Source: Field data

The sub-group classification of respondents similarly depicts a positive response without any difference among them when it comes to the issue of the necessity of ethnic-based church as shown in Figure 5.10. Women theologians have been 100% positive about it.

Most of the participants' arguments center around the significance of LIKBK as the guardian of the Lai culture wherein one articulated respondent has strongly asserted that: *'The LIKBK is the only Christian institution in the world that has its goal set exclusively for the Lai Culture, their heritage, language promotion and protection along with intact Christian values.'* (Lai T.T). Some of them have validated the centrality of ethnic based church by giving a divine sanction saying that: *'The divine providence of the Almighty prevents our demise, prompting a compelling need to establish the ethnicity-focused church, namely LIKBK, ensuring our survival and prosperity in this world.'* (Lalthapuii, Leader, Youth wing). Whereas some stated the centrality of Lai culture by giving a political back up saying that: *'The LADC alone is insufficient to protect our Lai tribes. We require additional institutions that can complement the task of safeguarding us, and the LIKBK is the right answer.'* (Hlawnthluaii, Secretary, women wing).

However, respondent who opined that preservation of Lai culture should not be the central focal point mainly argued that: *'I don't agree that the Lai Culture is the central focal point of the emergence of LIKBK, however, the Lai culture plays an important*

role for the functioning and programing of the LIKBK. And at the same I do agree that emphasis on culture is important but should not be the first priority of the LIKBK. Instead, teaching Christian doctrines should be the main focal point.' (Vuangtu, Church-elder, Aizawl locality). Another respondent had similarly argued that: *'I don't think we should over-enthusiastically concentrate on Lai ethnic-based Church because if we focus only on the Lai people, our LIKBK will be stagnant and it will become smaller and smaller in future. We should not think only of Lai culture, instead, we should incorporate the multi-cultural approach like the Bawm culture, the Chakma culture etc.'* (Reginald, Deacon, Aizawl locality)

Aligned with Siddiqi's (2014) perspective, which primarily interprets the Islamic reform movement, commonly referred to as *'The Tablighi Jamaat'* in the UK and Bangladesh, as embodying a *'Tablighi-guided life,'* denoting a shield against the perceived non-Islamic Western lifestyle, this concept offers directives on how Muslims can navigate the contemporary world while maintaining their identity as typical Muslims. In a similar vein, Singh (2014) explored the *Sanamahi* and *Meitei* Christian Movements in Manipur, attributing their emergence to Hindu and British colonial influences. Singh argued that the primary aim of the *'Sanamahi Movement'* was to safeguard and promote the indigenous culture of the *Meiteis* and *Manipuris*. Similarly, it is concluded that the endeavor to safeguard the Lai culture from further assimilation, initially instigated by British colonialism and Christian hegemony, served as the primary driving force behind the eventual emergence of LIKBK, which is rightly described by one respondent as: *'If the LIKBK had not been established to safeguard our distinctive culture, we would likely have forfeited all aspects of Lai heritage, including Lai songs, traditional dances, attire, languages, and more. We might have faced complete assimilation into Mizo culture and the Baptist Church culture. Therefore, the Lai community owes profound gratitude to the LIKBK for preserving the nearly extinct Lai people.'* (Lalramthliri, Chanmary locality)

5.3 Ideology and Role of Leadership

Melucci (1996: 332) posited that 'ideology' of a social movement provides crucial insights into its motivations, origins, and evolution. The set of beliefs, values, and

principles that shape a movement's goals, strategies, and tactics form the foundation upon which the movement operates. Understanding this ideology helps to contextualise the movement within its socio-political landscape and reveals the driving forces behind its actions. Moreover, tracing the evolution of ideology over time sheds light on how the movement adapts to changing circumstances and influences its trajectory. Overall, studying the ideology of a social movement is essential for a comprehensive understanding of its dynamics and impact.

Indeed, social movements typically do not emerge spontaneously; rather, they often originate from the efforts of one person or a small group who motivate others to join in addressing a common problem or advocating for a shared cause. These individuals or groups serve as catalysts for change, inspiring others to become involved and mobilising collective action. Their leadership, vision, and organisational efforts play a crucial role in shaping the movement's direction and momentum. Understanding the role of these initiators and early leaders is essential for comprehending the genesis and dynamics of social movements. These group of leaders are at times, organised in hierarchy. (Turner and Killian, 1957).

In India, for instance, various movements have been spearheaded by influential leaders who mobilised people around specific demands or causes; *Panchanan Thakur* led the *Rajbanshi Kshatriya* movement by asserting the identity of *Rajbanshis* as *Kshatriyas* and rallying support around this claim. Similarly, leaders like *Charu Majumdar*, *Kanu Sanyal*, and *Jungal Santhal* played key roles in initiating the Naxalite movement in West Bengal, while figures such as *N. Patnaik*, *Chandra Pullu Reddy*, *Nagi Reddy*, and *Seetharamiah* led the movement in Andhra Pradesh. In the women's movement, numerous leaders have emerged across different regions of the country. For example, *Sri Narayana Guru* was a prominent leader in the SNDP movement in Kerala. These movements often exhibit collective leadership, where various elites contribute to the cause with a division of labor based on their expertise and influence. (Rao, 1979: 251). Rao (1979:1) suggests that extensive mobilisation efforts have culminated in the formation of organised movements characterised by defined ideologies and influential leaders. These movements have played significant roles in instigating transformative changes within the societies from which they emerge.

The above arguments portrays that the presence of a clear and precise ideology is crucial for the success of any social movement, including the LIKBK Movement. The ideology outlined in the LIKBK Constitution, particularly ‘the goal of preserving Lai culture from further assimilation’ (LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws, 2020:5), serves as a guiding principle for the movement. This commitment to cultural preservation provides a cohesive framework for organising and mobilising supporters, shaping the movement's objectives, strategies, and actions. By articulating such an ideology, the LIKBK Movement establishes a sense of purpose and direction, which is essential for galvanising collective efforts towards its goals. Besides this statement of the Constitution, the researcher’s finding with 82% of the respondents which opinionated that ‘preservation of Lai culture is the central theme of the movement’ truly serves as the testament of the main ideology of the movement. The issue of ‘language assimilation’ was the main catalyst for the development of such ideology. Many factors had contributed towards the rise of discontentment and confusion among the Lai people of which fear of assimilation being one of the main reasons for the birth of LIKBK wherein 58 % the overall respondents argued that fear of assimilation is the main factor for the birth of LIKBK among other various factors.

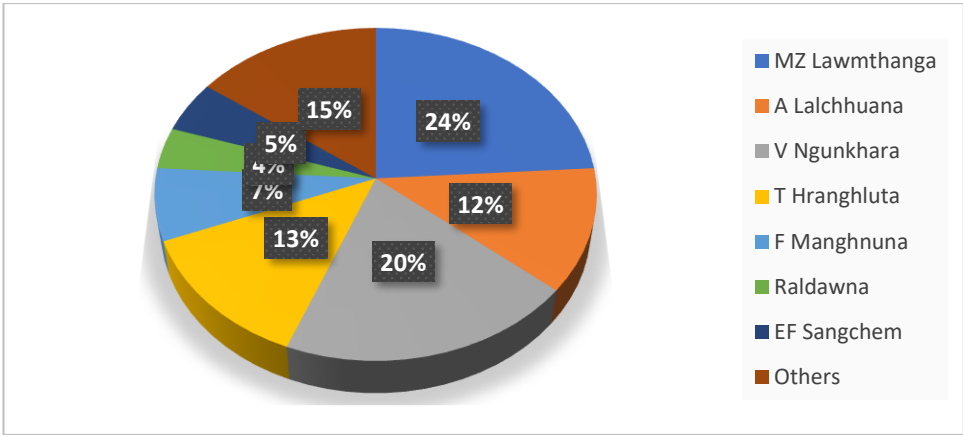
DeCesare (2013) argued that in the history of the study of social movement, the role of leadership tends to be ‘poorly theoritised’ and ‘overlooked’. Hopper (1950) identified five types of leaders in social movement – the agitator, the prophet, the reformer, the statesman, and the administrator-executive. Each of these five general types of leaders was more or less prominent during the theorised stages of revolutionary movement. Drawing from DeCesare, (2013) who laid importance for the role of leadership towards successful movement and Hopper’s (1950) typology of leaders of Social Movement organization (SMO), the study of LIKBK Movement thereby is focused on the roles of charismatic leaders, the prophets and the statesmen who inspired, motivated and directed the LIKBK Movement so as to achieve a concrete shape. Speaking of the role of leadership for a successful movement as a pre requisite, indeed, in the LIKBK Movement, we find a number of very able and influential leaders who had initiated the Movement. These leaders served as pillars of comfort and reassurance for the Lai people during uncertain times. Their guidance and

support provided assurance and confidence to the community, especially when facing the challenging prospect of declaring independence from the BCM, the mother church. In moments of doubt and weariness, the leadership's steadfast commitment to the movement's goals and the belief in the path towards independence helped to uplift and unify the Lai people, instilling in them the courage and determination to press forward despite obstacles. In the course of the researcher's fieldwork, respondents consistently praised several leaders from both the IKK and LBK Churches for their exceptional charismatic leadership qualities and their unwavering commitment to the movement's success. These leaders were admired for their clear vision and strategic direction, which guided the movement forward. Moreover, respondents noted the leaders' dedication and hard work, evident through their significant contributions to the movement's progress and achievements as shown in Figure 8.2. One poignant aspect of the church leaders' story is the unwavering commitment and sacrifice displayed by some pastors serving under the Baptist Church. Despite having families to support, individuals like *Reverend. M.Z. Lawmthanga Sathing* and *Reverend. V. Ngunkhara*, converted to the Lai ethnic church without hesitation. This decision was made despite the unknown future, highlighting their strong sense of loyalty to their community and conviction in the movement's cause. The Baptist Church's reaction to *Mr. Lawmthanga Sathing's* conversion is particularly noteworthy. He was charged a significant amount, ₹9,860.00, to repay the expenses incurred by the church during his Bachelor of Divinity studies. However, *Mr. C. Ngura* of *Lunglei* district stepped forward to cover this debt, demonstrating solidarity and support for *Mr. Lawmthanga Sathing's* decision to join the Lai ethnic church. Such acts of generosity and solidarity underscore the deep bonds and sense of community within the LIKBK Movement. (Hrangzuala, 2022:147).

In the LIKBK Movement, leaders such as *Reverend E.F. Sangchem* and *Reverend Raldawna* from the initial phase, known as IKK, played pivotal roles. *Reverend E.F. Sangchem*, originally from *Lungzarhtum village*, had been a teacher at Blue Mountain High School. Recognising the shortage of leaders in IKK, he made the selfless decision to unconditionally resign from his teaching position and wholeheartedly dedicated himself to the cause, eventually becoming its first General Secretary. During his

tenure, he was assigned to pursue a Bachelor of Theology (B.Th) degree at Jorhat, followed by further studies in Bachelor of Divinity (B.D) at the United Theological College in Bangalore. Leveraging his extensive educational background, knowledge, and skills, he spearheaded the crucial task of translating the Lai Bible, for which the Lai community holds immense gratitude. *Reverend Raldawna's* contribution to the founding of IKK is notable and deserves acknowledgment. Sponsored by *Dr. Lalliana Mualchin* from the USA, he pursued his Bachelor of Divinity (B.D) degree at the United Theological College in Bangalore in 1975. Subsequently, he devoted himself full-time to the advancement of the movement and the Church. It may also be pertinent to mention *Reverend Chhumkunga*, the first pastor of IKK, previously served as the Chairman of *Phawngpui Division* under BCM. Later, he joined the IKK movement and became its first pastor, highlighting his significant and timely intervention. Additionally, during fieldwork, some individuals mentioned that the initiative was basically taken by old, uneducated village spiritual peoples who implanted the idea of establishing a separate ethnic-based church among the people. Nevertheless, note should be taken that there were numerous leaders from both the IKK and PBK movements, although they are not detailed here due to constraints of time and space (Figure 5.11).

Figure 5.11: Name of Leaders in the LIKBK Movement



Source: Field Data

In the second phase of the LIKBK Movement, known as PBK, notable political figures like *Mr. T.Hranghluta* and his associates such as *Mr. A. Lalchhuana*, *Mr.F.*

Manghnuna, and *Mr. Lalchunga Chinzah* emerged as key figures. During this period, *Mr. T.Hranghluta*, serving as the Chief Executive Member of the Lai Autonomous District Council, undertook a significant journey to Delhi to meet with the then Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Their objective was to advocate for a separate Autonomous District Council for the Lai people. During their meeting, Mrs. Gandhi questioned *Mr. Hranghluta* about why the Lai people should be granted autonomy, especially considering they did not have a distinct language. Momentarily at a loss for words, *Mr. Hranghluta* received timely assistance from his associate, *Mr. Hiato*, the Chief Executive Member of the *Lakher (Mara)* Autonomous District Council (MADC). *Mr. Hiato* discreetly advised him to emphasise the existence of their ethnic church, IKK, which resonated with the Prime Minister. Furthermore, Mrs. Gandhi advised them to be vigilant in safeguarding their identity, emphasising that without it, they would risk losing their autonomy. This counsel underscored the importance of preserving their cultural distinctiveness in maintaining their autonomy status. Upon returning from Delhi, they wasted no time and promptly took action to establish a second separate ethnic church, named *Pawiram Baptist Kohhran (PBK)*. In this manner, the far-sighted leaders from the Lai community demonstrated their adeptness in multiple roles, including the agitator, the prophet, the reformer, the statesman, and the administrator-executive, as highlighted by Hopper (1950), which are essential for the success of any social movement.

5.4 Collective Mobilisation in the LIKBK Movement

Rao (1979) opines that every social movement includes two characteristics, namely, ‘Collective Action’ in which that action is ‘oriented towards change’. Smelser’s Strain Theory (1962) lists ‘six fundamental prerequisites’ as ‘necessary and sufficient’ foundations for group behavior. (Arthur, 2009:5-6). Similarly, these six requirements are validated in the LIKBK movement as follows:

5.4.1 ‘Structural Conduciveness’: This refers to the organised components of society that either facilitate or hinder specific types of social behavior. It implies that the societal structure can either promote or impede collective behavior among its members. For instance, tribal or rural communities, characterised by simple and

traditional social structures, may be less prone to engaging in collective behavior compared to modern and complex metropolitan societies. As such, the Lai community assembles this structural conduciveness which was earlier characterised by the common tribal homogenous group who were unitedly functioning within the structure of Lai chieftainship before the advent of Christianity nor Colonialism.

5.4.2 ‘Structural Strains’: Smelser argued that 'collective behavior' can be influenced by various situational factors such as poverty, conflict, discrimination, and future uncertainty. Feelings of injustice and exploitation often drive individuals to take drastic actions, prompting them to collaborate with others in search of solutions. These circumstances create a sense of urgency and solidarity among affected individuals, motivating them to mobilise collectively to address the underlying issues and bring about change. Accordingly, the Lai people had also experienced such ‘structural strains’ especially in their cultural structure due to radical changes that had been brought about in the way of life of the Lai due to Christianity coupled with the advent of British and the arrival new faith and modern education. According to Smelser's perspective, potential alliances for collective behavior often include exploited classes, oppressed racial groups, and insecure minorities. In the context of Lai society, two opposing forces can be identified in the initial phase. Firstly, the ‘Colonisers’ represented by the British officials, and the ‘Lai tribal Chiefs’ such as *Hausata* and *Dokulha*. This tension escalated to the extent of violent actions, as seen in the killing of British officials like Lieutenant Stewart on February 3, 1888, due to British encroachment on Lai territory. The second antagonistic class can be understood as the conflict between the ‘*Baptist Church of Mizoram*’(BCM) and ‘the Lai people’. The Lai people were dissatisfied with the discriminatory treatment they received from the BCM, leading to the creation of their own ethnic church, known as LIKBK, as a response to the perceived injustices and marginalization they experienced.

5.4.3 ‘Generalised Belief’: According to Smelser's analysis, structural conduciveness and strains are not sufficient in themselves to lead to collective behavior. Before engaging in any collective action, people must develop a shared belief or understanding about the situation. This belief serves to identify the source of the threat, potential avenues of escape, or opportunities for fulfillment. Over time, this belief may

‘crystallise into an ideology that is directed towards change’. Likewise, the great awakening of the Lai tribe in terms of ethnicity may be paralleled with the establishment of the first ethnic church, *Isua Krista Kohhran* (IKK) in 1972 at *Bualpui NG* village. This may be regarded as the first collective action of the Lai people which is directed towards change in the social structure. They did so by declaring complete independence from the BCM church thereby forming their own. The idea to have an exclusive ethnic base church exclusively meant for preserving and uplifting the Lai culture and the Lai people have been the dominating ideology which was collectively accepted by all the Lai people.

5.4.4 ‘Precipitating Factors’: Collective behavior typically does not occur spontaneously. Instead, it is often preceded by a dramatic occurrence or event that serves as a catalyst for action. This inciting incident could be sparked by various factors such as a perceived act of high-handedness, injustice, or violence. Such events validate people's skepticism and unease, galvanising them into collective action. In many cases, violence may escalate as a result of these tensions and grievances. In the case of LIKBK Movement, the immediate cause of the abrupt declaration of freedom from BCM control was due to one incident that really hurt the Lai sentiments which was sadly narrated by one respondent saying that: *“Whenever we made a plea to the Serkawn Church, they usually turned a deaf ear towards us. We demanded a separate Executive Secretary (ES) to administer the Lai areas (Chhintuipui area) as the administrative areas under ‘Phawngpui Division’ was way too large to be single handed by one person, which was outrightly rejected”* (Interview with K.C. Chuangkimi on 10.5.2023, 11:00 am- 12:00 AM, *Bualpui NG*, Lawngtlai). Therefore, the Lai people were left with little choice but to declare separation from the BCM and start their own Church in the hope to reform and preserve their own culture and to develop at their own pace.

5.4.5 ‘Mobilisation’: Smelser's perspective suggests that collective mobilisation often leads to the emergence of leaders who inspire others to take action. In the case of the Lai people, the movement appears to have been initiated by ‘spiritual individuals’ who claimed to have received a divine calling to send missionaries to their Lai brethren in Myanmar areas. However, this idea was rejected by the BCM (Interview with Upa.

Thawnglianga Vuangtu on 23rd. 7. 2023, 1:00 PM -2:00 PM at Mission Vengthlang, Aizawl). Despite this initial setback, the rejection may have served as a catalyst for further collective action, eventually leading to the emergence of leaders who rallied the community around common goals and aspirations, such as the preservation of Lai culture and identity. These leaders likely played a crucial role in inspiring and mobilizing others to participate in the movement. The movement, thus crystallised itself into collective mobilisation with the emergence of capable leaders unconditionally directed towards bringing change as was evidently mentioned by one respondent in course of fieldwork as: *'LIKBK is the only Christian institution in the world that has its goal set exclusively for the Lai Culture, their heritage, language promotion and protection along with intact Christian values.'* (Lai T.T.)

5.4.6 'Social Control': The outcome of a social movement can be influenced by the effectiveness or power of social control mechanisms. These mechanisms, which include leadership, police power, mass media, political authority, and others, play a critical role in regulating and managing group behavior within society. If these mechanisms are strong and effective, they may be able to restrain or mitigate the impact of collective behavior. However, if these mechanisms are ineffective, they may exacerbate the behavior or fail to contain it, potentially leading to escalation or further unrest. However, in the case of LIKBK Movement, the movement garnered wide support from various segments of the society including the political leaders who played a contributive role. For instance, the second ethnic based Church, the *'Pawiram Baptist Kohhran'* (PBK which was later named as *Lairam Baptist Kohhran* (LBK) was created in 1982 by some prominent political leaders themselves like *Mr. Hranghluta* (the Chief Executive Member of LADC at that time), *Mr. A. Lalchhuana* and *Mr. Lalchunga Chinzah* and other influential political leaders. (Interview with Mr. F. Lalramdina on 22.10.2023, 7:30PM_8:00 PM, Shillong). This support from political leaders demonstrates the movement's broad-based appeal and legitimacy within the community'.

In fact, the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) and the ethnic based churches complement each other very well and reinforced each other positively. In support of this assertion, Lalsangliana (2022:35) narrated that while the politicians like *Mr. T.*

Hranghluta went to Delhi to meet Mrs. Indira Gandhi in demand of separate autonomous council for the Lai people, they were questioned the reason for their uniqueness of their tribe so as to make them demand Autonomous District Council. They promptly replied by saying that they even had an ethnic-based Church, IKK which make them unique to all the other tribes in Mizoram. This is the main point taken as a satisfactory answer by Mrs. Indira Gandhi as a step to grant them the Lai Autonomous District Council. Therefore, if not due to the prior establishment of IKK, the Lai may perhaps not be granted a separate District Autonomous Council by the Indian Central Government. Soon after their return from Delhi, *Mr. T. Hranghluta* and his friends were thus, well-aware that establishment of an exclusive ethnic-based church for the Lai people was the ultimate solution so as to preserve the uniqueness of the Lai and it was the only visible instrument to prove that the Lai people are unique and different from other tribes in Mizoram and that they deserve a special treatment like the 'Sixth Schedule' of the Constitution of India.

Tilly's (1973) 'Political process theory of social movement' underscores the idea that collective action is not arbitrary but is shaped by the underlying political conditions and dynamics within a society's 'core politics'. Accordingly, the birth of the second ethnic based movement can thus be analysed by using Tilly's claim of social movement as: *'A sustained series of interactions between national powerholders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly-visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with public demonstrations of support'* (Tilly, 1973:12; Morris and Herring, 1984:9). Tilly's accreditation of the 'nationalisation of politics' and the 'development of special purpose groups' that give rise to the idea of social movements in the nineteenth century was the exact case in the formation of LBK, wherein political parties, unions, and other associations emerged as the main arenas through which groups fought for dominance and institutionalised their interests during that century. As mentioned before, *Mr. T. Hranghluta*, who served at the capacity of the biggest political figure as Chief Executive Member (more or less similar rank with Chief Minister of state) along with other influential political leaders at that time like *C. Ngunhaia*, *B. Siamhranga*, *C.T.*

Luaia, C. Hniartura, A. Lalchhuana and L. Chinzah (Hrangzuala, 2022:99) were the worth-mentioning names who were the chief architect of the PBK Movement. Despite facing serious criticisms and ridicule, they courageously took up the initiative, demonstrating remarkable perseverance and solidarity in the face of adversity. Together, they navigated the challenges and obstacles, united in their commitment to advancing the interests and aspirations of the Lai community through the PBK Movement. According to Tilly, these people formed social movements that fight for national power through ‘special purpose associations,’ much like their ‘institutionalised counterparts’. (Morris and Herring, 1984:10).

5.5 Stages of the LIKBK Movement

Charles and Tilly (1978), and Blumer (1951) had talked of four stages of social movement like ‘the preliminary stages’, ‘the popular stage’, ‘the formalisation stage’ and ‘the institutionalisation stage’. Similarly, the LIKBK has contented all these criteria of successive stages. As mentioned on the previous chapter, the LIKBK movement had not just happened in an overnight; it has been undergoing various painstaking successive stages of over twenty years or more. Accordingly, the LIKBK maybe aptly conceptualized as an ethno-religious movement that had undergone various successive stages of social movement and finally taking the form of a tribe-based church in its final stage.

The first stage of the movement may be marked as the year 1970 where the first ethnic based church, *Isua Krista Kohhran* (IKK) was formed at *Bualpui NG village* which is popularly referred to as ‘the first Exodus’. The church was then gradually beginning to take its firmer ground when the second ethnic based Church was formed at Lawngtlai, known as ‘*Pawiram Baptist Kohhran*’ (PBK) in 1982 which was almost twenty years after the birth of IKK. This second stage is then referred to as ‘the second Exodus’ (Lalpekhlu, 2022: v). The name of PBK was then changed to ‘*Lairam Baptist Kohhran*’ (LBK). Finally, after a prolonged period of peaceful negotiations and discussions, the LIKBK was officially formed on November 27, 1999, at New Saiha. This significant event symbolised the culmination of efforts to unite the two ethnic-based churches, IKK and LBK, under a common platform. Together, these churches,

comprising Lai people with shared values and sentiments, aimed to steadfastly preserve Lai culture and identity within the broader social and cultural landscape.

5.5.1 The ‘preliminary Stage’ of the LIKBK Movement (1889-1970): This stage may be characterised as the ‘unrest stage’(Blumer,1951). As Smelser (1962) had argued that ‘all social movements begin with some feelings of discontentment with the existing social order’. Similarly, discontentment and a feeling of deprivation had been experienced by the Lai people which had thus in course of time accumulated into the inevitable formation of the LIKBK movement. The preliminary stage of the LIKBK movement may be approximately traced back to the year of British intervention upon the land of the Lai in 1889 wherein they mercilessly subdued all the Lai chiefs. (Bawitlung, 2012:14) till the year before the birth of the first ethnic church, IKK in 1970. Ever since the occupation of the Lai territory by the British colonisers, the Lai people had been experiencing a sense of retaliation and discontentment and could not come to terms that the Lai chief were regarded merely as de-facto rulers. Moreover, no missionary was assigned to the Lai people and were thus comparatively backward as compared to other tribes settling in Mizoram. Under the Independent India, the Lai territory had attained a special status of ‘*Pawi Lakher Regional Council*’ in 23rd. April.1953 and this had further enhanced their sense of independent spirit among the Lai people. The situation became worse with the discriminatory treatment of the BCM Church of *Serkawn, Lunglei*. The main points of discontentment addressed by the respondents may be summed up as follows:

Cultural Erosion of The Lai: The arrival of Christianity in the southern part of Mizoram, particularly among the Lai people, led to significant changes in their traditional culture and practices. Before the introduction of Christianity, the Lais had a distinct culture with well-defined customary laws and practices. Village administration was under the control of the chief and his elder, known as ‘*Upa*’. With the establishment of the Baptist Missionary Society in March 1903 at *Serkawr*, Lunglei and the subsequent arrival of Reginald A. Lorraine in September 1907 at *Serkawr, Saiha*, along with the *Lakher Pioneer Missionary*, profound changes occurred in the region. The impact of Christianity was strongly felt, and the traditional culture of the Lai people underwent a process of ‘Christianisation.’ The British advent, coupled with

the spread of Christianity, brought about drastic transformations in Lai customary practices. Elements deemed incompatible with Christian doctrines and practices were replaced by Christian culture. In essence, the influence of Christianity played a key role in reshaping the cultural landscape of the Lai people, aligning it with Christian values and beliefs. Dr Vanlalringa Bawihlung has rightly remarked as *'After the British advent together with the coming of the Christianity.... drastically changed the customary practices of the Lai people whichever is deemed against Christian doctrines and practices are replaced by Christian Culture.'* (Bawihlung, 2012:59)

Prior to the Christian era, the Lai people maintained a highly developed cultural standard characterised by colorful songs and dances. They had a well-organised society with unique customs, ceremonies, and festivals that enhanced their social standards and values as compared to other tribes in Mizoram. However, the arrival of the Gospel marked a significant shift in the social dynamics of the Lai community. After embracing Christianity, the Lais have almost ceased to observe traditional festivals such as *'Tho'* and *'Hlukhla,'* which were originally intended to pay homage to the deceased. After converting to Christianity, the Lais have largely stopped participating in traditional festivals like *'Tho'* and *'Hlukhla,'* which were originally meant to pay homage to the deceased. The primary reason for abandoning such customs is due to the perceived inconsistency with Christian values regarding it as 'unchristian' particularly because these dances typically involved the consumption of alcohol (*zureu* in Lai language). In this regard, Mr. Zothangliana, a church elder of LIKBK has strongly argued that, *"The missionary's condemnation of 'Zureu' (alcohol) in the Lai society was one of the most serious irreparable work ever done to the Lai society. Zu is closely associated with the Lai culture and consumption of 'Zu' is in no way 'Unchristian'".* Personal interview H. Zothangliana, 10th.10.2022, 10:00 A.M -10: 45A.M, Chawnpui, Aizawl. Schedule 14).

Moreover, some of the unique traditional dances like *'Ruakkhatlak'* (Bamboo Dance), *'Conglaizawn'* (ceremonial dance performed near the dead body) and *'Sarlamkai'* (war victory dance) have now lost their significance and are replaced by Church activities. In fact, all the Mizo traditional dances like *'Cheraw'* (bamboo dance), *'Rallulak'* (war victory dance) and *'Chawnglaizawn'* had their origins in the Lai

culture but had been adopted by the Mizos' by officially declaring them as 'Traditional Mizo Dances' (Interview with C. Mangchunga on 25.1.2023, 10:AM -11:30 AM, Bualpui NG)

The main reason is that the Lai people were a late developer when it comes to education and literacy in comparison to other tribes in Mizoram making them low in publicity and literature. Therefore, the concept of cultural preservation awareness came to the Lai people relatively late, resulting in the loss of their original culture in the hands of the more advanced tribes of the *Mizos*. (Interview with J.H. Lalmangaiha, *Thinkah*, Lawngtlai on 13th .5.2023, 1:00 Pm -1:45PM). The Lai people who were once renowned for their distinct high-quality hand-woven dress has now completely been assimilated by the western dress with the coming of Christianity. (Hrangzuala, 2000:32). A series of change has also been observed in the Lai marriage system and divorce practices. They have now deviated from the Lai Marriage Customary Laws. Most of the rituals and ceremonies associated with the marriage have been replaced by Christian form of marriage in the Church. The Lai Customary Law pertaining to marriage and divorce has now been replaced by the Church Laws and Constitution. The Church has now the full authority to even 'ex-communicate' a person who is found to act against the Law. The traditional social control mechanisms have been replaced by the Church to a great extent. In this way, the '*Lai nunze mawi*' (the typical Lai way of Life) has been dismally replaced by the 'Christian way of life'.

Colonial Imperial Policy: The colonial influence of the British, which significantly impacted numerous Indian communities, also had repercussions on the Lai community. In addition to the British neglecting the development and welfare of the Lai people, tensions between the British and the Lai escalated due to the Lai's resistance against encroachments upon their territory. The Lais were renowned as the most formidable tribe in Mizo history, exemplified by their daring act of killing Lieutenant Stewart and his party. The primary motive behind the attack was the repeated encroachments by the British onto Lai land. The British had already laid claim to their western boundary extending as far as *Chandragon*, a territory the Lai considered rightfully theirs. (Lalthangliana, 1989:105). In response to the killings, The Shimla Conference sent Brigadier General Treagor to conduct the Chin-Lushai

Expedition 1889-1890. The main purpose of this expedition was to subdue and bring into justice the strongest *Chinzah (Lai)* chief, *Hausata* and his brother, *Dokulha* who were held responsible for the murder of Lt. Steward, leader of a survey party. The British mercilessly invaded the land of the Lai people in 1889 and started occupation in 1891. After colonial intervention, the ruling chiefs were recognised as 'de facto rulers' under the British administration. The *Pawi (Lai)* chiefs continued to enjoy certain privileges making them the representatives of the colonial government in their own land. (Bawitlung, 2012:14). Therefore, the Lai chiefs who once were the absolute power were subdued by the British and the chief's power of administering the Land according to the Lai customary laws and practices were being put to an end. They, however retained responsibilities like making and maintaining inter-village paths and collecting taxes in their own villages. The powers like the criminal, civil and social matters were left to the traditional chiefs, nevertheless, grave issues like murder, suicide, rape or the like heinous crimes were to be reported to the Superintendent for his verdict. (Government Notification. No 2530(a) A.P. 27th .3. 1938; Bawitlung, 2012:14).

Eventually, the British administration in India divided the *Lushai hills* (now Mizoram) into North and South, placing them under the jurisdictions of Bengal and Assam in 1895. *The North Lushai Hills (Aizawl Division)* was placed under the administration of the Chief Commissioner of Assam and the South Mizoram (*Lunglei Division*) under the Lt. Governor of Bengal. The Lai people and the present Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) was included in the *South Lushai Hills*. The British soon realised the necessity of consolidating the two Districts into one administrative unit for both political and financial conveniences. Therefore, on the 1st. April. 1898, it was brought under the administration of the Government of Assam and was termed as '*Lushai Hills District*' wherein Major John Shakespear was appointed as the first Superintendent of the Lushai Hills District. (Lalzuimawia, 2016:4)

The splitting of the Lushai Hills and their subsequent consolidation into a single unit disrupted the cohesion of the Lai people inhabiting both the northern and southern regions of Mizoram (Hrangzuala, 2000:38). The fragmentation of the Lai tribes deepened as a consequence of the Government of India's resolution to divide the *Chin*

Hills and the *Lushai Hills*, assigning them to Burma and India, respectively. This decision stemmed from the Chin-Lushai Conference held at Fort Williams, Calcutta on January 25-29, 1892, chaired by Sir Charles Alfred Elliott, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal (Pau, 2021:10). Moreover, demarcation of administrative borders with *Manipur* and the *Chin-Hills* had further divided the Lai people. Unexpectedly, when British Burma was separated from British India in 1937, it did not cause any change to the existing colonial ‘administrative borders’. In addition, postcolonial India and Burma recognised the ‘traditional’ line of the colonial period as the boundary between the two countries in 1967 without giving any consideration to the zo-ethnic affiliations. (Pau, 2018: 15)

James Johnstone, the Political Agent of Manipur (1877 to 1886), proposed the amalgamation of Manipur and the Chin Hills under one administration (Pau, 2018: 4). However, this proposal was deemed impractical and rejected by the Governor General in a note dated October 29, 1889. (NAI, Foreign External-A Proceeding (FEAP), November 1889, No.127; Pau, 2018:7). An initiative that might have possibly unified the *Zo* people under a single administration was disenchanted due to administrative and military concerns (Pau, 2018:7). Consequently, the Government of India established a Chin-Manipur Boundary Commission in 1898, chaired by P. Maxwell and H.W.G. Cole, to delineate the boundary between the *Lushai Hills* and Manipur, a demarcation that remains in effect today. (landrevenue.mizoram.gov.in, 2012)

Due to the division and demarcation of boundaries, the Lai people gradually lost their unique identity, resulting in them being known by different names in various locations such as Mizo and Lai in Mizoram; *Bawm*, *Tlanglau* and *Laizo* in Bangladesh; *Chin* or *Zo* in Myanmar and under various names such as *Aimol*, *Anal*, *Lamkang*, *Maring* etc in Manipur (Hrangzuala, 2000:40). Besides, the never-ending debate pertaining to accepted common nomenclature among the various Zo-ethnic tribes may be attributed to such division wherein some Lai people are not even aware of their origin or ethnic affiliations till today. In the light of this argument, it had been aptly asserted that, ‘*Had it not been for the delineation of boundaries separating the Chin Hills from southern Mizoram, the Lai people would indisputably stand as the most influential and populous*

tribe in the annals of Mizoram's history'. (Personal Interview with Lalnunthara.H.C on 26.5.2023,11:30-12:45, Lawngtlai, College Veng)

Literature and Language Assimilation: The influence of Christianity on Lai people has been a complex and multifaceted process. On one hand, Christianity has played a role in transforming certain aspects of Lai culture and traditions, with some customs being condemned as heathen or incompatible with Christian values. This transformation has been part of the broader impact of missionary activities in the region. Additionally, Christianity has been instrumental in the development of written forms of the *Lushei* and *Mara* languages, but the Lai language seems to have been left out of this process. The focus on education and the dissemination of the gospel in Mara and Lushai Languages may have contributed to the gradual drifting away from the Lai language. While Christianity has brought positive aspects such as education and the development of literature to Mizoram, it has also posed grave challenges for the preservation of Lai identity, culture, and language; the root cause being no separate script for the Lai language was developed by the missionaries. The current language profile of the Lai district presents a regretful picture showcasing that the Lai people have lost touch with their original language; only 20.96 % are able to speak the Lai language (Census of India, 2011). These Lai speaking people are located in few villages like *Lungzarhtum*, *Pangkhua*, *Sangau*, *Vawmbuk* and *Archhuang* situated mostly in the Eastern belt of the region. The decision to embrace Christianity or pursue education often comes with the perceived need to abandon aspects of one's cultural and linguistic heritage. This tension highlights the complex interplay between religious conversion, cultural transformation, and the preservation of indigenous identities.

Since Christianity was brought to the Lai people by the *Lusei* community using the *Mizo* language as a medium, and considering that the Lai people lacked their own distinct script, they quickly integrated into the Mizo linguistic sphere. This assimilation occurred because Mizo had been made as the primary mode of communication since the missionary period in Mizoram. In fact, all the earlier writings and records, the hymn book, Bible translation of the New Testament (1916) and catechism, the first Lushai-English dictionary (1898) initiated by the missionaries, F.W. Savidge and J.H. Lorraine were done only through the Mizo language, and thus,

the Lai language could not make it through the test of time. Moreover, R. A. Lorraine who had been fervently serving as a missionary for the *Lakher*s (*Mara*) had also developed an exclusive script for the *Mara* people. He completed translation of the New-Testament in 1927 (Zakonia, 2011:206). Unfortunately, R.A. Lorrain passed away on February 1st, 1944, before he could finish the translation. The work was then taken up by the succeeding missionaries and after dedicated efforts spanning forty-nine years, the complete *Mara* Bible was finally translated on February 25, 1973 (Beithie, 1997: 8). He introduced the first printing press to *Maraland* in 1908, producing numerous pamphlets and booklets (Hlychho, 2009: 245). Additionally, R.A. Lorraine initiated the ethnic-based Evangelical Church of *Maraland* in 1907. (Beicho, 2014:151) which is an important milestone for the *Mara* people as it paved the way for them to be able to worship God through their own language.

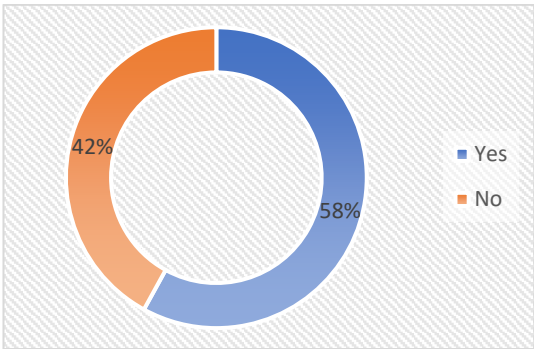
The *Lai* people being geographically sandwiched by such an avaricious advanced tribes (the *Luseis* in *Lunglei* and the *Maras* in *Saiha*) in literature were thus left out and this may arguably be the root cause of relatively lower rate of literacy within the *Lai* District till date. Christianity put the *Lai* people at a very critical situation that for the *Lai*, to become a Christian or to avail modern education means to surrender their own identity, culture and language. (Hrangzuala, 2000:43). *Mr.M. Lianhmunga*, Chief of *Rulkual* village had vehemently argued as he refused to convert to Christian saying that: '*Christianity as such is good, but to convert into Christian is a matter of surrendering our own language and culture and to adopt the Lushei culture*' (Hrangzuala, 2000:44). As a result, the *Lai* people have harbored a profound fear of assimilation since the advent of Christianity and British rule in India. This apprehension has played a significant role in the emergence of an ethnicity-centered church, the *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Church* (LIKBK) in *Lawngtlai*.

Fear of Assimilation: Similar to the *New York Times*' (January 1, 2001) announcement on the fear of assimilation advocated by Zoroastrians amounting to merely 200,000 around the globe, the *Lai* people has been developing a deep fear of assimilation in which they are so helpless. The root cause of this fear of assimilation can be described in three ways. Firstly, the British rule, as was mentioned before had badly impacted the *Lai* customary law and authority structure. With the introduction

of modern education and more advanced law and order, the root of the Lai culture and way of life had been badly shaken. Secondly, the already confused Lai people were made to see the worst kind of discrimination in the hands of the White Missionary. Whereas, all the other regions in Mizoram had benefitted positively through the missionary's work, the Lai people were left out and no such missionary were assigned in the region. As was rightly mentioned by one participant: *'No constructive work was done by the early missionaries. I don't have anything to say about the constructive work of the missionary as no remains of the work of Christian Missionary were available in our land.'* (R.K. Chhingi, women wing leader). To be more specific, while their neighbouring tribes were given a written script of their language, no such work was seen in the Lai territory. On the contrary, R. A. Lorraine who had been fervently serving as a missionary for the *Lakher*s (*Mara*) had also developed an exclusive script for the *Mara* people. He completed translation of the New-Testament in 1927 (Zakonia, 2011:206). He introduced the first printing press to *Maraland* in 1908, producing numerous pamphlets and booklets (Hlychho, 2009: 245). Additionally, R.A. Lorraine initiated the ethnic-based Evangelical Church of *Maraland* (ECM) in 1907. (Beicho, 2014:151) which is an important milestone for the *Mara* people as it paved the way for them to be able to worship God through their own language. Thirdly, to make the situation worse, as mentioned before, gospel and education were introduced by the *Lusei* evangelists through the *Mizo/ Lusei* medium and as such, the Lai people, in order to avail modern education, they have to give up their Lai identity and language. Moreover, all the earlier writings and records, the hymn book, Bible translation of the New Testament (1916) and catechism, the first Lushai-English dictionary (1898) initiated by the missionaries, F.W. Savidge and J.H. Lorraine were done only through the *Mizo* language, and thus, the Lai language could not made it through the test of time. Therefore, after the introduction of Christian culture, the traditional festivals and Lai dances like '*Rawkhatlak*', '*Conglaizawn*' etc. had become out of practice as they were regarded as 'Unchristian' by the Church. As a result, the Lai people have harbored a profound fear of assimilation since the advent of Christianity and British rule in India.

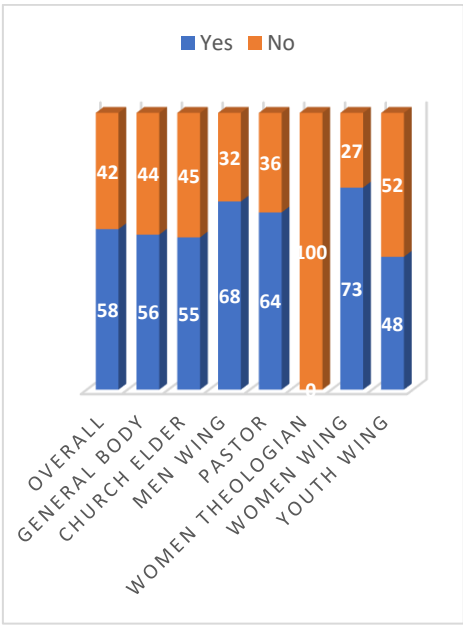
The above apprehensions thus need serious consideration on whether this fear of assimilation has been one of the major factors for the birth of LIKBK. The research thus attempts to find out on whether the fear of assimilation experienced by the Lai people gives birth of LIKBK. The finding reveals that 58% with a frequency of 233 persons (Figure 5.12) are of the opinion that fear of assimilation is the basic reason for the birth of LIKBK. Women wing (73%) and the men wing (68%) are the chief exponents of this proposition. (Figure 5.13). Whereas, 42% with a frequency of 168 persons are arguing that fear of assimilation is not the main reason for the birth of LIKBK and the chief exponents of this notion are mainly from the women theologian (100%) and youth wing (52%), as evidenced in Figure 5.13. Their main point of argument is that the birth of LIKBK was mainly due to the strong urge to have an exclusive ethnic-based church so as to serve God that aligns with the Lai culture.

Figure 5.12: Respondents’ Opinion on ‘Fear of Assimilation’ and the Birth of LIKBK



Source: Field Data

Figure 5.13: Sub-group’s Opinion on ‘Fear of Assimilation’ and the Birth LIKBK



Source: Field Data

Drawing from Bijukumar (2013) who studied ethnicity on the basis of social exclusion in the context of North-East India such as ‘The *Naga* Movement’, ‘The *Mizo* National Front Movement’ (MNF Movement), United Liberation of Assam (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland etc. and concluded that fear of exclusion, assimilation

and the feeling of ‘us’ and ‘them’ against the ‘outsider’ generate ethnic movement, the study may likewise concluded that fear of assimilation is the main reason for the birth of LIKBK. As was also rightly expressed by one respondent that:

The Lai people are helpless when it comes to fear of assimilation because even our language has totally been assimilated and thus, we need to be protective towards further assimilation. Even the construction of KMMTP road, perceived as a potential instrument for assimilation, has raised concerns. To address these apprehensions, seminars and awareness campaigns are frequently organised by the Church and NGO's. (Malsawma Chinzah, men wing leader).

Another respondent has also added that fear of assimilation has been felt very strongly not only by the LIKBK but by the society as a whole saying that:

Yes, I agree that fear of assimilation is one of the main reasons for the birth of LIKBK. This concern is not limited to LIKBK alone; the younger generation of Lai people has also felt a compelling need to safeguard their homeland, Lairam, from further assimilation. This protection extends beyond language, encompassing measures to curb illegal migration of Buddhist Rakhaine and Chakma individuals from Bangladesh and Myanmar. Vigilances in border villages like Zochachhuah, Hmawngbuchhuah, Laitlang, and Varang have been notably strengthened. Even The Young Lai Association (YLA) conducted thorough electoral surveys in these border villages during the years 2018-2019 as part of their efforts and had even pushed back numerous illegal migrants.” (Mawii, women wing leader).

Additionally, one respondent has also said that: ‘By embracing Christianity, we have almost lost our unique Lai culture which had thereby led to the adoption of the Lusei culture which is almost foreign culture to us. Therefore, fear of assimilation may be one of the main reasons for the birth of LIKBK.’ (Lalthuthlungthara, church elder).

On the other hand, few respondents argued that the primary reason for the birth of LIKBK was the ill-treatment they received from the *Serkawn* Baptist Church. This perspective suggests that grievances with specific institutions or individuals within the community led to the formation of LIKBK, rather than broader concerns about cultural assimilation saying that: ‘I don’t agree that fear of assimilation is the reason for the

birth of LIKBK; instead, it was due to the ill- treatment given to us by the Serkawn Baptist Church. If we were given a fair treatment by the Serkawn Baptist Church, The LIKBK would not come into being.’ (Remchung, youth wing undergraduate)

Drawing from Syiemlieh (2013) and who studied the ‘*Sheng Khasi Movement*’ in Meghalaya and Mahadevran (1974) on ‘*Zeliangrong Movement*’ among the Nagas in Manipur who similarly argued that the birth of such movements was due to Christianity that had introduced new set of rules, morals and conduct undermining their traditional beliefs and culture, the study on the birth of LIKBK Movement may be similarly attributed as such. This apprehension thus suggests that the Lai people has been developing ‘fear of assimilation’ ever since the British rule in what they assumed as their lawfully land, and thus, in course of time, had led to the inevitable birth of LIKBK. Moreover, as mentioned by some respondents on the measures taken by the Lai people, including strengthening vigilance in border villages and conducting electoral surveys to address illegal migration, demonstrate their commitment to preserving their identity and homeland. This proactive approach indicates a strong sense of community and cultural pride among the Lai people.

Political Issues: The onset of the British era ushered in a new chapter in the political landscape of the Lai region. The stripping away of the absolute political power previously held by the Chiefs, as mentioned earlier, sparked a growing sense of discontentment among them. This erosion of authority wounded their pride, yet they found themselves powerless to resist the overwhelming might of the British. Following the declaration of the bifurcation of Lushai Hills into North and South Lushai Hills in 1895, a somewhat formalised system of political administration was introduced (Doungel, 2016: 37). Over time, the region was amalgamated into a single administrative unit on April 1, 1898, under the governance of the Government of Assam. The Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council was created in 1952. The Lai people, owing to their ethnic distinctiveness and relative backwardness as compared to other tribes residing in Mizoram, thus, demanded a separate administrative unit which was granted by the Governor of Assam. The *Pawi-Lakher* Autonomous Regional Council was then created in 1953. In course of time, it had attained the status of Pawi Autonomous District Council with the declaration of Union Territory of

Mizoram under the North-Eastern Areas Re-organization Act,1971. Finally, the term 'Pawi' was renamed into 'Lai Autonomous District Council' with the amendment of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India in 1972. (<https://ladc.mizoram.gov.in/page/brief-history-of-ladc>)

Reflecting back on the political history of the Lai areas, from the era of chieftainship onward, the Lai people had remained independent, never coming under the control of any other tribes. In fact, they were the most powerful tribes in the history of Mizoram. The Lais had a strong awareness of their regional identity even prior to colonial rule, and they upheld a distinct ruling class that remained unaffected by the authority of the *Sailo* chiefs from the North Lushai Hills. (Doungel, 2016:36). On the contrary, according to the accounts of esteemed Mizo historian V. Lunghnema, it was the *Sailo* Chiefs who paid taxes and tributes to the *Pawi* Chiefs of *Chin Lushai Hills*, indicating a hierarchical structure where the authority flowed in a different direction than previously assumed. (Lunghnema,1993:79). Such state of affairs persisted until the British arrived on the scene in 1889 and commenced their occupation in 1891. (Bawitlung, 2001:14). As mentioned before, the pride of the Lai had been dented and could never accept the fact that they were to be ruled by an outsider from far-off places who did not have enough knowledge of the real state of affairs of the Lai people. Moreover, since no missionary was assigned to Lai territory, they were well aware that they were lacking behind comparing to other tribes. Therefore, the Lai people had been driven by the idea to have their own administrative unit as well as a separate ethnic based Church so as to develop at their own pace.

Moreover, Lawngtlai, unlike the other districts in Mizoram functions almost an independent body under the Autonomous District Council, that is, the Lai Autonomous District Council (29th.April.1972) having a separate autonomous legislative, executive and judicial functions in accordance with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. Having being in this advantageous position and power, the Lai claims themselves to be almost free from the control of the state and a sense of independence against the State has been felt by the people since time immemorial. The Lais are acutely aware of the fact that the LADC is the vital life-supporting mechanism, and for which they ardently assert that they are different from the other

Zo-ethnic tribe and this recognition fuels their enthusiastic demand for special treatment and provisions akin to those provided by the. In other words, the Lais recognise that asserting their ethnic distinctiveness is crucial for preserving their autonomy. They believe that establishing a separate Autonomous District Council, along with an ethnicity-based church, are essential steps to showcasing their uniqueness. These two entities complement each other effectively, serving as the ultimate means to maintain their identity and autonomy intact.

No Missionary assigned For the Lai: One very astounding issue about the Lai history of Christianity is that no missionary was designated for the Lai people even though they were well aware that there was a unique tribe called ‘*Pawi*’ or ‘*Lai*’ residing in the *Chhimtuipui* area, at present known as Lawngtlai. Gospel was introduced from a secondary source and not directly from the White Missionary themselves. The oversight of the Lai people by missionaries has been an emotionally painful issue for them, as they struggle to comprehend why they were consistently overlooked despite their presence being well-known. Furthermore, the Evangelical Church of *Maraland*, Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, and Baptist Church of Mizoram, which directly received the gospel from white missionaries and became well-established in their own territories, chose not to extend their missions to the Lai people, adding to the perplexity and disappointment of the Lai community. (Lalpekhluva, 2022:4). It was solely through ‘itinerant evangelists’ that the gospel managed to reach the Lai people, marking a significant but indirect introduction to Christianity within the community.

There had been many speculations why Missionaries were not sent to the Lai people. One prevailing speculation suggests that since missionaries were already allocated to the Lai people residing in the Chin Hills, funding agencies in the early missionary efforts might have concluded that there was no need for additional missionaries specifically designated for the Lai people in Mizoram. In 1899, Reverend. Arthur Carson and his wife, Laura Carson were sent from America to the Chin Hills wherein they stationed themselves in *Halkha*, a village which of around three hundred people settlements during that time. (Chinzah, 2019:12). These two missionaries devoted their utmost efforts to creating a script tailored for the Lai people. Consequently, there might

have been a misguided assumption on the part of missionaries that there was no necessity for a separate missionary focusing on the Lai people in Mizoram.

Another factor contributing to the perceived lack of need for a specific missionary focus on the Lai people in Mizoram might have been the fact that they were proficient in conversing in Mizo (*Duhlian* language). This proficiency could have led missionaries to believe that the Lai people were adequately served linguistically within existing missionary efforts targeting the broader Mizo community (Lalliansanga, 2022:27). However, note should be taken that the Lai people in course of migration from the Chin Hills to the present habitat, had intermingled elements of their original Lai language with the Mizo language. This amalgamation resulted in the development of what is known as the '*Khuafo Language*'. It is a blend of Mizo and Lai language. The *Chinzah* chiefs had also practiced inter-tribe marriage with the daughter of the *Sailo* Chiefs in the past and this had also led to the birth of '*Khuafo Language*'. Since the *Sailo* daughters mostly converse to their children in Mizo Language, this is the reason why '*Khuafo Language*' has popularly been known as '*hmeichhe tawng*' meaning language for the Lai women. (Personal Interview with Lalnunthara.H.C on 26.5.2023,11:30-12:45, Lawngtlai, College Veng)

A third assumption could be that due to the Lai people's long-standing reputation for their pride, stubbornness, and boldness, missionaries might have felt it was exceedingly impossible to effectively reach out to them. (Lalliansanga, 2022:27). Indeed, another possible factor is that missionaries may have perceived an indifference or resistance from the Lai people towards new faces attempting to enter their territory. In support of this assumption, Mr. Zazawna Lai said that '*The Lai people often recount an anecdote claiming that when missionaries arrived in the village of Lungtian, a dog's intestine was tied at the entrance of the village as a symbolic gesture indicating their unwelcome presence*'. (Personal interview with B. Zazawna Lai on 10th. 19.2023, 4:30 PM- 5:30 PM, Lawngtlai).

The Baptist Church of Mizoram's (BCM) Hegemonic Control Over the Minority Lai people: In order to make the situation worse, The *Serkawn Baptist Church* administered over the land of the Lai people in such a way that they were so neglected

by the central Church. A sad story had been narrated by Mrs. Rualchhingi from Bualpui NG village saying that *‘Whenever we made a plea to the Serkawn Church, they usually turned a deaf ear towards us. We demanded a separate Executive Secretary (ES) to administer the Lai areas (Chhimtuipui area) as the administrative areas under ‘Phawngpui Division’ was way too large to be single handed by one person, which was outrightly rejected.’* Several difficulties faced by the Lai people due to the unusual largeness of one Administrative Area was also expressed by one interviewee saying that *‘I can still recall the late Mr. Tialsaia from our village, Bualpui NG, a primary teacher who received his education under the missionary, Mr. Buanga. He was one of the founding members of IKK. He expressed in deep pain on how the Serkawn Baptist Church had neglected us, mentioning that touring the entire southern areas took more than three months, during which pastors couldn't even come to perform death ceremonial rites’.* (Interview with Rev L.H. Lalliansanga on 20th. 10. 2023, 1:20-2:00 PM. at Chanmari, Aizawl).

The BCM, instead of meeting the demand for separate Executive Secretary for the Chhimtuipui area, made such a hegemonic re-arrangement of the demarcated Phawngpui Area. This restructuring, as aptly noted by Rev. H. Lalliansanga, seemed to reflect a ‘divide and rule policy of the BCM’. (Lalliansanga, 2022:16). In 1967, a new division called the ‘South Vanlaiphai Area’ was established, stemming from the previous ‘Phawngpui Area’. This new division included Lai villages such as Sangau, Pangkhua, and Thaltlang. It is worth noting that South Vanlaiphai is situated outside the Lawngtlai District. The implementation of this new arrangement deeply wounded the sentiments of the Lai people. Although the BCM revoked the decision five years later, the damage had already been done. By that time, the first ethnic-based church, Isua Krista Kohhran (IKK, later LIKBK), had already emerged, marking a significant development in response to the perceived neglect and injustices faced by the Lai community. (Lalliansanga, 2022:16).

The BCM, due to their unconcerned disposition towards the Lai people had indirectly paved the way for the Lai people to establish their own Church under the banner of LIKBK. Mr. Vanlalringa, a proficient Baptist Church elder had also supported this cause saying that *‘The earlier Baptist officials were short sighted; if only they consider*

some of the reasonable demands made by the Lai people, a separate Church would not have been established by the Lai people'. The Lai people made a reasonable demands like establishment of medical dispensary within the Lai areas, allocation of mid-wifery (nurse) and establishment of Bookroom which was utterly declined by the Church officials. Moreover, due to lack of proper transportation and communication, the Lai people could not avail the *Serkawn* Baptist Hospital even in case of emergency. (Interview with Upa. Thawnglianga Vuangtu on 23rd. 7. 2023, 1:00-2:00 PM at Mission Vengthlang, Aizawl). Numerous grievances were voiced, indicating that the Lais felt neglected within the *Serkawn* Church-sponsored Hospital, despite their arduous journeys from distant lands, often burdened by sickness and being on the brink of death. The Lai people found themselves unable to secure seats for church-sponsored training courses in pastoral and nursing roles. Additionally, they were consistently overlooked when it came to employment opportunity for position as office staff within the Church office. (Lalsangliana, 2022:36)

The Revival Factor: Like all the other Christian community, the Lai people had also experienced the period of renewed spiritual interest, awakening, and fervor. It was characterised by a widespread sense of God's presence, a deepened commitment to faith, and a renewed passion for living out the principles of Christianity. It first started at *Chawnhu* village in 1963 (Hrangzuala, 2022:116). As mentioned before, the Lai people did not actually receive a firsthand Gospel from the Missionary. However, by 1945, gospel had been disseminated to the whole of the Lai areas through the work of local evangelist (Chinzah, 2019:17). Such was the situation of Christianity among the Lai that their thirst for gospel was heightened ever since the gospel had reached their community. With no proper Pastor or Minister to administer them, the revival spirit that had occurred firstly in *Chawnhu* (1963) and later in *Bualpui NG* (1966) put the Lai people in a chaotic condition. The revival among the Lai people seems to have had a profound impact, stirring up a strong thirst for the Gospel and a desire to deepen their understanding and practice of Christianity. However, the lack of proper pastoral leadership and ministerial oversight may have led to challenges in effectively guiding and nurturing the spiritual growth of the community. In order to make the situation worse, the parent Church, BCM was not supportive to such cause and their appeal for

sending missionary was flatly declined. This action deeply wounded the feelings of the Lai community.

Revival of the Lai ignited a passion for sharing the gospel with others. As individuals experience the life-changing power of God in their own lives, they feel compelled to share that message of hope and salvation with those around them. The main theme of the first revival in *Chawnhu* (1963) was that the people had felt a strong missionary zeal to reach out the people of 'Miria' in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Subsequently, in 1964, *Chawnhu* Pastor Bial Mission Board was established. However, the Parent Church, BCM had strongly directed to dissolve such Missionary Board as it was established without prior knowledge of the later. Despite this, they still sent three to persons to accompany Mr. Killuaia namely, C. Tanmanga, F. Sangluaia and Thanchhuma. Mr. Killuaia gave up all his comforts and put himself in danger for the love of the Miria Community by ending up in *Bandarban Jail* at first and was later transferred to *Chittagong Jail* where he was later released. (Hrangzuala, 2022:114-115).

The revival in *Bualpui (NG)* (1966) particularly resonated strongly with the younger generation. The main theme of the revival was to send a missionary to their Lai brethren residing in Burma. There were several tribes like *Matu, Khumi, Dai, Miria, Doitu, Uppu* and other tribes who settled mainly at *Paletwa, Minpia, Matupui and Kampalet* Districts. The Lai people felt that it was their sole responsibility to enlighten such tribes saying that such challenging task had been shouldered upon them by God. Against the permission of BCM, they still sent missionaries, Mr. T. Tumsanga and P.C. Liannghaka from *Bualpui NG* in the very year of the revival itself. However, they were apprehended and subsequently imprisoned in *Pakuku Jail* for six months. Following this, they were transferred to *Mindat Jail*, where they remained for an additional four months before being released. Tragically, Mr. Laierha, who had been sent from *Pangkhua* prior to the 1966 revival, could not make it alive out of the jail (Hrangzuala, 2022:116). Therefore, the final cause of discontentment had cropped up when the Lai people were swept by a strong revival spirit wherein, they were spiritually urged to send missionary to their Lai brethren in *Matupui* areas (Burma). They made an appeal to the *Serkawn* Baptist authority, which was outrightly rejected

by the authority. Therefore, in order to make their mission successful, they were left with no choice but to be separated from the mother church and establish their own ethnic based Church. (Interview with K. Hre Kung on 5th. 7. 2023, 11:00-12:00 PM at Lawngtlai, Bethel Veng).

Identity Issues and Sense of Deprivation and Exclusion Towards the Birth of LIKBK

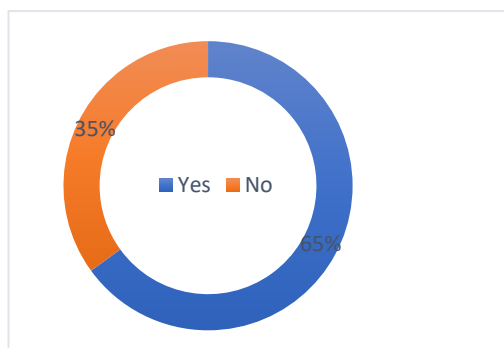
The Lai people, since they are the most underdeveloped tribes, owing to the missionary's non-intervention within the Lai territory were themselves well-aware that their tribes were backward. This had made them developed inferiority complex and a sense of deprivation and exclusion by the *Lusei* tribes as well as by the BCM Church. They kept on experiencing humiliating incidences whenever they were around the *Lusei* tribes or even during Conferences held by the BCM in *Serkawn*. Those humiliating incidences had made them want to have a church of their own. Moreover, since they already had a political autonomy under the 'Sixth Schedule' of the Constitution of India, the idea of having 'religious autonomy' was met with enthusiasm. Some respondent's remarks regarding the ridiculed-treatment faced in the hands of the *Lusei* and the BCM Church are: *'Yes, the LIKBK truly is a reform movement against the discriminatory treatment of the Serkawn Baptist. I can still recall my late grandfather narrating an anecdote about his past experience where the Lai people who excitedly went to the Assembly in Serkawn wearing nothing but a mere 'loincloth' became the laughing stock. He even said that all their pleas and demands always went unnoticed.'* (Interview with Remngura Chinzah on 26.4.2023, 7:30-9:15 PM, Siachangkawn village). Another respondent had also sadly expressed still being ridiculed by the *Lusei* tribes as: *'Even though we, the Lai are settling permanently within Mizoram state, I feel hesitant to identify myself as Mizo because the Mizos used to make fun of the way we speak as our tune and accent are different.'* (Interview with F.C. Lalramengmawia, 30.3.2023, 1:00PM-2:20 PM, Bualpui NG village).

Merton (1949) in his study of 'The American Soldier' come up with the concept of 'Relative Deprivation' and has thus argued that relative deprivation is related to how a person compares himself with other group as mentioned in his classic work, 'Reference Group Theory'. He further argued that this has been the source of social

unrest and may thus lead such group or person to engage in normless behaviour. The Lai people, like the 'American Soldier', feels a sense of deprivation and exclusion while comparing themselves with their neighbouring associates like the *Lakher* tribe (Mara) and *Lusei* tribe in the north Mizoram. While their neighbouring tribes have been making significant advancement ever since the missionary days, the Lai people were excluded by the missionary in their mission and thus feel excluded. They, thus, remain relatively backward in comparison to the other *Zo*-ethnic tribes in Mizoram in terms of education and other spheres of development as Christianity and modern education had reached the Lai territory comparatively late as compared to other tribes. Moreover, as mentioned before, their unique Lai language has almost faced extinction due to the process of *Lusei/Mizo* assimilation.

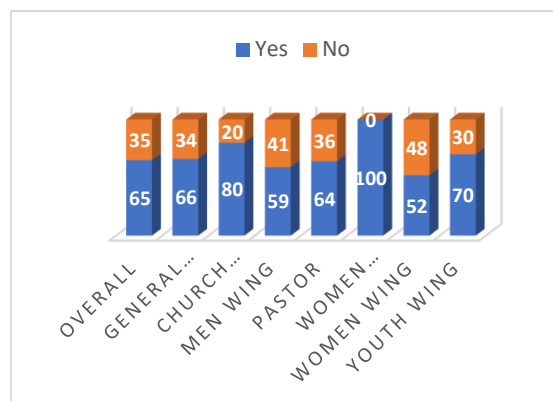
Regardless of the types and nature social movement, be it a reform or revolutionary, every social movement needs to be studied in relation to the root cause of social movement. As such, Alberle (1966) talks of the necessity in finding the root cause of deprivation that has also non-material base as a source of social movement, for example, status, behaviour, worth etc, and accordingly classifies social movement into 'alternative', 'redemptive', 'reformative' and 'transformative'. For him, relative deprivation, i.e., the discrepancy between legitimate expectations and the reality are the central point of social movement. In line with this statement, the Lai people and their sense of feeling deprived and exclusion is thus analysed as to what extent it plays as the contributing factor towards the formation of LIKBK. The finding reveals that the Lai people are feeling a sense of deprivation and exclusion and these had been one of the pivotal factors that has ultimately led to the establishment of an ethnic movement in the form of an ethnic based church. Most of the participants with overall percentage of 65% with a frequency of 261 persons (Figure 5.14), agree that the feelings of deprivation and exclusion are the main reason for the birth of LIKBK. All sub groups too, commonly agree to such statement. (Figure 5.15). However, 35% of respondents (Figure 5.14), especially from men-wing (41%) and women-wing (48%) (Figure 5.13) have argued that the feelings of being deprived and excluded are not the reason for the birth of LIKBK, and rather take the blame themselves saying that since they did not have the heart to preserve their own culture, they are susceptible to be discriminated.

Figure 5.14: Respondents' Opinion on 'Sense of Deprivation and Exclusion'



Source: Field Data

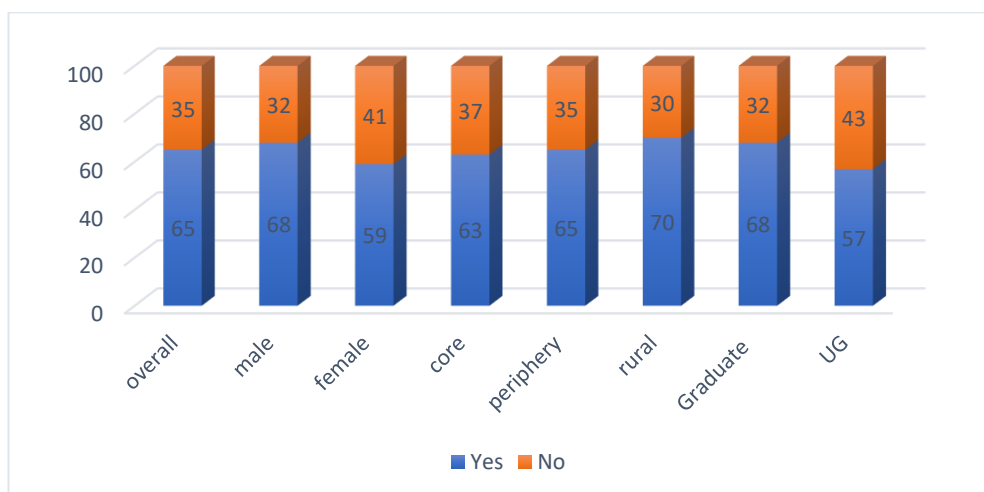
Figure 5.15: Sub-Groups' Opinions on Sense of Deprivation and Exclusion'



Source: Field Data

In order to find out whether there is any variation in terms of gender, residence (rural, core, and periphery), participants are further divided on the bases of gender, residence and educational level. Most of the participants categorised on the bases of residence, educational qualification have also commonly agreed along with the above finding that feelings of deprivation and exclusion are the main driving factors for the birth of LIKBK. (Figure 5.16).

Figure 5.16: Categorised Responses on Sense of Deprivation and Exclusion



Source: Field Data

In support of the above finding, one scholarly participant's argument reflects a strong aspiration for the preservation and protection of the unique identity and interests of the deprived Lai community, asserting that:

The Lai people continue to experience a feeling of deprivation and exclusion in comparison to other tribes in Mizoram. This sentiment has driven the

establishment of the LIKBK church as a reform movement with the aim of safeguarding the interests of the Lai people. We, the Lais remain unconvinced by the 'Zohnahthlak Movement' (PAN Mizoram Movement) and express a desire for a distinct Lai ethnic movement rather than being part of the broader movement. (T. Thangzuala Vanchhawg, Bualpui NG village)

Rao (1978:6) similarly argued that relative deprivation offers the most satisfying explanation causes of social movement. He, however, argued that inclusion of 'individual' and 'psychic deprivations' and also 'religious factor' needs to be taken into account. Accordingly, in course of fieldwork, it has been revealed that the Lai are still facing a sense of deprivation and exclusion at the individual level, making them develop inferiority complex while comparing themselves to other tribes. One participant has narrated that: *'Yes, discrimination against the Lai people still exists, although it may not be as pronounced as before. I vividly remember my school days in Aizawl when I faced mockery for being Lai.'* (Lalthara, Siachangkawn village). Additionally, one respondent discloses the feeling of being excluded at the psychological level, asserting that: *'Eventhough we, the Lai are settling permanently within Mizoram state, I feel hesitant to identify myself as Mizo because the Mizos used to make fun of the way we speak as our tune and accent are different.'* (F.C. Lala, Rulkual village). Some participants also complained the portrayal of Lai people in Mizo comic novels like *'Chhura Thawnthu,'* where they are depicted as *'Pawih sumdawng,'* a term they find derogatory saying that:

'I sense that comparing to another tribe, we are still discriminated. Ridiculing our accent when we speak in Mizo is unfair. This is merely a regional variation and nothing to laugh at about. The Mizo comic novel like 'Chhura Thawnthu' even depicts us as 'Pawih sumdawng' meaning a hilarious petty businessman. The term Pawih itself is derogatory. Moreover, the Paihte tribes and not the Pawih were the comical petty businessman in the olden times. This is the reason why many Lais are rebellious against the Mizos and do not want to identify themselves as part of Mizos.' (Lorraine Chinzah, Chanmary locality)

Captivatingly, the Men-Wing (100%) and Women-Wing (72%) from rural areas (as per Table 5.3) offered an introspective perspective, suggesting that the emergence of LIKBK was not driven by feelings of marginalisation, but rather by their own failure

to value and preserve their cultural identity, including their language, which has led to disrespect from other tribe.

Table 5.3: Percentage of participants response from Men and Women Wing sub-group

Participants response from Men Wing sub-group							
Responses	Overall	Male	Core	Rural	Periphery	Graduate	UG
	Nos(%)	Nos(%)	Nos(%)	Nos(%)	Nos(%)	Nos(%)	Nos(%)
Yes(%)	13(59)	13(59)	6(67)	0(0)	7(64)	3(75)	10(56)
No(%)	9(41)	9(41)	3(33)	2(100)	4(36)	1(25)	8(44)
Total	22(100)	22(100)	9(100)	2(100)	11(100)	49(100)	18(100)
Participants response from Women Wing sub-group							
Response	Overall	Female	Core	Periphery	Rural	Graduate	UG
	Nos(%)	Nos(%)	Nos(%)	Nos(%)	Nos(%)	Nos(%)	Nos(%)
Yes(%)	37(52)	37(52)	27(63)	5(50)	5(28)	5(62)	32(51)
No(%)	34(48)	34(48)	16(37)	5(50)	13(72)	3(38)	31(49)
Total	71(100)	71(100)	43(100)	10(100)	18(100)	8(100)	63(100)

Source: Field Data

Referring to a statement made by one respondent regarding the issue of discrimination faced by the Lai tribe due to factors such as language proficiency, lifestyle, and educational qualifications, which appears to suggest that the Lai community bears some responsibility for the discrimination they face due to these factors: *‘Yes, I do agree that we are still struggling with the problem of discrimination by other tribes. However, the blame is on us because being Lai but not being able to speak in our own language is something loathful for other tribes. Moreover, we maintain high and expensive lifestyles with no proper educational qualifications while our literacy rate is the lowest within the states of Mizoram.’* (Alice, women wing-member, Sangau village). One respondent highlights the lingering impact of past experiences of ridicule on the Lai community alleging that: *‘I feel that the Lusei from the northern side (hmar lam) of Mizoram does not ridicule or disdain us like before. But, due to our past experience of being ridiculed, we are prone to develop inferiority complex very easily.’* (M. Chinzah, men-wing leader, Lungzarhtum village)

Some respondents have also asserted that the Lai people are still excluded especially in terms of politics contending that: *‘Because direct funding is still not permitted by the State and we are still very much deprived.’* (Reginald, men-wing, Aizawl). One respondent similarly argued that: *‘The Mizoram government continues the undesirable*

practice of obstructing and delaying development funds for the LADC.’ (A. Chinzah, women wing, Sangau village). Additionally, another respondent has avowed that:

Yes, we are still experiencing a sense of exclusion and deprivation by the Mizoram Government despite our protective discrimination policy like the Sixth Schedule. The Minister Mr. Lalzirliana in the March, 2023 Mizoram Budget Session had also mockingly replied the Lai’s demand of ‘Direct Funding from the Central Government of India’ as mere lies just to simply, please them. (Lem ang kan der mai mai lom). (C. Remchunga, men-wing, Bualpui NG village)

Drawing from Satyanarayana (2020) who studied the Dalit movement in Telangana, saying that ‘distinct Dalit Christian Culture’ marked by ‘self-respect, confidence, dignity and justice’(2020:293) was attained through their self-assertion and Guru (2013) who studied the Dalit Movement in terms of relative deprivation theory, social mobility and reference group theory, the study may likewise be concluded that in spite of all the protective mechanisms like being facilitated with the Autonomous District Council under the Sixth schedule to the Constitution of India, the Lai people are still portraying themselves as the victims of being differentiated and excluded and thus, they are prompted to assert their own identity through the LIKBK Movement and this may be attributed to the one of the reasons for the birth of LIKBK. However, it may be mentioned that the degree of discrimination may not be as overt as in the past, however, it still persists. All the respondents agreed that they are no longer being ridiculed as before wherein one respondent highlights a positive shift in attitudes towards the Lai people, noting that they are no longer subjected to ridicule by the Lusei/Mizo people and suggests a growing appreciation for the cultural heritage of the Lai community within the broader Mizo society: *‘The Lusei people no longer ridicule us as they did before. In fact, contemporary Mizo singers like Vanlalsailova and others are putting significant efforts into learning Lai songs and the Lai language. This is because, when they go to America, the majority of the Mizos there belong to Lai ethnic groups and prefer Lai songs over Mizo songs.’* (Lorrain Vanlalrema Chinzah, youth-wing member, Chanmary locality). It may also be highlighted that the Lai peoples’ main complaints in regard to being differentiated and excluded are seen in terms of language proficiency and in at the governmental level, which may exacerbate socio-

economic disparities and hinder the development and well-being of the Lai community.

5.5.2 The ‘Popular Stage’ of the LIKBK Movement (1970-1982)

Blumer (1951) speak of the popular stage as the stage where the people started to form some sort of a popular idea with the emergence of charismatic and influential leadership. In the context of the LIKBK Movement, this stage had been approximately estimated to cover from the birth of IKK in 1970 till the birth of PBK in 1982. At this stage, the movement had seen the birth of various sectarian churches within the Lai territories along with the emergence of various leaders who had been serving as the pillar of strength and comfort for the Lai people who were doubtful of what the future might bring for them. However, only the emergence of sectarian churches will be discussed here as the leadership role had already been discussed in the above section of the paragraph.

Declaration of Independence by the *South Vanlaiphai* Area against BCM Pastorate: In *South Vanlaiphai* pastorate, there are three Lai villages namely; *Sangau*, *Pangkhua* and *Thaltlang* who still retain the original Lai language to this day. The residents of these villages strongly advocate the belief that ‘*God has given us a land exclusively for the Lai people for His kingdom to prosper and to proclaim His mastery in this God-given land.*’ This conviction, perceived as a divine message, has deeply influenced the entire community, leading them to organise parades throughout the villages while hoisting white flags and declaring the slogan ‘*Every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*’ (Phillipi 2:11). Driven by this fervent faith, they unconditionally declared independence from the Baptist Church even before 1970 and established an independent church called ‘*Isua Krista Kohhran*’.

Declaration of Independence by the *Phawngpui* Area: Following the declaration of independence by the *South Vanlaiphai* area, the expansive *Phawngpui* Area, comprising eleven villages—*Bualpui* NG, *Lungpher*, *Vawmbuk*, *Tialdawngilung*, *Archhuang*, *Pangrang*, *Fungkah*, *Rawlbuk*, *Cheural*, *Lungtian*, and *Vartek*—asserted their autonomy as early as March 28, 1969. Although they did not make an official declaration at that time, it was unanimously agreed to cease sending tithe to the Baptist

Church of Mizoram (BCM). The following year, on January 15, 1970, during the *Phawngpui Bial Standing Committee* meeting held at *Lungtian Village*, the official declaration of independence from the BCM was made. Consequently, a new church was formed under the name '*Lairam Baptist Kohhran*'. (Lalsangliana, 2022:40)

Declaration of Independence against the *Lakher* Pioneer Mission: The Lai were suffering not only in the hands of the BCM, but also within the Pastorate area of the *Mara Lakher* Pioneer Church. There were two Lai villages- *Niawhtlang* and *Lungzarhtum* under such pastorate who were of the typical Lai speaking people. Their main problem with the *Lakher (Mara)* Church being the language communication gap. Since all the Church's Assembly were conducted in *Mara* language, the Lai representatives in 1964 from *Lungzarhtum village* could understand any of the proceedings, making them wanted to serve Lord in their own mother-tongue. With the passage of time, finally in May 23, 1970 a joint meeting was conducted at *Rawlbuk village* among the several sectarian churches and finally agreed to be merged under one church by the name, IKK.

After twelve years of the birth of IKK, the second Lai ethnic church, *Pawiram Baptist Kohhran (PBK)* was then formed at Lawngtlai on the 7th. 1. 1982. One unique event of the Church creation was that the church was initiated the dominant political leaders like the Chief Executive Member (CEM), *Mr.T. Hranghluta* and his political allies as mentioned in the previous sub-headings. Their primary slogan emphasised the importance of creating a tribe-based church to uphold the integrity and continuity of the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC). Additionally, they believed that while the *Isua Krista Kohhran (IKK)* served Lai-oriented aims and objectives, it was insufficient as it was a mere sectarian church. Thus, they advocated for the establishment of a full-fledged regional church dedicated to the prosperity and preservation of the Lai tribe, aiming to prevent the complete loss of the Lai language and ensure the tribe's survival and advancement.

5.5.3 The Formalisation Stage: (The formation of IKKL, 1999)

The Lai people could not be at ease with the fact that there exist two different Lai ethnic churches, which were more or less similar in their objectives, one under the

headquarter at *Bualpui NG* and the PBK at Lawngtlai. Therefore, the ‘first talk’ between the two churches then took place on 2.6. 1982 at *Bualpui NG* by the initiative taken by the PBK church. With a series of talks held between the two churches within the span of ten years, on December 28, 1995 the ‘Churches Unity Commission’ was then formed with seven representatives each from both parties. Finally, on 25th -28th November, 1999, a joint convention was held at *New Saiha* wherein the two churches agreed to be amalgamated as one church on the 27th November, 1999, 4:00PM by the name ‘*Isua Krista Kohhran Lairam*’ (IKKL). (Lalsangliana, 2022:92))

In this stage, said Blumer (1995), ‘a party, organisation, or group of individuals may put forward an alternative vision, world-view or ideology to analyse and solve the prevailing issues.’ Both the IKK and the LBK had developed a more or less defined Constitution and started to function in a well organised manner. Since both the Churches had been well -trained in the organisational structure and by learning through experience both from the Baptist Church and the *Maraland Church*, they did not face much difficulties when it came to drafting the Constitution pertaining to Church administration and Management. (Lalsangliana, 2022:59). However, their main problem being shortage of a well-qualified Bachelor of Divinity degree. For instance, the IKK functioned under three tier administration – the Assembly level, the pastorate (*bial*) level and the unit level (local church). Three fellowship departments were then created - women wing, youth wing and the children wing. (Lalsangliana, 2022:60-62). The PBK had also drafted its own Constitution which was given due importance since its birth date. It was more or less similar with the BCM Constitution except on baptism. It functioned in a well-organised hierarchical set-up with the top position occupied by the President, followed by General Secretary, Executive Secretaries and Administrative Secretaries. The highest committee level being the ‘Assembly’ which comprised of Assembly Executive Committee, General Committee, Pastoral Committee, Finance Committee, Mission Committee, Christian Education Committee, Communication Committee and Social Front Committee. One note-worthy point of the PBK’s undertakings was that even before amalgamating with the IKK, it had taken keen efforts to promote the Lai language and literature by ‘reciting the Lord’s Prayer in Lai language, ‘*Boipa tlacamnak*’ and singing the typical Lai song in church by the

‘Church Choir’ (*Zaipawl*) and the children department were also made to learn such. Both the regional churches took the initiatives of Bible translation in Lai language since 1998. (Hrangzuala, 2022:189-191)

5.5.4 The Stage of Institutionalisation of the Movement (The Birth Of LIKBK, 2004)

At this stage, the active participation phase of the movement had come to an end wherein *‘it is no longer collective behaviour, because it is organized, followed accepted norms of society, and has replaced its emotional phase with bureaucratic set up and ideology and aims of the movement becomes crystalised.’* (Smelser, 1965). Likewise, the LIKBK Movement had also become more formalized depicting a typical bureaucrat set-up. The name of the IKKL was changed into LIKBK permanently in the year 2004 General Assembly. With the change of the name from IKKL to LIKBK, the movement had become more solid and their aims and objectives, the Constitution and the manner of administration had become more crystalised just like any successful social movement. The comprehensive ‘LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws’ had been successfully drafted in 2000 which was then subsequently revised in the year 2000, 2008, 2011, 2015 and 2020. The present Constitution and Bye Laws has 16 Chapters wherein detailed descriptions of the Church, the Motto, Emblem, Objectives, organisational structure, description of fellowship departments, nature of posting and appointment, the dos and don’ts for the members, and disciplinary measures etc. are stated.

Reflecting on the initial phase when the two regional churches began to merge, the total number of churches was scarcely 10,000 for *Isua Krista Kohhran* (IKK) and 7,000 for *Pawiram Baptist Kohhran* (PBK) (Vanlalzauva, 2022:213). Moreover, at the initial stage of the amalgamation, the total calculated amount of the two combined treasury could hardly amounted to sixty lakhs (Vanlalzauva, 2022:283). However, by 2021, the total estimated church budget had amounted to ₹ 24,00,00,000. (Assembly Record Book, 2022:30). Ever since the birth of the LIKBK and even before the amalgamation of the churches, the movement has been successfully operating as a powerful institution that has been instigating changes and reforms in the Lai culture.

All the preliminary goals and the visions have now been successfully implemented in practical manner. Their dream of dispatching missionary to the Lai brethren in the neighboring countries has been carried out and the ultimate goal to preserve the Lai culture has been strongly undertaken by promoting the Lai dress, the Lai language and the Lai songs. Literature has been popularised through the successful compilation of 'Lai Bible' and 'Lai Hymn Book' etc.

5.5. Outcomes of the LIKBK Movement

Towards the mid-1970s, there has been a growing interest among scholars of social movements in analysing their outcomes. (Bosi and Uba, 2009:409). Social movements can lead to a variety of consequences that go beyond simple notions of success and failure (Amenta and Young, 1999; Giugni, 1998; Jenkins, 1983). The outcomes of social movements, whether short-term or long-term, encompass modifications or changes across political, cultural, biographical, and economic domains, which may include both intended and unintended goals (Bosi, 2006). Various studies focus on different dimensions of these outcomes. For instance, Giugni (1998) and Amenta et al. (2019) reviewed research on political outcomes, while Passy and Monsch (2019) examined biographical outcomes. Earl (2004), Amenta and Polletta (2019), as well as Van Dyke and Taylor (2019) delved into broader cultural outcomes. Whittier (2004) explored the consequences of social movements on each other, including spillover effects. Meanwhile, Giugni and Grasso (2019) provided an overview of the expanding literature on economic outcomes stemming from social movements and protest activities.

Drawing from the above arguments, the LIKBK movement, as is also described in Table 7.1 above, has instigated significant reformatory efforts that have been observed by the Lai society at large. This movement can be considered as a 'wake-up call' for all Lai brethren, regardless of their location, whether within or outside the state of Mizoram or even in other countries, towards the reform and assertion of Lai ethnic identity. This statement suggests that the LIKBK movement has a profound impact on the Lai community, prompting them to reconsider and reaffirm their ethnic identity, potentially leading to various reforms and assertive actions aimed at preserving and

promoting their cultural heritage and identity. It implies that the movement has sparked a sense of unity and awareness among the Lai people, transcending geographical boundaries and inspiring them to take proactive measures towards the advancement of their community. The LIKBK movement has played a crucial role in promoting the Lai language through various initiatives. These include the compilation of the Lai Bible and Lai Hymn Book, as well as the introduction of 'Lai Night' in church services once a week. These efforts aim to preserve and strengthen the Lai language within the community, emphasising its importance in religious and cultural practices.

Furthermore, the movement has influenced a trend of reform in the political affairs of the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) to officially recognise the Lai language for office communication and documentation purposes. This acknowledgment underscores the significance of the Lai language in official capacities and highlights its importance as a means of communication within the administrative framework of the LADC. Additionally, the LIKBK movement has encouraged the observance of wearing Lai traditional dress once a week, a practice that has been positively accepted by the LADC. This initiative serves to celebrate and uphold Lai cultural heritage, fostering a sense of pride and identity among community members. Overall, the LIKBK movement's efforts to promote the Lai language and culture through various means, including religious, political, and social avenues, reflect a concerted effort to preserve and revitalise the unique identity of the Lai community.

For instance, the establishments of *Lairam* Christian Medical Centre (LCMC), the *Lairam* Motherless Home (LMH), *Lairam* Child Adoption Centre (LCAC), *Lairam* Rescue Centre (LRC), *Lairam* Handloom, *Lairam* Girls Hostel at *Chandmary* locality, Bookrooms, Training Center comprising of courses like beauty culture, hair cutting, computer courses etc. which are discussed in detailed manner in the previous chapter are all the invaluable socio-economic reforms that has been brought about by the LIKBK Movement. In short, the LIKBK has a positive impact in bringing about the 'Lai ethnic renaissance'. Besides providing huge employment opportunity for the Lai educated as well as uneducated persons in the various institutions set up by the LIKBK, it has also fetched the long- needed reforms in the socio-economic condition of the Lai people.

5.6 Overview

An overview, providing a comprehensive validation of LIKBK as a distinct ethno-religious movement, examining: the underlying causes and motivations that led to its formation; The key stages in its development and evolution; the significant role of ideology in shaping its beliefs and practices; the impact of exceptional leadership on its growth and success; the notable outcomes and achievements that have resulted from its efforts.

Causes of the LIKBK Movement: Countless factors had played to the cultural erosion of the Lai people, such as Christianity, the British colonial rule, the BCM hegemonic rule etc, which had ultimately led to the Lai ethnic consciousness, which are put forward as follows:

Christian Hegemony: Using Gramsci's (1970) concept of hegemony, Christian hegemony has been established over the Lai community, leading to cultural erosion and the decline of traditional practices. The dominant Christian ideology has imposed its values and norms, labeling traditional customs and ceremonies as 'unchristian' and therefore undesirable. This has resulted in the marginalisation of traditional festivals and dances, which were once integral to Lai culture and social dynamics. The replacement of traditional practices with Church activities demonstrates how Christian hegemony has redefined what is considered acceptable and desirable, shaping the cultural narrative and social norms of the Lai community. The loss of significance of traditional dances and festivals, such as '*Ruakkhatlak*' and '*Cheraw*', illustrates how Christian hegemony has disarticulated the cultural identity of the Lai people, rendering their unique customs and traditions irrelevant. Gramsci's concept of hegemony highlights how power operates not just through coercion, but also through consent, as the Lai community has internalised Christian values and norms, leading to the erosion of their cultural heritage.

British Hegemony: The British colonial administration's imperial policy led to the subjugation of the Lai chiefs, who were once absolute rulers, to '*de facto*' status. The British colonial administration's imposition of imperial policy and foreign rule over the Lai people exemplifies Gramsci's (1970) concept of hegemony, where a dominant

group exercises power over subordinate groups through a combination of coercion and consent. The British eroded the autonomy of Lai chiefs, curtailed their authority, and imposed foreign control over various aspects of Lai life, sparking resistance and fueling ethnic consciousness. This colonial legacy has contributed to the birth of ethnic consciousness among the Lai people, driving the formation of LIKBK, a movement seeking to reclaim territorial rights and cultural identity, and unite fragmented Lai tribes across national and international borders.

BCM Hegemony: The Baptist Church of Mizoram's (BCM) actions exemplify Gramsci's (1970) concept of hegemony, whereby the BCM's neglect and rejection of Lai demands for autonomy and better administration demonstrate a clear exercise of hegemonic control, perpetuating the marginalisation of the Lai people. By restructuring areas and ignoring Lai concerns, the BCM reinforced its dominance, leading to feelings of neglect and powerlessness among the Lai community. The BCM's indifference to Lai needs and denial of reasonable demands further solidified its hegemonic grip, ultimately prompting the Lai people to establish their own church, LIKBK, as a means of resistance and self-empowerment. This illustrates how hegemony can lead to counter-hegemonic movements, as subordinate groups seek to challenge and reclaim their autonomy and cultural identity.

Fear of Assimilation: The introduction of Christianity in Mizoram, while bringing benefits like education and literature, has also posed significant challenges to the preservation of Lai identity, culture, and language. The lack of a separate script for the Lai language has contributed to a decline in its usage, with only 20.96% of the population able to speak it. This has resulted in a fear of assimilation among the Lai people, who feel pressured to abandon their cultural and linguistic heritage in favor of the dominant Mizo language and culture. This fear has driven the emergence of the *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Church* (LIKBK), an ethnicity-centered church in Lawngtlai, as a response to the perceived threat of cultural erasure. The LIKBK movement's emergence can be understood through the lens of social movement theories, particularly those of Blumer (1995), Turner and Killian (1957), and Oberschall (1973), who collectively highlight the significance of 'fear of assimilation' as a pivotal factor in the formation of social movements, triggering collective action

and mobilisation among groups seeking to preserve their identity, culture, and autonomy. The LIKBK movement's birth, driven by the Lai people's desire to reclaim their territorial rights and cultural identity, resonates with these theoretical perspectives, underscoring the importance of fear of assimilation in shaping social movement dynamics.

Political Factor: The creation of the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) in 1972, with its autonomous legislative, executive, and judicial powers, has been a crucial factor in the emergence of the LIKBK movement. The Lai people's demand for a separate administrative unit, driven by their ethnic distinctiveness and relative backwardness, was granted, and they have since maintained a sense of independence from the state. The LADC has become a vital mechanism for preserving their autonomy, and the Lai people ardently assert their ethnic distinctiveness to maintain this autonomy. The recognition of their uniqueness has fueled their demand for special treatment and provisions, leading to the establishment of an ethnicity-based church, LIKBK, which complements the LADC in preserving their identity and autonomy. The political empowerment of the Lai people through the LADC has thus been a significant factor in the birth of the LIKBK movement, as it has enabled them to assert their distinctiveness and maintain their autonomy. The emergence of the LIKBK movement aligns with the theoretical perspectives of (Tilly, 1978; Tarrow, 1994; McAdam, 1982; and Gamson, 1975), who collectively emphasise the significance of political factors as a crucial catalyst for the birth of social movements. These scholars concur that political factors, such as shifts in power dynamics, changes in government policies, and political opportunities, play a decisive role in triggering social movement emergence. The LIKBK movement's formation, driven by political factors like the desire for territorial rights and self-governance, exemplifies this trend, underscoring the importance of political factors in shaping social movement dynamics.

The Revival Factor: The Lai people experienced a spiritual revival in the 1960s, characterised by a deepened commitment to faith and a desire to share the Gospel with others. Despite the lack of proper pastoral leadership and the parent Church's (BCM) unsupportive stance, the revival sparked a passion for missionary work among the Lai people. They established their own missionary boards and sent missionaries to

neighboring communities, including those in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and Burma, despite BCM's disapproval. The BCM's rejection of their appeals for support and recognition ultimately led to the Lai people's decision to establish their own ethnic-based church, LIKBK, in order to pursue their spiritual and missionary goals without hindrance. The revival and subsequent missionary endeavors had created a sense of discontentment among the Lai people, culminating in their separation from the BCM and the birth of LIKBK. The emergence of the LIKBK movement resonates with the theoretical perspectives of Stark (1984), Beckford (1989), and Williams (1996), who collectively highlight the significance of religious issues as a catalyst for social movement emergence, across both modern and pre-modern societies. These scholars concur that religious factors can serve as a driving force behind social movement formation, and the LIKBK movement's birth, fueled by the desire to reclaim and preserve Lai cultural identity and religious practices, exemplifies this phenomenon. The movement's emergence, driven by religious concerns, mirrors the patterns observed by these scholars, underscoring the enduring role of religion as a mobilising force in social movement dynamics.

Identity Issues and Sense of Deprivation and Exclusion: As was evidenced from the above study, the Lai people's experiences of humiliation, ridicule, and exclusion at the hands of the *Lusei/Mizo* tribes and the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) contributed to their sense of deprivation and inferiority complex. Being the most underdeveloped tribe, they felt marginalised and overlooked, leading to a strong desire for autonomy and self-governance. The Sixth Schedule's provision for political autonomy inspired them to seek religious autonomy as well. The constant ridicule and discriminatory treatment they faced during conferences and gatherings fueled their determination to establish their own church, free from the dominant *Lusei/Mizo* influence. The birth of LIKBK was a response to these identity issues, aiming to provide a platform for the Lai people to practice their faith without fear of ridicule or exclusion, and to assert their unique cultural and linguistic identity. The LIKBK movement's emergence parallels the dynamics observed by Reetz (1993) in pre-independence colonial India, where regionalisation of politics along ethnic and religious lines galvanised nationalist movements, primarily driven by sentiments of

deprivation and identity concerns. Similarly, the LIKBK movement's birth can be attributed to comparable factors, as the Lai people's sense of deprivation and quest for identity preservation fueled their mobilisation, culminating in the formation of the movement. The LIKBK movement's trajectory resonates with Reetz's (1993) analysis, highlighting the pivotal role of ethnic and religious identity issues in shaping social movement emergence.

An Element of Ethno-religious Reform Movement: The study of LIKBK is validated as an ethno-religious reform movement through the following arguments:

Regionalism: Shils' Primordial Approach (1957) posited that individuals frequently exhibit a deep-seated attachment to the land they inhabit or the place of their origin, as well as to their religion and kinship ties. Barth (1969) argued that this 'strong primordial attachment' represents a foundational model for understanding ethnicity and ethnic movements, as it is often taken for granted within the discourse surrounding these phenomena. Applying this notion, the LIKBK movement resembles such elements of an ethnic movement. Since its inception, the LIKBK Movement has been characterised by regionalism and ethno-nationalism, which have played dominant roles in shaping its trajectory.

Ethno-nationalism: According to Pannikar (2011), ethno-nationalism encompasses both loyalty to a nation lacking its own state and loyalty to an ethnic group within a specific state, especially where the state is perceived as a nation-state. In ethno-nationalism, a group expresses loyalty to its nation, aspiring for absolute control over its political, economic, and social matters. This pursuit often signifies the desire for statehood by an ethnic community. Indeed, the study of the LIKBK movement reflects a similar pattern. In line with Pannikar (2011), the Lai community has cultivated strong ethnic sentiments and takes pride in their identity as Lai individuals. Over time, this pride has evolved into the LIKBK movement.

The Centrality of Lai Sentiments: The Lai community has cultivated strong ethnic sentiments and takes pride in their identity as Lai individuals. Over time, this pride has evolved into a strong ethnic consciousness among the Lai people' and thus ultimately led to the birth of LIKBK. The research results demonstrate that a significant

proportion of respondents, 72% (298 persons) (Figure 5.5), took great pride in identifying Lai ethnic sentiment as the key factor that gave rise to LIKBK, emphasising its importance in the movement's origin. The finding thus echoes well with Udeagha and Nwamah (2020), and Mate (2018) who argued that ethnic sentiment is the deciding factor for the formation of various ethnic religion and ethnic movement, which pervades all other spheres of like the politics, economy and all other spheres of society.

Reformed Response Against the British Hegemony: Colonial powers often imposed their cultural, social, and political structures onto indigenous populations, leading to the suppression or erasure of indigenous identities, languages, and traditions. This 'cultural assimilation', can endanger resistance and foster the emergence of ethnic movements as marginalised groups seek to reclaim and preserve their unique cultural heritage and identity in the face of colonial dominance. This cultural oppression often served as a catalyst for ethnic movements, which could manifest as either violent or non-violent resistance against colonial domination, as marginalised groups sought to reclaim and assert their cultural identities and rights. Following Reetz (1993) who contends that all the Indian nationalist movement's apex was characterised by an overarching 'anti-colonial struggle.' the LIKBK movement reflects a resistance against encroachment and external control since the British occupied their land starting from 1891.

Reformed Response Against the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) Hegemony:

Upon asking the question on 'Do you think the LIKBK has emerged as a reform response against the discriminatory treatment of the BCM?' The findings reveal that overall, significant number of 85% participants, amounting to a frequency of 348 persons agree that the BCM's discriminative policy served as the main reason for the birth of LIKBK due to a very strong in-group sentiment. (Figure 5.7). Drawing from Gramsci (1970) and Torres and Young (1992) who commonly argued on the inevitability of social movements due to hegemonic culture exhibited by the ruling class, the study likewise concludes that the 'BCM Hegemony' is the root cause for the emergence of an ethnic based church, that had eventually taken the shape of an ethno-religious movement.

Reformed Response Towards Preservation of Lai Culture: The respondents have largely accepted that an ethnic based church is very crucial for the preservation of their own exclusive Lai culture. 93% (328 persons, Figure 5.9) from the total population agree that an ethnic based church is the only solution to preserve their culture from further assimilation. The research reveals that the erosion of traditional Lai culture-, including their distinctive dress, music, and language, resulting from the assimilative pressures of British colonialism, Christianity, and the processes of westernisation and modernisation, has led the Lai people to seek the creation of an indigenous church that caters exclusively to their ethnic group. This initiative seeks to safeguard and revitalise their cultural heritage. Aligned with Siddiqi's (2014), and Singh (2014) perspectives, who primarily interpret reform movement as denoting a shield against the perceived non-indigenous, western lifestyles, it is concluded that the endeavor to safeguard and reform the Lai culture from further assimilation, initially instigated by British colonialism and Christian hegemony, served as the primary driving force behind the eventual emergence of LIKBK movement.

Stages of the Movement: Employing Blumer's (1995) stages of successive social movement stages, the LIKBK movement may likewise be classified into The Preliminary stage, The Popular Stage, The Formalisation Stage, The Stage of Institutionalisation of the Movement.

The Preliminary stage (1889-1970): The LIKBK Movement's preliminary stage embodies the characteristics of the 'unrest stage' described by Blumer (1951). This phase was marked by growing discontent and feelings of deprivation among the Lai people, stemming from various factors such as British colonial rule, Christian missionary influence, Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) hegemony, fear of assimilation, political marginalisation, and religious concerns. As Smelser (1962) posits, this collective discontentment with the existing social order laid the groundwork for the emergence of a social movement. The LIKBK Movement's preliminary stage aligns with Blumer's (1951) and Smelser's (1962) frameworks, where simmering unrest and discontent ultimately coalesce into a unified movement, setting the stage for collective action and social change.

The Popular Stage (1970-1982): The Lai people's desire for autonomy and self-governance led to the emergence of various sectarian churches, declaring independence from the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) and the *Lakher* Pioneer Mission. The *South Vanlaiphai Area* declared independence in 1970, establishing the '*Isua Krista Kohhran*' (IKK) church, while the *Phawngpui Area* asserted autonomy in 1969 and officially declared independence in 1970, forming the '*Lairam Baptist Kohhran*' (LBK) church. Additionally, Lai villages under the *Lakher* Pioneer Mission declared independence due to language barriers, merging with other sectarian churches to form the 'IKK' church in 1970. Later, in 1982, the '*Pawiram Baptist Kohhran*' (PBK) church was formed, initiated by political leaders aiming to establish a tribe-based church to preserve the Lai language and ensure the tribe's survival and advancement. The LIKBK's Popular Stage of the movement parallels with Blumer's (1951) description of a popular stage where the people feels a sense of independence and detachment from the current condition, which thereby led them to declare independence from the parent Church.

Emergence of Ideology and Leadership: The LIKBK movement exemplifies Blumer's (1951) concept of the popular stage, where a collective idea takes shape among the people, facilitated by the emergence of charismatic and influential leadership. The movement's popular stage was characterised by the rise of prominent leaders, including *Mr. T. Hranghluta*, who held a prominent position as Chief Executive Member, and other key figures like *C. Ngunhaia*, *B. Siamhranga*, *C.T. Luaia*, *C. Hniartura*, *A. Lalchhuana*, and *L. Chinzah*. These individuals, as noted by Hrangzuala (2022:99), played a crucial role in shaping the movement, thereby embodying Blumer's notion of influential leadership that galvanises popular sentiment and propels collective action. The LIKBK movement's trajectory aligns with Blumer's framework, illustrating how charismatic leaders can crystallise popular aspirations and drive social movement momentum. The LIKBK movement's evolution was further marked by the emergence of charismatic leaders, exemplifying Blumer's (1951) notion of influential leadership. *Reverend E.F. Sangchem* and *Reverend Raldawna*, key figures in the initial phase of the movement (IKK), demonstrated exceptional leadership qualities. Notably, *Reverend E.F. Sangchem*, a former teacher at Blue

Mountain High School, exemplified selfless dedication by resigning from his position to fully commit to the movement, ultimately becoming its first General Secretary. His unconditional devotion to the cause embodies the characteristics of charismatic leadership, which played a pivotal role in shaping the movement's trajectory and mobilising collective action, thereby aligning with Blumer's concept of leadership in social movements. The LIKBK movement, therefore aptly aligns with Blumer's (1951) conceptualisation of emergence of ideology and influential leadership at the initial stage of the movement.

The Formalisation Stage (The formation of IKKL, 1999): After years of uneasiness with the existence of two separate Lai ethnic churches, namely the one headquartered at *Bualpui NG* village and the *Pawiram Baptist Kohhran* (PBK) at Lawngtlai, despite sharing similar objectives, the Lai people engaged in a series of discussions spanning over a decade. Ultimately, a joint convention was held from November 25-28, 1999, at *New Saiha*, culminating in the historic decision to merge the two churches into a single entity. On November 27, 1999, at 4:00 PM, the merger was formalised, giving birth to the unified church, '*Isua Krista Kohhran Lairam*' (IKKL). According to Blumer (1995), a social movement's formalisation stage is characterised by the emergence of a clear alternative vision, worldview, or ideology to address existing issues. Similarly, the LIKBK movement's progression to this stage is marked by the development of a defined Constitution by both IKK and LBK, enabling them to operate in an organised and structured manner. This mirrors Blumer's (1995) description, as the LIKBK movement has transitioned into a formalised stage, solidifying its framework and approach to achieving its objectives.

The Stage of Institutionalisation of the Movement (The Birth Of LIKBK, 2004): As described by Smelser (1965), the final stage of a social movement is characterised by formalisation, where collective behavior gives way to organised structures, accepted norms, and a bureaucratic setup. The LIKBK movement has similarly transitioned into this phase, marked by increased formalisation and a clear crystallisation of its ideology, aims, and objectives. The permanent name change from IKKL to LIKBK in 2004 symbolises this shift, solidifying the movement's structure and administration. This study confirms that the LIKBK movement has successfully

navigated all necessary stages of a social movement, validating Smelser's theoretical framework. The movement's evolution into a formalised entity with a clear constitution, administration, and objectives demonstrates its maturity and stability, akin to a successful social movement. The LIKBK movement thus, matches with Smelser's (1965) description of the final stage of social movement which is marked by high level of formalisation of the movement that takes the shape of institution.

Based on an examination of the reasons and catalysts, the stages, and the nature of LIKBK movement, which highlight its primary mission of preserving Lai culture, thus defining it as a sincere ethno-religious reform movement, the subsequent chapter will delve into LIKBK's transformative impact on Lai society. It will specifically explore the reforms initiated by LIKBK in social, political, economic, and cultural spheres, illustrating how these initiatives have reshaped and influenced the fabric of Lai community life.

CHAPTER VI
THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS
BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE LIKBK IN LAI SOCIETY

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6.2 LIKBK and Upliftment of Health and Wellness

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CHAPTER VI

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter probes into the validation of LIKBK as a potent instrument that has instigated significant changes and initiatives within Lai society. It is divided into two main parts. Firstly, it scrutinises the socio-economic transformations facilitated by LIKBK in Lai society. This includes its contributions to improving health and wellness, the pivotal role in promoting and preserving Lai exclusive identity, establishing full-fledged educational institutions, the unparalleled efforts in uplifting the rural poor and marginalised tribes residing within and beyond the Lai Autonomous areas, fighting discriminations and apathy, its effective measures against anti-social behaviors such as drug and alcohol addictions, and its substantial contribution to employment generation. Secondly, the chapter explores LIKBK's distinctive role in shaping the political landscape of the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC). It underscores the unique influences exerted by LIKBK within the LADC and analyses the subsequent reforms it has introduced into the political arena such as being a watchdog of marginalised, creating ideology and public sphere, political decision making, advocacy for social justice, electoral reformation, leadership role, vote bank and voting behaviour, role towards human rights and democracy, church leaders in politics and gender policy. The study concludes that church can be precisely visualised as an instrument of socio-economic and political changes, reforms and development whereby the LIKBK serves as a social enterprise.

6.2 LIKBK and Upliftment of Health and Wellness

Since the inception of the first ethnic based church, *Isua Krista Kohhran* (IKK) on 1970 and the second ethnic based church, *Lairam Baptist Kohhran* (LBK) on January 7, 1982, there has been a steadfast vision to establish a well-equipped hospital in the Lai district. When IKK and LBK merged in 1999, the women-wing had already

accumulated a substantial amount of two lakhs in fixed bank deposits specifically earmarked for the hospital's establishment (Hrangzuala, 2022:167). One of the primary motivations behind the formation of a separate ethnic-based church, by branching off from the mother church, Baptist Christian Mission (BCM), was to establish an exclusive hospital for the Lai community in the heart of the Lai district. This goal was a key factor in the merger of IKK and LIKBK into IKKL (*Isua Krista Kohhran Lairam*), later renamed as *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran* (LIKBK). With a limited fund of hardly two lakhs, the church remarkably initiated the hospital. As highlighted in the preceding chapter, there was a pressing need for a hospital among the Lai people, as they had to travel to distant locations for medical treatment, such as the *Serkawn* hospital in the *Lunglei* district, which was not even within Lawngtlai district. Often, seriously ill individuals succumbed on the journey due to the drawn-out travel time of more than two or three days, compounded by the lack of proper roadways. Additionally, the Lai district was previously plagued by high rates of malaria and typhoid infections, and the government hospital lacked adequate test kits and treatments for such illnesses. Furthermore, emergency procedures like appendectomies, childbirth, and accident treatments could not be adequately provided by the government hospitals. (Interview with Rev. C. Ngurengmawia, LCMC Chaplain on September 18, 2023, from 3:30 PM to 4:30 PM at College Veng, Lawngtlai).

Furthermore, during the course of fieldwork, the researcher encountered several respondents who claimed that despite paying regular monthly *tithes* to the BCM, the Lai people were dissatisfied with the treatment they received. They felt that BCM did not show any interest in returning the favor by establishing even a simple dispensary for the Lai community, notwithstanding the fact of their countless pleas to establish such. For instance, one respondent had asserted that: '*Despite collecting monthly tithes from the impoverished Lai people, the Early Baptist Church of Mizoram showed no interest in establishing schools or hospitals for us in return. Their treatment of the Lai people was substandard and biased, akin to the unfair treatment portrayed in the Cinderella story by a stepmother*'. (Lai T.T). Furthermore, some respondents had alleged that the BCM showed indifference towards the Lai people even within the

hospital setup, complaining of neglect and lack of attention wherein one responding emotionally revealed that:

The establishment of LIKBK is primarily attributed to the perceived discrimination and neglect experienced by the Lai people from the Serkawn Church. Allegedly, derogatory terms like 'Pawite' were used to mock us, and there was a sense that the Serkawn Church only sought our financial contributions through tithes. Furthermore, the Lai people were not given opportunities to participate in church-sponsored training courses for professions like nursing and pastoral roles. Additionally, there were allegations that when seeking medical treatment at Serkawn Hospital, the Lai people were purportedly neglected, and proper care was denied to them. These grievances contributed to the emergence of LIKBK as a distinct entity. (T.T. Vanchhawg, Bualpui NG village).

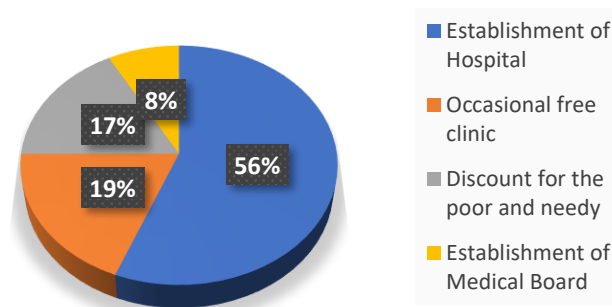
The Lairam Christian Medical Centre (LCMC) was formally inaugurated on September 19, 2001. The decision to use the term 'center' was made after careful deliberation, as they envisioned that 'center' would have a broader scope compared to 'hospital'. It was believed that 'center' could encompass various levels of medical facilities, ranging from sub-centers and primary care facilities to communication centers and medical colleges. (Vanlalzauva, 2022:330). The LCMC started at first as a medical store and consultation clinic and with passage of time, by November 2004, it expanded its services and evolved into a semi-hospital with a capacity of ten (10) beds. (Interview with V. Lailiankima, LCMC Manager on 23rd September.2023, 1:00 PM-1:45 PM at LCMC Hospital). With the registration obtained on 3rd April, 2008, it has now been running as a full-fledged hospital and the name 'Lairam Christian Medical Centre' has also been added as the term Hospital and is now currently known as 'Lairam Christian Medical Centre and Hospital' (LCMC & H).

Walumsibi (2022) envisaged the Church's deep tradition as a 'field hospital' by examining Augustine's metaphor of the Church as a hospital in which the Church is depicted as a place of healing and restoration, mirroring the inclusive role of a hospital in caring for the sick and the wounded, regardless of their background or

circumstances, the Church is called to embrace all people with love and compassion. This means reaching out to those who are marginalised or excluded, offering them a place of belonging and acceptance within the community of faith, thereby bringing about socio-economic reforms.

Following this statement of Walumsibi (2022) and considering the aforementioned statements explaining the dire need for a hospital among the Lai people, the research study aims to investigate the extent of LIKBK's impact on improving the health and wellness of the Lai society. The respondents concurred that the establishment of the hospital is the most notable achievement of LIKBK in enhancing the health and wellness of the Lai society, with 56% expressing common agreement on this statement. (Figures 6.1). However, it is noted that the benefits of the hospital cannot be fully enjoyed by the rural residents, situated at far off village from the main town where the Hospital is established. Therefore, 19% of the rural residents feel that the occasional free clinic was more beneficial for them. Additionally, discount given in medical treatment of the poor people has also been highly praised by the rural residents, which however may not fully cover the entire rural poor, due to financial constraint of the Hospital, as evidenced in Figure 6.1, where only 17% opted for 'discount for the poor and needy'.

Figure 6.1: LIKBK Towards Upliftment of Health and Wellness for the Lai Society



Source: Field Data

Furthermore, majority of respondents have emphasised that the establishment of LCMC stands out as the most notable contribution of LIKBK to the socio-economic development of the Lai society. One respondent specifically stated: *"The most noteworthy endeavor undertaken by LIKBK is the establishment of a well-equipped*

Hospital known as 'Lairam Christian Medical Centre' (LCMC). It was beneficial not only for the Lai areas but also for people residing within Mamte and Thingfal Villages from Lunglei and Saiha Districts who came to the Hospital." (P.C. Zoramthanga, church elder). Another respondent expressed contentment, stating that they no longer have to endure the inconvenience of traveling to distant districts for minor treatments, remarking:

Previously, the Mizoram government-run hospital could not even supply sufficient amount of malaria and typhoid testing kit and the mortality rate due to malaria and typhoid had been comparatively higher as against other Districts in Mizoram. The LCMC has been tirelessly pooling all resources available so as to modernise the hospital's laboratory equipments and it has now installed a CT scan, ultrasonography which has been very beneficial for even people residing in the outskirts of the district; they no longer need to take the troubles to go to Lunglei or Aizawl for minor medical treatments. (C. Lalruata, church-elder)

Secondly, the occasional free clinics organised by LCMC have been highly valued by respondents, particularly those residing in rural and remote villages who could not avail the Hospital as such. Overall respondents amounting to 19% expressed their heartiest appreciation for the occasional free clinic. The unmatched works carried out towards the occasional free clinic was rightly mentioned by the Manager of LCMC as:

Since one of the main missions of LIKBK is to carry out healing ministry, occasional free clinic has been conducted from time to time. On March 11- 12, 2022, a free clinic was organised at Vawmbuk Pastor Bial wherein 400 patients were given treatments. The Hospital in collaboration with Doctor Without Border India (DWBI) had also conducted a free clinic for the refugees in the Bangladesh border area of Parva village where the prescribed medicines were distributed free of cost. (Interview with V. Lailiankima, LCMC Manager on September 22, 2023, 1:00 PM -2:00 PM, at LCMC Hospital, Lawngtlai).

Thirdly, the respondents highly praised LCMC's initiative of offering discounts for the poor and needy, with 17% of them considering it the most significant effort towards

the socio-economic upliftment of rural poor communities. (Figure 6.1). The manner in which the Hospital carried out such initiative was clearly stated by one interviewee saying that:

Ever since the establishment of LCMC in 19th. September. 2001, the Hospital has been giving discount to the poor and the needy and even refugees are treated with care by our hospital. In the year 2022, out of the sum total of Rs. 2,89,010 received as a charity fund, 21 patients were given financial support besides treating several patients free of cost and also discharged through credit system. (Interview with Rev. C. Ngurengmawia, LCMC Chaplain on September 18, 2023, from 3:30 PM to 4:30 PM at College Veng, Lawngtlai).

Additionally, it has also been mentioned that the Hospital takes utmost care for the inmates of LCMC's undertakings like 'Lairam Rescue Centre' (LRC) and 'Lairam Motherless Home' (LMH) wherein one respondent stated that: *'Our hospital also make sure that the inmates of the Lairam Rescue Centre (LRC) and The Lairam Motherless Home (LMC) are charged with minimal fees wherein only the investigation fee and prescribed medicines will be paid by them. Besides, occasional free clinics are also usually carried out in these Centres.'* (Interview with V. L. Chhunga, Lairam Rescue Centre Superintendent, on December 27, 2023, 7:00 PM -8:00 PM, at Bungkawn locality, Aizawl). It has also been noted that the poor people are given concessions through the 'Charity Fund' dedicated exclusively for the LCMC. Donations come from individuals, churches, NGOs, and others, spanning across the district and beyond the state, regardless of denominations or religions. For instance, in the year 2022, the total received amount for the 'Charity Fund' reached a significant sum of ₹2,89,010. (LIKBK Assembly Minute, 2022:189)

As of 2022, LCMC comprised 93 staff members, including 5 doctors with 2 specialists, 33 nurses, 9 technicians, 1 pharmacist, 1 chaplain, and 45 other workers. The facility has 63 beds at present, distributed among various wards, including 11 private cabins, 12 male medical wards, 10 female medical wards, 6 maternity wards, 10 surgical wards, a 10-bedded pediatric ward, a staff sick room, and a three-bedded casualty room. There are future projects to construct a new building block that will include an outpatient department (OPD), 24 cabin rooms, an ICU, and an operation theatre. (LIKBK Assembly Minute, 2022:188). The construction is being voluntarily

undertaken by Mr. C. Hmingthantluanga, the son of a veteran politician Mr. C. Ngunlianchung, the current MLA of Lawngtlai West Constituency. In fact, they were the initiators of the construction of the present hospital, for which LIKBK is extremely fortunate to have such individuals who genuinely care for its cause, and they are deeply indebted to the family. Additionally, the Hospital is now well-equipped with the modern hospital medical devices like CT scan, ultrasonography, endoscopy, dialysis and up-to-the-minute laboratory. Taking into account LIKBK's humble beginnings, initiating the hospital project with minimal financial resources of just 2 lakhs, the current status of the hospital reflects a promising endeavor. It can be rightfully seen as an institution that has instigated change and reform in the health and wellness of the Lai community. Furthermore, it is remarkable that the hospital is self-sustaining, as it can cover all staff salaries and procure basic medical equipment through its own revenue generation. Even more astonishing is that the salaries of the doctors, particularly the specialist doctors, are slightly higher than the government pay scale, which is truly remarkable.

In summary, inspired by the journey of the Christian Medical College, Vellore, initially founded as a sub-center by Miss Ida Scudder and now renowned as one of India's leading medical colleges (Vanlalauva, 2022: 330), LCMC exhibits promising venture in bringing further socio-economic transformation for the Lai people in the future. Furthermore, the LIKBK aligns well with Walumsibi's (2022) characterisation of the Church as a 'field hospital,' where it attends to the needs of the impoverished, the infirm, and those on the fringes of society with attentive regard and financial assistance, thereby fostering genuine socio-economic progress within the community.

6.3 Monthly Contribution for the Socio-Economic Upliftment

The concept of *tithing*, or giving one-tenth of one's income or produce to support religious institutions or purposes, has its roots in various passages in the Bible, primarily in the Old Testament. The word '*tithe*' comes from the old Greek word '*dakate*' which means 'one-tenth' (Ministry designs, 2022). In the Old Testament, *tithing* is mentioned several times, primarily in the books of *Leviticus*, *Numbers*, and *Deuteronomy*. One of the key passages is found in *Leviticus* which states: '*A tithe of*

everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.' (27:30). Another important passage is from Deuteronomy: *'Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always.'* (14:22-23). *Tithing* was primarily agricultural in nature, involving giving a tenth of one's crops, herds, and flocks. However, it also evolved to include monetary income as societies developed. In addition to these passages, *tithing* is mentioned in other parts of the Old Testament, and the practice was further elaborated upon and discussed in various Jewish writings and traditions.

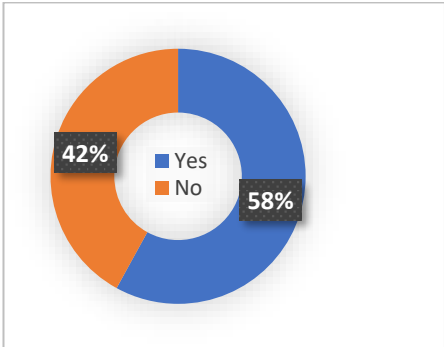
While *tithing* is not explicitly commanded in the New Testament, there are references to giving generously and supporting the work of the church and those in need. Christians often debate the applicability of Old Testament tithing laws to modern-day practices, with some churches teaching that Christians should tithe a tenth of their income, while others emphasise principles of cheerful and sacrificial giving without specifying a fixed percentage. As such the research study would like to know the socio-economic significance of tithing within the context of LIKBK. The research question is framed as: 'Do you think the monthly contribution of one-tenth (*tithe*) by the Church members is necessary for the socio-economic upliftment of the poor?'

The study reveals that the practice of *tithing* offers a controversial debate among the respondents wherein 58% (mainly 100% from women theologian, 73% from pastor and 75 % women-wing) of the respondent amounting to a significant frequency of 231 persons (Figure 6.2) agree that tithe is fundamental for the socio-economic development. They argue that tithing has led to a substantial accumulation of wealth within the Lai district, particularly since the tithes are now retained locally within LIKBK, rather than being sent to the parent church, Baptist Church (BCM) at *Serkawn* district, as was the practice prior to LIKBK's establishment.

Nevertheless, there are compelling assertions among the participants, with 42% representing a frequency of 170 individuals (Figure 6.2), contending that tithe does not directly contribute to the welfare of the underprivileged, as it does not go directly to

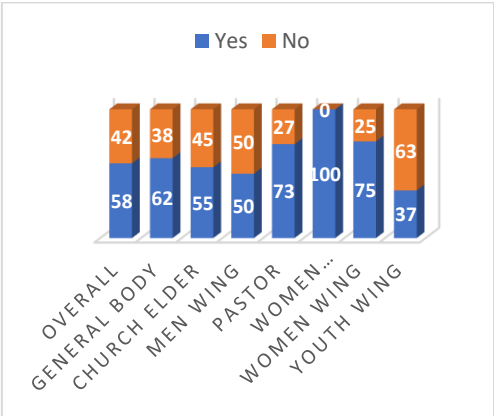
the poor, but for management of Church. However, they acknowledged the significance of tithing, saying that the tithe enables the smooth church management like meeting salaries for the Pastors and other office workers. This viewpoint is predominantly advocated by 63% of youth-wing and 50% of men-wing. (Figure 6.3)

Figure 6.2: Significance of Tithe for The Socio-Economic Upliftment



Source: Field Data

Figure 6.3: Sub-Groups’ Opinions on the Significance of Tithe



Source: Field Data

The enthusiasm in *tithing* is exquisitely expressed by one respondent saying that: ‘*I am happy to pay tithe as it now goes directly and only to the Lai territory itself and not outside the district. Therefore, this huge accumulation of wealth brings forth socio-economic development in the Lai society.*’ (R.K. Chhingi, women-wing leader). Another respondent had also expressed the socio-economic significance of tithing as: ‘*After the establishment of LIKBK, the tithes no longer go to Lunglei District; instead, they go directly to our Assemblies within our own district. This has resulted in a huge accumulation of financial wealth that circulates exclusively in our District. The LIKBK’s estimated annual budget for the year 2023-2024 has astonishingly amounted to Rs.26,90,00,000. This has benefitted not only the LIKBK but the Lai district as a whole.*’ (K. Lalngurliana, church-elder). One respondent expressed a belief in divine endorsement, stating that voluntary *tithing* results in personal prosperity as well, stating that: ‘*When we fail to give our monthly tithe, our family struggles to manage throughout the entire month. This aligns with the biblical notion that refraining from tithing will result in God removing our wealth. Hence, I wholeheartedly endorse*

tithing not only for socio-economic development but also for family prosperity.' (Dinengmawii Sektak, women-wing member)

The study of *tithe* in the context of LIKBK also reveals that *tithe* is one of the basic issues as to why LIKBK came into being as the Lai people could not accept the fact that their hard-earned *tithe* previously went directly to the BCM residing in different, far-off District without any return of favour for them, whereby one respondent had asserted that:

The BCM at Serkawn aimed to consolidate absolute power and opposed the decentralisation of authority. Additionally, they demanded that all tithe and contributions from Lai Christians be handed over to them without reciprocating for the advancement of Lai society. Requests such as establishing a mini-bookroom, hospital dispensary, and assigning a missionary to the Lai brethren in Burma were outrightly dismissed. It appeared that they solely prioritised acquiring our tithe. Hence, LIKBK emerged exclusively to serve the interests of the Lai people'. (T. T. Vanchhawg, Church-elder).

Another person had also wretchedly voiced that no prospects were given to the Lai people despite them paying *tithe* regularly saying that: *'Despite regular tithe payments from residents of Lawngtlai or Saiha, employment opportunities in the BCM office were never extended to them. Furthermore, the Lai people were never acknowledged to the church-sponsored training courses for positions like pastor or nurse, despite their consistent tithing to the Baptist church.'* (Regi, Deacon)

Despite the prevailing views, a significant proportion of participants (42%, n=170) argue that *tithe* does not have a direct impact on the well-being of the disadvantaged (Figure 6.2). This perspective is primarily championed by the youth wing, with a majority (63%) of young participants (Figure 6.3) concurring that *tithe* is ineffective in promoting socio-economic development for the impoverished. Aligned with this perspective, a luminary respondent articulated a Biblical assertion suggesting that *tithe* should be directed solely towards church management. He stated: *'Considering the historical context of the Bible, tithe traditionally supports the temple rather than being allocated directly for church management. Therefore, tithe isn't inherently designated*

for the assistance of the poor, but rather for the administration of the church'. (Nguna, youth-wing).

It is imperative to note that most respondents have not critically examined the concept of *tithing*. In fact, many view it as a means for socio-economic development. However, they also assert that it is customary for *tithes* to be significantly allocated for church management rather than aiding the poor, as expressed by one respondent who stated:

Because 'tithe' usually goes to the Church treasury so that it can be utilised for Church's management and administration and not directly to the poor. However, tithe goes directly to the Lairam itself and circulates within the Lai people and thus creates huge wealth accumulation which ultimately led to socio-economic development. (Thawnga, youth-wing leader).

Another respondent had also expressed with high appreciation that the *tithe* is conveniently used for church management and for giving salaries to the church worker saying that: *'In reality, the ten percent (tithe) is intended to be utilised for the honorarium of Church workers' and for the smooth administration of the Church, without which the LIKBK would not have endured to this day.'* (Hmingchungnunga, youth-wing Secretary).

While majority of respondents affirm that *tithe*, although not directly benefiting the poor, is effectively employed for church management, one notable exception in the research study is the statement of one respondent, who vigorously contended in favor of discontinuing obligatory *tithing* in the contemporary context, asserting that: *'Tithe is not specifically used for upliftment of the poor. In any case we, Christians are not under the obligation of payment of tithe. Jew's people are obligated to offer tithe. So, obligatory tithe offerings need to be abolished from the Church. We should offer gift to God with clear conscience, without holding back, with joy and in accordance with the blessings we received from the Lord.'* (Zonunmawia, youth-wing leader).

Citing Ajah (2013), who investigated the attitudes of African Christians towards *tithing*, and concluded that African Christians strongly associate *tithing* with the 'getting rich quick' mentality. The study more or less similarly concludes that within LIKBK church members, *tithing* is perceived as an obligatory practice for Christians, with the belief that failure to *tithe* will anyway result in the Lord removing their wealth.

The ongoing and unresolved discussions surrounding the obligation of *tithing* within contemporary Christianity, and whether it stems solely from the Old Testament, are addressed in a study. It asserts that within the context of LIKBK, *tithing* remains highly obligatory just as any other Christian Churches across the State. Accordingly, 'LIKBK Constitution's Bye Laws' explicitly states that '*For the management of the Church and for The Kingdom of God to prosper, the church members are required to give tithes*' (LIKBK Constitution & Bye Laws, 2020, Part 6 (3):10). This emphasises the vital role of *tithing* for the functioning of the church and the advancement of God's Kingdom. Additionally, it has been noted that tithing is one of the big basic issues that led to the emergence of an independent LIKBK within the Lai community as the Lai people could not come to term that their hard-earned tithes simply went away to the BCM residing in far off regions. Many respondents expressed satisfaction that since *tithes* no longer flow to external institutions, there has been a substantial accumulation of wealth within Lai areas. This wealth can now be effectively utilised for ensuring the smooth functioning of church administration, indirectly contributing to the socio-economic development of the impoverished Lai society. It is noteworthy that the aspirations of LIKBK's founders to establish a dedicated hospital and motherless home could materialise solely through voluntary *tithing*. Without this support, LIKBK, with its modest membership of around 30,000, would not have persisted to this day.

6.4 Role of Lairam Social Mission Committee of LIKBK

Since its inception, the LIKBK has prioritised establishing a well -established bureaucratic and administrative framework, characterised by clearly defined rules and formal laws to ensure the institution's efficient operation. Accordingly, the initial Constitution and Bye Laws was formulated in 2000, subsequently undergoing amendments in 2008, 2011, 2015, and 2020. Consequently, as outlined in the 2020 edition of the 'LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws,' Chapter 10 specifies the establishment of distinct operational units within the LIKBK Assembly, referred to as 'Assembly Department Committees.' These committees encompass a range of functions, including the 'General Administrative Committee,' 'Finance Committee,' 'Pastoral Committee,' 'Mission Committee,' 'Medical Board,' 'Christian Education Committee,' 'Communication Committee,' '*Lairam* Social Mission Committee,' and

the ‘Pension Board of Trustees’ (LIKBB Constitution and Bye Laws, 2020: 69-94). Hence, the *Lairam* Social Mission stands out as a crucial committee established by the LIKBB to ensure the advancement, reform, and provision of aid to the needy within the Lai society. The Constitution also clearly stipulates the number of seats and their terms for members of the *Lairam* Social Mission Board. It specifies that the Assembly Chairman assumes the role of Chairman of the Board, with the Secretary in charge empowered to convene committee meetings in consultation with the Chairman. In addition to these two members, the appointed Coordinator of the *Lairam* Social Mission automatically becomes a committee member, followed by the Superintendents of the *Lairam* Motherless Home (LMH) and *Lairam* Rescue Centre (LRC), who serves as ex-officio members of the *Lairam* Social Mission Committee. Apart from the ex-officio members, the Committee may also include ten elected members, with two years tenure. However, it is important to note that an individual may not be elected for more than two consecutive terms.

In addition to the aforementioned provisions, the Constitution also explicitly outlines the functions and authority that the *Lairam* Social Mission Committee may exercise within its jurisdiction. Such powers and functions vested to be performed are as follows:

- a) The Committee will serve as a dedicated body to ensure the maintenance of a healthy social condition, where fair and just political election prevails.
- b) The Committee will assume sole responsibility as the caretaker of the *Lairam* Motherless Home.
- c) The Committee will ensure to monitor various social evils and uphold human rights and dignity.
- d) The Committee will oversee the members of sub-committees under the *Lairam* Social Mission Committee and may, when necessary, take corrective measures regarding any untoward behaviour exhibited by such members.
- e) The Committee will assume sole responsibility for the *Lairam* Rescue Centre (LRC).

- f) If deemed necessary, the *Lairam* Social Mission Committee may establish one or more sub-committees on need basis to ensure the effectiveness of its work.

(LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws, Chapter 10 (37), 2020:88-90)

Lairam Motherless Home (LCMC): Firstly, the *Lairam* Motherless Home (LMH) is the one of the most worth-mentioning undertakings of the *Lairam* Social Mission Department, and this establishment has been one of the main reasons for the birth of LIKBK. The *Lairam* Motherless Home had been initiated by the women-wing of *Isua Krista Kohhran* way back in 1991, even before the amalgamation of two churches, that is the IKK and PBK. The IKK women wing was having a heavy heart to help the motherless babies even before the formal establishment of the motherless home building. They even reached out and helped as many as they could until the urge to establish a proper motherless home was initiated in 1991. They, thus estimated a budget to save up ₹ 1,25,000 within three years' time by the women wing. The Home was officially inaugurated in January 11, 1994. The actual admission of babies was started in 20 June 2000. As of 2023, there are 22 Staffs (including staffs of *Lairam* Adoption Centre) serving at various capacities like Superintendent, Case worker, Councillor, Accountant, Home mother, Chowkidar, Nurse, Helper, Cook, Driver. There are 28 children at Motherless Home and 7 children at Adoption Centre. The children mainly comprise of *Tuikuk (Brus)*, *Chakmas*, *Bawm*, *Pang* and few from Lawngtlai town. (Interview with Chanchinthahrilthangi, Home Mother on 16th September, 2023, 12:30 PM - 01:00 PM at Motherless Home, Lawngtlai). With a proper registration acquired from the Government, the Home is initially estimated to accommodate children till 10 years. However, since it is the only Home for the whole district, children below 18 years of age irrespective of ages are admitted by the Home who are in dire need of care and shelter, as they cannot outrightly reject admission of such needy children. The children admitted to the Home are first premeditated by the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) as per the Government's instruction. Not only motherless children are admitted to the Home, but also children in need of care, support and protection from various violences or the like are also referred to this home by the government's Child Protection agency here, which is officially claimed by the government as 'Children in Need of Care and Support'. The duration of stay for the children are decided according to the children's family status and in case, children does

not have proper family to go back after reaching a stipulated time and year, they are then transferred to the *Lairam* Child Adoption Centre. At present, there are 28 children and 7 from *Lairam* Adoption Centre.

One noteworthy point mentioned by the Home Mother is that a yearly dedicated budget say like 12 lakhs has been allocated annually by the LIKBK Assembly. Additionally, ₹2160 from Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) for each children are received, but irregular. From there, the workers are also given extra salaries by the LIKBK apart from getting salaries from the ICDS. For example, the baby sitter gets ₹6500 salaries from the ICDS, the rest is paid by the LIKBK where their total salaries amount to ₹12000 each. However, the LIKBK is the main sponsoring agency.

The main problem faced by the Home as mentioned by the Home Mother is that there is acute shortage of water wherein their present water storage capacity is only 50,000 litres which is usually used up within two weeks. Moreover, the Home being the only motherless Home for the whole district, they usually exceeded the seat capacity which is 25, they however presently hosted 28. Therefore, the building and the infrastructure capacity is still very limited and cannot meet the needs of the Lai District satisfactorily. There are plans to resume constructing the second-storied of the present building, which however could not be immediately initiated due to limited funds. Moreover, the Home Mother had also specifically mentioned that there is a high need for proper fencing and proper security guards since some of the elder children tend to ran off easily from the Home as there is no proper fencing and security.

Moreover, the study reveals that the Motherless Home being the only Home of such kind in the whole district cannot suffice the needs of the Lai district. With its limited fund and infrastructure, there is an urgent need to upgrade the building and the other infrastructure of the Home as was clearly mentioned in the 2022 Assembly as: *“Eversince the establishment of Lairam Motherless Home in 11 January 1994, not only the orphans but also ‘Children in Need of Care and Support’ have also been accommodated. With the limited seats of hardly thirty (30) in numbers coupled with the steady decline of the funds allocated by the Church, the LMH may not be able to run smoothly in future. Mere funds received from the ICDS (Integrated child Development Scheme) is not sufficient so as to feed and nurture the children.* (Assembly Minute Book, Dr. L. H. Lalpekhlu, Associate General Secretary, 2021-

2022). In support with this statement, the Home Mother had also stated that: *“Having been serving as a capacity of ‘mother’ in the Lairam Motherless Home for the past 25 years, my only wishes are to have a bigger building and infrastructure. Since it is the only motherless home in the whole of the district, we now have exceeded even the seat capacity. Moreover, we are also facing acute water problem as our present storage capacity is only 50,000 litres which are used up within two-week’s time. I also sincerely wish that we could have a proper fencing and security staffs as the elder children may at times tend to run off from the Home.”* (Interview with Chanchinthahrilthangi, Home Mother on 16th September, 2023, 12:30 PM - 01:00 PM at Motherless Home, Lawngtlai).

Lairam Child Adoption Centre (LCAC): Closely associated with the Motherless Home is the Lairam Child Adoption Centre which function at a separate building nearby the Motherless Home from 28 April, 2011. This Adoption Centre, under the guidance of the Indian central governments’ s agency known as Specialised Adoption Agency (SAA) have been contributing immensely for the motherless babies and prospective childless parents. The previous problem whereby children were simply adopted by parents without government’s approval has been done away with, which may at times lead to child trafficking and may at times being subjected to abuse and neglect by the foster parents. At present, there are 7 Children and 11 staffs, Co-Ordinator, social worker, nurse, part-time doctor, chowkidar and 6 AYAH (baby sitter). At present, they have 14 year old twin (boy and girl) ready for adoption. So far, 30 children had been adopted even from foreign parents like France and Belgium. One very noteworthy point mentioned by the Co-ordinator is that the *Mizo* childless couple are still not opting for adoption and she urges that it is high time that the *Mizos* from within the state will take step in this action. If *Mizo* couples are willing to adopt, first priority is given to them but since there are hardly such prospective parents, the children have been adopted to other states and other countries as they strictly follow the Central’s CARA seniority rules. Follow up for 6 months have been seriously undertaken wherein the Child Agency from that region will further take up the follow up. Utmost care and follow-up are rigorously carried out wherein they send photos etc keeping them updated. (Interview with H. Lawmnarammawii, Co-ordinator, *Lairam*

Child Adoption Centre on 29.9.2023, 2:30 PM-3:20PM, Lairam Adoption Centre, College Veng, Lawngtlai)

Lairam Multipurpose Training Centre: The Social Mission Department had also undertaken a noteworthy project known as '*Lairam Multipurpose Training Centre* in collaboration with Asia Pacific Baptist Aid, in the hope that it will generate employment opportunities to the Lai people and thereby enhancing the socio-economic status of the Lai people. The project was undertaken since 2014. Training courses like hair cutting and beauty culture, computer training courses on CCA and DCA, tailoring and handloom are the courses offered with minimal fees.

Charity Shop: Commencing in September 2015, the Social Mission Department inaugurated a charity shop initiative, which garnered significant contributions of clothing and goods from church members across various denominations, including LIKBK, as well as individual donors. These donations enabled the shop to offer items at substantially reduced prices, catering to the needs of economically disadvantaged individuals. On occasion, the shop even provided items free of charge to those in need. However, this philanthropic endeavor was discontinued as of April 1, 2022. (LIKBK Assembly Report, 2023:54)

Comprehensive Livelihood Project: In collaboration with Assembly and Church auxiliary for Social Action (CASA), the Social Mission Department has been tirelessly taking up the social cause of this project with the main aim of bringing socio-economic change and development in 15 targeted villages. A Community Based Organisation (CBO) was established as the nodal agency through which the Project will be carried out. The selected villages include *Saikah, R, Vanhne, Rulkual, Saizawh, Saikah L, Chawntlangpui, Sihtlangpui, Kawlchaw W, Chawnhu, Mampui, Diltlang, Ngengpuikai, Tuithumhnar and Ngengpui*. (LIKBK Assembly Report, 2022:102). Between the year 2020-2021, the main activities carried out within the targeted villages include:

- a) Distribution of hoardings to each village.
- b) Workshop on training of surgical mask stitching
- c) Awareness programme on the utility of Health Care Scheme and encouraging the villagers towards such enrolment thereby giving them direction.

- d) Between 19th-6th December, 2020, the farmers from targeted villages of *Ngengpuitlang, Diltlang, Sihltlangpui, Chawntlangpui, Saikah and Tuithumhnar* were given fertilizers and various agricultural tools free of cost.
- e) Quilt was distributed to each household of targetted villages. (LIKBK Assembly Report, 2021: 95-95)

The Lairam Rescue Centre (LRC) and its Unique role Towards Combating HIV/ Aids and Addiction: The task of combating the social evils like drug addiction, alcohol abuse, untoward sexual behaviour and the like are addressed seriously by the LIKBK. The women wing, known as LIKBKHP, recognised the urgent need for a rescue center to provide support and resources for those affected by these issues, in order to encompass the Lai society as a whole. As such, the women-wing started contributing and saved up ₹18,31,371, which was then handed over to the Assembly on August, 2017 paving the way for the actual construction of the *Lairam* Rescue Centre. After successive painstaking efforts and contributions made by individual and several Departments and Fellowships under the LIKBK, and by the donations made by several individual, the *Lairam* Rescue Centre actually become a reality situated at six kilometers away from *Lawngtlai* Town at *Mampui* road commonly known as *Tuiphal peng*. The place was donated by the late prominent Church elder cum veteran politician, V.L. Dawma from Bazar Veng, Lawngtlai. The formal inauguration of LRC was held on 12 November, 2021 and the inmates were admitted on the following year starting from 10 February 2022. The present staff strength is 10, including the Superintendent, Staff Nurse, Counsellor, Ward Attendant, 3 Securities, Cook and Driver at present. The actual seat capacity is estimated to be 15, however, due to facilities and accommodation constraints, only 12 inmates are being admitted. Only male inmates are accommodated at present since it is still in the initial stage. Admissions are processed on a first-come, first-serve basis, whereby prospective applicants must obtain an application form from the main office located at *Chanmari, Chawngte Peng, Lawngtlai*. Applicants must provide necessary information and await availability of seats, upon which they will be notified. The Centre welcomes individuals from diverse backgrounds, regardless of religion, denomination, or region, including those from Saiha and Aizawl districts. The residential program is designed to span a duration of three months. (LIKBK Assembly Report, 2023:57).

Despite being in its nascent stage and awaiting official government registration and approval, the *Lairam* Rescue Centre has received minimal funding, although the support from LIKBK and other stakeholders has been encouraging. Notably, the government has contributed to the construction and paving of the approach road to the building. Additionally, Mr. *Lalbiakzauva*, Member of Legislative Assembly, has facilitated the connection of water supply from the Public Health Engineering (PHE) department. Furthermore, Mr. *Ngunlianchung*, MLA, has donated ₹5 lakhs from his MLA Fund, enabling the commencement of the main building's construction, which was subsequently continued by his son, Mr. *C. Hmingthantluanga*. The Centre has also received unwavering support from various departments, including the women's and youth wings, in the form of cash and manual labor assistance. Between April 2022 and February 2023, the centre received a total of ₹12,10,980 in cash donations.

The *Lairam* Rescue Centre, situated within *Mampui* village, has received considerable support from the *Mampui* Village Council, which has facilitated the successful terracing work through the allocation of NREGS funds. Additionally, neighboring Village Councils, such as *College Veng* VC and *Chanmari* VC, have also demonstrated their support for the centre's mission. Notably, the Centre has established a collaborative relationship with the prominent NGO, Young Lai Association (YLA), as evidenced by the Memorandum of Understanding signed on January 16, 2022. As a testament to their partnership, two seats have been reserved for candidates recommended by YLA, in recognition of their efforts to combat drug abuse in the region through the Drug Reduction Squad initiative.

The *Lairam* Rescue Centre (LRC) has made significant contributions towards combating HIV/AIDS in the region. Unaware of their HIV status, some individuals seeking refuge at the Centre were found to be positive. To address this, the Centre has implemented mandatory blood screening for all inmates, conducted at the LCMC. The results are then referred to the government's HIV Testing Centre (ICTC) at Civil Hospital, where trained counselors provide pre-test counseling and post-test support. This comprehensive approach enables the Centre to not only diagnose but also provide emotional and psychological support to those affected, instilling hope and promoting a positive outlook on life beyond HIV. The Centre similarly takes into action to

implant peace in the heart of such patient preaching to them that there is life after HIV. Moreover, prior to admission to the *Lairam* Rescue Centre, inmates undergo screening for drug-related diseases such as Hepatitis B and C, and Tuberculosis, with their informed consent. The Centre maintains collaborative relationships with various organisations implementing HIV/AIDS projects, including the Gilead Drop-in Centre and government hospitals, ensuring a comprehensive approach to addressing the health needs of its inmates. The good working relationship between such institution is mentioned by one respondent saying that: *“We pay a regular visit to the HIV positive inmates of the Lairam Rescue Centre to give counselling and to check their health status. We supply them ART (Anti-Retroviral Therapy) medicine to the HIV positive inmates who are required to take such medicines. There were times when their parents come to get the medicine and deliver themselves to the inmates as it depends on the inmates’ choice and besides, maintaining secrecy and confidentiality is highly required.”* (Spurgeon Hauheng, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Gilead Drop - in Centre, MHIP, Lawngtlai, IDU Project)

Inmates who are on Oral Substitution Therapy (OST) are also welcomed and helped by the Centre. However, there are inmates who have a change of heart after coming to the Centre and bravely dropped such substitution so as to really give up any related drugs. Moreover, some HIV positive inmates who are on regular Anti Retroviral Therapy (ART) are also warmly received by the Centre wherein their timely dose of ART are obtained by the staff itself for them so as not to skip such vital medicines. Not only the HIV positive inmates but Hepatitis positive patients are also given treatments whereby the Centre works out every possible way to made the medicine free of cost to such patients. However, the tuberculosis infected inmates are not admitted to the Centre as there is no separate isolation room for such patient owing to the possible chance of spreading to other inmates, they are usually referred to the Hospital for a proper treatment.

Ever since the establishment of LRC, the burden of the Lai family infected with drug addiction, alcoholism, HIV/AIDS and the like have been eased to a considerable extent as they no longer need to go all the way to other district to detox. Previously, the nearest was the *Thutak Nunpuitu Team* (TNT) at *Lunglei* District. Provision for

accommodation of women in need are also made for the near future prospects. The future plan also include skill training for the inmates during their tenure of three months as was visioned by the Superintendent saying that: *'I dream of launching a skill training short courses like mobile repairing and tailoring and the like so that the inmate after leaving this place will have a change of heart and earn their livelihood in a respectful manner and, as such, they will develop a sense of belongingness in the society'*. (Interview with Reverend Lianchhunga, Superintendent, LRC on 18th September, 2023, 7:22 PM – 8:30 PM, Tuikual South, Aizawl).

The efforts of LIKBK, particularly through its Committee of Social Mission Department, are commendable in their dedication to socio-economic development within the Lai society. Their initiatives draw upon available resources to make a meaningful impact. One notable aspect of LIKBK's work is that they are the pioneering institutions in the entire district. For instance, establishments like the *Lairam* Motherless Home, The *Lairam* Rescue Centre, The *Lairam* Adoption Centre, The Charity Shop, among others, stand as the first and only of their kind in the Lai areas. These institutions reflect LIKBK's commitment to addressing various societal needs and contributing positively to the community's welfare.

6.5 Communication Committee for Upliftment of the Lai Literature

As noted earlier, the LIKBK has consistently prioritised the development of a dynamic bureaucratic and administrative structure, marked by clearly delineated regulations and formal legislation to ensure its effective functioning. This commitment to organisational efficiency is evident from the 2020 edition of the 'LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws,' Chapter 10 which specifically outlines the creation of specialised working division of units within the LIKBK Assembly known as 'Assembly Department Committees.' These committees encompass a diverse array of responsibilities, including overseeing the 'General Administrative Committee,' 'Finance Committee,' 'Pastoral Committee,' 'Mission Committee,' 'Medical Board,' 'Christian Education Committee,' 'Communication Committee,' 'Lairam Social Mission Committee,' and the 'Pension Board of Trustees' (LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws, 2020: 69-94). The Communication Commmittee is one such undertaking of

the LIKBK to ensure that the Lai people has striven towards progress in print media, musical and audio visual in the manner that serve the Lai people well. Similar to the Social Mission Committee, that specifies that the Assembly Chairman assumes the role of Chairman of the Board, with the Secretary in charge, who is empowered to convene committee meetings in consultation with the Chairman. In addition to these two members, the appointed Coordinator of the Communication Committee automatically becomes a committee member, followed by the Manager of Printing Press and Bookroom and the editor of a monthly magazine, '*Kohhran Tlangau*'. Apart from the ex-officio members, the Committee may also include ten elected members, with two years tenure. However, it is important to note that an individual may not be elected for more than two consecutive terms.

In addition to the aforementioned provisions, the Constitution also explicitly outlines the function and authority that the Communication Committee may exercise within its jurisdiction. Such powers and functions vested to be performed are as follows:

- a) To take the responsibility in print media, and educate the Lai people through printed books, radio, television and audio visuals.
- b) To take the sole charge of looking after the LIKBK Printing Press and Bookroom.
- c) Music Ministry
- d) To make sure that all the staffs under the communication Committee are not involved in any inappropriate behaviour and to take necessary action as such.
- e) The Communication Department of LIKBK is tasked with periodical compilation of study booklets for the Church, tailored specifically for Wednesday night service Biblical lesson (*Nilai Zan Thupui*) and group study Biblical topics for the annual September Month (*Beihruai Thupui*).
- f) If deemed necessary, the Committee has the authority to establish one or more subcommittees to facilitate the efficient operation of the Committee. (LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws, Chapter 10 (38), 2020:86-88). The Communication Department as such is sub divided into various Departments - *Lairam* Offset Press (LOP), *Lairam* Music Training Institute, *Lairam* Bookroom and Stationery, Literature and Publication and Media.

Lairam Offset Press (LOP): The LIKBK Offset Press, established in 1983, has a staff of 14 members, including a manager, and is expected to generate revenue of ₹ 75,60,000 as per the Assembly Minute. As of January 2022, the Press has earned ₹ 59,23,164 and is on track to meet its target. Notably, the Press is self-sustaining, with staff salaries fully covered by its operations. Over the years, the Press has upgraded its machinery and currently offers a range of printing services, including school textbooks, magazines, cash books, lucky tickets, receipt books, forms, invitation cards, book binding and repair, spiral binding, and self-inking seals. Prior to the establishment of the Press, the Lai people had to order stationery from *Lunglei* or *Aizawl* Districts, incurring additional transportation costs. However, with the creation of LOP, the Lai community can now access these essential goods at a lower and more reasonable cost, enhancing their economic viability.

Lairam Bookroom and Stationery: Since April 2012, the *Lairam* Bookroom and Stationery has been operating from the LIKBK Assembly Headquarter Office, gradually expanding its reach. A second Bookroom was established in Bazar *Veng* (*locality*) on December 6, 2019, followed by mini-Bookrooms in remote villages - *Bualpui NG* on February 27, 2020, and *Lungtian* Village on November 17, 2022. This expansion has improved access to essential books and materials for Lai communities in far-flung areas, offering student textbooks, Lai Hymn Books, Lai Bibles, and stationery items at uniform prices, thereby enhancing the socioeconomic conditions in these villages and bridging the gap with other district. In 2014, a significant agreement was reached between the *Lairam* Bookroom and the Mizoram *Synod* Bookroom of the Presbyterian Church of India (PCI), establishing a pricing parity agreement. This partnership ensured that both bookrooms sold books and materials at identical prices, promoting unity and cooperation between the two churches and fostering a more equitable distribution of resources. The difficulties that had been overcome by the establishment of *Lairam* Bookroom has been specifically mentioned as: *'Since the inception of the Lairam Bookroom and Library, schools in the Lawngtlai District no longer face the inconvenience of placing orders for prescribed books from Aizawl, reducing potential delays. All books and stationery items are available at the specified Maximum Retail Price (MRP). Additionally, Bibles and hymn books can be obtained*

from our Bookroom at the same price as those in Aizawl.' (Interview with Lallawmsiami, Lairam Bookroom Seller on 29th September, 2023, 3:00 PM-3:45PM, Lawngtlai)

Literature and Publication Board: Besides the LOP and *Lairam* Bookroom and Stationery, the Literature and Publication Board has been actively working towards drafting, finalising and compiling the various Biblical Study Book for the various Departments like the Children wing. The Board is tasked with periodical compilation of study booklets for the Church, tailored specifically for Wednesday night service Biblical lesson (*Nilai Zan Thupui*) and group study Biblical topics for the annual September Month (*Beihruai Thupui*), prayer guide Book, and individual book, worthy of publication have also been published by this sub-Committee. The second edition of Lai Hymn Book had been reprinted with 3000 copies between the year 2022-2023. The Media Ministry, print media and electronic media have been basically undertaken by the Board as well. Since 1982, the monthly LIKBK magazine, '*Kohhran Tlangau*' has been published. The creation of You Tube channel 'Grace Channel LIKBK Assembly' is attributed solely to the efforts of the Communication Committee. Currently, there are around 160 videos uploaded on the channel, and it has garnered over 2250 subscribers. (LIKBK Assembly Minute Book, 2023:51). Video coverages of numerous sermons, documentations of *Lairam* Motherless Home, *Lairam* Rescue Centre, *Lairam* Higher Secondary School, *Lairam* Christian Hospital Oxygen Plant, live coverages conferences and assemblies etc are available in this channel.

The Communication Committee plays a crucial role as an agency facilitating the learning of the Lai language among the Lai people. It has taken up the initiative of promoting Lai language by organising a special 'Literature Campaign Board' spearheaded by Upa.H. Lalduhawmi and K.T. Chuangsangvunga. This campaign has successfully aided towards the enhancement of Lai literature. For instance, it carried out the following initiatives:

- a) The Communication Committee encourages the Church Member towards the importance of regular reading of Bible related books, it also encourages the theologians to contribute article in '*Kohhran Tlangau*'

- b) In every local churches of LIKBK, within a year, at least two church services are dedicated for promoting Lai language whereby the Speakers of such services are directed to have a speech specially dedicated to Lai literature so as to made the Church members aware of the importance of Lai language.
- c) Article writing competition was organised in a topic related to ‘the importance of writing and reading’.
- d) The theologians serving under the LIKBK are encouraged for regular writing and publication wherein they are requested to contribute at least one article annually for publication.
- e) Every church members are requested to develop a reading habit by requesting them to read at least one book with not less than 150 pages within the year 2022-2023.
- f) For the promotion of the monthly LIKBK featured magazine ‘*Kohhran Tlangau*’, innovative ideas are put forward. The LIKBK’s Communication Committee promotes Lai literature by rewarding the best author in the Church’s weekly newsletters (*Kohhran Tlangau*). Holy Bible and citation are given to such authors since 2022-2023. In fact, the payment of the magazine can now be made through electronic payment like Gpay. The LIKBK media Channels such as the K.T Vision are rewarded with citations as the best chosen agent who significantly features the best LIKBK programmes as regular shows.

The points mentioned above truly underscore the crucial role of LIKBK and their earnest commitment to catalysing socio-economic change and development through various departments such as the Social Mission Committee and the Communication Committee. These discussions highlight LIKBK's sincere endeavors not only to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Lai people but also to promote the Lai language and literature. One respondent admirably stated that: *‘Publishing Lai Krihfa Hlabu (Lai hymn book) and translating Lai Baibal Thiang (Lai Bible) are the most distinguished works done by the Communication Committee of LIKBK. In this way, they are exuberantly promoting and enriching the Lai language and literature, thereby promoting the Lai culture.’* (Robert Vanchunga, church-elder)

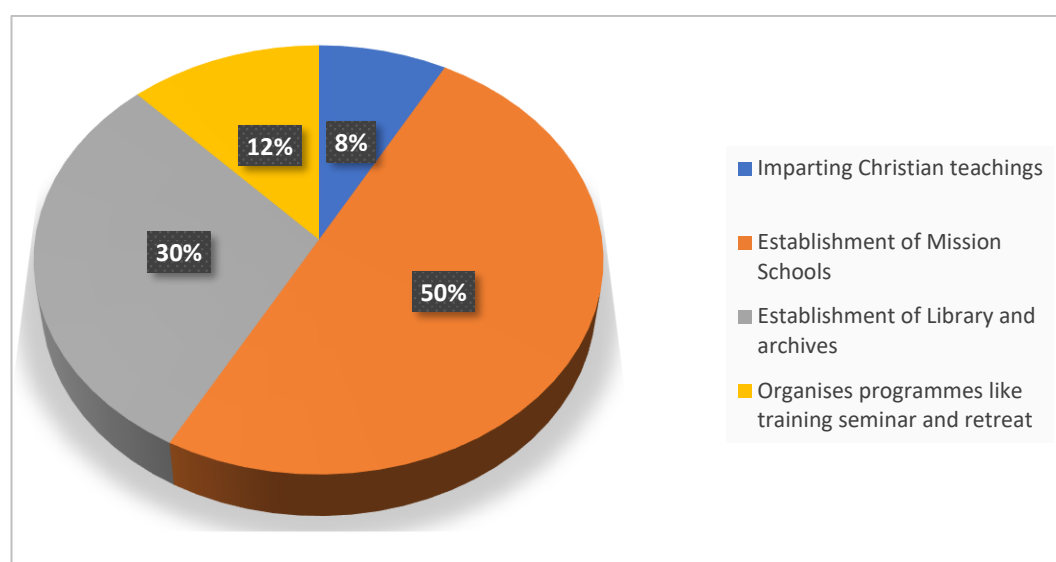
6.6 Role of Christian Education Committee (CEC)

The Christian Education Committee is another important Committee that has been created by the LIKBK Assembly which was also specifically mentioned in the LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws. Under this Committee, apart from the ex-officio members like the Co-ordinator of Christian Education Committee, the manager of *Lairam* Library and Archive and the Principal of Higher Secondary School, the Committee may also include ten elected members, with two years tenure. However, it is important to note that an individual may not be elected for more than two consecutive terms just like the other Committees mentioned above. The core work of the committee constitutes imparting Christian education which may include the overall assessment of ensuring a typical Christian education including the Sunday Schools and the Church sponsored schools will be undertaken by the Committee. The Committee may organise seminar and retreat if deemed necessary. They will take upon the responsibility of maintaining the library and archive. Just like the other Committees, the Committee may check any untoward behaviour among its staffs and may take necessary actions accordingly. (LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws, 2020, Chapter 10 (35): 84-86).

Among the several undertakings of the Christian Education Committee, the establishment of Mission schools, and specifically *Lairam* Higher Academy of Science (LAHAS) stands out as the most important task as was mentioned by most of the respondents from the fieldwork where 50% of the respondents with a high frequency of 199 persons opinionated that the establishment of science stream in higher secondary level for the first time in the history of Lawngtlai for the science aspirants students is a problem-solving initiatives especially for the poor science aspirant student. (Figure 6.4). The second highest rank compiled in the fieldwork (30%, n=123) is the Christian Education Committee's (CEC) undertaking of '*Lairam* Library and Archives'. The respondents commonly praised this initiatives, saying that it is beneficial for not only theologians, but also for students and academic researchers, from within and outside the region. Securing 12% (n=119), the third most important undertaking as is compiled from the study is the 'organisation of training, seminars and retreat' for the Church members, where the respondents alleged that the organisation of seminars and training on various topics ranging from gender

sensitisation, child rights, human rights and such have highly sensitised and empowered the community. The fourth most important contribution of Christian Education Committee as mentioned by the respondents is the ‘Christian Teaching’ imparted by the CEC (8%, n=58). The LIKBK has been socialising the church members right from their childhood stage, and as such, the Communication Committee has been taking the lead role in compiling separate study book (*zirlaibu*), for each sub-wing. Additionally, the Communication Committee sees to it that all the Christian study books are well-aligned with the teachings of the Lai culture.

Figure 6.4: Distinguished Contribution of Christian Education Committee



Source: Field Data

Prior to 2017, the Lai District lacked higher education opportunities in Science, forcing students to seek alternatives in other districts, which was often financially burdensome for disadvantaged families, leading to some students discontinuing their studies. Recognizing this need, the LIKBK initiated the establishment of a Science Stream program in its funded higher secondary school, known as *Lairam* Higher Academy of Science (LAHAS), which commenced in 2017. The school received official permission from the Directorate of School Education, Government of Mizoram, in 2018 (No.B.17011/25/2016-EDN/149 dt. 7.2.2018) and was subsequently affiliated with the Mizoram Board of School Education (MBSE). Building on this success, the

Arts Stream was introduced on July 15, 2022, further expanding access to quality education in the region.

The student strength is recorded as 40 Science stream students and 17 Arts stream students, with 44 hostellers at present. It is highly noteworthy that the hostellers encompass mainly of the least fortunate tribes like the *Brus*, *the Chakmas*, and *the Maras* hailing from the most backward and far-off corners of the region like *Tuisentlang*, *Tuidangtlang* etc, and the refugees from Manipur and Myanmar. Besides, the fee structures are designed in a manner that the poor people can afford the fees as a minimal fee of ₹ 6300 is charged for the hostellers whereas it is commonly charges as ₹ 8000 in other institution and for the dayscholar, minimal fee amounting to ₹ 2000 is charged. Notably, the LIKBK-funded higher secondary school has implemented a distinctive 'Scholar Incentive Programme', offering a 15-25% discount to students from families employed by the LIKBK. Remarkably, the school achieved a 100% pass rate in the 2022 HSSLC examinations. As of 2022, the school's staff comprises 16 members, including the Principal, 9 lecturers covering both Science and Arts streams, 1 clerk cum Computer Operator, 2 Hostel Wardens, 1 IV Grade worker, and 2 cooks, demonstrating a strong commitment to academic excellence and student support.

Furthermore, under the auspices of the Mission Committee, the LIKBK has been instrumental in establishing a network of twenty schools (LIKBK Assembly Report, 2021:98), known as New Vision English Schools (NVES), in underserved areas of the district, particularly among the *Bawm*, *Chakma*, and *Bru* settlements, since 2012. Notably, a Higher Secondary School was established in *Nghalimlui* village to provide access to higher education for underprivileged tribes, reducing the need for lengthy commutes. Additionally, the LIKBK has undertaken adult education initiatives in selected *Chakma* settlement areas, targeting sites that have not yet been reached by the LADC's Education Department, thereby expanding educational opportunities in these marginalised communities. (T. Lalbiaki, NVES Teacher)

Despite the humble beginning of the School, it proves to be a dynamic centre of learning for the poor Lai aspirants. The School further planned out a clear-visioned future prospects of establishing high school as per the New Education Policy (NEP)

of the central Government. However, the School is also not without its drawbacks; their main problems encountered is the shortage of funds and infrastructure wherein the Principal had hopefully asserted that:

I wish our School will be able to have a bigger building than this so as to accommodate more students in need and also to have a separate building for the Library so as to create a true reading environment for the students. Also, I wish that we could have a separate building for the Science Laboratory so that the students can avail such in his own appropriate timings. However, the contents of books and equipments on the library and laboratory are quite satisfying but our main dream is to have a separate buldings for such. (Interview with Reverend. C. Chanchinmawia, LAHAS Principal, 18th September, 2023, 1:00 PM- 1:45 PM, LAHAS, Lawngtlai)

The second highest rank compiled in the fieldwork (30%, n=123) is the Christian Education Committee's (CEC) undertaking of 'Lairam Library and Archives'. The LIKBK under the CEC has also been actively maintaining and updating the 'Lairam Library and Archives' so that the Lai people can easily avail the Library. This undertaking is compiled as the second most important task of the LIKBK as was mentioned by the respondents. (Figure 5.6). All the proceedings of the LIKBK are well documented and kept safely at the Archive for future reference. The Library and Archive was established on 31st October, 2018 on the second floor of the Assembly Main Office. As of 2022 Assembly Record, the Library consists of 675 Books readily available for borrowing and 460 Books which are archived. LIKBK maintains meticulous records of important religious milestones, including Baby Christening and Baptism, with detailed numerical data and yearly series. Additionally, each Local Church is required to maintain a comprehensive record of Church proceedings, and as of now, 60 out of 117 LIKBK Local Churches have successfully submitted the desired records, providing valuable insights into the spiritual growth and development of the community. (Assembly Meeting Minute, 2022:90-93). The Library serves as an important source of information centre not only for the Church members but the Lai people as a whole as was rightly mentioned by one interviewee saying that: *'The library has proven to be a valuable resource centre for students, teachers, academics,*

and even pastors, providing easy accessibility to all.’ (Interview with Lallawmsiami, Lairam Bookroom Seller on 29th September 2023, 3:00 PM-3:45PM, Lawngtlai)

Securing 12% (n=119), the third most important undertaking as is compiled from the study is the ‘organisation of training, seminars and retreat’ for the Church members. The LIKBK consistently prioritises the organisation of seminars and training sessions conducted by various wings within the organisation, including the Women Wing, Youth Wing, Children Wing, and others under the direction of the CEC. *‘These seminars address contemporary issues such as gender-based violence, human trafficking, child rights, women's rights, political awareness, and environmental protection. The church ensures the involvement of professional experts as speakers for these seminars, emphasising a holistic approach to education and awareness.’* (Interview with H. Lalrinsangi, woman theologian, in-charge of LOP and Lairam Bookroom on 28th July, 2023, 7:30 AM -8:20 AM, Lai House, Bungkawn, Aizawl)

The fourth most important contribution of Christian Education Committee as mentioned by the respondents is the ‘Christian Teaching’ imparted by the CEC (8%, n=58). The Church has placed great emphasis on Sunday school as the primary institution for imparting Christian values and teachings to its members. To foster spiritual growth and development, a comprehensive Sunday school program has been established, catering to various age groups, including Beginner, Primary, Junior, Sacrament, and Senior Departments, culminating in full church membership upon completion of the program at age 18. The Christian Education Committee strongly encourages regular attendance from childhood, maintaining attendance records for each department, and recognising individuals who complete the full program with rewards, thereby promoting consistent church engagement and spiritual development.

As previously mentioned, the absence of a missionary dedicated to the Lai people led to the establishment of LIKBK, with a primary objective of providing quality Christian education through a well-established school in Lawngtlai district. This emphasis on education was also evident in the formation of the second ethnic-based church, *Pawiram Baptist Kohhran (PBK)*, which had a robust Christian Education Committee from its inception. Even after the amalgamation of the two churches into LIKBK, the

Christian Education Committee remains a vital and crucial component of the church's structure. A notable achievement of the Christian Education Committee is the pioneering initiative of LIKBK in introducing the first Science Stream at the higher secondary level, making quality education accessible at an affordable fee structure. Moreover, the strategic selection of village sites for establishing Mission Schools demonstrates a deliberate effort to enhance the socio-economic status of marginalised regions, where government presence is still limited. Thus, LIKBK has emerged as a custodian and champion of the rights and development of the disadvantaged tribes and villages in Lai-dominated areas, fostering inclusive growth and empowerment.

6.7 Rice Contribution for Socio-Economic Development

The *Buhfai Thàm* (Handful-of-Rice Collection) Project is a distinctive aspect of the Women's Fellowship's work. '*Buhfai Thàm*' refers to setting aside a small portion of rice from the family meal preparation. In Mizoram, where rice is a staple food, households typically consume two to three rice-based meals per day. In Christian households, after measuring the rice for cooking, the mother separates a handful or more and places it in a designated container called the *Buhfai Thàm Bél* (handful-of-rice container). This collected rice is then offered to the church for sale, generating a significant amount of funds. J.M. Lloyd notes that the innovative approach of raising funds was first introduced by Mrs. D.E. Jones. Mrs. Jones learned of this method from a *Khasi* Christian and decided to adopt the idea to support the construction of a new chapel, as mentioned in her letter dated March 1911. Additionally, Lloyd highlights that the funds generated from this initiative played a significant role in enabling the appointment of the first Bible Woman in 1913. (Lloyd,1991:163). The practical and effective method of collecting funds has gained widespread popularity among Mizo Christians, evolving beyond its original scope when Mrs. D.E. Jones first introduced it. This approach is also highly valued in *Khasi-Jaintia* churches in the state of Meghalaya, where it is commonly used to support the establishment of Christian elementary schools in non-Christian regions. Moreover, churches in the western areas of the *Khasi* Hills appear to have adopted this form of collection even earlier. (Lloyd,1991:146). The tradition persists to this day across Mizoram. Despite its humble beginnings as a seemingly insignificant activity by a small segment of society,

the '*Buhfai Thàm*' project has expanded and flourished, evolving into a primary source of income not only for the Presbyterian Women's Fellowship but also for the different denominations as a whole. This initiative has been undertaken by the women wing even in LIKBK which prove to be highly beneficial for the LIKBK Mission Department and for the socio-economic development of the Lai society as a whole.

This handful of rice contribution by the LIKBK women wing (LIKBKHP) has been one of the major financial source for the Mission Department. For instance, the total estimated Mission Department's budget within the reporting period of 2021-2022 was ₹ 487,70,000 (LIKBK Assembly Record Book, 2022:110). All the sum of money are thus utilised for the socio-economic development of the 'unbelievers'. The 'Mission Department' is basically created for spreading the gospel to the unbelievers and non-Christians. The Mission Department has been divided broadly into four fields-Foreign Mission (Myanmar and Bangladesh fields), Inland Mission (Manipur, Missing and Odisha Fields), Home Mission (Chakma Home Mission, School Ministry and Christian *Milan Sanghati*), Partnership Mission (Ghana and China). The Mission Department functions through a total number of 183 missionaries; 19 missionaries who operates outside the state and foreign countries, 69 missionaries within Mizoram, 3 partnership missionaries and 81 native missionaries. One of the unique undertaking of this Mission Department is the establishment of New Vision Schools in such areas. As of 2021 Assembly Statistics, there are 22 schools under operation. The Missionaries and the missionary teachers have been playing active role towards the socio-economic upliftment in their assigned areas. The Church makes sure that conversion to Christianity leads to overall development among the natives' health, education, income etc. In fact, the LIKBK always makes sure that the Schools are established in a remote areas which are still untouched by civilisation.

Initially, individuals unfamiliar with Christianity struggled to comprehend the purpose of the 'handful-of-rice' project. However, as awareness gradually grew, the Bible Women responsible for introducing and promoting the project faced significant challenges, including being targeted with stones due to the perception that they were the primary beneficiaries. They were often accused of implementing these 'unusual' methods to enrich themselves, leading to accusations of laziness and dependence on

handouts. Furthermore, there were allegations of theft by these same Bible Women from the project. Despite the barrage of negative feedback, the project persisted and ultimately became highly effective within the church community. (Vanlalthanpuui, 2019:81). The study therefore would like to know the effectiveness and the people's perception of 'handful of rice contribution' in the context of LIKBK.

Upon asking the question, 'Do you agree that a handful of rice contribution has aided towards upliftment the poor and the needy?', the study consequently reveals that majority of the respondents, 70% (Figure 6.5), mainly from the women-theologian (100%), the church-elder (80%) and women-wing (70%), as depicted in figure 6.6, have agreed that the 'handful of rice' (*buhfai tham*) has been very useful for the 'Mission Committee'. One active member of women-wing has asserted that: *"Yes, a handful of rice contribution is used only for mission. By mission, I mean 'ramthim rawngbawlina', all the money made out of buhfai tham is used for the unbelievers (who are still not Christians) residing in the states of Manipur, Bangladesh and Myanmar etc. It has been very helpful towards upliftment of the poor and underprivileged tribes from such mission areas."* (Lalduhsaki, women-wing).

However, the study reveals that 40% of the respondents basically from the Pastor Wing (45%) and the Men wing (50%) as evidenced in Figure 6.6, argued that the handful of rice contribution has not been that helpful for the socio-economic development of the Lai society as it goes directly to the mission fields. They, however agreed and acknowledged that even though it does not go directly to the poor Lai people, it is very effective for the non-Lais and the non-Christians and the newly Christian converts in the mission fields both within and outside the Lai region.

Figure 6.5: Handful of Rice Contribution and Socio-economic Development

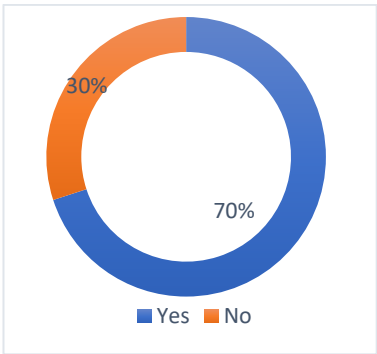
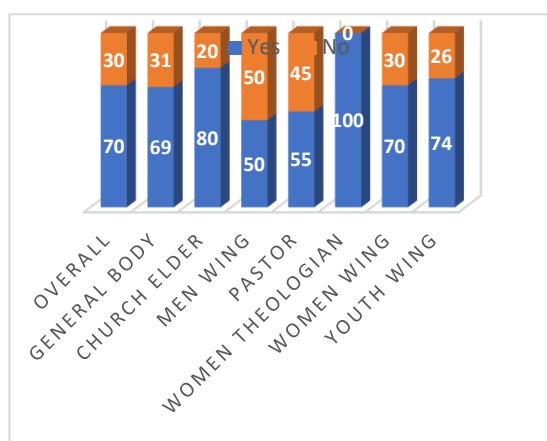


Figure 6.6: Sub-Groups' Opinions on Handful of Rice Contribution and Socio-economic Development



Source: Field Data

Following Vanlathanpuii (2019) who asserted that the church women in the Presbyterian Church of India in Mizoram has been the main earner of the church treasury and Ganesh (2009) who studied the women role in micro financing in *Ukhrul* District of Manipur who highlighted that the *Ukhrul* women were accustomed to basic practice of micro financing right from the early days through their handful of rice contribution, the study may likewise conclude that the LIKKB's women wing practice of 'handful of rice' contribution may be equated with the basic practice of micro financing that has ultimately resulted in a huge accumulation of wealth for the church's treasury, whereby the Church can thus delegates missionaries to various places including within and outside the states including foreign countries. Through the 'handful of rice contribution', the Church not only delegates missionaries but also is in the position of bringing about socio-economic development for such designated 'Mission Fields'. Therefore, their die-hard vision of delegating missionaries to the neighbouring states and countries, which, in fact was one of the driving factors for the birth of LIKKB could become a reality due to the women wing's steadfast earnings through the handful of rice contribution.

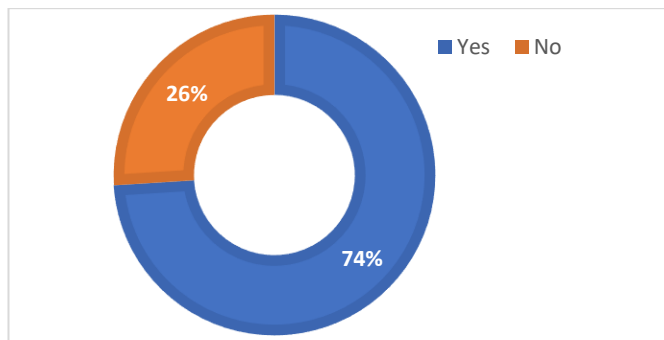
6.8 The LIKBK as A Guardian for The Poor

As highlighted in the introduction section of the study, Lawngtlai district stands out as the most underdeveloped region in Mizoram, characterised by a notably low literacy rate of only 65.88%, encompassing both males and females (Statistical Handbook Mizoram, 2022:5). Additionally, the demographic makeup reflects a diverse population, with predominant representation from disadvantaged tribes such as the *Bawm*, *Chakmas*, and *Brus* etc. Thus, there is an urgent imperative to address and confront these adverse conditions.

While numerous studies have examined the Church's significant role in uplifting the poor and marginalised communities globally. For instance, Modise (2018) delves into the significance of ecumenical churches like the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the Uniting Reform Church (URLSA), as well as the Ministers on devising strategies to realise a society characterised by freedom, justice, and equality. In his 2018 thesis titled 'The Church's Role in Community Development,' Kariuki investigated the church's contribution to community development in Africa, particularly focusing on poverty alleviation in rural Kenya. The church has provided financial support for housing projects, offered entrepreneurship education, raised awareness about HIV/AIDS, and fostered spiritual development. A noteworthy initiative undertaken by the church was the establishment of a library for unemployed youth. Additionally, the church operates a microfinance project to promote entrepreneurship. Soundararajan (2020) coined the term 'sub-altern church' to describe the South-Indian Church, noting that many churches primarily consist of Dalits and marginalised segments of society. He emphasised that the Church in India, particularly the Church of South India, comprises a significant portion of these subaltern communities. Therefore, the primary mission of the Church is to stand in solidarity with all oppressed subaltern groups and assist them in breaking free from oppressive structures, envisioning a new and equitable future. However, there is a notable absence of specific research on the LIKBK's contribution to socio-economic transformation of the least privileged section. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the LIKBK's efforts in addressing the needs of the impoverished, residing both within and beyond the district.

In course of fieldwork, the study reveals that most of the respondents amounting to 74% with a high frequency of 297 persons (Figure 6.7) are agreeing that the LIKBK is the main guardian for the poor disadvantaged tribes like the *Bawm*, the *Chakmas*, the *Rakhaine*, the *Mok*, the *Brus* etc. Insignificant percentage amounting to hardly 26% (n=104) are of the opinion that the LIKBK cannot be labelled as the guardian of the poor, validating their statement that the LIKBK is still not financially sound enough, even though it tries its utmost best to reach out the poor and underprivileged communities. They, however, acknowledged and highly praised the LIKBK's endeavor and wish that it could do more in future.

Figure 6.7: The LIKBK as the Guardian of the Poor



Source: Field Data

The respondents' main statements are that the church plays a crucial role in assisting impoverished individuals and communities. It often serves as a beacon of hope and support for those in need. Through various outreach programs, charitable initiatives, and community services, churches provide practical assistance such as food, clothing, shelter, and medical aid to the poor. The work done by the LIKBK towards the downtrodden section like the orphans, the sick and drug addicts are expressed by one respondent as the most distinguishing work saying that:

It brought the down trodden into the mainstream society such as orphans are provided with home, addicts are given assistance through rescue center, physically sick are provided with doctors etc like Jesus did to the lepers, the adulterers who were outcasted were brought back in the society.' (Tinthe, church-elder).

Besides opening Schools known as New Vision English Schools in several far-off villages for the said tribes, the sign that shows that the LIKBK gives special priority to the least disadvantaged section of the region can also be witnessed in one respondent's statement saying that: *'The ongoing Bawm Bible translation by Reverend J. Ushoy is also strongly supported by the LIKBK. This will be helpful in reaching out to the lower section of the society like Bawm, Chakma and Brus.'* (Zothangliana, church-elder).

Correspondingly, another respondent has also mentioned that a special church especially dedicated for the poor people has been established in Aizawl saying that: *'Even the Sihhmui LIKBK Church in Aizawl is established to exclusively incorporate the low wage earners and the poor. The least fortunate class and the non-Lai people like the tribes of Bawm, Hmar etc are welcomed with open arms. Therefore, the LIKBK is truly a sub-altern Church.'* (Regi, deacon).

Besides the above-mentioned points, the LIKBK's work towards giving first hand assistance to the refugees is worth mentioning. A special committee known as 'Myanmar Refugee Coordination Committee' was created in 2022 in order to give assistance to the refugees. The Committee firmly commits that whoever comes to take shelter and refuge to our LADC area will be given a proper assistance and will be welcomed by the Church. Irrespective of the location, whether remote village or not, the Church will see to it that they cater the needs of the refugees. Besides, in order to make easy transfer of money from foreign countries for the refugees, the Church bank accounts as well as the individual account were utilized. A special Chin Refugee Committee was created at the local/joint level in 15 sites, comprising both the village and town areas has been created. Additionally, 11 fellowships have been created for the refugees residing in the refugee camps. The Church sees to it that the refugees themselves look after such Chin Refugee Fellowships, giving them a sense of ownership feelings. Besides, all the sub-wings like the women wing, youth wing, men wing etc from each local church made a separate donations both in cash and kind for the refugees. The outstanding contributions made by the LIKBK towards upliftment of the refugees is exquisitely mentioned by one respondent saying that: *'Our church can truly be regarded as a sanctuary for the poor because even the refugees from*

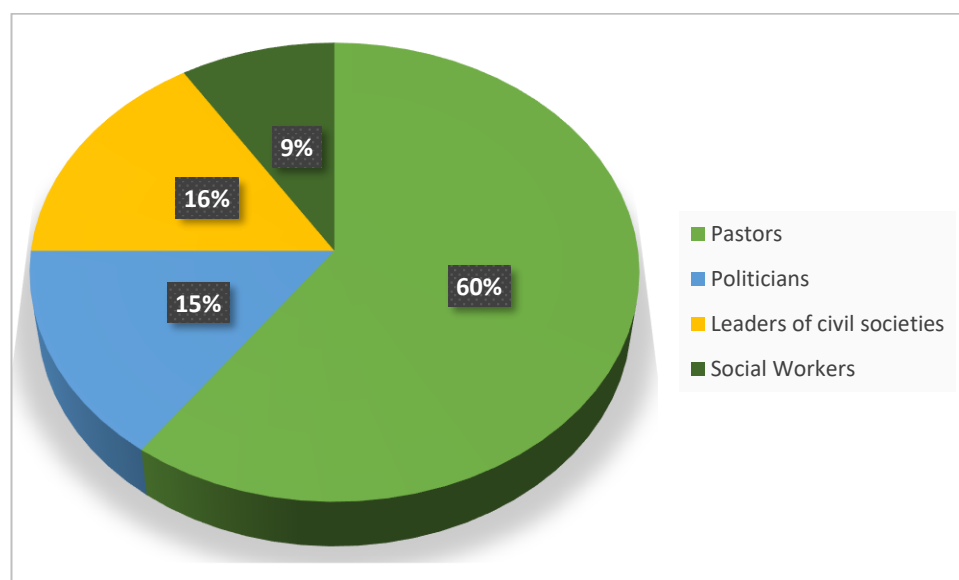
Myanmar and Bangladesh always seek refuge in us. Even the YLA usually refer the refugees to us and we always support them in whatever ways possible even to the extent of constructing separate churches for them.’ (Zorami, women-theologian)

6.9 LIKBK as a Leadership Training Centre

Wright (2024) argues that since planting and strengthening churches are the basic fundamentals in Christian teachings, the process of training local leaders is of prime importance to ensure the continuity of the Church as an institution. Churches often have existing infrastructure, resources, and a community-oriented atmosphere that can provide an excellent environment for leadership development. Churches regularly hold classes, workshops, and seminars on various topics related to personal development, spiritual growth, and leadership skills. These can include communication skills, conflict resolution, team building, and ethical decision-making. Many churches offer opportunities for members to volunteer in various capacities, such as leading small groups, organising events, or serving in outreach programs. These roles provide practical leadership experience and allow individuals to develop their skills in a supportive environment. Churches often have programs specifically designed for youth and young adults, which can include leadership development components such as mentoring, service projects, and leadership training retreats. Some churches offer formal internship or apprenticeship programs for individuals interested in pursuing vocational ministry or leadership roles within the church. These programs typically provide hands-on experience, mentorship, and training in areas such as preaching, pastoral care, and organisational leadership. Churches provide a built-in network of support and encouragement for individuals seeking to develop their leadership abilities. This network can include pastors, church staff, volunteer leaders, and fellow members who can offer guidance, feedback, and accountability. Interestingly, many churches teach and model the principles of servant leadership, emphasising humility, empathy, and a focus on serving others. These approaches to leadership development can have a transformative impact on individuals, shaping them into compassionate and effective leaders.

Aligned with the aforementioned assertions, the study endeavors to highlight the role of LIKBK towards generating capable leadership. In response to the question, ‘the LIKBK serves best as a leadership training centre by generating mostly’: Pastors (60%, n=240, while few respondents opted that it generates Leaders of civil society too (16%, n=66). Furthermore, a notable minority (15%, n=60) believed it serves to generate politicians, while a smaller proportion (9%, n=35) thought it produces social worker. Consequently, the findings indicate that LIKBK not only produces pastors but also cultivates proficient politicians and social workers within the Lai society (Figure 6.8). The study further reveals that persons who adheres to the rules and regulations of the church teachings tends to be more successful social leaders in future prospects wherein one respondent had mentioned that: *‘The LIKBK has been instrumental in nurturing leaders within the civil society, contributing to the formation of leaders in organisations like the Young Lai Association (YLA), Lai Student's Association (LSA), and Lai Women Association (LWA). Many active church members, who have adhered to the church's rules and regulations since their youth, have proven to be influential leaders and valuable contributors to society as well.’* (Lalruatdika, men-wing leader)

Figure 6.8: Leadership Training Role of LIKBK



Source: Field Data

Speaking of leadership, it may be pertinent to mention the acute problem faced by the first ethnic based church, *Isua Krista Kohhran* (IKK) in 1986, which was first

established at *Pangkhu* village. At the initial birth of the first ethnic based Church, the church was facing acute problem of shortage of qualified leaders, especially Pastors to run the Church. At first, they requested the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) to spare them Pastors or at least probationary Pastors to administer the congregation, which was however rejected. They however, did not give up and as such, they took the unusual way of appointing the then Church deacon, Mr. *F. Lalmuana*, a primary school teacher to assume the role of Pastors. (Lalsangliana, 2022: 51). Moreover, it may also be pertinent to mention that even on the birth of the second ethnic based church, that is, the *Pawiram Baptist Kohhran* (PBK) in 1982, the same problem of shortage of pastor was still the acute problem. However, Reverend *M.Z.Lawmthanga* and Reverend *V.Ngunkhara* stepped in the church movement. Consequently, the two churches took immediate steps towards delegating persons to pursue studies in theology (Hrangzuala, 2022:154). Moreover, laymen Pastor were also engaged to look after the new churches. Considering all these problems faced by the LIKKBK, it is amazing that as of now, the LIKKBK has generated significant number of Pastors belonging exclusively to the Lai community, as one articulated respondent had stated that: *'Had the LIKKBK not taken its birth, our Lai district will not be able to generate this much Pastor which have now amounted to more than a hundred in number.'* (R.K. Chhingi, wowed-wing, Aizawl)

The study also reveals that the LIKKBK not only generate pastors and leaders of civil societies, but also political leaders as well. In fact, it is noteworthy that majority of the political leaders serving at the capacity of Member of District Council (MDC) and Executive Member (EM) usually belong to the members of LIKKBK, as was beautifully articulated by one respondent saying that: *'Most of the politicians' hail from our Church, it is such a divine blessing. The active Church members are always the chosen one even in the politics. No wonder most of the Member of District Council (MDC's) belongs to our Church, including the present CEM and even in the past political elections, such was the trend.'* (L. Lahnim, church-elder)

Therefore, it can be aptly asserted that LIKKBK serves as the primary hub for leadership development, yielding not only future pastors but also a significant number of leaders within civil society. Notably, leaders emerging from LIKKBK extend beyond the confines of the church, playing instrumental roles in organisations such as the Young

Lai Association (YLA), Lai Students Association (LSA), and Lai Women Association (LWA). This trend underscores a crucial insight: effective leaders within the church often exhibit remarkable capabilities in broader societal contexts. Through the comprehensive training imparted within church activities, members are molded into individuals who demonstrate high proficiency not only within the church but also excel as adept politicians and leaders in civil society.

This phenomenon highlights the transformative power of leadership training within the church, which equips individuals with not only spiritual guidance but also practical skills and values essential for effective leadership across diverse domains. By fostering a culture of servant leadership, ethical decision-making, and community engagement, LIKBK cultivates individuals who are not only committed to serving within the church but also dedicated to making meaningful contributions to society at large. This holistic approach to leadership development not only strengthens the church as an institution but also enriches the broader community by producing leaders who embody integrity, compassion, and a deep sense of purpose.

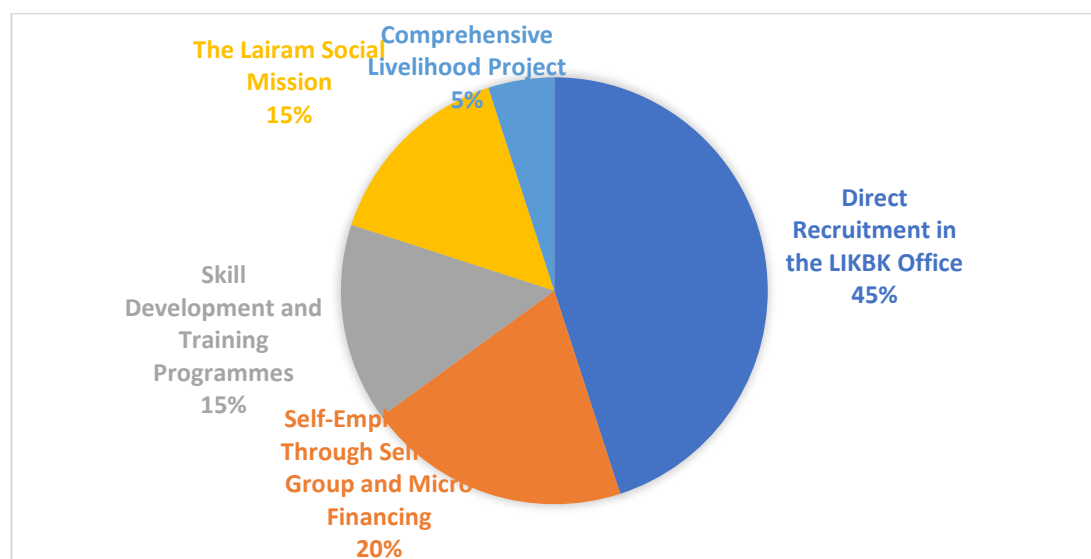
6.10 LIKBK and Employment Generation

While the literature on the role of churches in employment opportunities may not be as extensive as in some other fields, there is a growing body of research that highlights the important contributions of churches and faith-based organisations to economic empowerment and community development. For instance, (Kyernum, 2022; Kariuki, 2018; Basara and Misati, 2022; Soundararajan, 2020) made in-depth studies on the role of Church towards bringing about socio-economic life of the people through the educational and micro-finance initiatives taken by the Church, which have positively impacted the rural people. However, these studies mainly focus on the changes that have been brought about in the education, belief system, prospect of saving and investment, improvement in attitudes towards health and provisions for better health care, and as such, the employment opportunities created by the Church ventures had been only vaguely mentioned. Therefore, this study aims to focus on the LIKBK as a generator of employment opportunities for the Lai people.

The LIKBK's employment generation functions were ranked by respondents, with 'Direct Recruitment in the LIKBK Office' being the highest at 45%, followed by 'Self-

Employment Through Self Help Group and Micro Financing’ at 20%. ‘Skill Development and Training Programmes’ and ‘The *Lairam* Social Mission’ tied for third at 15% each, while the ‘Comprehensive Livelihood Project’ came in last at 5%. This indicates that direct recruitment and self-employment opportunities through LIKBK are the most significant contributors to employment generation, followed by skill development and social mission initiatives like *Lairam* Women Development Project (LWDP), poultry farming and Skill Development Centre like beauty culture, tailoring etc. The *Lairam* Social Mission is the fourth highest score in the research data that has actively undertaken skill development training programmes in targetted villages, in collaboration with CASA (Church Auxiliary for Social Action) and from foreign German aid (Bread for The World) received by the Mission. Fifthly, the Comprehensive Livelihood Project, scoring 5% among the respondents’ opinions, is another important recent undertaking of the LIKBK. Skill training, distribution of blankets, providing agriculture tools for the farmers, awareness of health care scheme etc are carried out extensively under this Project, and thus proves to be a promising venture. It is noted that apart from direct recruitment in the LIKBK office, self-employment is highly generated by the other undertakings like ‘Self Help Group and Micro Financing’, ‘Skill Development and Training Programmes’, ‘The *Lairam* Social Mission’ and ‘Comprehensive Livelihood Project’.

Figure 6.9: LIKBK’s Schemes Towards Creation of Employment Opportunities



Source: Field Data

Direct Recruitment in the LIKBK Office: Among the various roles played towards socio-economic development, creating job opportunity stands out as one of the long-lasting impacts of the Church towards socio-economic development whereby 45% of the respondents find it the most beneficial in regard to the LIKBK's undertaking towards employment generation. (Figure 6.9). LIKBK has opened up numerous employment generation for the Lai educated as well as uneducated people. At present, the total number of employees are recorded as 438 (LIKBK Assembly Report, 2022:72). There are 191 substantive post (regular employees) and 247 on temporary basis. The *Lairam* Christian Medical Centre (LCMC) alone has created job opportunities for 93 persons, 5 doctors, 33 nurses, 9 technicians, 1 pharmacist and 45 workers till 2022. Beside this, there are several workers in various Departments like 14 in *Lairam* Offset Print (LOP), 4 in Bookroom, 16 in LAHAS Science Academy, 12 in *Lairam* Motherless Home and so on. The New Vision Schools alone have given employment to 74 missionary teachers and keep on increasing. It has also employed around 81 native missionaries (LIKBK Assembly Record, 2021:35). It has also created several employment opportunities in Rescue Centre, *Lairam* Guest House, *Lairam* Main office, *Lairam* Handloom, *Lairam* Multipurpose Centre etc.

Self-Employment Through Self Help Group and Micro Financing: Scoring 20% from the respondents, another worth mentioning project is poultry farming undertaken by the women-wing under the *Lairam* Women Development Project (LWDP). The poultry farming is located at AOC locality at Lawngtlai town area. It has also emerged as a highly effective means of income generation for the Women-wing. With financial assistance amounting to ₹ one lakh provided by the Minister of State, Mr. *Ngunlianchunga*, the poultry farming venture commenced with 300 rainbow roosters on May 29, 2018. Throughout the year, the rainbow roosters and broilers are successfully reared interchangeably, eight times annually. These poultry are raised profitably and sold every three weeks, ensuring a continuous stream of income throughout the year. (LIKBKHP Golden Souvenir, 2022:56). Through the initiative of establishing self-help groups focused on poultry farming, women have experienced increased empowerment and financial independence. These self-help groups have not only enabled women to engage in poultry farming but have also facilitated the

implementation of saving schemes to secure their financial future. As a result of their collective efforts, these self-help groups have reached a point where they can afford to employ a caretaker to oversee the daily operations of the poultry farm. This caretaker receives a monthly salary of ₹4000 and has been provided with separate accommodation, indicating the sustainable growth and development of the poultry farming enterprise. The employment of a caretaker not only signifies the success of the poultry farming venture but also highlights the positive impact it has had on the local community. By providing job opportunities and contributing to economic stability, the self-help group initiative has become a catalyst for socio-economic empowerment. It exemplifies the transformative potential of grassroots initiatives in fostering sustainable livelihoods and promoting inclusive growth.

Skill Development and Training Programmes: As is depicted in the Figure 6.9, the LIKBK's initiative towards Skill Development and Training Programmes is notable. Many churches offer skill development and training programs aimed at enhancing the employability of individuals within their congregation or the wider community. These programs may include vocational training, job readiness workshops, and mentorship opportunities. The LIKBK likewise takes special efforts in this area. Besides conducting various seminars and workshops related to employment opportunities, the *Lairam* Multipurpose Training Centre stands out as the second most important undertakings of the LIKBK towards job prospects. (Figure 6.10). Notably, 15% of respondents are arguing that it is one of the most impactful undertakings of the LIKBK. Under the *Lairam* Multipurpose Training Centre, basic training courses like beauty culture and hair cutting, Computer (CCA/ DCA), tailoring and handloom are also carried out. Among the various training courses offered, the Handloom training is highly praised by majority of the respondents, and the courses offered is of six months certificate course duration, with a minimal fee charge of only ₹ 3500 per month, the students passed out mainly comprises of people from '*khawthlang*', meaning the western corner of the Lawngtlai District of mainly Bru settlement. In this way, the LIKBK opened up job prospects not only for the Lai tribe but other least privileged tribes like *Bru* are highly benefitted by the undertakings, as was mentioned by a respondent as: '*Previously, I have been working as supervisor cum accountant in Lai handloom, now I can open my own handloom in private. If not for the Lairam*

Handloom initiative, I will not be able to attain this success. Surprisingly, my sales are also quite satisfactory.' (Interview with Chhungboihi, former Supervisor cum Accountant, Lairam Handloom, 12. April. 2024, 3:00 PM-3:30 PM, College Veng, Lawngtlai)

The Lairam Social Mission: Scoring 15% in Figure 6.9, the Lairam Social Mission is another remarkable task undertaken by the LIKBK towards employment generation. The LIKBK has also actively undertaken skill development training programmes in selected 15 targetted villages. In collaboration with CASA (Church Auxiliary for Social Action) and from foreign German aid (Bread for The World) received by the Mission, 3 main targets are undertaken – among the 15 selected villages, 175 households will get benefit from government schemes, strengthening Self Help Group (SHG) and 15 youths are targetted and given training on say like poultry farming, soap making etc. Their main aim is to made the villagers aware of availing government schemes, such as MGNREGA, Old Age Pension Scheme, Maternity Benefit Scheme and the like (Telephonic Interview with Rebecca Lalmangaihzuali, Coordinator, Lairam Social Mission on 12.4.2024, 3:30- 4:00 PM, Lairam Office, Lawngtlai).

Comprehensive Livelihood Project: As portrayed in Figure 6.9, the Comprehensive Livelihood Project emerges as the fifth most significant endeavor undertaken by LIKBK in terms of employment generation, with a corresponding score of 5%. The recently created Comprehensive Livelihood Project stands out as another important venture mainly targeted for the rural poor. Most of the respondent from the village finds it very promising. Moreover, under Comprehensive Livelihood Development Project, 16 targetted villages such as *Saikah, Kawlchaw west, Chawnhu, Thingkah, Mampui, Diltlang, Ngengpuikai, Tuithumhnar and Ngengpuitlang* are selected. The villages are selected with care after a thorough study conducted by the assigned team in order to see the real socio-economic condition of the people of such villages. Life skill training, distribution of blankets, providing agriculture tools for the farmers, awareness of health care scheme etc are carried out extensively. This project has proved to be very significant for creating social capital for the villagers. (Interview with C. Lalnunfeli, Women Theologian, Secretary, Women Wing on 12.4.2024, 3:00- 3:20 PM, Lairam Office, Lawngtlai)

Considering the various initiatives and undertakings aimed at employment generation, it is remarkable to note the pivotal role that the Church plays in addressing unemployment issues. Alongside direct recruitment efforts within LIKBK offices, endeavors such as the poultry farming initiatives led by women and the establishment of the Lairam Multipurpose Training Centre are dedicated to skill development, thereby fostering sustainable development within communities. The multifaceted role of the Church in employment generation extends beyond mere job creation. Its activities encompass a broad spectrum of endeavors aimed at empowering individuals, strengthening community ties, and advocating for economic justice and dignity for all. Through initiatives like vocational training programs, job placement services, and support for entrepreneurship, the Church serves as a beacon of hope and opportunity for those facing unemployment and economic challenges. By addressing the root causes of unemployment and poverty, the Church contributes significantly to the overall well-being and prosperity of society. Its commitment to fostering inclusive growth and promoting the dignity of every individual underscores its vital role as a catalyst for positive change in the realm of employment generation and community development.

6.11 LIKBK and Political Reformation

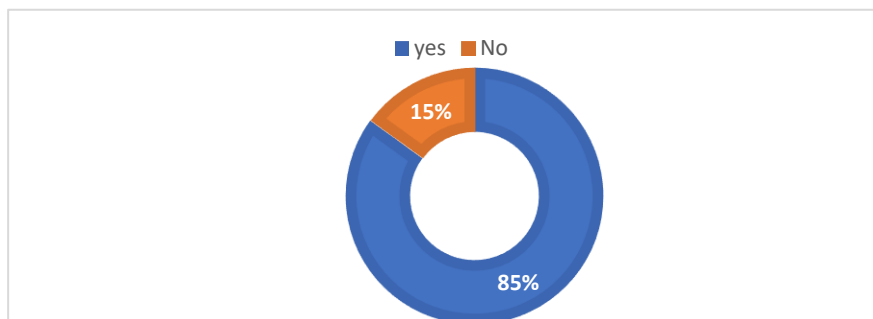
Owing to the Lai district being relatively backwards as compared to other tribes in Mizoram, the independent India facilitated them with an autonomous District Council that resulted in the establishment of the *Pawi Lakher* Regional Council. Following the enactment of the Assam District (Constitution of the District Council) 1953 on April 23rd, 1953, the Council was thus created, marking a significant milestone for the Lai people. Subsequently, with Mizoram's transition into a Union Territory in 1972, changes ensued, leading to the division of the *Pawi-Lakher* Regional Council into three distinct entities: the *Pawi* Regional Council, the *Lakher* Regional Council, and the *Chakma* Regional Council on 29 April, 1972. This division was a consequence of Mizoram's transformation into a Union Territory and was facilitated by legislative measures such as the North East Areas (Reorganisation) 1971 and the Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Act, 1971. As a result, the *Pawi-Lakher* Regional Council evolved into three separate Autonomous District Councils. These were named

the *Pawi* Autonomous District Council, the *Lakher* Autonomous District Council, and the Chakma Autonomous District Council. The Lai people, residing in the Lai Autonomous District Council in the southern part of Mizoram, were traditionally referred to as '*Pawi*' by other Mizo tribes. However, they identified themselves as '*Lai*' and considered the term '*Pawi*' derogatory. The Lai Autonomous District Council officially adopted the term '*Lai*' in 1988 to replace '*Pawi*,' which the Lais found it offensive. Of particular note is the subsequent renaming of the Pawi Autonomous District Council in 1988, which saw it renamed as the Lai Autonomous District Council. This change underscored the recognition and identity of the Lai people within the framework of autonomous governance structures. The evolution from the *Pawi Lakher* Regional Council to the establishment of three distinct Autonomous District Councils reflects the dynamic political landscape and the evolving aspirations of the Lai people within the broader context of Mizoram's administrative reorganisation. Since the establishment of the Autonomous District Council, the Lai territory operates with a degree of autonomy akin to that of a semi-state, possessing separate judicial, administrative, and executive powers. This arrangement grants the Lai people a significant level of self-governance, allowing them to manage their affairs independently within the framework of the broader state or union territory. In essence, the creation of the Autonomous District Council has transformed the Lai territory into a quasi-state entity, endowed with the capacity to govern itself in a manner that reflects its unique identity, values, and aspirations. This arrangement underscores the recognition of the Lai people's right to self-determination and serves as a testament to their enduring commitment to autonomy and self-rule in line with their distinct ethnic identity.

The establishment of the Lai Autonomous District was primarily founded on ethnic lines, reflecting the aspirations and identity of the Lai community. Similarly, the *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran* (LIKBK) Church has its roots deeply entrenched in Lai ethnic sentiments, emerging as the predominant religious institution within the District. Given its significant influence and representation within the Lai community, this research study seeks to examine the pivotal role played by the LIKBK Church in driving political reform within the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC). The

study indicates that the LIKBK is significantly contributing to the political reformative efforts within the Lai society. Majority of the participants, comprising 85% (n=349) as depicted in Figure 6.10, affirm that the LIKBK primarily serves a reformative function within the LADC. Only insignificant number amounting to 15% (n=61) disagreed as such, arguing that politicians often disregard the opinions of religious leaders, and conversely, religious leaders may, at times be swayed by politicians, rendering their involvement in politics ineffective.

Figure 6.10: LIKBK and its Political Reformation Role



Source: Field Data

Drawing from the above finding, the transformative impact of the LIKBK on the LADC can be analysed through the lens of Habermas's (1989) theory of 'Religion and the Public Sphere' in the following themes:

Inclusion in Political Decision Making: According to Habermas, the public sphere should provide a space for open and inclusive dialogue where diverse voices can contribute to democratic deliberation. The LIKBK's request for the appointment of church members in the Lai House reflects an effort to ensure representation and participation in political decision-making processes. By having church members present, the LIKBK seeks to advocate for the interests and concerns of the Lai community within the political sphere that is evidenced from one Pastor's statement which is quoted as: *'We have a positive working relationship with the LADC. We even requested them to appoint church member in Lai House, and they complied.'* (Reverend L.H. Lala). Additionally, the study also detected that the LIKBK and LADC are working hand in hand in various crucial issues like environment protection, war against drug and so on as was mentioned by one respondent saying that:

The LIKBK and LADC are in a good working relationship. Several MOU's have been signed by the two parties. The youth wing (LIKBKTP) has signed MOU with the Forest Department for environmental protection, planting of trees and protection of wild animals and birds. Another MOU was also signed with The Education Department so as to strengthen the youth wing's 'Amos Operation'. This Operation's kick off programme was held in 28th May, 2023, with its main aim in reducing drug addiction and has agreed to undertake intensive awareness campaign against drugs in all the Council's sponsored schools. (H. Chinzah, youth-wing leader)

Additionally, one respondent has also asserted the advisory role played by the LIKBK towards the promotion of Lai culture as: *"Before the pre-LIKBK period, efforts were hardly taken up any organisation nor the LADC so as to uplift the Lai culture. Due to the strong influence of LIKBK, periodical and daily newspapers have also now been publishing in 'Lai Hawlh' (Lai language). In this way, it has brought significant change in our society."* (Zoramsangi, women-wing leader). The LADC initiative to promote Lai Dress in the office has also been made possible due to LIKBK's advice as one respondent has asserted that: *'The LIKBK has greatly motivated the Lai people towards popularisation of Lai dress. As per the suggestions given by the LIKBK, Office of the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) have now officially declared every Wednesday as a traditional dress day and every Monday for all the educational institutions.'* (C. Vanzama, church-elder).

One respondent highlighted the symbiotic relationship between LIKBK and LADC, noting that they play complementary roles in supporting and promoting each other's efforts towards sustainability and growth as:

Without LIKBK, there will be no exclusive local Church or religion for the Lai people. Thereby, the Government of India would terminate the Lai Autonomous District Council as the 6th Schedule to the Constitution of India clearly lays down the law that each Tribal Autonomous District Council should have their own separate religion. In this way, the LIKBK plays a safeguarding role and

towards sustenance of the much-needed Lai Autonomous District Council.'
(Laia, church-elder)

Engagement in Public Discourse: Habermas emphasises the importance of rational discourse and debate in shaping public opinion and political outcomes. The LIKBK's annual meetings on political and good governance topics with LADC officials, as well as the fervent prayer-supports provided by churches, demonstrate a commitment to engaging in public discourse on matters of political significance. These interactions facilitate dialogue between religious and political institutions, fostering mutual understanding and cooperation. A supporting quote to validate this statement is presented as: *'LIKBK Assembly Officers annually conduct a meeting on political and good governance topics with LADC officials and also the Churches fervently give prayer-supports.'* (Reverend Muana). Besides, the LADC do make it appoint to invite the religious leaders in their session which is mentioned as: *'LIKBK pastors and prominent church figures are regularly invited to participate in the inauguration of the LADC Assembly, underscoring the cooperative ties between the two entities.'* (Pastor Mawia)

Divine Influence of LIKBK on LADC: The LIKBK has a divine influence on the election process wherein usually, the successful candidates normally belongs to the members of LIKBK, which is aptly expressed by one respondent as:

The LIKBK has a divine and somewhat strange influence on the politics of the Lai Autonomous District Council. This is so because the majority in numbers of the Members of the District Council always belong to the members of LIKBK. Moreover, in every election, the post of Chief Executive Member (CEM) is usually occupied by the person belonging to the church of LIKBK and even if by rare incidence, the post is occupied by the non-LIKBK, the post can never be retained for the whole five years; rescheduling or dissolving of post has always taken place due to some unforeseen situations. Instances where Mr C. Zungchema (Baptist church member) and Mr.V.L. Hmuaka (also Baptist Church member) who were not able to hold the CEM post for even a year or

so had also been weirdly encountered in the Lai politics. (H. Vanlalhlhma, church-elder)

Besides, the LIKBK's significant influence in the politics of the region is evidenced by the fact that many Chief Executive Members (CEM), including the current CEM, Mr. V. Zirsanga, are members of the LIKBK. The presence of individuals with a strong regional affinity for Lai in these political positions indicates the influence of LIKBK on the political landscape which is expressed by one respondent saying that: *'In the election of the Chief Executive Member (CEM) within the Lai Autonomous District Council, individuals affiliated with the LIKBK church usually secure votes for this position. This trend is primarily driven by the fact that a significant majority of the Members of District Council (MDC) involved in the CEM election are members of the LIKBK church.'* (C. Lalawmpuia, youth-wing member)

Advocacy for Social Justice: Habermas (1989) highlights the role of civil society organisations in advocating for social justice and promoting democratic values. The LIKBK's efforts to address political defects, such as corruption and complacency, can be seen as fulfilling a prophetic role in condemning unethical behavior and advocating for political reform. By speaking out against these issues, the LIKBK contributes to public awareness and mobilises support for positive change within the LADC. *'Personally, I strongly spoke out against the defects in politics, considering it a prophetic role, condemning corrupt politicians with extravagant buildings and the overall laziness of the Lai people due to the easy availability of job cards (MGNREGA).'* (Rev L.H. Lalliansanga)

Ethical Influence on Policy: Habermas (1989) argues that ethical considerations should inform political decision-making and policy formulation. The LIKBK's influence on the LADC's decision to designate Lawngtlai as a 'dry area,' prohibiting the unrestricted sale of alcohol, reflects the ethical influence of religious values on public policy. By advocating for policies that align with its religious teachings, the LIKBK promotes social welfare and ethical governance within the LADC. *'The LIKBK and LADC maintain a positive working relationship. Notably, during the implementation of the MLPC Act that permitted the free sale of alcohol within*

Mizoram state, Lawngtlai (Lai district) was designated as a 'dry area,' prohibiting the unrestricted sale of alcohol. This decision was influenced by the strong opposition of LIKBK against the establishment of wine shops within Lai district. The LADC heeded this advice from LIKBK without hesitation.' (Pastor Mawia).

LIKBK Towards Electoral Reformation: Additionally, one respondent has also mentioned the positive role of the Church towards reforms in election process saying that: *'All the LIKBK Pastors are members of Mizoram People Forum (MPF). At present, I, myself am also serving as a capacity of Vice President of MPF and our main aim is to put a check on any unfair means of election.'* (Reverend Zionvarmawia)

Despite all the above-mentioned statement validating that the LIKBK plays a crucial role in the political reformation of LADC, there are few respondents amounting to 15% (Figure 6.10) who are against such statement. Their main argument is that the politicians has not actually given importance to religious related advice where one respondent contended that: *'I don't think the LIKBK or any other churches can have a strong grip over the politics. In the early days, a church elder, Mr. Aitlinga who was a seer / a visionary often went to give advice to the politicians just like the prophets who used to condemn the rulers as seen in the Bible. However, the politicians did not pay heed to such kind of advice.'* (C. Lawmsanga, church-elder). Another respondent has also asserted that the LIKBK is not powerful enough to have an influence saying that: *'LIKBK does not wield a significant influence on the political affairs of the Lai autonomous District council (LADC). Rather, it is controlled by the Mizoram politics. After all, we still don't have any ethnic based political party.'* (T. Thangzuala Vanchhawg, church-elder). Surprisingly, one respondent has also narrated that at times, the politics rather influence the religious leader saying that: *'The LIKBK church does not bring political reformation at all. Instead, the Church leaders are sometimes influenced by the politicians so much that they almost bring politics in the Church.'* (H. Zothanpuia, youth-wing member)

Despite few respondents who are against the opinion that that the LIKBK is not playing any effective role, it may be concluded that the LIKBK's noteworthy engagement in political reformation within the LADC aligns with Habermas's emphasis on

democratic participation, rational discourse, and ethical influence in the public sphere. Through its advocacy efforts, representation in political institutions, and engagement in public discourse, the LIKBK contributes to shaping political outcomes and promoting social justice within the Lai community.

6.12 The LIKBK as a Decisive Vote Bank

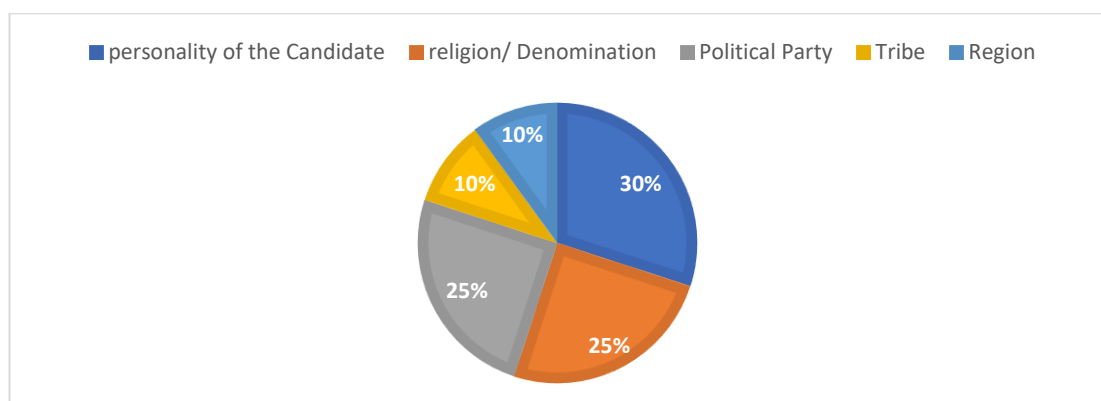
Religion has a significant influence on voting behavior in many parts of the world, particularly in countries where religion plays a central role in society and politics. In fact, religion can serve as a potent factor in shaping political alliances, party platforms, and voting behavior, often resulting in the formation of distinct religious vote banks. For instance, McCammon (January 24, 2024) observed that White Evangelicals remain steadfast in their support for Donald Trump. She noted that approximately 8 out of 10 white evangelicals backed Trump in both the 2016 and 2020 general elections, even though he lost to President Biden in 2020. Research has consistently shown that individuals often align their voting preferences with candidates or parties they perceive as in harmony with their religious values and moral beliefs (Green et al., 1996). For instance, religious voters may prioritise issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, or religious freedom and tend to support candidates who share their positions on these matters. Moreover, different religious traditions and denominations can influence voting decisions, as studies have revealed variations in political preferences among various religious groups (Wald and Allison, 2014). Additionally, religious institutions and leaders can wield significant influence over voting behavior. Sermons, religious teachings, and endorsements by religious leaders have been shown to shape the political attitudes and choices of their followers (Smidt, 2003).

Coming to the Indian political scenario, Modifi (2015) noted that the utilisation of religious sentiments in Indian politics has persisted from post-independence to the early 21st century, with an observed amplification compared to pre-independence times, despite India being a secular state. India's diverse religious landscape has facilitated the continued integration of religion into political discourse. Bashir and Khalid (2019) affirmed a significant rise in the electoral support for religious political parties during the 2018 general elections, with a nationwide increase of 2.17% and a

1.32% increase in Punjab specifically. They highlighted the effective mobilisation of the *Barelyvi* vote bank by *Tahreek Labbaik* Pakistan, a radical *Sunni* Islamic party, which emerged as the third-largest party in Punjab in terms of votes garnered. Given the significant influence of religion on political voting behavior observed both nationally and internationally, this study aims to investigate whether the prominence of LIKBK in Lawngtlai District holds any significance in shaping voting behavior.

The study reveals that the religious affiliation / denomination stands out as the second crucial factor for shaping the electoral voting behaviour. With 25% (n=121) of the respondents agreeing that their religious affiliation/ denomination in the LIKBK has significantly influenced their voting behaviour. (Figure 6.11). While religion may play a role, it is not the sole determining factor, as 30% of respondents identified the 'personality of the candidate' as the key consideration. It is worth-noting that political affiliations (25%) was the third most selected option, a breakdown of the responses shows that politicians were the primary respondents who chose this option over religion and the candidate's personality, indicating a potential bias towards their own professional affiliations. Additionally, family/tribe (10 %) and region/residence (10%) connections can outweigh religious affiliations, with few respondents willing to vote for a close relative and common residence despite differing religious affiliation, as shown in Figure 6.11.

Figure 6.11: Determining Factors of LIKBK Members' Voting Behaviour



Source: Field Data

Drawing from the above Figure, it is apparent that the people feel a sense of obligation to their church while casting vote which was expressed by one respondent as: *I will*

not deny that voting behaviour is sometimes influenced by denominations. Even I find myself somewhat guilty if I cast my vote to other denomination.' (Thangrualkhuma, church-elder). Additionally, it is evident that religious denomination plays its part mainly in Member of District Council (MDC) election and may also play its role in election of social leaders say like Young Lai Association (YLA) as one respondent said that: *'The election voting behaviour is sometimes influenced by denominational affiliations, particularly in the election of Member of District Council (MDC) but not as much in general election of MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly). This trend of voting behaviour is trending not only in MDC and MLA elections, but also in the election of YLA and other NGO. However, religion may not always be the deciding factor.'* (K. Zoramsanglura, youth-wing)

However, note should be taken that religion may not always be the deciding factor when it comes to choosing a candidate who happens to be a voter's family or sub tribe even nonetheless that candidate belongs to the same denomination as one respondent had explained that: *'The Lai community still upholds the strength of familial ties. Beyond immediate family connections, individuals within the same clan or sub-tribe are regarded as integral parts of an authentic family structure. Within a democratic framework, such as the Chinzah or Hnialum sub-tribes, these entities may maintain considerable influence as substantial 'vote banks'. The size of the family correlates with its potential impact as a unified voting bloc in democratic proceedings'* (C. Mangchhuma, church-elder). Additionally, one respondent had also asserted that he will cast his vote to his family members first saying that: *'I may cast my vote to my fellow church member on condition that the other candidates do not belong to my close family members.'* (Lalrosanga, deacon)

In conclusion, the study reveals that religion, particularly the LIKBK, not only exerts a significant influence on political reformation but also plays a decisive role in shaping voting behavior as it stands out as the third most decisive factor, following closely behind the 'personality of the candidate' and 'sub-tribe or family'. Additionally, this finding validates Modifi (2015) and Babalola (2020) arguments that religion has been more prevalent in the 21st Century for the Indian political mobilisation and even for the successive Presidential election in Nigeria, which has been the exact picture even in the political scenario of the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC). This

underscores the multifaceted nature of religious influence in the political landscape, where it not only molds ideological perspectives but also mobilises cohesive voting banks. By understanding the pivotal role of religion in electoral dynamics, policymakers and stakeholders can better navigate the complexities of democratic processes, ensuring inclusive representation and governance reflective of diverse societal values and beliefs.

6.13 The LIKBK's Dual Role Towards Human Rights and Democracy

Churches have played a crucial role in upholding human rights throughout history, often leading advocacy campaigns on various issues such as environmental justice, gender equality, and poverty alleviation. These campaigns are rooted in the fundamental principles of human rights, which find their origins in documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) established in December 1948. In fact, the Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox ecumenical movements were instrumental in shaping the events that led to the adoption of the UDHR by the United Nations General Assembly. Their contributions were significant in defining the moral and ethical framework that underpins the UDHR, which has since served as a cornerstone for international efforts to protect and promote human rights. (Davila, 2009). To overlook the contributions of churches to the development and promotion of human rights would be a historical oversight. Their advocacy, grounded in principles of justice, compassion, and human dignity, has been instrumental in advancing the cause of human rights worldwide.

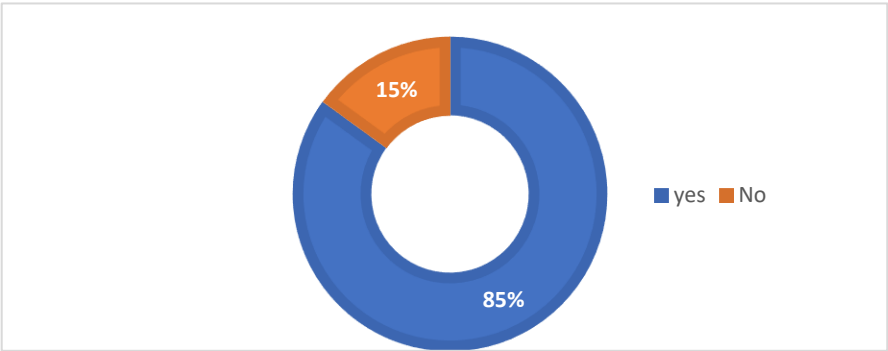
As such, numerous studies spanning academic, ecclesiastical, and theological research have highlighted the positive impact of the church in advocating for human rights. For instance, scholars such as (Gibbs and Deborah, 1999; Rychetska, 2022; Intan, 2018; and Davila, 2009) have extensively examined the church's efforts in addressing various forms of human suffering, including poverty, child labor, rape, physical torture, war crimes, and similar injustices. While many churches strive to uphold human rights and promote dignity, there have unfortunately been instances where religious institutions or their representatives have been implicated in human rights violations. As with any institution, the role of the church in upholding human rights and democracy are

subjected to critical examination and accountability by various scholars. Onorato (1989) argues that Churches have undergone a tumultuous learning journey regarding their stance on human rights. The Catholic Churches in these nations are selective in their promotion of human rights. While they advocate for certain rights, they hesitate to challenge repressive governments. He asserted that in order to effectively advance political rights, coordination between the Vatican and national Catholic Churches is essential. The Pope, leveraging his dual roles as head of state and temporal leader of the Church, should take decisive action. Without such coordination, repressive governments will exploit divisions between the Vatican and local bishops, and the Church's actions may only serve to maintain 'saving face'. This trend is still prevalent in today's scenario whereby Weisner (5 September, 2023) argued that while today, churches stand among civil society actors defending and promoting human rights globally, this position has evolved through a history marked by ecclesiastical partiality. He further contends that within the institution of our Church, human rights continue to be systematically and seriously violated, particularly in two areas: the discrimination against women, who are barred from ordination and leadership positions solely based on their gender, and compulsory celibacy, which restricts individuals' freedom to choose their marital status or profession.

Taking into account the potential dual role of the church in advocacy and violations of human rights, the LIKBK is analysed to determine the type of role it assumes regarding human rights. the finding suggests that the LIKBK is the true facilitator of Human rights and democracy where significant positive responses (85%, n=341) of the respondents (Figure 6.12) give positive feedback towards the role of LIKBK in regard to upholding human rights and democracy. The majority of respondents confirmed that LIKBK is a genuine champion of human rights and democracy, citing the free and fair elections for various church positions. They noted that the church embraces not only Lai tribes but also marginalised groups like the *Bawm* and *Chakmas*, demonstrating a truly inclusive and democratic setup where human rights are equally valued. Furthermore, LIKBK's appointment of non-Lai individuals to top-most roles such as Pastors and church-elders underscores its commitment to democratic principle. However, an insignificant number of responses (only 15%), are arguing that the

LIKBK may sometimes violate human rights especially in regard to gender policy and job prospect.

Figure 6.12: LIKBK as Advocate of Human Rights and Democracy



Source: Field Data

To validate the above illustration, it may be mentioned that the LIKBK demonstrates a commitment to upholding human rights and democracy through its inclusive practices and beliefs. Despite being established as a tribe-based church, it embraces members from various tribes and backgrounds, exemplifying a democratic ethos. By recruiting pastors from diverse Mizo sub-tribes, such as *Sailo* and *Hmar*, the LIKBK promotes equality and inclusivity within its leadership, as was rightly stated by a respondent saying that: *‘The LIKBK is more or less democratic in its function; despite being set up as a tribe-based church, it welcomes any tribe in our congregation. The Church even recruits Pastors from various Mizo sub-tribes like Sailo, Hmar etc.’* (Aenhziki, women-wing). Moreover, the church's emphasis on giving equal importance to all tribes, including those considered backward or non-Lai speaking, reflects its dedication to human rights principles of non-discrimination and respect for diversity. By openly welcoming anyone willing to join the congregation, regardless of tribe or skin color, the LIKBK fosters a sense of belonging and dignity for all members, as was mentioned by one respondent saying that: *‘The LIKBK do make it a point to firmly uphold human rights and democracy by giving equal importance to all the tribes; be it a backward tribe, non- Lai speaking tribes or any skin colour. No tribes are differentiated and openly welcomes anyone who is willing to join our congregation.’* (Reverend Sanga). Furthermore, the LIKBK's belief in human dignity, rooted in the understanding that all human beings are created in the image of God,

underscores its commitment to human rights. This perspective extends to marginalised tribes such as the *Chakma*, *Bawm*, and communities from Burma and Bangladesh, who are treated with respect, love, and dignity within the church which is validated by one respondent asserting that:

The LIKBK firmly believes in human dignity and human rights. All human beings are created in the image of God. Therefore, some of the least fortunate tribes like Chakma, Bawm, Burma and Bangladesh are treated with equal respect, love and dignity. Mission school for the underprivileged are established in several backward areas and a special committee 'Myanmar Refugee Co-ordination Committee' (MRCC) has also been established to look into the needs of the Refugees. (T, Thanga, church-elder)

Moreover, the Church is a staunch advocator of democratic ideal which is reflected in the Church's democratic practices within its organisation by conducting elections to fill seats and positions, emphasising fairness and inclusivity as was mentioned by one respondent stating that: *'The Church consistently ensures that all seats and positions in the offices of the LIKBK are filled through democratic elections, adhering to principles of fairness and inclusivity. Additionally, it steadfastly upholds human rights, acknowledging the importance of treating individuals with dignity and respect.'* (Reverend Thanga). Besides, the church prioritises human rights and democracy, aligning its teachings with democratic principles and respecting individuals' decisions regarding membership. A dedicated 'Lairam Social Mission Committee' has also been created by the LIKBK Constitution to uphold human rights and dignity as one respondent had also asserted that:

The LIKBK upholds human rights and democracy and our teachings never clash with democratic principles. We prioritise the importance of respecting one's decision, and never ask anyone to forcefully join our church. Besides, the Lairam Social Mission Committee is created by the Church Constitution to actively promote human rights awareness by organising seminars on various topics, including child rights, women empowerment, and combating human

trafficking. These seminars feature experts as resource persons to provide valuable insights. (M. Sangi, women-wing leader).

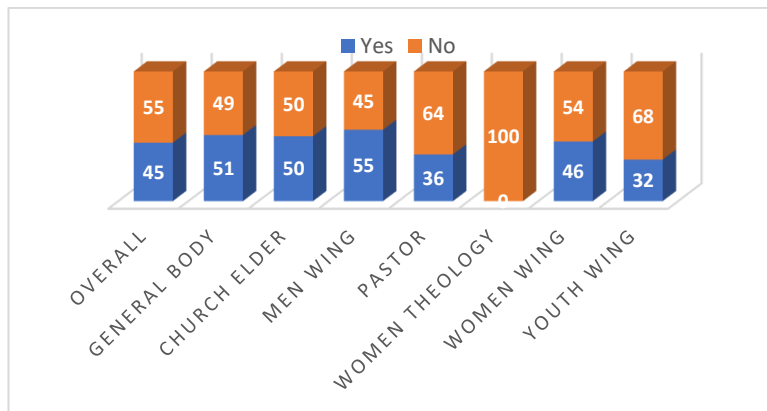
Moreover, the LIKBK opposes nepotism, electoral misconduct, bribery, and any violations of human rights, with its members actively involved in organisations like the Mizoram People's Forum (MPF), which serves as an ombudsman for democracy as was rightly mentioned by one respondent stating that: *'LIKBK strongly opposes nepotism, violation of election code of conducts, bribery and any violation of Human Rights through the Pastor's and Church elders's active involvement in Mizoram People's Forum (MPF), who is the watchdog of Democracy.'* (Reverend Lalmuana). The church's commitment to empowering people through human rights and democracy is evident in initiatives such as studying politics and religion as part of their Biblical Study Book curriculum, aimed at educating people on these principles as was expressed by one articulated respondent as: *'LIKBK always strives towards empowering people through human rights and democracy. There was a time that the whole Church studied politics and religion as Wednesday Night Biblical Study Book (Nilai zan thuzir) as a curriculum to educate people in upholding human rights and democracy.'* (Reverend Zuala)

6.14 LIKBK and its Gender Policy

Underrepresentation of Women Theologians within LIKBK: Addressing Positional Disparity

Despite majority of respondents agreeing that the LIKBK steadfastly advocates for human rights and democracy, there is dissent among women theologians. In Figure 6.13, 100% of women theologian express concerns that gender differentiation persists within the church, as women are still not ordained as pastors. Additionally, the youth-wing (68%), and Pastor (65%) are sharing the same view-point with the women theologians, asserting that it is high-time that the LIKBK Constitution redraft its laws in favour of women ordination as Pastor.

Figure 6.13: Gender Balance in the Church



Source: Field Data

In support to the above disturbing figure, one woman theologian highlighted this disparity, stating: *‘Despite being qualified and suitable for the role of pastor, our church continues to deny us this position. The highest position we can attain is that of coordinator, despite having the same qualifications as male theologians.’* (Mary, Women Theologian). In a study involving seven women theologians employed within the auspices of LIKBK, a troubling pattern has emerged; despite possessing notable qualifications such as Bachelor of Theology (BTh), Bachelor of Divinity (BD), or Master of Theology (MTH), these women theologians are not afforded the same treatment as their male counterparts. *Mrs. Mawii*, a respected figure among them who serves as the Co-Ordinator in Christian Education, has candidly expressed her aspirations. She dreams of a day when women theologians can be ordained as pastors, highlighting a poignant issue. She notes that: *‘Even in international contexts, such as when representing India at conferences, we face disparities simply because we lack the title ‘Reverend’ in our names’*. This observation underscores a systemic bias that persists despite the professional achievements and dedication of these women within the field of theology. It speaks to a broader need for recognition and equality within religious institutions, both domestically and abroad.

Mrs. Rami, holding a B.D. degree, currently serving as the Co-Ordinator in the communication department within the LIKBK office, highlighted a significant disparity faced by women theologians. She pointed out that women theologians receive unequal pay compared to pastors, primarily because they are not ordained.

Additionally, she noted a recent change in the LIKBBK Constitution and Bye Laws, which previously categorised both men and women theologians under the same service cadre of 'Theologian'. However, in the last three years, revisions to the Constitution have introduced a distinction between 'ordained' and 'unordained theologians'. Consequently, women theologians, lacking ordination, have been relegated to 'ministerial service' and are no longer included in the category of 'pastoral service'. This rephrased statement highlights the institutional discrimination faced by women theologians, where their qualifications and contributions are not reflected in their pay or professional categorization due to their gender and lack of ordination. It underscores the need for systemic change within religious institutions to address gender equality and fair treatment for all members, regardless of gender or religious status.

Mrs. Kimi, a 47-year-old woman holding both Bachelor of Theology (B.Th.) and Master of Divinity (M.Div) degrees, currently serves as the head of the Children-Wing Promoter highlights a significant disparity in the treatment of male and female theologians within LIKBBK. While male theologians, upon completing their three-year probation period, are ordained as pastors and receive salary raises, women theologians are often relegated to starting positions such as Co-Ordinator. Furthermore, they do not benefit from salary increases after the probation period, unlike their male counterparts. This rephrased statement brings attention to the stark contrast in career progression and compensation between male and female theologians within LIKBBK. By emphasising the disparity in treatment based on gender, it underscores the need for gender equality and fair practices within the organisation. Such discriminatory practices not only hinder the professional advancement of women theologians but also perpetuate systemic gender biases within religious institutions. Addressing these issues is crucial for fostering an inclusive and equitable environment where all members are valued and treated fairly, regardless of gender.

Lali, a 34-year-old single woman, currently serves as a Pastoral Assistant to a male pastor. She candidly expresses her frustration, stating that: *'despite studying theology with the primary aim of serving the mission, women theologians are often limited in their opportunities due to the lack of ordination. Consequently, we find ourselves relegated to roles as assistants to male pastors, despite possessing similar*

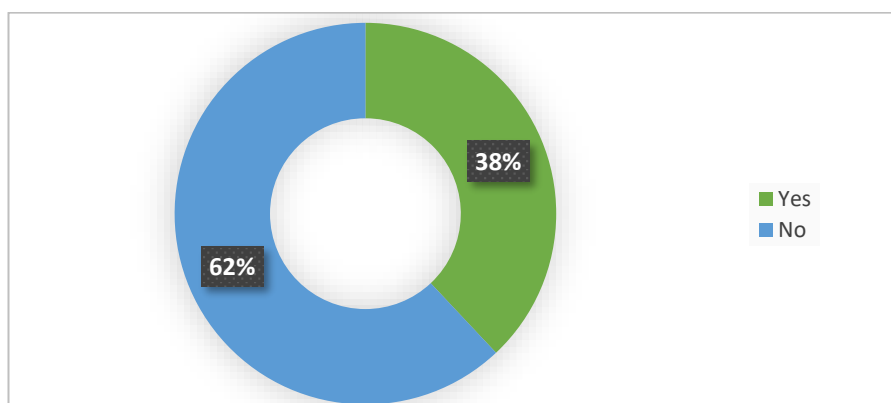
qualifications and completing the same study courses'. Furthermore, Lalhrilmawii laments the diminishing prospects for career advancement for women theologians. Unlike in the past, where they could be appointed directly as Coordinators, now they must start from lower positions such as Assistant Coordinator and work their way up to Coordinator until retirement, with no other alternative career paths available. This rephrased statement highlights the frustration and disillusionment experienced by women theologians within the organisation. It underscores the challenges they face in advancing their careers and achieving equal recognition despite their qualifications and dedication to their vocation. Addressing these systemic barriers is essential for promoting gender equality and ensuring that all members have equal opportunities for professional growth and fulfillment within the religious institution.

Should Women Be Ordained as Pastors? - Investigating Public Opinion

The findings of the study delve deeper into public sentiment regarding the acceptance of women theologians as pastors within the LIKBK Church. A significant portion of the 248 respondents, comprising 62%, express their disagreement with the idea of women being ordained as pastors, as depicted in Figure 6.14. The primary reason respondents opposed the ordination of women as pastors was their reference to a traditional phrase, *'Hmeichhia in sakhua an neilo,'* which translates to 'women have no birth religion.' This phrase suggests that women should automatically adopt their husband's religion without question, implying a subordinate role in religious matters. However, a significant minority of 38% of respondents believe that it is time for women to be ordained as pastors. One respondent passionately argued that: *'women theologians, having studied the same courses and incurred the same expenses as their male counterparts, should be ordained as pastors'* (Puii, women-wing leader, Bualpui NG Village). She emphasised that: *'Failing to do so would waste their knowledge and potential resources. But nothing can be done since the LIKBK's Constitution still does not favour women ordination'*. This text highlights the persuasive argument made by the respondent, emphasising the equal qualifications and potential of women theologians. Her comment underscores the need for gender equality in religious leadership and the frustration caused by the existing Constitutional barrier. This

perspective suggests that there is a growing sentiment within the community that supports women's ordination, which could potentially lead to future reforms.

Figure 6.14: Ordination of Women Theologian as Pastor



Source: Field Data

One worth-mentioning issue is the resistance towards women's ordination from few male pastors themselves. One prominent male pastor went as far as stating: *'I don't agree that women should be ordained as pastor because if an ordained woman theologian Pastor gets married to non-LIKBK, she will definitely follow her husband's denomination and this will be a great loss for the Church'* (Reverend. Vara). This statement highlights the entrenched opposition towards women's ordination within the LIKBK Church, both among the general public and even among male pastors. The rationale provided by one pastor reflects concerns about potential loss of members to other denominations if women pastors marry outside the LIKBK fold. Such attitudes underscore the need for deeper conversations and cultural shifts within the church to address gender equality and inclusivity in leadership roles.

Therefore, the study concludes that the LIKBK assumes a dual role, both advocating for human rights while also being implicated in violations. While the church is highly regarded for its humanitarian efforts, including poverty alleviation, education, and inclusive membership policies, as well as its involvement in political election affairs, where it is known for serving the needy and upholding their rights regardless of tribe, color, or financial status, it falls short in its gender policy. In line with Weisner (5 September, 2023) global observation arguing that the Churches are still biased in

gender policy, the LIKBK, similarly, may not fully fulfill its role as an advocate for human rights in terms of gender equality. This is evident in the church's reluctance to accept women theologians as pastors, despite their qualifications and suitability for the role.

6.15 Involvement of Church Leaders in Politics

The involvement of the church in politics has a long and varied history that spans centuries and different regions of the world. For instance, during the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church wielded significant political power in Europe. The Pope and the hierarchy of the Church often played a central role in the political affairs of kingdoms and empires. This period saw the concept of 'Christendom,' where the Church and state were closely intertwined, with rulers seeking the approval and legitimacy of the Church for their authority. (Chazan, 2006). In the 11th and 12th centuries, a conflict known as the Investiture Controversy erupted between the Papacy and secular rulers, particularly the Holy Roman Emperor. The controversy centered around who had the authority to appoint bishops and other church officials – the Pope or the secular rulers. This conflict highlighted the struggle for power between the Church and political authorities. (Griffith, 2021, December 4). Consequently, the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century led to significant changes in the relationship between church and state. In many European countries, the emergence of Protestant denominations resulted in the fragmentation of religious authority and the rise of new political dynamics. Some rulers embraced Protestantism to consolidate their power and break away from the authority of the Catholic Church. (Mark, 2022). The Reformation sparked religious conflicts and wars across Europe, such as the Thirty Years' War, which had both religious and political dimensions. These conflicts highlighted the interplay between religious beliefs and political interests and often resulted in significant social upheaval and suffering. (Becker., et.al, 2016). Thereafter, in the era of European colonialism, Christian missionaries often accompanied colonial expeditions, spreading Christianity to different parts of the world. This led to the fusion of religious and political agendas, as colonial powers sought to assert control over indigenous populations while also promoting their religious beliefs.

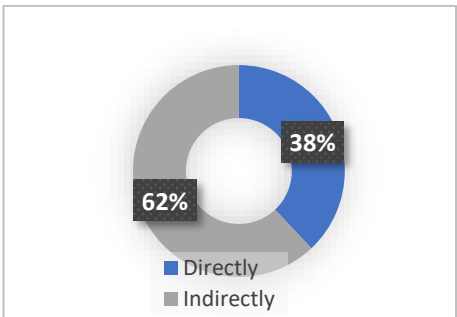
These above examples illustrate the complex and evolving relationship between the church and politics throughout history, with instances of cooperation, conflict, and mutual influence. As such, whether the church should involve in politics is a complex and debated issue among the various scholars. Studies advocating that church leaders should engage in politics argued that the relative aim of Christian politics can be described as anything that serves human needs and addresses issues such as poverty, ignorance, oppression, sickness and human dignity. (Baba, 2022). According to Okullu (2003:19), the Church's duty extends beyond mere denouncement; it must also empower individual Christians to fulfill their prophetic roles in society. Haselbarth (1976:229) highlights the church's new servant role, emphasizing its function as peacemakers and intercessors in global conflicts. Okullu (2003:53-54) asserts that the church's societal role includes praying for the government and promoting peace among people.

Contrary to the proponents of church involvement in politics, some argue that the church should remain separate from politics, adhering to the principle of the separation of church and state. They believe that involvement in politics can compromise the spiritual mission of the church and lead to the erosion of its moral authority. Additionally, they argue that political involvement can divide congregations and alienate members who hold differing political beliefs. Olawale and Jacob (2020) analyse the church's role in Nigeria's economy, noting its historical contributions to socio-cultural liberation and economic development. However, they also highlight the church's collusion with political elites, perpetuating bourgeois dominance over the proletariat. This alliance led to resource exploitation and expropriation, ultimately contributing to Nigeria's economic underdevelopment. Jamison (2019) contends that religious leaders in America utilise the pulpit not for the purpose of advancing God's kingdom, as they profess, but rather to gain access to power and political privileges. Haynes (2023, October 25) similarly argues that religious leaders in Ghana strive to reconstruct the nation according to their values and beliefs, raising concerns about its adverse impact on democracy. Shaji (2023, September 27) observes that Bishops hold significant sway, influencing community preferences, which elucidates the BJP's courting of senior Church officials. Modifi (2015:278) similarly observes that within

the Indian context, all political parties are culpable of leveraging religious issues for political advantages, and even religious leaders are not an exception from this conduct.

Given the aforementioned statements in favour and against the involvement of Church elders in politics, the research sought to investigate the opinions of LIKKB church members regarding whether church leaders should engage directly in politics or refrain from doing so. The findings indicate that 62% (n=250) of the respondents (Figure 6.15), totaling 250, mainly from Pastor (82%), youth-wing (78%) and church-elder (70%) are of the view that church leaders should refrain from direct involvement in politics (Figure 6.16). According to respondents who advocate for a separation of church and state, religious leaders, especially those in prominent roles like Pastors, former Pastors, and church elders, should not participate in politics. However, 38% (n=151) of respondents advocate for direct involvement of church leaders in politics. Upon closer look of the figures, it can be ascertained that predominantly, women-theologian (100%), men-wing (59%) and women-wing (49%) (Figure 6.16) are the chief exponents arguing that it is high time for church leaders to get directly involve in politics. Respondents advocating for religious leaders' political engagement reasoned that the Biblical model of prophets as both spiritual and political guides warrants their involvement. Additionally, they believed that, in the face of present-day political corruption, truly dedicated religious leaders should step into politics to effect positive change and restore integrity.

Figure 6.15: Clergy Political Involvement



Source: Field Data

Figure 6.16: Sub-Groups' Opinions on Clergy Political Involvement

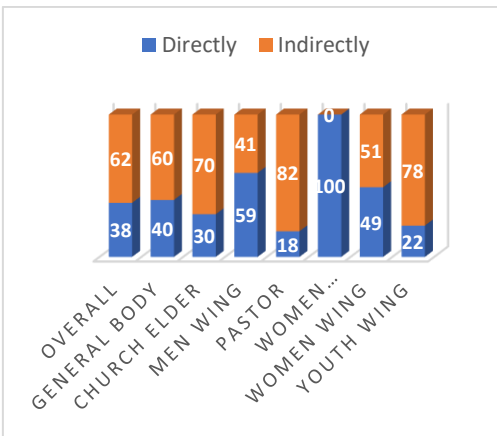
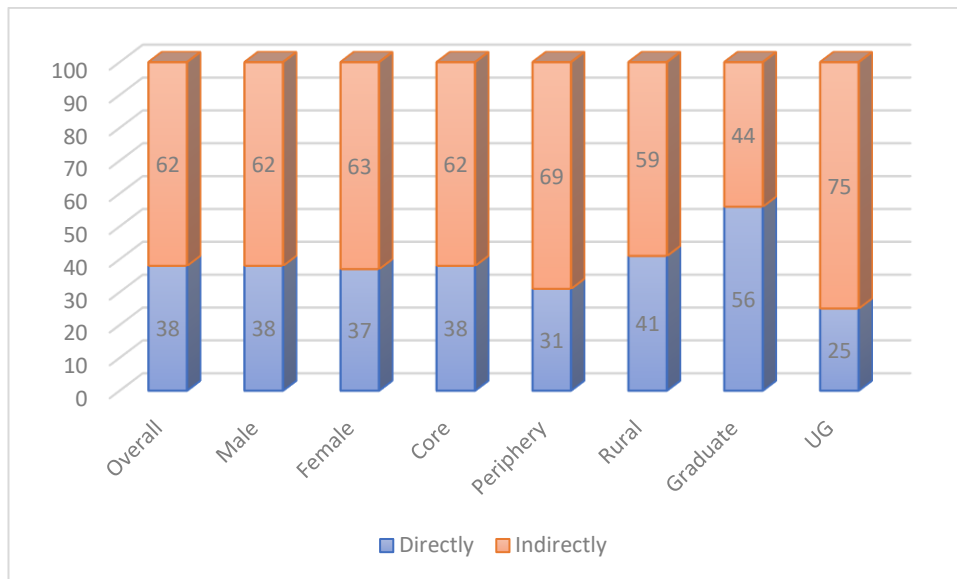


Figure 6.17: Categorised Groups' Responses on Clergy Political Involvement



Source: Field Data

Majority are of the opinion that they do not find it appropriate for the church leaders to contest in election with one respondent stating: *'I don't find it appropriate that religious leaders serving at a capacity of Pastor or ex-Pastors nor church elders should contest in politics. However, I may perhaps accept some church leaders who serves a minor role like deacons, youth leaders or the like.'* (Chinzah, LIKBK Pastor). Other respondents referenced biblical teachings, such as one who stated: *'Since the Pastors are to serve the Church and God in a full-time capacity, I feel they should refrain from involvement in politics.'* (R.K. Puii, Youth-wing member)

However, the findings indicate that 38% of respondents advocate for direct involvement of church leaders in politics, predominantly comprising the Church elders, women theologians (Figure 6.15), and graduates (Figure 6.16). Drawing inspiration from historical Biblical figures known for their impactful leadership, one renowned church elder had asserted that: *'I hope our religious leaders demonstrate a greater interest in political matters, akin to Nehemiah, renowned in the Bible for his transformative leadership, which brought about moral and liturgical reforms among the Jews.'* (C. Hranga, men-wing member). Another prominent political figure cum church elder had also commented that: *'I wish that the Church would intervene in the political affairs of the LADC. The problem is that the Church stays too aloof in the*

political affairs. More intervention will be highly appreciated and Lairam will obviously reap the benefits.’ (Nguna, church-elder). Additionally, a women-theologian member expressed frustration with the current political system in the Lai Autonomous District Council and hopeful for the positive intervention of church leaders, stating: *‘Considering the political situation in our Lai Autonomous District Council, it is high time that a genuinely born-again religious leaders must engage in politics. Our current political system is marred by nepotism, corruption, and personal favoritism.’* (Lalawmpuii)

However, it is important to note that majority of respondents who support the direct involvement of church leaders in politics have emphasised certain conditions, such as requiring individuals to be true born-again believers, as expressed by one respondent who stated: *‘Yes, I feel that it is appropriate for the church leader to contest in politics but it is appropriate only when that individual is convinced of his will power and that he will not be swallowed up by the existing system.’* (Zonunmawia, men-wing).

6.16 Overview

This chapter provides an in-depth examination of two primary aspects: firstly, the socio-economic transformation initiatives undertaken by LIKBK to upthrust the Lai community, and secondly, the political reforms and influences wielded by LIKBK in decisive Lai politics. The following overview summarises the key findings:

LIKBK and Upliftment of Health and Wellness: Despite having a relatively small membership of around thirty thousand in south Mizoram, the LIKBK has the potential to play a significant role in socio-economic development, particularly in the areas of health and wellness. The church's initiatives, such as establishing a long-needed hospital, conducting occasional free clinics in remote villages, and offering discounts to the poor and needy, have been well-received by the respondents. However, it is noted that the hospital's location in the main town limits accessibility for rural areas, which is why the church ensures that regular free clinics are held and discounts are provided to those in need, even if it caters limited poor population. Therefore, in line with Walumsibi (2022) who envisages the Church’s deep tradition as a ‘field hospital’ in which the Church is depicted as a place of healing and restoration, mirroring the

inclusive role of a hospital in caring for the sick and the wounded, regardless of their background or circumstances, the LIKBK likewise is viewed as such.

Monthly Contribution for the Socio-Economic Upliftment (*tithing*): The practice of *tithing* has played a crucial role in the socio-economic development of the Lai society, enabling the LIKBK to initiate various development projects. Although a few respondents questioned the usefulness of tithing for socio-economic development, the majority acknowledged its significance, despite the fact that *tithe* funds are primarily used for church administration, such as salaries for church workers and renovation or sometimes sent to other districts unaccounted. They recognised that tithing has contributed to the accumulation of wealth within the Lai district, particularly since the establishment of LIKBK, which has allowed *tithe* funds to be retained and utilised locally more for socio-economic development, rather than being sent to other districts. Similar to Ajah's (2013) findings on African Christians' views on tithing, this study reveals that members of LIKBK church also have a strong belief in the obligatory nature of *tithing*. They associate tithing with financial prosperity, and conversely, believe that failing to tithe will lead to God withdrawing blessings and wealth from their lives, mirroring the 'get rich quick' mentality observed in Ajah's study.

Role of *Lairam* Social Mission Committee of LIKBK: The study highlights the establishment of the *Lairam* Social Committee by LIKBK as a significant milestone in playing a crucial role in driving socio-economic development among the Lai people. The committee has pioneered innovative initiatives in Lawngtlai district, including the setup of a Motherless Home, Child Adoption Centre, *Lairam* Multipurpose Training Centre, Charity Shop, Comprehensive Livelihood Project, and The *Lairam* Rescue Centre to combat drug addiction. These initiatives demonstrate the committee's commitment to addressing social and economic challenges in the region. Citing Wry, T., & York, J. G. (2017), who postulate that the Church is a potential source of social enterprise activities, the study of LIKBK depicts the same trend.

Communication Committee for Upliftment of the Lai Literature: The Communication Committee, established by LIKBK, has made substantial contributions to the socio-economic development of the Lai society. In addition to

launching key initiatives like the *Lairam* Offset Press, *Lairam* Bookroom, and Stationery, the committee's Literature and Publication Board has played a vital role in revitalizing Lai literature and language. Through its efforts, the committee has helped reform the previously neglected Lai language, promoting it through various programs and instilling a sense of pride among the Lai people to speak and write in their native tongue. Drawing from Vanlalzaiva (2022), who envisages the church as a crucial centre for learning, the study of LIKBK aptly qualifies this statement.

Role of Christian Education Committee (CEC): The Christian Education Committee, established by LIKBK, has made significant contributions to the community, with the establishment of Mission schools being a notable achievement. The launch of *Lairam* Higher Academy of Science (LAHAS) stands out as a particularly important initiative, as highlighted by most respondents. The introduction of a science stream at the higher secondary level, a first in Lawngtlai's history, has provided a vital opportunity for science aspirants, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, LIKBK has set up a higher secondary school in the remote *Nghalimlui* village, primarily serving the impoverished *Chakma* tribe, demonstrating their commitment to uplifting the socio-economic conditions of underprivileged communities despite limited resources. LIKBK ensures that Mission Schools are established only in areas lacking government-sponsored schools, thereby supporting the government's efforts and filling a critical gap in education. Following Magdelaine (2015) who validates the Church as a valuable learning centre, the LIKBK proves to be a crucial promoter of modern education along the lines with bible teachings.

Rice Contribution for Socio-Economic Development: The study highlights that the '*buhfaitham*' initiative, where women from the LIKBK Women's Wing (LIKBKHP) contribute a 'handful of rice', has been a significant accumulative financial source for the Mission Department. This practice, inspired by Christian missionaries, has been effectively adopted throughout the state. The accumulated wealth from this contribution has substantially supported LIKBK's mission works, both within and outside the region. The Mission Department, responsible for spreading the gospel to non-Christians, operates across four key fields: Foreign Mission (Myanmar and Bangladesh), Inland Mission (Manipur, Mizoram, and Odisha), Home Mission

(Chakma Home Mission, School Ministry, and Christian *Milan Sanghati*), and Partnership Mission (Ghana and China). Following Vanlathanpuui (2019) and Ganesh (2015) who posit ‘handful of rice’ as the main earner of church treasury, the LIKBK depicts similar trend.

The LIKBK as A Guardian for The Poor: The LIKBK's role as a guardian for the poor is strongly evident in the findings, particularly in its support for disadvantaged tribes such as the *Bawm*, *Chakmas*, *Rakhaine*, *Mok*, and *Brus*. Through various outreach programs, charitable initiatives, benevolent attitude and community services, the LIKBK provides essential assistance, including food, clothing, shelter, and medical aid, to the poor, marginalised, needy and disabled. The establishment of schools like New Vision English School and the planting of new churches in these areas further demonstrate the LIKBK's commitment to supporting marginalised communities. Notably, the *Sihhmui* local LIKBK church in Aizawl is specifically dedicated to serving the poor, including daily wage earners and tribes like the *Bawm* and *Hmar*. The finding aligns with Soundararajan (2020), who coined the term ‘sub-altern church’ to describe the South-Indian Church, noting that many churches primarily consist of Dalits and marginalised segments of society. The euphoric function of Church (Durkheim, 2012) was well appreciated by the respondents in this study.

LIKBK as a Leadership Training Centre: The LIKBK plays a pivotal role in leadership development, nurturing not only future pastors but also a significant number of leaders who make a profound impact in civil society. Leaders emerging from LIKBK transcend the church's boundaries, assuming instrumental roles in prominent organizations such as the Young Lai Association (YLA), Lai Students Association (LSA), and Lai Women Association (LWA), thereby contributing to socio-economic development by cultivating a cadre of leaders who drive positive change, foster community engagement, and promote collective progress. This highlights the LIKBK's significant contribution to socio-economic development by developing leaders who extend their influence beyond the church, driving positive change and progress in various spheres of society. By nurturing leaders who assume key roles in civil society organizations, the LIKBK helps build capacity, promote community engagement, and foster collective progress, ultimately contributing to the socio-economic development

of the community and neighborhood. Drawing from Wright (2024) who strongly advocates for the Church as a potential centre for leadership training, the study of LIKBK shows similar finding.

LIKBK and Employment Generation: The LIKBK has played a vital role in addressing unemployment by generating employment opportunities for both educated and uneducated individuals. Through direct recruitment in its office and fieldwork, the LIKBK has created jobs, scoring the highest in this regard. Moreover, the organisation has implemented various initiatives to tackle unemployment, including micro-financing, self-help groups, skill development, and training programs, as well as the *Lairam* Social Mission and Comprehensive Livelihood Project. These programs aim to equip individuals with the necessary skills and resources to secure employment or become entrepreneurs, thereby reducing unemployment and promoting economic empowerment. Self-employment is promoted and tends to increase. The study similarly concludes in line with Ryan (1984), who posits the Church as a problem solver of unemployment in the African region.

LIKBK and Political Reformation: The establishment of LIKBK has been instrumental in bringing about political reformation in the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC), the highest political institution in the Lai territory. As the LIKBK and LADC share a common ethnic lineage, they complement each other, with the former's existence paving the way for the latter's establishment. Notably, the LIKBK serves as a watchdog, ensuring that the LADC conducts free and fair elections, thereby promoting democratic governance. By doing so, the LIKBK has played a crucial role in shaping the political landscape of the Lai territory, fostering an environment of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, which has contributed significantly to the region's political reformation. This study supports Habermas (1989) as to how diverse voices can contribute to democratic deliberation, political outcomes of robust public opinion and more so the role of civil society organisations in advocating for social justice and promoting democratic values.

The LIKBK as a Decisive Vote Bank: The LIKBK wields significant electoral influence, as evidenced by the findings, where religious affiliation emerges as the

second most crucial factor in voting behavior, closely following the 'personality of the candidate' as the primary consideration. However, familial ties can supersede denominational loyalty, with respondents prioritising family members as their first choice, even if they share the same denomination. The majority of successful political candidates holding key positions in the LADC, such as the Chief Executive Member (CEM) and Executive Member (EM), are affiliated with the LIKBK church. Furthermore, LIKBK members exhibit a strong sense of unity and solidarity during elections, not only in LADC politics but also in NGO leadership contests, like the Young Lai Association (YLA), particularly at the village level. This study supports Green et al., (1996) who posits how individuals often align their voting preferences for those candidates in harmony with their religious values and moral beliefs.

The LIKBK's Dual Role Towards Human Rights and Democracy: The LIKBK emerges as a stalwart protector of human rights and democracy, as evident from the findings. By emphasising equal importance for all tribes, including marginalised and non-Lai speaking communities, the church upholds the principles of non-discrimination and unity in diversity. This commitment extends to vulnerable groups, such as the *Chakma*, *Bawm*, and refugees from Burma and Bangladesh, who are treated with dignity and respect within the church. Moreover, the LIKBK champions democratic ideals, reflected in its internal democratic practices, including fair and inclusive elections. The church actively opposes nepotism, electoral misconduct, bribery, and human rights violations, with its members engaged in organisations like the Mizoram People's Forum (MPF), which promotes democratic accountability. By recruiting pastors from diverse Mizo sub-tribes, the LIKBK ensures equality and inclusivity in its leadership, solidifying its role as a guardian of human rights and democracy. Following (Gibbs and Deborah, 1999; Rychetska, 2022; Intan, 2018; and Davila, 2009) who argued that the Church serves the primary function of addressing human right and democracy, especially in third world countries, the LIKBK is seen to have such similar function.

LIKBK and its Gender Policy: Despite its commendable efforts in promoting human rights, the LIKBK's role is complex and multifaceted, as it simultaneously advocates for and falls short in upholding certain rights. While the church is renowned for its

humanitarian work, including poverty alleviation, education, and inclusive membership policies, as well as its involvement in political elections where it champions the rights of the needy regardless of tribe, color, or financial status, it has notable shortcomings in its gender policy. Specifically, the church has yet to ordain women theologians as pastors and rarely has female church elders, indicating a gap in gender equality within the LIKBK. This study, informed by Weisner's (2023) global observation on gender bias in churches and Zarzozuali (2024) who employs Michel Foucault's 'power dynamics' framework critique of the church's human rights commitment, examines the LIKBK Church's gender policy and treatment of women, particularly women theologians, this research likewise critically analyses how the LIKBK Church's power structures and discourses perpetuate gender inequality, silencing and excluding women. The church's reluctance to ordain qualified women theologians as pastors raises questions about its commitment to gender equality and human rights, suggesting that the LIKBK Church may not fully fulfill its role as an advocate for these values.

Involvement of Church Leaders in Politics: When asked if church leaders should engage in politics, a significant majority of respondents (62%) disagreed, stating that particularly pastors, former pastors, and church leaders should not be involved in politics. However, a smaller but notable proportion of respondents (38%) argued that it is high-time for church leaders to directly participate in politics to reform and improve Lai politics, suggesting a divergence of opinions on the matter. Beeson (2017), Haynes (2023), Shaji (2023) and Modifi (2015) contend that religious leaders should refrain from politics, the study likewise validates that involvement of church leaders in politics and over politicisation are not supported by the respondents.

Nevertheless, note should be taken that some of the initiatives undertaken like the Rescue Centre, the LAHAS, the Hospital etc. are still at their initial stage, nevertheless they are putting their best efforts in combating grave issues like water shortage, lack of infrastructure and limited funds and are trying their best in upgrading with the latest technology made available to them. Nevertheless, the pivotal roles played by the LIKBK towards socio-economic and political developments are highly visible and undeniable wherein not only the LIKBK church members but the Lai society as a

whole are reaping the benefits. The LIKBK embodies the essence of a social enterprise through its multifaceted approach to addressing societal challenges within the Lai community. By integrating elements such as education, Lai literature promotion, and health improvement initiatives, the LIKBK demonstrates a commitment to fostering sustainable change and generating social value. Drawing from the definitions of social entrepreneurship provided by experts like Bornstein & Davis (2010), and Wry & York (2017), the LIKBK's efforts align with the core principles of identifying societal issues and effecting change through innovative solutions. Consequently, the LIKBK exemplifies the characteristics of a true social enterprise by actively engaging in initiatives that addresses pressing social challenges, promote sustainable change, foster community development and political reforms. Through its diverse range of programs and initiatives, the LIKBK, operating through its diverse sub-groups, exhibits a resolute dedication to enhancing the well-being of its members and making a constructive impact on society.

The next chapter will provide an in-depth examination of each sub-group's distinct contributions to societal development, highlighting their specific initiatives and achievements. This nuanced exploration will demonstrate the multifaceted nature of LIKBK's commitment to social betterment and its members' overall quality of life.

CHAPTER VII
THE ROLE OF SUB-MEMBERS OF LIKBK IN SOCIAL
TRANSFORMATION IN LAI SOCIETY

7.1 Introduction

7.2 LIKBKHP (women-wing)

7.3 LIKBKTP (youth-wing)

7.4 Pastors

7.5 Church Elders (*Kohhran Upa*)

7.6 Deacons (*Rawngbawltu*)

7.7 LIKBKMP (men-wing)

7.8 Overview

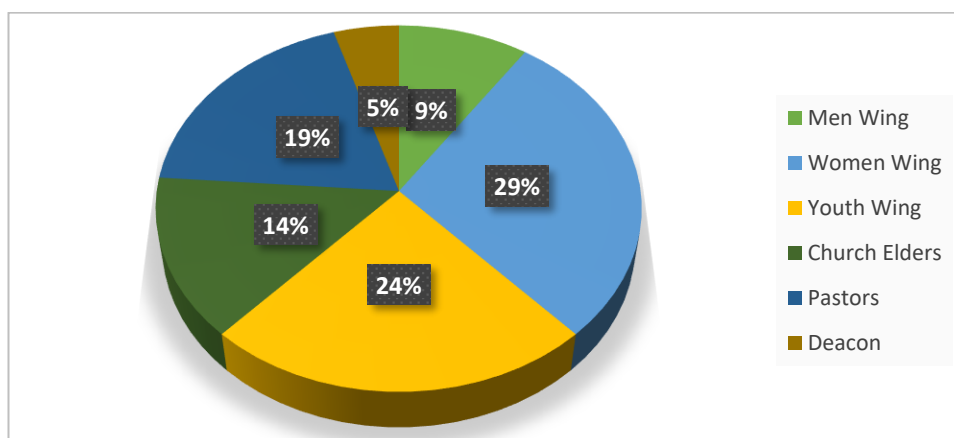
CHAPTER VII

THE ROLE OF SUB-MEMBERS OF LIKBK IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN LAI SOCIETY

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the six fellowship departments within the LIKBK institution, which include *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran Hmeichhe Pawl* (LIKBKHP / Women wing), *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran Thalai Pawl* (LIKBKTP / Youth wing), the Pastor wing, the Church Elders wing, *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran Mipa Pawl* (LIKBKMP/ Men wing) and Deacons. The chapter primarily examines the substantial contributions made by each subgroup toward the socio-economic advancement of the Lai society. The fellowship departments are organised in a sequence starting from the women's wing (LIKBKHP) and concluding with the Deacons, following the ranking provided by the respondents during the research. The rankings provided by the respondents were based on the perceived contributions of each subgroup to the socio-economic development of the Lai society, from the highest contributions to the least. This sequence ranged from the women-wing (LIKBKHP) at the top to the Deacons at the bottom (Figure 7.1). In this chapter, the terms 'wing,' 'sub-group,' and 'fellowship' are used interchangeably, indicating that they refer to the same concept or group within the organisation.

Figure 7.1: Contributions of Each Sub-Group Towards Socio-Economic Development



Source: Field Data

As mentioned on the previous chapter, a sample size of 379 were distributed proportionately to the various sub-groups such as the Pastors, the Church Elders, the deacons, the women wing, the youth wing, the men wing and the women theologians.

From the samples collected, it has been observed that the women wing was securing the first rank (29%, n=109) when it comes to the contribution towards socio-economic development of the Lai society, followed by youth-wing (24%, n= 91), Pastor (19%, n= 72), church-elder (14%, n= 53), men-wing (9%, n= 35), and deacon (5%, n=19). However, each sub-group had their own unique contribution which are sequentially put forward in this chapter.

7.2 LIKBKHP (women-wing)

The women-wing was established as early as 1972, predating the formal establishment of LIKBK, during the initial stages when it was known as *Isua Krista Kohhran* (IKK). Following the amalgamation of IKK and *Lairam Baptist Kohhran* (LBK) on November 29, 1999, at New *Siaha* town, the inaugural Assembly Executive Committee (AEC) took place on 29 November 1999. During this AEC, various fellowships under the church were approved, with the women-wing being one of them (Vanlalzaupa, 2022:264). The Women-wings from both the IKK and LBK Churches were merged into a single entity initially named '*Isua Krista Kohhran Lairam Nu Pawl*' (IKKLNP). Subsequently, this was renamed '*Isua Krista Kohhran Lairam Hmeichhe Pawl*' (IKKLHP) on February 9, 2000. (Lalduhawmi, 2022:2). Following the alteration of the church's name to '*Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran* (LIKBK)' during the Assembly held at *Electric Veng* (locality) in 2003, the Women-wing underwent a permanent name change to '*Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran Hmeichhe Pawl*' (LIKBKHP). Giving regards to the initial stage of the birth of IKK in 1972, the 'Rising Day' for the women wing was officially declared as 25th March.1972.

Despite their modest beginnings, with an overall budget and property account totalling just ₹5,64,227, as indicated in Table 7.1, the women-wing has been actively involved in fostering socio-economic development by spearheading numerous projects and departments.

Table 7.1: Estimated Wealth of the Women- Wing (IKK and LBK) at the Initial Year of 2000

	IKK women wing		LBK women wing	
1	Steel almirah	1	Steel almirah	2
2	Type Writer	1	Secretariat table	1
3	Cow reared	6	Telephone	1

4	Account	₹ 2,99,293	Account	₹ 2,64,934
5	Total accounts of IKK and LIKBK			₹ 5,64,227

Source: LIKBKHP Golden Souvenir, March, 2022.p.2.

Indeed, all interviewees across various sub-groups have consistently expressed high appraisal for the efforts of the women-wing, holding them in the highest regard. One particular respondent emphasised the significant contributions of the women-wing, stating that:

The Women wing contributed the most for the socio -economic development of the Lai society. The works done by them are beyond words to describe. They offer endless prayers and fasting for the substance abusers. A well-established hospital known as the Lairam Christian medical Centre (LCMC) become a reality due to the initiative taken by them. Besides Hospital, Lairam Motherless Home, Lairam Rescue Centre (de-addiction Centre), Golden Jubilee Hall (Guest House) etc. are all the productive works of the Women Wings which are one of their kinds in the Districts and the benefits of such institutions are reaped by all the society and not only by the LIKBK. (Lalngurliana, church-elder).

Lairam Motherless Home (LMH) and Lairam Child Adoption Centre

Besides the various contributions and charities undertaken by the women-wing, the establishment of ‘Lairam Motherless Home’ (LMH) is worth- mentioning. It is one of the kind in Lawngtlai District which was officially launched in the year 1994. However, the work had been initiated way back in 1991 by the women-wing of IKK with the approval of the project by the IKK Assembly in 6th-9th. February 1991 at College Veng. (LIKBK Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 2022:50). With opening account only amounted to ₹ 1,25,000 which was handed over to the Church Assembly by the Women wing, it is notable that the Hospital can actually take its final shape.

As previously mentioned, the establishment of LIKBK was a gradual process, resulting from the merger of two ethnic-based churches, namely IKK and LBK. Notably, the women-wing of IKK had already been actively engaged in supporting motherless children even before the official inception of LIKBK. Furthermore, the IKK had generously allocated land at 71 RCC Road at Lawngtlai town for the purpose of establishing a facility for these vulnerable children, demonstrating a long-standing commitment to their welfare.

The actual year of the functioning of the Motherless Home was 28th. July. 2008 wherein motherless babies were actually admitted under their care. At present, there are 22 Staffs (including staffs of Lairam Adoption Centre) serving at various capacities like Superintendent, Case worker, Counsellor, Accountant, Home mother, Chowkidar, Nurse, Helper, Cook, Driver. There are 28 Children at Motherless Home and 7 children at Adoption Centre. The children mainly comprise of *Tuikuk (Brus)*, *Chakmas*, *Bawm*, *Pang* and few from Lawngtlai town. (Interview with Chanchinthahrilthangi, Home Mother on 16th September, 2023, 12:30 PM - 01:00 PM at Motherless Home, Lawngtlai).

Lairam Christian Medical Centre (LCMC)

Another noteworthy socio-economic development initiative by the women wing is the establishment of Hospital, *Lairam Christian Medical Centre (LCMC)* which was officially launched as a fully operational hospital on 11th. February, 2019 with a seventy (70) bedded hospital at its initial stage. (LIKBP Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 2022:52).

At the outset, the hospital commenced its operations on 19 September 2001, functioning merely as a medical pharmacy. Subsequently, by November 2004, it expanded its services and evolved into a semi-hospital with a capacity of ten (10) beds. (Interview with V. Lailiankima, LCMC Manager on 23rd.September.2023, 1:00 PM-1:45 PM at LCMC Hospital). It was solely the idea of the women-wing of the LBK who had already taken up the initiative in 1987 way back before the establishment of LIKBP to build a proper hospital as during that time, the government hospital could not afford to suffice the medical needs of the Lai people. The women-wing of LBK started with only ₹ 1,73,500 and this had consequently amounted to ₹ 2,06,000 with the establishment of LIKBP. The socio-economic significance of the establishment of Pharmacy which was later converted into full-fledged hospital was exquisitely elucidated as:

The most- noteworthy point I would like to mention regarding the productive work of LIKBP is the establishment of pharmacy in Lawngtlai Bazar locality prior to the establishment of the LIKBP's hospital. Previously, no medicine was sold in the MRP (Maximum Retail Price) within the whole of

Lawngtlai district; it was only after the LIKKB's pharmacy that the Lai people can avail medicine exactly as the MRP.” (Lalnunhlimi Lahnim, women-wing).

It this way, the women wing had also contributed positively towards the local market economy of Lai district by moderating the overpricing of the medicine sold in the region, thereby signifying a landmark contribution towards the socio-economic condition of the Lai dominated region.

Lairam Rescue Centre (LRC)

The establishment of ‘Lairam Rescue Centre’ by the women wing of LIKKB is also highly applauded by the respondents. The Centre was officially launched on 12 November 2021. It initially began with three inmates on February 10, 2022, and now has reached its full capacity of fifteen seats, which are currently occupied exclusively by male inmates. Admission of women inmates has been initiated for future prospect. It can be observed that the *Lairam* Rescue Centre (LRC) is currently in its nascent stage, having commenced operations on November 12, 2021. According to Reverend Lianchhunga, Home Superintendent of LRC, *‘the centre is still focused on establishing its primary infrastructure, hindered by limited financial resources. Additionally, the Centre faces challenges in accessing water, as the process of pumping water from Mampui village through pipelines is exceedingly difficult’*. Despite these obstacles, Reverend Lianchhunga expresses optimism saying that: *‘the Centre's fundamental needs and requirements will expectantly be met within the current year’*. This initial stage of development underscores the importance of supportive resources and infrastructure for the Centre's growth and effectiveness in serving its intended purpose. (Interview with Reverend. Lianchhunga, Home Superintendent, Lairam Rescue Centre On 18 September, 2023)

The staff strength at present are ten (10), including three (3) Securities, Ward attendant, Cook, Councillor, Driver, Staff Nurse, and Superintendent. (Interview with Reverend. Lianchhunga, Superintendent, Lairam Rescue Centre on 18th. September.2023, 8:00PM – 9:00 PM, Tuikual South, Aizawl). The LRC, being the sole de-addiction Centre in the entire District, holds immense significance for the enhancement of the social fabric of Lai society. The Women-wing, which commenced with a mere ₹18,31,357 on February 23, 2018, has since been enthusiastically and passionately

contributing ₹2 lakhs annually, thus establishing it as a yearly mandatory target. (LIKBKHP Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 2022:53)

Lairam Women Development Society (LWDS)

The Women-Wing has played a pivotal role in the establishment of the '*Lairam Women Development Society*' (LWDS). With the Assembly's approval for its establishment on August 10, 2000, the Society was subsequently registered in 2002 under Firms and Societies, Government of Mizoram, and later in 2006, it was registered under the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC). The two most significant undertakings of the Society are Lairam Handloom, and Poultry Farming.

Within a span of four years, the Handloom industry achieved self-sufficiency, generating enough revenue to cover all staff salaries entirely on its own. Currently, the Handloom is actively engaged in weaving '*Hnika*', Lai women's traditional dress, traditional-designed neckties, bags, shawls, etc, thereby serving as one of the main agencies for promoting Lai traditional attire and preservation of Lai identity. '*The Handloom plays a crucial role as an empowering agency for Lai women, offering training courses that enable them to attain self-independence.*' (Interview with Vanlalmangaihchhungi, Supervisor, *Lairam Handloom* on 18th. September, 2023, 1:00PM -1:45PM at Lawngtlai). It has proven to be an invaluable self-employment opportunity for Lai women, which was aptly remarked as:

Among the numerous undertakings of women wing towards socio-economic developments, I express my profound appreciation particularly towards their initiative in establishing 'Lairam Handloom'. This endeavour has empowered several individuals, enabling them to start their own handloom enterprises and become self-sufficient. (Dinengmawii Sektak)

Poultry farming has also emerged as a highly effective means of income generation for the Women-wing. With financial assistance amounting to ₹ one lakh provided by the then Minister of Veterinary Department, Mr. Ngunlianchunga, the poultry farming venture commenced with 300 rainbow roosters on May 29, 2018. Throughout the year, the rainbow roosters and broilers are successfully reared interchangeably, eight times annually. These poultry are raised profitably and sold every three weeks, ensuring a continuous stream of income throughout the year. (LIKBKHP Golden Souvenir, 2022:56)

The LIKBKHP's journey from a modest beginning to achieving outstanding success is a testament to its effective self-help group and self-employment initiatives, particularly for Lai women. Moreover, the organization has demonstrated its commitment to community welfare by providing stable employment to Mr. Vanlalruata, a local resident, as a caretaker on a contract basis, with a monthly remuneration of ₹ 4000, thereby contributing to his economic well-being and social stability.

Lairam Guest House

The establishment of the 'Golden Jubilee Building,' serving as a guest house for the needy, stands as another noteworthy contribution of the LIKBKHP. Positioned adjacent to the *Lairam* Hospital, this project gained approval from the Assembly on October 15, 2015. Subsequently, the construction of the guest house commenced, culminating in the creation of a three-storied building measuring 100 feet in length and 65x36 feet in width and height. Additionally, the guest house features a generously sized parking lot. The estimated budget for the project was twenty lakhs, with completion projected within a span of ten years.

The most outstanding part of the story on how it was constructed and took its final shape is worth mentioning. All the efforts put in by the women-wing is worth remembering wherein every unit of the women-wing spanning across the district comprising of all village units and the town units contributed unitedly towards meeting such a huge expenditure required for construction. Their dedication went beyond mere contributions; they organised fundraising initiatives specifically for the Guest House. Members of the Women-wing voluntarily donated a day's salary each, while church offerings from the Assembly were dedicated towards the building. Additionally, every member contributed one tin each of sandstone and stone chips annually during the construction phase. Furthermore, the interest earned on the women-wing's official bank account was also directed towards the building. (LIKBKHP Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 2022:58). The Guest House has proven to be immensely beneficial, not only for LCMC patients and their attendants coming from distant villages but also for guests arriving from other states and districts. This inclusive facility warmly welcomes individuals regardless of their denominational or religious affiliations, offering accommodation at very affordable rental charges. At present, the Guest House employs four workers, including a receptionist, security personnel, cleaner, and a resident cook.

(Interview with F. Lalrinzuala, Receptionist, Guest House on 30 September 2023, 11:30 AM -12:00 PM, College Veng, Lawngtlai).

The women wing has also immensely contributed even to the rural areas which was rightly commented by one interviewee from Tuithumhnar village saying that:

I cannot speak for other villages, but in our village, Tuithumhnar, I can boldly state that the women wing plays a significant role in the socio-economic development. They actively work towards fostering community unity, providing financial assistance to the sick, and extending a helping hand through agricultural activities such as ploughing fields, fetching water for impoverished families, and planting rice seeds in the fields of those who are unwell or in need. (L. Lahnim, church-elder)

Sensitisation of women through occasional seminars and workshops

In addition to the aforementioned contributions, the women-wing has played a vital role in sensitising women through occasional seminars and workshops on various topics such as women's rights, human trafficking, violence against women, and women entrepreneurship etc. (H. Lalrinsangi, women theologian). Women-wing has also contributed positively towards moral reformation which was precisely expressed as *'Women wing's most fruitful work for the socio-economic upliftment is that they normally conduct a once in a week fasting prayer focusing for the drug addicts as well as for their children. They also occasionally organise salvation gospel camping.'* (Lalthanpuui, women-wing leader)

Hence, the Women-wing has made unparalleled contributions, unmatched by any other subgroup. A significant trend in their contributions is that every institution they have built is financially self-generating wherein each institution can cover the salaries of their respective staff members. Starting with a modest financial beginning of just five lakhs or so during their initial stages, the women-wing has embarked on numerous socio-economic friendly projects. Their current annual estimated budget has reached a remarkable figure of ₹41,20,000 as of 2021-2022. This figure is expected to increase even further in the coming financial years. (LIK BK Assembly Book, 2021:182)

7.3 LIKBKTP (Youth Wing)

Scoring 24% from the respondents towards their outstanding contribution to socio-economic development for the Lai society, the *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran Thalai Pawl* (LIKBKTP/youth wing) scores the second position (Figure 7.1). It was established in 27th.February.1972 under the LIKBK Assembly Constitution and Bye Laws part 7 (2). At present, the total number of youth wing member counts to 7711 (5005 males and 2706 female) (General Assembly Report, 2022:209). The main intentions for the establishment of this youth wing are; to draw the unsaved soul closer to God; to render their youthful service for serving the Lord and The Church, and thirdly, to shape the younger generation to effectively contribute to the welfare of the land and the people of the fellow Lai. (<https://sites.google.com/view/likbkt/home?authuser=0>).

The LIKBKTP, right from its very inception has been committing themselves to serve for the betterment of *Lairam* (land of the Lai) and its people. Accordingly, numerous outstanding works to uplift the Lai socio-economic condition have been taken up along with the undying enthusiasm to protect and promote the Lai ethnicity. Some of the worth-mentioning tasks undertaken by the LIKBKTP fellowship are discussed as follows:

Fight against social evils like drug-addiction

Amongst the various activities undertaken by the youth wing, the ‘Amos Operation’ is worth-mentioning. Recently, the youth wing has taken up ‘Amos Operation’ (Appendix 1) to combat drug addiction. A separate unit has been created for this particular Operation. *‘The main aim of this Operation is to reach out to the addicts, providing them with essential support such as food, medicine and to refer them to Rescue Centre if needed. Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) was also signed with Human Resource and Education Department under the District Council to give awareness campaign against drug and addiction as part of the action plan under ‘Amos Operation’.’* (Lalngurliana, youth-wing member)

Environment protection

They also take active part in tree plantation and forest protection. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was also signed with the Forest Department of Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC). An efficient ‘Environment Protection Committee’ has been

duly created to look after the environment. For instance, every year is systematically divided into three seasons; Season 1 (February to March), Season 2 (June to August), Season 3 (September to December). During season 1, notifications has been issued to protect wild fire as it is a dry season and since it is a mating season, the community are made aware to refrain from killing animals and birds through air guns, wild fire, catapult etc. Season 2 is dedicated for planting trees wherein during the year 2022, 400 tree saplings had been planted owing to the favorable season for planting trees. During Season 3, circulars had been issued not to indulge in catching fishes through electric dynamos that may lead to hazardous river ecosystem and further intimidations towards refraining from unnecessary huntings of birds and animals were issued. (25th LIKBKTP General Assembly Report,2022:48-50). *'Each unit are assigned with looking over a stipulated number of trees and saplings in various assigned regions. For instance, the youth wing currently oversees 150 tree saplings at Thingkah.'* (J.H. Lalmangaiha, youth-wing leader).

A positive remark of the outcome of the undertakings was given by one respondent from Vawmbuk village saying that *'Due to their effective undertaking of forest protection, we no longer engage in hunting animals or birds in our Village.'* (Thangrualkhuma, church-elder)

Promotion of Lai Language and Literature

The LIKBKTP takes special interest in promotion of Lai language. They undertake numerous initiatives like essay and article writing competition in Lai language, Sports cum cultural meet, recitation competition in Lai language, Lai song singing competition etc. (Alice Chinzah, Sangau Village youth-wing member). As per the Conference Committee Minute, *'Thangthat Caan'* (music and song competition) was encouraged to be observed by each unit of the youth wing. (25th LIKBKTP General Assembly Report,2022:59). A reattempt to observe *'Lai Night'* every Friday in a week was also further reattempted to be observed in a serious manner in the hope to get the youth to be well versed with the Lai language and Lai culture. (25th LIKBKTP General Assembly Report, 2022:62)

Blood Donation

One worth-mentioning initiative taken by LIKBKTP for the Lai society is the monthly blood donation program conducted by every youth wing unit of the LIKBK. A

dedicated 'Blood Donation Calendar' has been established, allowing each unit to participate at least three times a year in a rotating schedule. The donated blood serves not only the LIKBK church members but also anyone in need. (Interview with Lorrain Vanlalrema, youth-wing)

Girl's Hostel

LIKBKTP Student Girl's Hostel was in function from 1st July, 2022 with eight hostellers. At present, there are nine hostellers coming from far off villages like three from *Rawlbuk*, two from *Rulkual*, one from *Lungpher*, and another one from *Vathuampui*. It is attempted to accommodate capacity of twenty (20) hostellers by next year. At present, the mess fee is charged at a minimal rate of ₹2000 with no extra charge on rental. Our future vision in future is to accommodate the destitute girls at free of cost. (Interview with Reverend Lalropeka Chinzah, Hostel Superintendent, 25th.September,2023, 2:15 PM- 2:45 PM at Chanmari, Lawngtlai). The significance of the hostel was ecstatically expressed as '*Girls Hostel was set up at Lawngtlai, Chanmari in order to accommodate the working girls and students who came from the villages. This is very helpful for the girls who do not have any relative in the town.*' (Lalngurliana, youth-wing member)

Awareness and Sensitisation Programs

The Youth Wing has been taking up a serious attempt to sensitise the Lai people towards drug abuse, tobacco misuse, alcohol abuse, gender sensitisation and the like. Occasional talk show was usually live telecasted in the *Central Thalai Pawl Youtube Channel* (an exclusive youtube channel of LIKBK youth-wing) regarding sexual abuse, general Lai identity, mental health and suicide, awareness and protection of women from domestic violence etc so as to circulate the messages in a mass, wide manner. Information about the significance of tree plantation, drug awareness, and religious teachings are disseminated through posters placed in crucial public spaces, including rest areas like public urinals. Seminars covering topics such as human trafficking and mental health are given priority, occasionally featuring guest speakers from Aizawl Training Institute (ATI). (Lalnghinglova, youth-wing leader)

Among the numerous socio-economic development tasks undertaken by the LIKBKTP (youth wing), some notable projects include providing financial support to missionaries through the Assembly Mission Department, constructing houses for

missionaries in remote and underdeveloped areas, and building a rest place in the Prayer Mountain, including a quarter for the Secretary. It is noteworthy that the contributions of LIKBKTP in socio-economic development are, and will continue to be more significant in years to come. (K. Lalroliana, youth-wing member, College Veng)

The above are some of the overall socio-economic contributions made by the youth wing. For showcasing the socio-economic efforts of the youth wing towards upliftment of the Lai society, a village and unit wise contributions to socio economic development may be summed up as follows:

In *Vawmbuk* village, the youth wing has significantly contributed towards socio economic development through blood donation, protection of forest and environment and giving assistance to the refugees from Myanmar. Due to their effective undertaking of forest protection, we no longer engage in hunting animals or birds in our Village. (Thangrualkhuma, Vawmbuk Village)

In *Tialdawngilung* Village, the youth wing takes up the task of social works by cleaning the roads, encourages the youth for tree plantation and a special emergency and poor fund have been kept separately. (Vanhaia, Tialdawngilung Village)

In *Thingkah* Village, The *Thingkah* Youth Wing has undertaken various socio-economic development initiatives, such as assisting the underprivileged before Christmas through financial aid or donations in kind. Additionally, they engage in activities like taking a poor family out for shopping. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the youth wing provided support to quarantine families, irrespective of their denominations, by purchasing essential items like vegetables, dal, eggs, etc. A financial aid of ₹300 was extended to each quarantine family, regardless of their economic status. The youth wing actively supports Home Mission Schools by providing them with essential items such as almirahs, wardrobes, and sintex. They engage in annual social work activities, including cleaning public drainage systems, urinals, and roadsides (three times a year). The youth wing currently oversees 150 tree saplings. They adhere to a blood donation calendar, with each unit donating blood twice a year. As part of 'Amos Operation,' the unit plans to reach out to drug addicts, providing them with food, essential commodities, and sharing the gospel with them. (J.H. Lalmangaiha, Thingkah Youth-wing leader)

The *Tuithumhnar* village LIKBKTP youth wing has engaged in collaborative fellowship activities with neighboring villages such as *Kakichhuah*, where non-Christian tribes like *Rakhaine*, *Bru*, and *Chakma* reside. Taking a lead role, the LIKBK has been actively supporting refugees from Bangladesh and Myanmar who seek refuge in the area. These refugees often arrive with empty hands, lacking even spare clothes, and the LIKBK has played a crucial role in providing assistance and support to these individuals in need. (B. Biaka, church-elder)

7.4 Pastors

Ranking third as per the opinion of the respondents towards their contribution to socio-economic development, the pastor wing holds a notable position in the LIKBK administrative framework. With the power vested upon them by the LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws, Part 8, No 29 (2), they are the key person assigned to take the overall responsibility of the Church administration. As of the 2021 LIKBK General Assembly Statistics, there are presently 38 pastors, 10 probationary pastors, and 10 minister pensioners. (LIKBK General Assembly Record Book, 2021:67). In addition, for tending to the spiritual well-being of church members, they are credited with undertaking several commendable tasks, as highlighted by respondents:

Unmatchable steps towards preservation of Lai culture

Pastors are highly instrumental in promoting Lai ethnicity as was mentioned by a respondent that: *'The LIKBK Pastors consistently emphasise the significance of preserving Lai culture through their sermons and writings.'* (Lalngurliana, church-elder). In addition to actively promoting the Lai language through delivering sermons and writing about the necessity of preserving Lai identity in religious journals, they are also undertaking the task of relearning the Lai language. *'This effort enables them to deliver sermons in the Lai medium, further reinforcing the preservation of Lai culture and identity.'* (Z. Tinthe, youth-wing leader). Moreover, *'Pastor makes sure that they wear the Lai traditional dress in all the important religious function and thereby serving as a role model towards preservation of Lai culture.'* (C. Lalvawni, women-wing leader). The painstaking efforts undertaken by the Pastor for the preservation of Lai culture was explicitly explained by one interviewee during pilot study saying that *'As LIKBK Pastors, we are dedicatedly relearning the Lai language to effectively deliver sermons and as such, our efforts are yielding gradual success.'*

Notably, proficiency in Lai language is now a mandatory component in the syllabus for probationary Pastors. Through these measures, we are earnestly working towards the preservation and advancement of Lai language and culture.’ (Interview with Pastor Zionvarmawia Fanchun on 4th.10.2022, 10:45 AM-12:30 PM, Lai House, Khatla Bungkawn, Aizawl)

Exemplar of Social Unity

Pastors and especially the early Pastors who served at the initial stage of the birth of LIKBK had contributed handsomely towards the unification and firm establishment of LIKBK. For instance, *‘Pastor C. Hrangzuala played a pivotal role as the chief architect in establishing the hospital, advocating for collective efforts among members to turn the vision into reality. He consistently motivated both the administrative unit and general members to unite, fostering a collaborative front towards this endeavour’* (C. Rokimi, women-wing member). In addition to promoting unity, *‘...the LIKBK pastors have actively worked towards the consolidation of Churches, taking the leading role in the unification process of the IKK and LBK due to which the LIKBK could come into being.’* (J. Lianduna, church-elder). In line with their unique role towards fostering unity within the society, one participant in the research had overtly articulated it as: *‘The pastors serve as the primary mediators during pivotal life events encountered by church members, including marriages, conflicts, and misunderstandings within families or with neighbours. Endowed with a unique negotiating ability, they facilitate reconciliation and under their guidance, tranquillity, peace, and unity are maintained within the society.’* (C. Lalthangzuala, church-elder)

Trend-setter of Social and Civic Obligations

Pastors play a crucial role in social work and are indispensable during significant life events such as deaths and marriages. Their involvement extends beyond spiritual guidance to practical support within the community. Additionally, *‘Pastors often exemplify a clean and tidy lifestyle, steering clear of tobacco and other substance abuse. By maintaining personal cleanliness, they effectively promote these values to the community, contributing to a positive influence on social and individual well-being.’* (P.T. Chuanga, church-elder). The pastors, despite their high level of education, dedicate their entire lives to the cause of God, receiving a modest salary, which was

highly appreciated by one respondent as: *‘They willingly travel and are sometimes, posted to distant or underdeveloped villages, treating all church members equally, regardless of their economic status.’* (K. Lalroliana, youth-wing member)

Political Guardian

The LIKBK Pastors serve an important role in the political affairs of the Lai Autonomous District Council. They made sure that all the affairs of the Lai politics are at per with the moral teachings. They are the active member of Mizo People Forum (MPF), who serve as a watchdog for the political affairs of Mizoram as a whole. In fact, the present Vice President of MPF is LIKBK Pastor, Zionvarmawia Fanchun. *‘Whenever the LADC conducts a meeting or Parliamentary session, the LIKBK pastors are usually invited to conduct the opening ceremony.’* (Interview with K. Hre Kung, 14th. 11.2023, 7:00 PM-8:00PM, Chanmari, Lawngtlai) For instance, *‘I am the one who had instigated the LADC to prepare a yearly official calendar in Lai Language which has now been popularly in use wherein all the names of the month are translated in Lai language’* said Pastor Zionvarmawia Fanchun. Moreover, the LIKBK pastors are usually appointed as Chaplain in various government and Council-sponsored institutions like Hospitals, Lai House in various states like Aizawl, Delhi Students Hostel and Shillong Students Hostel. (Interview with Pastor L.H. Lalliansanga, 18th. 9. 2023, 12:00 PM-1:15 PM, Chanmari, Aizawl)

The Task of Uplifting the Socio-economic Condition of the Rural Poor

Even in remote rural regions where they are stationed, pastors actively contribute to the socioeconomic advancement of the local populace. One respondent eloquently expressed this sentiment saying that: *‘Pastors have played a significant role in fostering genuine socio-economic development, particularly in our village of Tuithumhnar, where a substantial number of Brus coexist along with us. The Brus are one of the most uncivilised tribes found in Mizoram and educating them and preaching them is an arduous task. Nevertheless, the LIKBK has successfully contributed towards educating several persons wherein some Brus are successfully molded into Pastors’.* (L.H. Zopianga). This stands as a true testament to the tangible socio-economic progress achieved through such initiatives.

7.5 Church Elders (Kohhran Upa)

According to Part 4, Section 12 (4) of the LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws, the 'Kohhran Upa' (Church elders) are acknowledged as permanent members of the congregation (*Puipa Nghet*), entrusted with the duty of overseeing the Church and its members. They are assigned to collaborate closely with pastors to fulfil their roles effectively. (LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws, 2020:11). Currently, there are a total of 711 LIKBK church elders. (LIKBK General Assembly Report, 2021:67). Securing the fourth rank in the researcher's data that were collected in course of fieldwork, their unparalleled contributions to the socio-economic development of the Lai society may be listed as follows:

Uncompensated Labour

Contrary to pastors, church elders persist in their altruistic endeavours without any complaints, even amidst their hectic family schedules which was expressed with high appreciation by the respondent as *'One aspect that I highly appreciate about the Church Elders is their active involvement in serving the church members without expecting any salary, unlike the pastors who receive a monthly salary.'* (B. Lalsawiluaia, general-body member). Another respondent passionately expressed the selfless deeds they carry out stating that: *'The church elders shoulder the entire responsibility of the church during challenging times. They provide steadfast guidance to all church members, ensuring that their needs are met. The elders diligently gather all the church requirements, taking on responsibilities that some may feel reluctant to undertake at free of service.'* (K. Lalroliana, youth-wing leader)

Political Reforms

The Church Elders have undertaken substantial efforts to instigate political reforms within the Lai society. Their active involvement in the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) and *Mizoram Kohhran Hruaitu Committee* (MKHC) are noteworthy. The MPF is a church-sponsored election watchdog who sensitises the voters as well as the political parties. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed with all political parties before every election wherein all parties took oath to adhere to the poll norms. One church elder from the respondents had expressed with great enthusiasm regarding the political reformative task as:

'In the hope of bringing about free and fair election process, we enroll ourself as an active member in MPF (Mizoram People Forum). We enroll even as an active member in Mizoram Kohhran Hruaitu Committee (MKHC) which is a conglomeration of religious leaders from all denominations. We went to the extent of reaching out to the State Election Officer to request rescheduling the voting date, which, unfortunately, falls on 3rd October 2023, a Sunday, a day revered by Christians for worship and prayer' (Upa T.H. Thanga).

An Architype of Social Security for the Lai people

The Church elders are seen as a social safety net by many of the respondents agreed in line with a statement that: *'The LIKBK Church Elders are working tirelessly for the drug addicts, offering endless prayers for the poor and the distressed. Their dedication serves as a source of inspiration, providing comfort and support for those who are sick and facing difficulties.'* (Lalngurliana, church-elder). In addition, the Church elders exemplify and advocate for tolerance and patience in alignment with the teachings of Jesus Christ which was highly applauded by the general public. Emphasising the importance of perseverance, one respondent apprehended that: *'they actively participate in home visits to the assigned areas of church members. During these visits, their primary focus is to ensure that the spiritual and physical well-being of the church members is maintained'*. (Thara, general-body member)

Concerning the distribution of responsibilities for church elders, each church is subdivided into several units, with each unit referred to as *'Upa Bial'*, denoting the territory of the church elders. *'One church elder is tasked with overseeing approximately 8 to 10 houses. It is the responsibility of the assigned church elders within their designated areas to care for church members during times of sickness, death, collection of tithe and other contributions for the Church or events such as marriages.'* (Interview with H.C. Lalnunthara, 4:30-5:30 PM, College Veng, Lawngtlai). It is said that the church-elder, akin to pastors are made to undergo a rigorous training when it comes to tolerance and endurance towards the church members as was mentioned as: *'Through their actions, church elders embody the values of patience, tolerance, and a commitment to the overall welfare of the congregation.'* (Chuanglura, general-body). Additionally, one respondent had also mentioned the crucial contribution made by the Church elders towards preservation of

Lai culture saying that: *'Church elders play a vital role in preventing further assimilation by incorporating messages in their sermons that encourage the youth to protect and preserve our culture.'* (C. Lalvawnnhunga, church-elder). It has become evident that church elders, utilising their religious platform, have conveyed the importance of preserving the Lai ethnic sentiments through their sermon delivery, much like pastors do.

7.6 LIKBKMP (Men wing)

Scoring fifth position in the author's ranking device, the men-wing, unlike the other sub-group, the *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran Mipa Pawl* (LIKBKMP) is not mentioned in the LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws. However, it is yet to be officially recognised in the next coming LIKBK General Assembly of 2024 by amending the present Constitution. (Interview with Mr. Laikhuma, Men Wing Member, 12th.10.2023, 12:00 PM-1:15 PM, College Veng, Lawngtlai). Owing to its recent creation, clear documentation of the record is hardly available. However, the total estimated number of Men wing was recorded as 1814 in 2021 (LIKBK General Assembly Report, 2021:67). The number at present has been roughly estimated to be 3000. (Interview with Mr. Laikhuma, Men Wing Member, 12th.10.2023, 12:00 PM-1:15 PM, College Veng, Lawngtlai). Through interviews conducted across urban and rural Churches, the researcher has compiled an overall record of socio-economic contributions. Despite the recent establishment of this subgroup, respondents consistently lauded their remarkable efforts towards the welfare of the Lai community. A unit wise record of their contribution may be summed up as follows:

In the *Electric Veng* locality, a respondent spoke positively about the contributions of the men-wing, stating that: *'Despite being recently established, the men-wing consistently meets all the targets assigned to them by the Church. Within our church unit, they spearhead initiatives such as constructing homes for underprivileged families. Their involvement significantly alleviates the burdensome workload assigned to the church.'* (K. Lalroa, church-elder)

In *Tuithumhnar* Village, another respondent had also spoken very highly of the men-wing saying that:

The 'Pavalai' (men-wing) actively contributes to socio-economic development by designing hoardings and signboards adorned with motivational messages such as

'This land belongs to God and God alone' (Ram chu Lalpa Ta a Ni), 'Lairam I Vawngfai Ang U' (Keep the Lairam Clean). Additionally, they take the lead in social initiatives, including the construction and renovation of homes for vulnerable families like widows. (Lalawmpuia, men-wing)

In Sangau Village, located in the eastern side of Lawngtlai District (*Tuichhak*), an active participant in the research also expressed her deep appreciation of the works of the men wing towards promotion of the Lai identity stating that: *'In our village of Sangau, the men-wing assumes a prominent role in advancing the use of the Lai language. They actively educate non-Lai speakers on conversational Lai and encourage families to incorporate bedtime prayers in the Lai language, even if proficiency is not yet fully attained.'* (Alice Chinzah, youth-wing)

In Bethel Veng (Bethel locality), a respondent expressed optimistic views about the future trajectory of the men-wing, stating:

The recently established LIKBK men-wing has made significant contributions to society. They have specifically targeted male heads of families who previously did not prioritise church involvement, often engaging in anti-social behaviours such as alcohol and drug abuse despite being church members. Through home visits and building relationships with these individuals, the Men's Wing has successfully persuaded them to attend church services. Over time, many of them have become active members of the church community and have even overcome their destructive habits, leading to positive transformations for both their families and society as a whole. (Lalngura, church-elder)

Echoing the sentiment above, a respondent from College Veng (locality) remarked:

'Although the LIKBKMP (men-wing) is relatively new and hasn't accomplished much yet, their involvement in social endeavours has strengthened their bonds and cultivated a sense of unity among them and I am highly optimistic that they will emerge as the most dynamic and proactive subgroup within the Church in the future' (Ziri, women-wing)

7.7 Deacons (*Rawngbawltu*)

In accordance with Part 4, Section 13 (a) of the LIKBK Constitution and Bye Laws, the position of '*Rawngbawltu*' (Deacons) is established as a fixed-term role. Deacons are authorised to assist the Pastors and Church elders within the local church

community. As per 2021 Assembly Report, there are as many as 978 Deacons in the overall LIKBK churches. The distinction between deacons and church elders lies primarily in their official ordination and selection process. Church elders are formally ordained, and their appointment involves a voting or selection process by the general church members. Additionally, prospective church elders must undergo a preliminary examination administered by the Assembly, and upon passing, they are ordained as church elders in the Regional Church Council (RCC) Assembly. In contrast to deacons, church elders hold the position of Chairman during church services. Furthermore, in situations where there is a shortage or unavailability of pastors, church elders are authorized to perform all religious rites and ceremonies (*Serh leh sang*) due to their ordained status. (Interview with H. C. Lalnunthara, Church Deacon, 4th. 10.2023, 4;00PM- 5:15 PM, College Veng, Lawngtlai)

The deacons, positioned sixth in the researcher's statistical measuring tool, primarily fulfil an assisting role, as explicitly outlined in the Constitution. Whilst church elders hold a multifaceted role and are authorized to officiate marriage ceremonies and conduct death ceremonies, especially in situations where pastors are unavailable, the deacons cannot perform such rites. Additionally, church elders can be appointed as village pastors. Within the local church structure, all office bearers (OB) should be church elders, including positions such as 'Chairman Elect' (similar to Vice Chairman), secretary, assistant secretary, finance secretary, and treasurer. In addition to being local church office bearers, even in the pastor conglomeration (*pastor Bial*), office bearers (OB) should be elected exclusively from church elders. Similarly, in the Regional Church Council (RCC), only church elders are eligible to be office bearers. There are four RCCs in our church, each comprising several pastors Bial, such as *Bungtlang South RCC*, *Lawngtlai South RCC*, *Lawngtlai North RCC*, and *Khawchhak RCC*. Even in the deacon election process, only the '*Puipa Nghet*' is authorised to elect deacons through a ballot paper, and not the general church members. '*Puipa Nghet*' refers to ordained church members such as Pastors, Church Elders, and retired Pastors in the local Church. (Interview with H. C. Lalnunthara, Church Deacon, 4th. 10.2023, 4;00PM- 5:15 PM, College Veng, Lawngtlai)

However, in places where there is a shortage of church elders, deacons may be appointed as office bearers. The term 'local church office bearer' encompasses these

roles. Furthermore, in the General Assembly, church elders can serve as delegates, but deacons cannot. In various Assembly sub-committees, deacons may be elected as members. However, in the Assembly Executive Committee (AEC) and Pastoral Committee, only church elders are eligible to be members, and not deacons. (Interview with Rinkhuma, Church Deacon, 8th. 10.2023, 3:00PM- 4:15 PM, Chanmari Veng, Lawngtlai)

Concerning the distribution of responsibilities for church elders and deacons, each church is subdivided into several units, with each unit referred to as ‘*Upa Bial*,’ (assigned territory of the Church elder) denoting the territory of the church elders. One church elder is tasked with overseeing approximately 8 to 10 houses. It is the responsibility of the assigned church elders within their designated areas to care for church members during times of sickness, death, collection of tithe and other contributions for the Church or events such as marriages. As such, the Deacons can only play the assisting role. In the designated *Upa Bial* (assigned territory of the Church elder), one or two deacons are appointed to assist the Church Elders. Nevertheless, certain Churches may allocate only one deacon to support the Church Elders in their assigned units, contingent upon the availability of deacons. During home visits or the collection of tithes and other church contributions from each household of the Church members, we accompany the Church elders. Occasionally, internal arrangements may be made between the church elders and deacons to divide the houses for the collection of such contributions. (Interview with Tlanghmingliana, Church Deacon, 6th. 1.2023, 2;00 PM-3:00 PM, L3, Lawngtlai)

One unique role of the Deacons however was observed in College *Veng* (locality), Lawngtlai where one respondent had mentioned such role saying that:

In my view, the most notable contribution of deacons is their involvement in death occasions in our designated area. The assigned deacon is responsible for conducting ceremonial rites, including opening and closing prayers and reading Biblical condolence, during the Young Lai Association night (YLA Night). The YLA Night refers to a program organised by the Young Lai Association to offer support and comfort to the bereaved family through activities such as singing songs and prayers for three consecutive nights in the deceased's house. This particular task is done only by the deacon and not by

the Church Elders. (Interview with H. C. Lalnunthara, Church Deacon, 4th. 10.2023, 4;00PM- 5:15 PM, College Veng, Lawngtlai)

Another unique role was also observed in Chanmary locality where one Church Deacon had alleged that: *'In our Penial Church, even though the Church elders are officially designated to collect all contributions and tithes, it is typically the Deacons who carry out this task of collecting such contributions.'* He went on saying that: *Even in Churches where there is shortage of Church elders, the Deacon may even take up the responsibility of Church elders such as being the 'Secretary' of the Church, 'Adviser' in Fellowship Departments such as LIKBKNP (children-wing), LIKBKHP (Women wing) and LIKBKTP (Youth Wing). Furthermore, in places where there is unavailability of Church elder and Pastor, we may perhaps perform even the death ceremony.* (Interview with J. Lianduna, Church Deacon, 6th. 1.2023, 2;00 PM-3:00 PM, Chanmari, Lawngtlai)

The Deacons actively participate in the collection of the 'Relief Fund' from each household of the Church Members in the Peniel Church, as was mentioned as: *"We encourage every household within our assigned territory to contribute to the 'Relief Fund,' emphasising its significance to the Church members. The collected 'Relief Fund' is utilised to assist the poor and the sick within our Church territory. In tragic incidents such as death, accidents, house fires, etc., we utilise the 'Relief Fund.'* (J. Lianduna, Deacon, Peniel Church). Additionally, the interviewee further mentioned that when other Churches in distant places with few new converts, such as in Missionary Fields, request funds, they provide assistance through this relief fund, which is quoted as: *'Even the Burma refugees receive assistance from our Church through the earnestly collected 'Relief Fund,' primarily managed by the deacons. Penial Church considers it a responsibility to care for the two hundred and eighty (280) or more Burma refugees residing at Mampui road near Rualkhuma Quarry.'* (Interview with J. Lianduna, Church Deacon, 6th. 1.2023, 2;00 PM-3:00 PM, Chanmari, Lawngtlai)

7.8 Overview

Despite the LIKBK's relatively small population compared to Lawngtlai's total population of 117,894, (2011 Census) which amounts to hardly 30,692 (LIKBK General Assembly Record, 2021) in total, the LIKBK community has managed to bring significant transformations and foster socio-economic development within the

society. This insight underscores the proactive role of LIKBK and its various subgroups in maintaining indigeneity, preserving Lai culture and ensuring the continuity of the Lai ethnocentrism. It highlights the powerful notion that population size becomes inconsequential when individuals unite with shared goals for the betterment of society analogous to Durkheim's (1893) concept of 'collective conscience'. When people join forces with common objectives, their collective efforts become unstoppable, regardless of numerical disparities.

A ranking table was presented to the respondents, listing the following sub-groups: Women's Wing, Men's Wing, Youth Wing, Deacons, Pastors, and Church Elders. The respondents were asked to rank these sub-groups in order of their perceived contribution to the socio-economic development of the Lai society, allowing them to identify which sub-group they believe makes the most significant impact.

Women-wing: The Women-wing emerged as the top choice (29%) among respondents, who praised its initiatives and impact. The women-wing is credited with launching profitable and significant projects, earning admiration from other sub-groups. Notable projects include the *Lairam* Motherless Home (LMH), *Lairam* Child Adoption Centre, *Lairam* Christian Medical Centre (LCMC), *Lairam* Rescue Centre (LRC), and *Lairam* Women Development Society (LWDS), which successfully implemented *Lairam* handloom and Poultry Farming, *Lairam* Guest House, and women's empowerment seminars and workshops. These initiatives demonstrate the Women-wing's substantial contribution to socio-economic development. The Women's Wing is a trailblazer in socio-economic development, with a wide range of innovative projects that address critical social and economic needs. Their initiatives, such as the *Lairam* Motherless Home and *Lairam* Women Development Society, showcase their commitment to empowering women and vulnerable populations. The success of these projects highlights the women-wing's leadership and dedication to creating positive change in the Lai community. Their efforts have not only improved the lives of individuals but also contributed to the overall socio-economic development of the region.

Youth-wing: With 24% of the respondents' votes, the *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran Thalai Pawl* (LIKBKTP/Youth Wing) secures the second position, recognising its exceptional contribution to socio-economic development in the Lai

society. The respondents highlighted several notable initiatives, including '*The Amos Operation*', a campaign against social evils like drug addiction, providing shelter, medicine, and gospel to addicts in the region. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) Education Department to conduct drug awareness campaigns starting from primary school, targeting young people. The Youth-wing's efforts to combat drug addiction and promote awareness among young people are commendable. The 'Amos Operation' and the MOU with LADC's Education Department showcase their commitment to addressing critical social issues and investing in the future of the Lai community. The Youth Wing's contributions extend beyond the 'Amos Operation', encompassing a wide range of significant initiatives that benefit the Lai community. These include: Environment protection efforts, preserving the region's natural resources; Promotion of Lai Language and Literature, preserving cultural heritage; Organising Blood Donation drives, ensuring a steady supply for medical needs; Establishing an affordable Girl's Hostel, supporting education and empowerment; Conducting Awareness and Sensitisation Programs on critical issues like- Drug abuse prevention; Tobacco and alcohol misuse awareness; Gender sensitisation and equality promotion. The Youth Wing's overall contribution is truly impressive, demonstrating a holistic approach to socio-economic development. By addressing environmental, cultural, health, educational, and social issues, they are nurturing a well-rounded and sustainable community.

Pastors: With 19% of the respondents' votes, the Pastor Wing ranks third in its contribution to socio-economic development, playing a vital role in the LIKKBK administrative framework. The Pastors are highly commended for their efforts in promoting Lai culture through their sermons, writings, and initiatives. Such appraisals include: Revitalising the Lai language by relearning it and delivering sermons in Lai; Ensuring proficiency in Lai language is a mandatory requirement for probationary Pastors; Setting an example by wearing traditional Lai attire during important religious functions, thereby preserving and promoting Lai culture. The Pastor Wing's contribution is significant, as they play a crucial role in preserving and promoting Lai culture, language, and traditions. By incorporating Lai language into their sermons and making it a requirement for probationary Pastors, they are ensuring the continuation

of their cultural heritage. Their commitment to wearing traditional attire during religious functions sets a positive example for the community, demonstrating the importance of cultural preservation. The Pastor Wing's efforts are essential to the socio-economic development of the Lai community, as they foster a sense of identity, unity, and pride. Pastors play a vital role in social work, providing indispensable support during significant life events like deaths and marriages, extending their involvement beyond spiritual guidance to practical assistance. They lead by example, embodying a clean and healthy lifestyle, abstaining from tobacco and substance abuse, and promoting personal cleanliness. Additionally, the LIKBK Pastors play a significant role in shaping the political landscape of the Lai Autonomous District Council, ensuring that political affairs align with moral teachings.

Church-elder: Church Elders, preferred by 14% of respondents, make distinct contributions to Lai socio-economic development. They engage in 'uncompensated labour', selflessly dedicating their time and energy without expectation of payment, even amidst busy family schedules. Respondents highly appreciate their altruism, highlighting that church elders serve church members without seeking a salary, unlike pastors who receive a monthly stipend. The church elders have been instrumental in driving political reforms within the Lai society, demonstrating their commitment to promoting democratic values. Their active participation in the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) and *Mizoram Kohhran Hruaitu* Committee (MKHC) is particularly notable, as they serve as a watchdog ensuring free and fair elections, preventing vote-selling, and upholding electoral integrity. The church elders' responsibilities are strategically distributed, with each church divided into smaller units called '*Upa Bial*', representing the territorial jurisdiction of the church elders. Each church elder is entrusted with the care of approximately 8-10 households, ensuring personalised attention and support. Within their designated areas, the assigned church elders are responsible for providing emotional and practical support to church members during significant life events, such as illness, death, and celebrations like marriages. Additionally, they oversee the collection of tithes and other contributions for the church and its activities. The church elders' role is truly multifaceted, encompassing spiritual guidance, emotional support, and practical assistance, making them an integral part of the church's fabric.

Men-wing: Ranking fifth with 9 % of respondents' votes, the men-wing, despite being a recently established group, has already made notable contributions. The Men-wing, despite its recent inception, has already made a significant impact, taking on critical and labour-intensive tasks that benefit the church and community. Within our church unit, they pioneer initiatives like building homes for underprivileged families, significantly easing the Church's workload. Moreover, they take the lead in social projects, such as constructing and renovating homes for vulnerable families, including widows. As primary family breadwinners, the men's wing plays a vital role in promoting the Lai language, teaching conversational Lai to non-speakers and encouraging families to incorporate Lai bedtime prayers, even if fluency is still developing. The newly formed LIKBK men-wing has made a profound impact on society by targeting male heads of families who were previously disengaged from church activities and struggled with antisocial behaviours such as substance abuse. Through personalised home visits and relationship-building efforts, the men-wing has successfully encouraged these individuals to attend church services, leading to a remarkable transformation. Many have become active church members, overcoming their destructive habits and positively influencing their families and the broader community. Their contributions are worth acknowledging, and their potential for future growth and importance is substantial. As they continue to evolve and establish themselves, it will be interesting to see how their role and influence expand within the church and community.

Deacon: The deacons, sixth (5%) in the researcher's statistical analysis, play a vital assisting role to the Church-elder and Pastor, as defined in the Church's Constitution. Like the church-elders, the deacons selflessly dedicate their time and energy to their assigned responsibilities without receiving any remuneration from the church, demonstrating their unwavering commitment to serving the community. By assisting the Church-elders and Pastors, they ensure the smooth functioning of the church's operations. In circumstances where church elders are scarce, deacons may be appointed to fill the role of office bearers, collectively referred to as 'local church office bearers'. However, distinct differences in responsibilities and privileges exist between the two roles. While church elders can serve as delegates in the General Assembly, deacons are not eligible for this position. Deacons may be elected as members of

various Assembly sub-committees, but are excluded from membership in the Assembly Executive Committee (AEC) and Pastoral Committee, which are reserved for church elders.

Comparative Perspective

Based on the measurement tools employed, it is evident that the women-wing makes the most significant contribution to the socio-economic development of Lai society. However, upon further examination of the women-wing and comparison with previous studies, it becomes apparent that despite their substantial contributions to the church's treasury and socio-economic development, women are still underrepresented in top leadership positions within the Assembly. Additionally, the responses reveal that some individuals perceive the Pastors' contributions to socio-economic development as minimal, with a few noting that they have limited insights to share on the matter in certain villages due to their full-time commitment to serving the Church. This observation highlights that the extent of Pastors' contributions to socio-economic development may be dependent on their individual motivations and personalities, leading to a range of involvement levels. It is also observed that the respondents hold the church-elders' roles in high esteem, noting that unlike the Pastors, they do not receive a salary from the Church yet selflessly serve the community in times of need, such as illness, family problems, and other challenges. The church-elders ensure the well-being and happiness of all church members within their designated area, demonstrating remarkable dedication and commitment. Additionally, the research notes that in certain churches, Deacons are taking on more prominent roles than Church-Elders, with some respondents expressing a stronger affinity for Deacons than Church-Elders. This suggests that the impact of sub-groups can vary greatly depending on individual motivations and humanitarian endeavours, which can diverge significantly even among members of the same group, such as Pastors, Church-Elders, Deacons, and others. This variability in commitment and dedication can lead to differing levels of contribution and influence within the same role or position.

It is also crucial to recognise that every subgroup is making valuable contributions within their own capacities, and these efforts are deeply appreciated by all respondents involved in the study. The ranking system serves as a tool for analysis and does not

diminish the significance of any group's contributions. For instance, despite the men-wing currently ranking low in terms of contribution, it possesses considerable potential for driving socio-economic development. As a newly formed group not yet formally acknowledged in the LIKBK Constitution, the men-wing is well-positioned for future growth and is viewed by most respondents as having the greatest potential to make meaningful contributions to socio-economic development in the years to come. Despite ranking lowest at sixth position, the deacons' contributions to the socio-economic development of Lai society are noteworthy. Especially in times of crisis, such as bereavement, accidents, emergencies, and sickness, the deacons assume a crucial auxiliary role, providing indispensable support to the Pastors and church elders, thereby underscoring their importance in the community's well-being. Furthermore, when it comes to humanitarian efforts specifically related to combating drug addiction, the youth-wing's overall contribution surpasses that of the women-wing, despite the women-wing ranking higher in the overall assessment tool. This suggests that the youth-wing is particularly active and effective in addressing drug addiction issues, demonstrating a strong commitment to this critical social cause. Each group's efforts are recognised and celebrated within the broader context of societal development and cultural preservation.

Building on Kariuki's (2018) assertion that Christian churches play a vital role in combating poverty through development initiatives, and Lumintang and Daliman's (2023) exploration of the interconnectedness of reformed theology and church reformation, this study highlights the significant contributions of LIKBK's sub-groups to socio-economic development. The findings demonstrate that LIKBK, like other churches, has evolved to collaborate with various organisations and implement community development programs, thereby improving the well-being of surrounding communities. This research underscores the importance of LIKBK as an agency of socio-economic development. Building on the significant contributions of each sub-group, the subsequent chapter will delve into the broader implications of the in-depth micro-studies conducted thus far, exploring how these findings can be scaled up to inform more comprehensive initiatives and interventions.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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8.2 Chapters Summary

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CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

This final chapter synthesises the key takeaways from the study, revisiting the research questions and objectives that guided our inquiry into the LIKBK movement. The study begins by providing a chapter-wise summary of the findings. It then delves into the macro implications of the micro studies undertaken, exploring the political, social, cultural, and economic outcomes that the LIKBK has prompted within the Lai society. Additionally, the study offers suggestions for future research, derived from the findings and analysis presented in this chapter. In essence, this concluding chapter provides a comprehensive summary of the study's main findings, distilling the essence of our research and its contributions to the field. By revisiting the study's goals and objectives, the study demonstrates how the inquiry has enhanced towards understanding of the LIKBK movement and its significance within the broader context of ethno-religious reform and development. It offers a nuanced perspective on the role of religion in shaping identity and challenging dominant ideologies. The findings have significant implications for the understanding of the intersections between religion, power, and identity in post-colonial contexts. This study basically is the study about the Lai people situated at the southern part of Mizoram, their unique culture, and the subsequent changes that the culture underwent due to foreign factors like the British rule and Christianity. The cultural assimilation that they were badly experiencing in the hands of the more advanced tribes, and their counter reaction towards such changes. This research underscores the significance of the *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Church* (LIKBK) as a dynamic identity movement that transcends its traditional role in disseminating Christian doctrines.

8.2 Chapters Summary

Chapter I deals with the introduction of the study where the study area, that is, Lawngtlai, the Lai people and the LIKBK are introduced, and consequently, the background for the study of the LIKBK are discussed. This chapter describes the religious profile of the Lai people in Lawngtlai, Mizoram, highlighting the dominant

presence of the *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran* (LIKBK), an ethnic-based church established on November 27, 1999. The LIKBK has 30,692 members and actively promotes Lai identity, culture, and language. The church's formation was a result of two decades of efforts, beginning with the establishment of *Isua Krista Kohhran* (IKK) in 1970 and *Pawiram Baptist Kohhran* (PBK) in 1982, followed by peaceful negotiations and unification. This journey, referred to as the 'first Exodus' and 'second Exodus', underscores the significant efforts to unify the Lai people's religious institutions and marks a milestone in their religious and cultural identity. The LIKBK, an ethnic-based church for the Lai people, prioritises preserving Lai culture, promoting Lai identity, and protecting the Lai community from assimilation and exploitation. The church conducts services in the Lai language and teaches Christian doctrine alongside Lai-centric values. Christianity arrived in the Lai areas relatively late, between 1909 and 1912, fifteen years after the initial introduction of Christian missionaries in Mizoram. This delayed introduction had a unique impact on the Lai people's cultural, socio-economic, and religious development, shaping their distinct identity and informing the LIKBK's mission. Upon these background studies, the research thus attempts to answer questions like:

1. Is Christianity responsible for the drastic change experienced by the Lai culture?
2. What are the basic reasons that led to the formation of LIKBK?
3. Is LIKBK an ethno-religious movement?
4. Is the LIKBK successful in its mission to reform the Lai culture?
5. What are the positive outcomes of LIKBK in terms socio-economic and political reforms?

Chapter II delves with thorough review of literature, so as to guide the study, and to ponder upon the research gap. It delves into the review of literature both the recent and the oldest literature, related to the research topic, made available both from online and the print versions. Care has been taken to see that the global, the Indian context, the north-east context, and Mizoram context of existing literatures are under review in a systematic way. The review of literature section is broadly divided into three parts-

1.The theoretical perspectives

2.The thematic perspectives

3.The methodological reviews

Under theoretical review, theories of religion are reviewed under four perspectives; the Functional, Conflict, Neo-Marxist and Critical Theories. Since the study focuses on the LIKBK as an ethno-religious movement, various theories on social movement have been reviewed accordingly, which have been categorised into three groups: (a) The traditional theory of social movement before 1960's (b) those contemporary theories after 1960's and (c) Indian thinkers on social movement.

The literature review is categorised into six themes: religion and culture, ethnicity and ethnic movement, economy, politics, reform movement, and gender studies. The review reveals that sociological analyses on ethnicity and reform movements are scarce, particularly in Mizoram and India's north east. It is noted there is a lack of sociological studies on the church itself in Mizoram's academic literature. While there are studies on ethno-religious movements in neighboring regions, such as Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Manipur, pure religious reform movements are underrepresented in the literature, despite numerous studies on ethnic-related movements in Mizoram and north east India.

The analysis of social movement theories reveals differences in focus and articulation, but these differences can be complementary, contributing to a comprehensive framework. The study seeks to identify the best theory to explain the LIKBK movement and potentially synthesise a new framework. A fresh perspective is needed to understand the relationship between religion, ethnicity, and social movement, considering reformative elements. While some scholars argue for categorising religious movements separately, others note that movements can overlap, exhibiting combined characteristics of ethnic, religious, and reformative elements. For instance, the *Zeliangrong* movement can be seen as both ethnic and reform movement. Therefore, social movements cannot be solely categorised as ethnic, religious, or reform movements, but may reflect a combination of these elements.

The methodological reviews reveal that ethno-religious studies have commonly employed: 1. Ethnographic methods 2. Comparative methods 3. Historical methods 4. Qualitative and quantitative survey methods (using questionnaires, case studies, Key Informant Interviews (KII), and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) 5. Participant observation 6. Theological approaches. These methods have been used to study religious institutions, ethno-religious movements, and related issues, providing a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships between religion, ethnicity, and culture.

Upon undergoing a thorough review of literature, the following research gaps have been detected:

1. Most literature comes from developed countries and mainland India, with few studies in the North-east or Mizo context.
2. Amongst the few literatures available in the Mizo context, studies have been done mostly from other disciplines and not from sociological perspective.
3. The study area, *Lawngtlai* have been largely unexplored in academic literature, representing a significant research gap.
4. The social transformation impact of LIKBK as a non-assimilatory ethno-religious movement in Lawngtlai's Lai population remains unexplored.
5. The past studies conducted on religion in Mizoram are ecclesiastical in their approach. The missing sociological perspective needs to be carved out.
6. Studying LIKBK as an ethno-religious movement from a sociological perspective is crucial and challenging, as previous studies have focused primarily on theological aspects.

Chapter III deals with the methodology section. The study has five objectives namely:

1. To study the Lai culture before and after the advent of Christianity.
2. To study the role of the LIKBK as an ethno-religious movement.
3. To study the socio-economic and political transformations brought about by the LIKBK in the Lai society.
4. To examine the role of sub-members of LIKBK in bringing about social transformation in Lai Society.

5. To examine the macro implications of this micro study.

Research design: The proposed study represents an exploratory cum descriptive research design. It employs ‘ethnographic-cum-historical’ approach for the collection, measurement and analysis of data since the proposed study attempts to study and reconstruct the past culture in order to relate it to the present social reality. Additionally, the researcher has been living with the Lai community for more than fifteen years or so in the study area, for which the researcher had the advantage of gathering a first-hand information through the natural settings for a prolonged period of time and thus, the research is naturally ethnographic in its approach.

Universe and Sample: In order to obtain an insight of the interplay between religion and society in Lawngtlai, the universe of the proposed study is the LIKBK population which has amounted to 30692 (as of 2021 General Assembly Records). Out of the total population, 379 samples are selected by using Formula of Determining Sample size available at CUEMATH (<https://www.cuemath.com/sample-size-formula/>).

Participants are further categorised by residence (rural, urban, periphery), gender, and education level to analyse variations in opinions. The interview schedule consists of 109 questions, including open-ended and close-ended questions, with a mix of nominal, ordinal, Likert scales, and dichotomous questions. This design enables both quantitative and qualitative data analysis to meet the study's objectives.

Formulation of Interview Schedule: The next step that was taken after sampling was the formulation of interview schedule. Choosing an interview schedule over a questionnaire was preferred because it offers significant flexibility to the interviewer. Furthermore, using an interview schedule is advantageous, especially when addressing sensitive topics like ethnicity. It allows for questions to be asked, and if needed, the interviewee can qualify or modify their answers. The total interview scheduled encompasses of hundred and nine (109) questions including both open- ended and close- ended questions. The closed-ended questions comprised of nominal, ordinal, two points Likert’s scale and five-point Likert’s scale including dichotomous questions. The questions were designed in order to enable the researcher to analyse the data both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Sources and Classification of Data: Primary data was collected mainly through the method of interview schedule, secondly, telephonic interview, personal observation, oral histories, taking notes, audio recordings and observations. Case studies of selected relevant individuals were undertaken among the selected office staffs of LIKBK and LIKBK women theologians. For KII schedule, five members each from the Village Council Members and MDC (Member of District Council) of LADC (Lai Autonomous District Council) were interviewed and proved to be very informative as well.

The secondary sources of obtaining data for this research were of colonial accounts, missionary reports, published and unpublished thesis and articles, newspapers, relevant internet and social media sites, televisions, pamphlets, magazines, census records, diaries, meeting minutes of the church, LIKBK's Annual General assembly Reports, Books and Souvenirs, Government records, Statistical Handbook published by Government of Mizoram, Government Archives and Gazette notifications had also proved to be very handy. In general, the researcher relied predominantly on primary, first-hand data, as studies related to LIKBK have been scarce and hardly been available.

Analysis of Data: A mixed-method approach is employed, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. A qualitative analysis was conducted in two stages. Firstly, a content analysis of secondary data sources, including documents and newspaper articles, was carried out using a systematic and objective approach to identify patterns, frequencies, and relationships. This involved categorising, coding, and quantifying specific words, themes, and concepts within the texts. Secondly, a narrative analysis tool was employed to examine the structure, content, and meaning of narratives from case studies and interviews. This involved analysing how individuals construct identities, communicate perspectives, and make sense of their experiences through the plot, settings, characters, and themes in their stories, as well as how they convey sentiments and depict lived experiences. For quantitative analysis, following established frameworks (Busenitz et al., 2000; Fogel, 2001; Manolova et al., 2008; Pou & Mishra, 2013), the research used Likert scales including open-ended and close-ended questions, with a mixture of nominal, ordinal, Likert scales, and dichotomous

questions to collect data. Additionally, percentages and frequency analyses were used to examine the data to assess how well the data aligns with the research objectives.

Whereas Chapter IV is dedicated to the study of the pre-Christian Lai culture the subsequent cultural changes brought about by Christianity are under review. Chapter V focusses on the validation of LIKBK as an ethno-religious reform movement, while Chapter VI is dedicated to the study of the social-economic and political impacts that had been initiated by the LIKBK in the Lai society. Chapter VII delves into the contribution of each sub-groups towards socio-economic development, and finally Chapter VIII summarises and concludes the overall findings as detailed below.

8.3 The Lai Culture During the Pre and Post Advent of Christianity

Chapter IV is dedicated for the study of the typical Lai culture and the changes that have been brought in various aspects of culture like norms, values, social ties, marriage and divorce, customary laws, status of women, funeral practices, nature of family and communal bonds, issues of cultural assimilation pertaining to Lai traditional dress, dance and Lai language. The primary question here is on what factors determines the changes in Lai culture and what are the most hard-hit parts of the Lai culture. The main findings of this chapter may be summed up as follows:

8.3.1. Lai Social Norms and Values: Drawing from Ingen et. al., (2015) who made an observation of the Dutch society and asserted that social norms and values has been declining with the advent of Christianity wherein both positive and negative changes had been witnessed, the advent of Christianity has led to a significant decline or dilution in the traditional social norms and values of the Lai community. Christian norms and practices have replaced or modified the traditional ones, resulting in a loss of cultural identity and heritage.

8.3.2. Lai Marriage System: The finding echoes with Angom's (2019) viewpoint that the Mizo marriage system has been Christianised with the introduction of Mizo Christian Marriage System. However, the Lai people still follow the practice of giving bride-price. Besides, a mixed form of marriage has emerged, which combines elements of both Christian and Lai traditional marriage practices. This has resulted in a compromise of traditional cultural practices and customs.

8.3.3. Divorce Practices: In line with Lloyd's (1991:158) and Ralte's (2023) arguments that highlighted a positive change brought about by Christianity in the divorce settlement, the study similarly reveals that divorce practices have also been impacted by Christianity. Divorce practices have also been impacted by Christianity. While rural areas still adhere to the traditional Lai Customary Divorce Law, urban areas have adopted more modern and Westernised practices. This has resulted in a dichotomy between rural and urban areas.

8.3.4. Status of Lai Women: Following Angom's (2020) assumption that Christianity had lessened the gap between the status of men and women, Christianity has, undoubtedly altered the status of Lai women, particularly in the realm of education. Women are now more empowered and have greater access to opportunities. However, they still face inequality and limited inheritance rights, indicating that there is still work to be done.

8.3.5. Funeral Practices: The finding echoes with the argument of (Poyil, n.d; Vitebsky, 2016) that Christianity has significantly impacted Lai funeral practices, reducing economic disparities and promoting a more egalitarian approach. This has resulted in a more inclusive and compassionate approach to funeral rites.

8.3.6. Family Bonds and Social Ties: Contrary to the findings of (Smith, 2005; Browning, 2007) who argued that Christianity had weakened the traditional support systems and sense of community, leading to a breakdown in social ties and a redefinition of family bonds, the findings indicate that the influence of Christianity has weakened traditional social ties only. While the Lai family bond remains intact, the sense of community and social cohesion has been eroded. However, it is noteworthy that the Lai people still fosters a relatively closer family bond as family and clan are still the crucial votebanks in matters of political elections.

8.3.7. Cultural Heritage and Assimilation: Christianity has led to assimilation issues, resulting in the near extinction of Lai language, dress, and dances. Drawing from Nagarwal and Kumar (2022) who studied the impact of westernisation on the Indian dress code, and also referring to Angom's (2020) statement that Christianity is the main offender for the gradual disappearance of the traditional dress of the least

advanced cultures, the Lai traditional dress has been impacted by Christianity along with western dress.

Following arguments of (Ekka, 2013; Patel, 2017; Behera, 2019) positing that Christianity not only affected the artistic expression of tribal communities but also eroded their cultural identities and spiritual practices, and in line with Lalhminghlui and Robin (2020:112), who argued that Christianity's declaration of alcohol as a sin was the main reason for doing away with the Mizo traditional dances, the study likewise asserts that Christianity's declaration of alcohol as a sin has been responsible for the loss of Lai traditional dance, as most of the traditional dances were highly associated with alcohol.

Drawing from Moran's (2020) argument who critically examined the missionary work carried out upon the 'Dakota American Natives' wherein he argued that English culture was forcefully introduced upon the Dakota natives which had ultimately led to the complete assimilation of the native culture, the study of the issues of assimilation of the Lai language may be basically attributed to the *Lusei* missionary who introduced gospel to the Lai people through Mizo medium and not Lai language. The root cause however, being the white-missionary's discriminative policy that failed to assign any missionary to the Lai people.

The Lai community is at risk of losing its cultural heritage and identity. However, the respondents are all thankful that the LIKBK has actively taken up the initiative to popularise the Lai culture.

8.3.8. Discriminatory Practices: In similar vein with the Post- Colonial Theorists (Guha, 1983; Chatterjee, 1986; Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994; Chakrabarty, 2000), who argued that Christian missionaries' half-hearted attention in tribal communities manifested as a superficial interest in converting tribals to Christianity, while neglecting to genuinely understand and respect their cultures, traditions, and beliefs, the missionaries' half-hearted attention to the Lai community's needs and concerns has contributed significantly to the assimilation problems faced by the community. This lack of attention has resulted in a lack of understanding and respect for Lai cultural practices and traditions.

The chapter concludes that in order to counter the cultural erosion and social transformations instigated by Christian missionaries, the Lai community established the LIKBK (Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran) as a means to revitalise their cultural heritage. Through the lens of Gramsci's (1971) hegemony theory, this research argues that the pervasive Christian influence, which aimed to replace Lai culture with Christian norms, is a root cause of the Lai community's struggles with cultural assimilation

8.4 Contextualising an ethno-religious reform movement

Chapter V is dedicated to the study of the LIKBLK movement, the causes, the stages and the ideology and role of leadership that had effectively made the LIKBK movement successful. Upon asking the question, 'Is LIKBK movement an ethno-religious reform movement?' The study validates that the LIKBK is a true reform movement that has successfully undergone all the essential pre-conditions for a successful social movement, like the causes, the stages, presence of clear ideology and role of able leaders. The main arguments and key findings of the Chapter are put forth as follows:

8.4.1 Causes of the LIKBK Movement: Countless factors had played to the cultural erosion of the Lai people, such as Christianity, the British colonial rule, the BCM hegemonic rule etc. which had ultimately led to the Lai ethnic consciousness, which are put forward as follows:

Christian hegemony: The Lai community has experienced cultural erosion due to Christianity, leading to the decline of traditional customs, ceremonies, and festivals like '*Tho*' and '*Hlukhla*', and dances like '*Ruakkhatlak*' and '*Sarlamkai*'. The introduction of Christianity replaced these traditions with Church activities, causing a loss of cultural significance. Delayed educational development and literacy further contributed to cultural erosion, allowing neighboring tribes to overshadow and assimilate Lai culture. Christianity has also impacted Lai marriage and divorce practices, supplanting traditional laws with Church ceremonies and governance, leading to the erosion of indigenous social control mechanisms. Christian hegemony, as described by Gramsci (1970), has led to cultural erosion in the Lai community. By

imposing its values and norms, Christianity has marginalised traditional practices, replacing them with Church activities. This has reshaped cultural identity, making traditional customs and festivals irrelevant. The Lai community's internalisation of Christian values has contributed to the decline of their cultural heritage, demonstrating how hegemony operates through consent.

British hegemony: The British colonial administration's policies subjugated the Lai chiefs, eroding their autonomy and imposing foreign rule. This sparked resistance among the Lai people, fueling ethnic consciousness and the formation of LIKBK, a movement seeking to reclaim territorial rights and cultural identity. The arbitrary division and consolidation of territories fragmented the Lai people, leading to cultural erosion and adoption of various names across different regions. This colonial legacy has contributed to the dilution of Lai cultural heritage and perpetuated divisions among the Lai people, ultimately leading to the emergence of ethnic consciousness and the birth of the LIKBK movement. British colonialism exemplifies Gramsci's hegemony, where a dominant group exercises power over the Lai people through coercion and consent, eroding autonomy and sparking resistance. This fragmented the Lai people, disrupting unity and cultural identity. The colonial legacy perpetuates divisions, fueling ethnic consciousness and the LIKBK movement, which seeks to reclaim rights, identity, and unite fragmented tribes.

BCM hegemony: The Baptist Church of Mizoram's (BCM) neglect and hegemonic control over the minority Lai people, exemplifying Gramsci's concept of hegemony, led to feelings of marginalisation and ultimately prompted the establishment of the LIKBK church as a counter-hegemonic movement to reclaim autonomy and cultural identity. The BCM's restructuring of administrative areas, indifference to Lai concerns for hospitals, bookrooms, and denial of reasonable demands solidified its hegemonic grip, forcing Lai elders and community members to create their own church as a means of resistance and self-empowerment.

Fear of assimilation: The introduction of Christianity in Mizoram has threatened Lai identity, culture, and language, as the lack of a separate script and dominance of Mizo language and culture have led to a decline in Lai language usage and a fear of

assimilation. This has driven the emergence of the LIKBK, an ethnicity-centered church, as a response to the perceived threat of cultural erasure and loss of distinctiveness. The LIKBK movement's emergence can be understood through social movement theories, which highlight the significance of 'fear of assimilation' as a key factor in collective action and mobilisation. Theories by Blumer (1995), Turner and Killian (1957), and Oberschall (1973) emphasise the role of fear of assimilation in triggering social movements, resonating with the LIKBK movement's goal of reclaiming territorial rights and cultural identity.

Political factor: The creation of the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) in 1972, granting autonomous powers, has been crucial to the LIKBK movement's emergence. The LADC has enabled the Lai people to maintain independence, preserve autonomy, and assert ethnic distinctiveness, fueling demands for special treatment and provisions, including the establishment of the LIKBK church, which complements the LADC in preserving Lai identity and autonomy. The emergence of the LIKBK movement aligns with the theoretical perspectives of (Tilly, 1978; Tarrow, 1994; and Gamson, 1975), who collectively emphasise the significance of political factors as a crucial catalyst for the birth of social movements.

The Revival Factor: The Lai people's spiritual revival in the 1960s sparked a passion for missionary work, but the Baptist Church of Mizoram's (BCM) unsupportive stance and rejection of their appeals led to the establishment of their own ethnic-based church, LIKBK. Despite BCM's disapproval, the Lai people formed their own missionary boards and sent missionaries to neighboring communities, ultimately separating from BCM to pursue their spiritual and missionary goals without hindrance, giving birth to LIKBK. The emergence of the LIKBK movement resonates with the theoretical perspectives of Stark (1984), Beckford (1989), and Williams (1996), who collectively highlight the significance of religious issues as a catalyst for social movement emergence, across both modern and pre-modern societies.

Identity issues and sense of deprivation and exclusion: The Lai people's experiences of humiliation, ridicule, and exclusion by the *Lusei/Mizo* tribes and Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) led to feelings of deprivation, inferiority, and marginalisation,

fueling their desire for autonomy and self-governance. The Sixth Schedule's provision for political autonomy inspired them to seek religious autonomy, and the constant ridicule they faced led to the establishment of LIKBK, a platform for the Lai people to practice their faith and assert their unique identity without fear of exclusion or ridicule. The LIKBK movement's emergence mirrors the dynamics observed by Reetz (1993) in pre-independence colonial India, where regionalisation of politics along ethnic and religious lines drove nationalist movements. Similarly, the Lai people's sense of deprivation and quest for identity preservation fueled the LIKBK movement's mobilisation, highlighting the crucial role of ethnic and religious identity issues in shaping social movement emergence.

8.4.2 An Element of Ethno-religious Reform Movement: The study of LIKBK is validated as an ethno-religious reform movement through the following arguments:

Regionalism: The LIKBK movement aligns with Shils' Primordial Approach (1957) and Barth's (1969) concept of "strong primordial attachment", which emphasises the deep-seated connection individuals have with their land, religion, and kinship ties. This attachment is a foundational aspect of ethnicity and ethnic movements, and is evident in the LIKBK movement's regionalism and ethno-nationalism, which have driven its trajectory since inception.

Ethno-nationalism: The LIKBK movement exemplifies ethno-nationalism, as described by Pannikar (2011), where an ethnic group seeks control over its political, economic, and social matters, often aspiring for statehood. The Lai community's strong ethnic sentiments and pride in their identity have evolved into the LIKBK movement, reflecting a desire for autonomy and self-governance, characteristic of ethno-nationalism.

The Centrality of Lai Sentiments: The Lai community's strong ethnic pride and consciousness led to the birth of LIKBK, with 72% of respondents identifying Lai ethnic sentiment as the key factor. The research found a positive correlation between preserving Lai culture and the emergence of LIKBK, across gender, locality, and income. This supports the arguments of Udeagha and Nwamah (2020) and Mate

(2018) that ethnic sentiment is a decisive factor in the formation of ethnic movements and religions, influencing various aspects of society, including politics and economy.

Reformed Response Against the British Hegemony: The LIKBK movement is a response to colonialism's cultural assimilation and oppression, which threatened the Lai people's identity, language, and traditions. This resistance movement seeks to reclaim and preserve their cultural heritage, echoing Reetz's (1993) notion of an 'anti-colonial struggle' that characterised Indian nationalist movements. The LIKBK movement's emergence is a manifestation of the Lai people's desire to assert their rights and cultural identity against external control, which began with British occupation in 1891.

Reformed Response Against the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) Hegemony: The study found that 85% of participants (348 persons) believe that the LIKBK movement emerged as a response to the discriminatory treatment by the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM). The results also show a positive correlation between this belief and the locality and income of the respondents. This supports the arguments of Gramsci (1970) and Torres and Young (1992) that social movements arise in response to the hegemonic culture of the ruling class. The study concludes that the BCM's hegemony is the root cause of the LIKBK movement, which evolved into an ethno-religious movement as a response to the discriminatory treatment.

Reformed Response Towards Preservation of Lai Culture: The study found that 93% of respondents (328 persons) believe that an ethnic-based church is essential for preserving their exclusive Lai culture. The Lai people seek to create an indigenous church to safeguard and revitalise their cultural heritage, which has been eroded by British colonialism, Christianity, Westernisation, and modernisation. This aligns with Siddiqi's (2014) and Singh's (2014) views that reform movements serve as a shield against non-indigenous influences. The study concludes that the desire to protect and reform Lai culture from further assimilation, initially triggered by colonialism and Christian hegemony, drove the emergence of the LIKBK movement.

8.4.3 Stages of the Movement: Employing Blumer's (1995) stages of successive social movement stages, the LIKBK movement may likewise be classified as follows:

The Preliminary stage (1889-1970): The LIKBK Movement's preliminary stage (1889-1970) was characterised by growing discontent and feelings of deprivation among the Lai people, fueled by factors like colonial rule, Christian influence, BCM hegemony, fear of assimilation, political marginalisation, and religious concerns. This stage aligns with Blumer's (1951) 'unrest stage' and Smelser's (1962) framework, where collective discontent laid the groundwork for a social movement. The simmering unrest ultimately coalesced into a unified movement, setting the stage for collective action and social change.

The popular stage (1970-1982): The popular stage (1970-1982) of the LIKBK movement saw the Lai people seeking autonomy and self-governance, leading to the emergence of sectarian churches declaring independence from the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) and *Lakher Pioneer Mission*. Various churches were formed, including *Isua Krista Kohhran* (IKK), *Lairam Baptist Kohhran* (LBK), and *Pawiram Baptist Kohhran* (PBK), driven by desires for linguistic and cultural preservation, and tribal survival and advancement. This stage aligns with Blumer's (1951) 'popular stage,' where people feel a sense of independence and detachment from the current condition, leading to declarations of independence from the parent church.

Emergence of Ideology and Leadership: The LIKBK movement exemplifies Blumer's (1951) concept of the popular stage, where a collective idea takes shape among the people, facilitated by the emergence of charismatic and influential leadership. The movement's popular stage was characterised by the rise of prominent leaders, including *Mr. T. Hranghluta*, *C. Ngunhaia*, *B. Siamhranga*, *C.T. Luaia*, *C. Hniartura*, *A. Lalchhuana*, and *L. Chinzah*. The LIKBK movement's trajectory aligns with Blumer's framework, illustrating how charismatic leaders can crystallise popular ideologies and drive social movement momentum.

The Formalisation Stage (The formation of IKKL, 1999): After years of discussions, the two Lai ethnic churches, IKK and PBK, merged into a single entity, '*Isua Krista Kohhran Lairam*' (IKKL), on November 27, 1999. This merger marked the formalisation stage of the LIKBK movement, characterised by a clear alternative vision and a defined Constitution, enabling organised and structured operations. This

aligns with Blumer's (1995) description of a social movement's formalisation stage, where a clear ideology and framework emerge to address existing issues, solidifying the movement's approach to achieving its objectives.

The Stage of Institutionalisation of the Movement (The Birth Of LIKBK, 2004):

As described by Smelser (1965), the final stage of a social movement is characterised by formalisation, where collective behavior gives way to organised structures, accepted norms, and a bureaucratic setup. The LIKBK movement has similarly transitioned into this phase, marked by increased formalisation and a clear crystallisation of its ideology, aims, and objectives. The LIKBK movement thus, matches with Smelser's (1965) description of the final stage of social movement which is marked by high level of formalisation of the movement that takes the shape of institution.

Based on an examination of the reasons and catalysts, the stages, and the nature of LIKBK movement, which highlight its primary mission of preserving Lai culture, thus defining it as a sincere ethno-religious reform movement. Drawing from Gramsci (1970), the LIKBK movement may be visualised as a counter-hegemonic struggle against the hegemonies of the British colonisers, Christianity and particularly, the BCM hegemonies, whereby the Lai people counter reacted through the LIKBK movement, thereby trying to supplant their own Lai hegemony through the LIKBK.

8.5 The Emerging Socio-economic and Political Transformations

Chapter VI is dedicated to answer the research question: 'What are the positive outcomes of LIKBK in terms socio-economic and political reforms? The study concludes that the LIKBK does not only bring cultural reforms, but also significant socio-economic, and political reforms have also been generated by the LIKBK movement. The main findings may be summed up in two heads; the socio-economic transformation, and the political transformation:

8.5.1. Socio-economic transformation

The LIKBK has brought about numerous socio-economic transformations, which can be summarised as follows:

LIKBK and Upliftment of Health and Wellness: The LIKBK, with hardly 30,692 members in south Mizoram, has the potential to significantly impact socio-economic development, particularly in health and wellness, through initiatives like establishing a needed hospital, conducting free clinics in remote villages, and offering discounts to the poor and needy, aligning with Walumsibi's (2022) vision of the Church as a 'field hospital' providing inclusive healing and restoration, and although the hospital's location limits accessibility, the church ensures regular free clinics and discounts for those in need, positioning the LIKBK as a caring force in its community.

Monthly Contribution for the Socio-Economic Upliftment (*tithing*): The practice of *tithing* has significantly contributed to the socio-economic development of the Lai society, with the majority of respondents acknowledging its importance despite some questioning its usefulness. *Tithing* has enabled the LIKBK to initiate development projects, accumulate wealth locally, and retain funds for community use. Similar to Ajah's (2013) findings, LIKBK members believe tithing is obligatory, associating it with financial prosperity and fearing that failing to tithe will lead to God withdrawing blessings, reflecting a 'get rich quick' mentality.

Role of *Lairam* Social Mission Committee of LIKBK: The study highlights the establishment of the *Lairam* Social Committee by LIKBK as a significant milestone in playing a crucial role in driving socio-economic development among the Lai people. The committee has pioneered innovative initiatives in Lawngtlai district, including the setup of a Motherless Home, Child Adoption Centre, *Lairam* Multipurpose Training Centre, Charity Shop, Comprehensive Livelihood Project, and The *Lairam* Rescue Centre to combat drug addiction. These initiatives demonstrate the committee's commitment to addressing social and economic challenges in the region. Citing Wry, T., & York, J. G. (2017), who postulate that the Church is a potential source of social enterprise activities, the study of LIKBK depicts the same trend.

Communication Committee for Upliftment of the Lai Literature: The Communication Committee, established by LIKBK, has made substantial contributions to the socio-economic development of the Lai society. In addition to launching key initiatives like the *Lairam* Offset Press, *Lairam* Bookroom, and

Stationery, the committee's Literature and Publication Board has played a vital role in revitalising Lai literature and language. Through its efforts, the committee has helped reform the previously neglected Lai language, promoting it through various programs and instilling a sense of pride among the Lai people to speak and write in their native tongue. Drawing from Vanlalzauva (2022), who envisages the church as a crucial centre for learning, the study of LIKBK aptly qualifies this statement.

Role of Christian Education Committee (CEC): The Christian Education Committee, established by LIKBK, has made significant contributions to the community, with the establishment of Mission schools being a notable achievement. The launch of *Lairam* Higher Academy of Science (LAHAS) stands out as a particularly important initiative. Furthermore, LIKBK has set up a higher secondary school in the remote *Nghalimlui* village, primarily serving the impoverished *Chakma* tribe, demonstrating their commitment to uplifting the socio-economic conditions of underprivileged communities despite limited resources. Following Magdeleine (2015) who validates the Church as a valuable learning centre, the LIKBK proves to be a crucial promoter of modern education along the lines with bible teachings.

Rice Contribution for Socio-Economic Development: Mirroring the findings of Vanlathanpuii (2019) and Ganesh (2015) who identified 'handful of rice' as the main earner of church treasury, the '*buhfaitham*' initiative, where LIKBK Women-wing members contribute a 'handful of rice', has been a significant financial source for the Mission Department, substantially supporting LIKBK's mission works within and outside the region. This practice, inspired by Christian missionaries, has been effectively adopted throughout the state, accumulating wealth that funds mission activities across four key fields: Foreign Mission, Inland Mission, Home Mission, and Partnership Mission.

The LIKBK as A Guardian for The Poor: Aligning with Soundararajan's (2020) concept of the 'sub-altern church' and Durkheim's (2012) idea of the euphoric function of the Church, the LIKBK plays a vital role as a guardian for the poor, particularly supporting disadvantaged tribes like *the Bawm*, *Chakmas*, and *Brus* through outreach programs, charitable initiatives, and community services, providing essential

assistance such as food, clothing, and medical aid. The establishment of schools and new churches in these areas demonstrates its commitment to marginalised communities. The *Sihhmui* local LIKBK church in *Aizawl* is dedicated to serving the poor, including daily wage earners and tribes like the *Bawm* and *Hmar*.

LIKBK as a Leadership Training Centre: The LIKBK plays a crucial role in leadership development, nurturing future pastors and leaders who make a significant impact in civil society. Leaders emerging from LIKBK assume key roles in organisations like YLA, LSA, and LWA, contributing to socio-economic development by driving positive change, fostering community engagement, and promoting collective progress. This highlights the LIKBK's contribution to socio-economic development by developing leaders who extend their influence beyond the church, aligning with Wright's (2024) advocacy for the Church as a centre for leadership training. By building capacity, promoting community engagement, and fostering collective progress, the LIKBK helps drive positive change in various spheres of society.

LIKBK and Employment Generation: The LIKBK has played a vital role in addressing unemployment by generating employment opportunities for both educated and uneducated individuals. The study similarly concludes in line with Ryan (1984), who posits the Church as a problem solver of unemployment in the African region.

8.5.2 Political Transformation

The political significance of LIKBK in the Lai political affairs are summed up as follows:

LIKBK and Political Reformation: The LIKBK's establishment has driven political reformation in the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC), the highest political institution in the Lai territory, by complementing its existence and serving as a watchdog to ensure free and fair elections. This has fostered transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, significantly contributing to the region's political reformation. The study supports Habermas' (1989) idea that diverse voices can shape democratic deliberation and outcomes, highlighting the crucial role of civil society

organisations like LIKBK in advocating for social justice and promoting democratic values.

The LIKBK as a Decisive Vote Bank: The LIKBK wields significant electoral influence, as evidenced by the findings, where religious affiliation emerges as the second most crucial factor in voting behaviour. The majority of successful political candidates holding key positions in the LADC, such as the Chief Executive Member (CEM) and Executive Member (EM), are affiliated with the LIKBK church. This study supports Green et al., (1996) who posits how individuals often align their voting preferences for those candidates in harmony with their religious values and moral beliefs.

The LIKBK's Dual Role Towards Human Rights and Democracy: The LIKBK emerges as a champion of human rights and democracy, upholding non-discrimination and unity in diversity by treating all tribes, including marginalised communities, with dignity and respect. It promotes democratic ideals through internal democratic practices, opposes electoral misconduct and human rights violations, and ensures equality and inclusivity in its leadership. The church's commitment to human rights and democracy is solidified by its members' engagement in organisations like the Mizoram People's Forum (MPF) and its recruitment of pastors from diverse Mizo sub-tribes. This aligns with research by Gibbs and Deborah (1999), Rychetska (2022), Intan (2018), and Davila (2009), highlighting the Church's role in addressing human rights and democracy, particularly in developing countries.

LIKBK and its Gender Policy: The LIKBK's role in promoting human rights is complex, as it excels in areas like poverty alleviation, education, and inclusive membership, but falls short in gender equality. Despite its humanitarian work and advocacy for the needy, the church has yet to ordain women theologians as pastors and rarely has female church elders, indicating a gap in gender equality. This study, informed by Weisner (2023) and Zarzozuali (2024), critically analyses the LIKBK's gender policy, power structures, and discourses, highlighting how they perpetuate gender inequality, silence, and exclude women. The church's reluctance to ordain qualified women theologians raises questions about its commitment to gender equality.

and human rights, suggesting that the LIKBK may not fully fulfill its role as an advocate for these values.

Involvement of Church Leaders in Politics: When asked if church leaders should engage in politics, a significant majority of respondents (62%) disagreed, stating that particularly pastors, former pastors, and church leaders should not be involved in politics. However, a smaller but notable proportion of respondents (38%) argued that it is high-time for church leaders to directly participate in politics to reform and improve Lai politics, suggesting a divergence of opinions on the matter. Following (Haynes, 2023; Shaji, 2023; Modifi, 2015) who contend that religious leaders should refrain from politics, the study likewise validates that involvement of church leaders in politics and over politicisation are not supported by the respondents.

The LIKBK operates as a social enterprise, addressing Lai community challenges through education, literature promotion, health initiatives, and more. Its efforts align with Wry & York's (2017) and Borstein & Davis' (2010) definitions of social entrepreneurship, identifying societal issues and driving change through innovative solutions. The LIKBK exemplifies social enterprise characteristics by engaging in initiatives that address pressing social challenges, promote sustainable change, foster community development, and drive political reforms. Through its diverse programs, the LIKBK demonstrates a dedication to enhancing member well-being and making a positive societal impact.

8.6 The Contributions of Sub-groups

Chapter VII explores the six fellowship departments within the LIKBK institution, which include *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran Hmeichhe Pawl* (LIKBKHP / Women wing), *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran Thalai Pawl* (LIKBKTP / Youth wing), the Pastor wing, the Church Elders wing, *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran Mipa Pawl* (LIKBKMP/ Men wing) and Deacons. The chapter primarily examines the substantial contributions made by each subgroup toward the socio-economic advancement of the Lai society. Women-wings scores the highest when it comes to the contribution to socio-economic development, followed by youth-wing, Pastors, Church-elder, men-wing, and deacons respectively.

Women-wing: The women-wing is credited with launching profitable and significant projects, earning admiration from other sub-groups. Notable projects include the *Lairam* Motherless Home (LMH), *Lairam* Child Adoption Centre, *Lairam* Christian Medical Centre (LCMC), *Lairam* Rescue Centre (LRC), and *Lairam* Women Development Society (LWDS), which successfully implemented *Lairam* handloom and Poultry Farming, *Lairam* Guest House, and women's empowerment seminars and workshops.

Youth-wing: The youth-wing of LIKBK secures the second position for its outstanding contribution to socio-economic development in the Lai society, with notable initiatives including 'The Amos Operation' against drug addiction, an MOU with LADC's Education Department for drug awareness campaigns, environment protection efforts, promotion of Lai Language and Literature, blood donation drives, an affordable girl's hostel, and awareness programs on critical issues like drug abuse, tobacco and alcohol misuse, and gender sensitisation. These initiatives demonstrate the youth-wing's commitment to addressing social issues, investing in the future of the Lai community, and making a positive impact on socio-economic development, showcasing its dedication to creating a better society for all.

Pastors: Pastor Wing ranks third in its contribution to socio-economic development, playing a vital role in the LIKBK administrative framework. The Pastors are highly commended for their efforts in promoting Lai culture through their sermons, writings, and initiatives. Such appraisals include: revitalising the Lai language by relearning it and delivering sermons in Lai; Ensuring proficiency in Lai language is a mandatory requirement for probationary Pastors; Setting an example by wearing traditional Lai attire during important religious functions, thereby preserving and promoting Lai culture.

Church-elders: The church-elders are highly appreciated for their selfless dedication and uncompensated labour, devoting time and energy without expectation of payment, even amidst busy schedules. Respondents commend their altruism, noting that unlike pastors, church-elders serve without seeking a salary. Their unwavering commitment to serving the community without financial gain is highly valued. Moreover, church-elders have driven political reforms, promoting democratic values through active

participation in organisations like the Mizoram People Forum (MPF) and *Mizoram Kohhran Hruaitu Committee* (MKHC), ensuring free and fair elections, and upholding electoral integrity.

Men-wing: The men-wing, established recently, ranks fifth with 9% of respondents' votes, yet has made significant contributions. Despite limited documentation, their impact is notable, taking on challenging and manual tasks within the church and community, demonstrating great potential for future importance. Their contributions are worth acknowledging, and their potential for growth and influence is substantial.

Deacon: The deacons, ranking sixth with 5% of the votes, play a vital supporting role to the Church-elder and Pastor, selflessly dedicating their time and energy without remuneration. Their willingness to serve without financial compensation showcases devotion, altruism, and prioritisation of community needs over personal gain, reflecting the church's emphasis on collective leadership and service.

This study builds on Lumintang and Daliman's (2023) and Kariuki's (2018) researches, highlighting LIKBK's sub-groups' significant contributions to socio-economic development. The findings show that LIKBK, like other churches, has evolved to collaborate with organisations and implement community development programs, improving surrounding communities' well-being. This research underscores LIKBK's importance as an agency of socio-economic development, echoing Kariuki's (2018) sentiments and Lumintang and Daliman's (2023) theological framework, demonstrating the church's vital role in combating poverty and driving community development.

8.7 The Macro Implications of the Micro Study

Certain researchers initiate their studies by focusing on the level of analysis that is most pertinent to their specific research inquiries. Subsequently, they establish connections to other levels of analysis to enrich their understanding and draw comprehensive conclusions. As such, Collins (1981) emphasises the significance of micro interactions and their impact on macro phenomena. Similarly, Klandermans (1997) starts his analysis by examining individual behavior to elucidate participation in collective action. However, he explores individual decisions within the broader context of organisational characteristics and political opportunities. Starting in the 1980s, numerous sociologists, including McCarthy (1977), Zald (1979), Huber (1991),

and Cicourel (1981), advocated for theories that bridged the gap between micro-level interactions and macro-level social structures and transformations. The succeeding scholars thus became intrigued by establishing connections among various levels of analysis with the aim of crafting more comprehensive theories of social movements. In line with this argument, Staggenborg (2002) argued that placing emphasis on the meso-level structures of social movement communities is crucial in elucidating movement processes. Mobilising structures influence micro-level interactions, motivations, and perceptions of macro-level political and cultural opportunities. The actions of meso-level actors can sometimes precipitate changes in large-scale political and cultural conditions. In short, combination of the three levels is crucial for the understanding of social movement. Micro-sociological analysis delves into the examination of individual behaviors and the intricate patterns of interaction among them. Conversely, macro-sociological analysis directs its attention towards 'large scale and long-term social processes' on a grand scale (Collins, 1981). Bridging these levels of analysis, the meso level addresses the 'structural but sub-societal phenomena' that are smaller in scale but still significant, such as organisations. (Smelser, 1998: 1)

In line with the above statements, and as delineated in the preceding methodological chapter, the study employed the three analytical levels, namely the macro, meso, and micro levels, to scrutinize the LIKBK movement. In order to draw a macro implication of the study, the micro studies of various selected units are undertaken, which are put forward as follows:

8.7.1 The LIKBK as the Lai Counter-Hegemonic Struggle

The British hegemony over the Lai people can be understood through Gramsci's (1970) concept of 'cultural hegemony', where dominant groups maintain power through consent, shaping the cultural narrative and values of subordinate groups. The British imposed their values, beliefs, and practices on the Lai, suppressing their indigenous culture and traditions through education, religion, and administration, portraying their own culture as superior. However, the Lai people resisted this cultural imposition, maintaining their cultural identity and traditions, and counter-reacting with a form of 'counter-hegemony', challenging the dominant British narrative and asserting their cultural autonomy.

The emergence of LIKBK can be attributed to the Christian hegemonies, particularly the BCM's dominance over the Lai people, which controlled ideology to serve the interests of the ruling class (Gramsci, 1970). The BCM's exploitation of the Lai people's tithes, despite their geographical distance, mirrors Marx's (1867) concept of economic exploitation. This led to the Lai people's fear of assimilation, catalysing the formation of LIKBK. The movement's nature can be understood through Melucci's (1996) concept of 'appropriation of identity,' where solidarity among the group drives the new social movement. The Lai people's struggle for independence centers on preserving their identity, which they have been painstakingly appropriating through promoting their language, Lai Bible, Lai traditional dress, Lai hymn book, observance of Lai Night and Lai traditional dances.

8.7.2 Lai Cultural Change - Westernisation vs. Modernisation

The cultural changes experienced by the Lai people are influenced by Christianity, as well as Westernisation and modernisation. Srinivas (1966) distinguishes between Westernisation, the adoption of Western customs and values, and modernisation, a broader process of social change encompassing economic, political, and social transformations. While Westernisation can lead to cultural loss, modernisation can bring both positive and negative consequences. The impact of Christianity on Lai culture reflects this dual dynamic, with both Westernising and modernising effects, resulting in beneficial and detrimental cultural changes. This nuanced analysis reveals the complex interplay between these factors, highlighting the need to consider multiple influences when examining cultural transformation.

8.7.3 The LIKBK: The Custodian of Lai Cultural Reforms

The changes brought by Christianity have impacted all aspects of Lai society, hitting the core elements of Lai identity, such as language, attire, songs, dances, and festivals, being the most affected. To address this, the LIKBK was established to preserve, protect, and promote Lai culture through initiatives like popularising Lai dress, songs, and language, compiling a Lai Hymn book and Bible, and practicing traditional dances. The LIKBK has also organized activities like competitions, quizzes, and lectures in the Lai language, and introduced 'Lai Night' to encourage members to

embrace Lai customs. Through these efforts, the LIKBK has emerged as the driving force behind Lai cultural reformation, working to revive cultural values and instill pride among the youth for their Lai heritage. The study shows similar findings with Melucci (1996) and Hefner (1998) who explores how social movements, including religious groups, can serve as guardians of traditional practices and culture, and how they can work to preserve and promote cultural identity.

8.7.4 The LIKBK's Socio-Economic Outcome

The investigation into the socio-economic reforms spearheaded by the LIKBK ultimately reveals that the LIKBK embodies a quintessential social enterprise, bringing about meaningful socio-economic transformation and advancement within the Lai community. Key characteristics that qualify the LIKBK a true social enterprise include:

Mission Driven: The LIKBK, akin to social enterprises, is guided by a clear social mission that defines its identity and purpose (Mair & Schoen, 2007). This mission-driven approach is evident in its dedicated Mission Department, which sends missionaries to underdeveloped tribes and establishes 'Mission Schools' like New Vision English School (NVES) in remote areas, demonstrating the organisation's commitment to its core principles.

Financial sustainability: Like social enterprises, the LIKBK prioritises social impact while also seeking financial sustainability through diverse revenue streams (World Bank, 2019). To achieve this, the LIKBK has initiated various projects, including printing, bookstores, handloom, poultry farming, and a medical center. These projects not only generate income but also serve the community at affordable rates, demonstrating the LIKBK's commitment to social impact. Most projects are self-sustaining, providing employment and contributing to the community's socio-economic development, exemplifying the characteristics of a true social enterprise.

Innovative Solutions: Social enterprises are renowned for developing innovative approaches to address social or environmental challenges, often leveraging entrepreneurial methods, technology, or creative business models to create scalable and sustainable solutions (Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, 2019;

Nicholls, 2006:12). The LIKBK is a shining example of this, demonstrating exceptional innovative skills through its diverse range of projects like *Lairam* Motherless Home, the *Lairam* Adoption Centre, the *Lairam* Christian Medical College, the *Lairam* Rescue Centre (specifically designed for addicts), and the *Lairam* Handloom, among others.

Double or Triple Bottom Line: The LIKBK, similar to social enterprise model, adopts a triple bottom line approach, measuring success by financial, social, and environmental outcomes (Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, 2019; Perrini, 2006). It prioritises positive outcomes in all projects, addressing social issues like care for motherless children, addiction, and HIV/AIDS, while also promoting environmental sustainability. The organisation's commitment to social and environmental impact is commendable, making a significant difference in marginalised communities. Its collaborative approach with NGOs and government departments amplifies its impact, serving as a model for balancing profit with positive impact.

Stakeholder Engagement: The LIKBK, like social enterprises, engages with diverse stakeholders, including customers, beneficiaries, investors, employees, and the community, prioritising transparency, accountability, and collaboration (Dart, 2004; O'Donohoe et al., 2014; World Bank, 2019). Its ventures involve various stakeholders, ensuring transparency through regular auditing and checking by the General Assembly. This approach exemplifies social enterprise characteristics, making the LIKBK a model for driving meaningful social impact while maintaining transparency and accountability. Its projects showcase the potential for organisations to balance social impact with financial sustainability, demonstrating a commitment to stakeholder engagement and accountability.

8.7.5 The LIKBK's Political Outcome

The findings on LIKBK's political influence can be understood through the lens of Habermas' (1962) 'Public Sphere' theory, which highlights the crucial role of civil society in facilitating public debate, scrutinising power, and advancing social justice. LIKBK's efforts have exemplified this dynamic, leveraging its platform to amplify

marginalised voices, challenge dominant narratives, and push for transformative political change, which are put forward as follows:

Public Sphere and Communicative Action: Habermas (1962; 1991) is renowned for his theory of the public sphere, which conceptualises the space where individuals converge to engage in rational discourse and debate about matters of common concern. In Habermas's perspective, religion and religious communities have a legitimate role to play in the public sphere, alongside other social and political actors. He emphasises the importance of open and inclusive dialogue, where diverse voices, including religious ones, can contribute to democratic deliberation and decision-making. In this context, the LIKBK's request for the appointment of church members in the Lai House reflects an effort to ensure representation and participation in political decision-making processes. By having church members present, the LIKBK seeks to advocate for the interests and concerns of the Lai community within the political sphere. This is evident from Reverend L.H. Lala's statement, '*We have a positive working relationship with the LADC. We even requested them to appoint church members in Lai House, and they complied.*' Furthermore, the study reveals that the LIKBK and LADC are collaborating closely on various critical issues, such as environmental protection and the war against drugs. This partnership demonstrates the LIKBK's commitment to not only promoting the interests of the Lai community but also contributing to the broader social and political good. The LIKBK's efforts to ensure representation and participation in political decision-making processes reflect a key aspect of Habermas's theory of the public sphere. By advocating for the interests and concerns of the Lai community, the LIKBK is helping to create a more inclusive and democratic political environment. Moreover, the collaboration between the LIKBK and LADC on critical issues highlights the potential for religious organisations to play a positive role in promoting social and political change. This partnership demonstrates that religious and political actors can work together to address common concerns and promote the public good.

Post-secular Society: Habermas has astutely observed that contemporary societies are characterised by a 'post-secular' condition, where religion continues to exert significant influence in public life, despite expectations of secularisation. This phenomenon

challenges traditional secularisation theories, which predicted the decline of religion in modern societies. Instead, Habermas acknowledges the enduring significance of religious worldviews and values, and contends that religion can contribute meaningfully to ethical and moral discourse in pluralistic societies. Moreover, religion can provide vital resources for addressing social and political challenges. The LIKBK's remarkable reformative role in Mizoram's political landscape resonates with Habermas' assertion that religion continues to be a potent force in post-secular societies. The LIKBK's distinctive influence on political reforms, particularly in the electoral process, is noteworthy. Through the platform of the Mizoram People Forum (MPF), LIKBK Pastors and church-elders have actively participated in the electoral process, promoting transparency and accountability by discouraging bribery and other forms of unfair means. This is truly commendable. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter VI, the LIKBK's influence on politics is evident in the fact that its members often occupy high political offices, such as the Chief Executive Member (CEM) and Executive Member (EM) in the LADC. This phenomenon validates Habermas' theory, demonstrating the significant role that religion can play in shaping political leadership and decision-making processes. The LIKBK's engagement with politics and its influence on political reforms in Lawngtlai is a testament to the enduring significance of religion in public life. By actively participating in the electoral process and promoting ethical governance, the LIKBK is contributing to the creation of a more just and equitable society. This resonates with Habermas' theory, which highlights the potential for religion to provide moral and ethical resources for addressing social and political challenges. The LIKBK's role in promoting transparency and accountability in politics is particularly noteworthy, demonstrating the positive impact that religious organisations can have on political processes.

Religion and Human Rights: Habermas' exploration of the relationship between religion and human rights offers valuable insights into the LIKBK's commitment to upholding human dignity, justice, and solidarity. By embracing members from diverse tribes and backgrounds, the LIKBK exemplifies a democratic ethos that resonates with Habermas' advocacy for a pluralistic approach to human rights. The church's inclusive practices and beliefs demonstrate a dedication to human rights principles of non-

discrimination and respect for diversity, which are foundational to Habermas' concept of human rights. The LIKBK's leadership recruitment strategy, which prioritises diversity and inclusivity, promotes equality and mutual understanding among different religious and secular perspectives. This approach aligns with Habermas' caution against the imposition of religious doctrines or norms in secular governance, instead promoting a pluralistic approach that respects individual freedoms. Moreover, the LIKBK's emphasis on human dignity, rooted in the understanding that all human beings are created in the image of God, underscores its commitment to human rights. This perspective extends to marginalised tribes and communities, who are treated with respect, love, and dignity within the church. The establishment of mission schools for the underprivileged and the 'Myanmar Refugee Co-ordination Committee' (MRCC) further demonstrates the LIKBK's commitment to human rights and democracy. In Habermasian terms, the LIKBK's approach to human rights and democracy embodies the principles of communicative action, where diverse perspectives are engaged in open dialogue to promote mutual understanding and respect. By fostering a sense of belonging and dignity for all members, the LIKBK creates a space for democratic deliberation and decision-making, which is essential for promoting human rights and democracy.

8.7.6 Implications on Gender Policy

The LIKBK has made progress in promoting gender equality, but still perpetuates gender discrimination in certain areas, such as: limiting women theologians to coordinator roles, while men can become Pastors or church elders; prohibiting women theologians from ordination to Pastor; scarcity of women in church leadership positions. These disparities are part of a broader societal issue, as other denominations also have similar policies. To promote gender equality, the LIKBK must address these concerns, recognising that it is not alone in its gender discrimination. By doing so, the LIKBK can create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all members. The study is in similar vein with (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2012; Kanter, 1997; Acker, 1990) who explore gender stereotypes, bias, and discrimination in organisations, including religious institutions, and how they impact women's opportunities and advancement.

8.7.7 Observance of Lai Night: Its Implication

The LIKBK observes 'Lai Night' every Saturday, where members wear traditional Lai attire and conduct the service entirely in the Lai language, promoting pride in Lai heritage, community unity, and cultural identity. The study found that 88% of respondents believe observing 'Lai Night' is crucial for preserving Lai culture, while 12% disagree, with some respondents objecting to the exclusive Lai observance, citing concerns about cultural exchange and adaptation with other tribes. Despite this, Lai Night remains a vital initiative for preserving and honouring Lai language, culture, and religious texts, and has become an integral part of LIKBK's cultural preservation efforts. In summary, the observance of Lai Night is a vital mechanism for the Lai community, promoting ethnic pride and cultural identity, preserving Lai heritage through language, religious texts, and traditions. Lai Night fosters unity, strengthens social bonds, and showcases Lai cultural practices, reaffirming individuals' connection to their roots. Clifford Geertz's concept of 'thick description' (1973) is highly applicable to the study of Lai Night, where the observance of this cultural practice is not just a superficial activity, but a complex web of meanings, symbols, and interpretations that reveal the deeper cultural significance and identity of the Lai community.

8.7.8 LIKBK and its Implications on Issues of Reunification and Unity

The British administration's division of the Lushai Hills into North and South in 1895, and subsequent consolidation into a single unit in 1898, disrupted the cohesion of the Lai people, leading to fragmentation and loss of unique identity. The demarcation of administrative borders with Manipur and Chin-Hills further divided the Lai people, resulting in different names and identities in various locations, such as *Mizo*, *Lai*, *Bawm*, *Tlanglau*, and *Laizo*, leaving some Lai people unclear about their ethnic roots and affiliations. Besides, the Lai people's religious landscape is marked by division, with the formation of ethnic-based churches like *Isua Krista Kohhran* (IKK) in 1970 and *Lairam Baptist Kohhran* (LBK) in 1982, which later merged to form the *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran* (LIKBK) in 1999. However, not all Lai people joined LIKBK, with some remaining under the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) and others backsliding to IKK, thereby raising questions about religion's role in unity or disunity.

among the Lai people. This study explores the extent to which LIKBK can be considered a force of unity for the Lai people.

This study finds that the LIKBK promotes unity among the Lai people, with 85% of respondents believing it fosters a renewed sense of unity among various Lai ethnic tribes, promoting social cohesion and stability, contrary to the global notion of religion being a source of conflict. This echoes Durante's (2015) findings on ethnic-based churches promoting integration while preserving heritage. The study concludes that LIKBK brings unity, reverberating Functionalist exponents like (Durkheim, 1912; Parsons, 1967 and Bellah, 1980) who argue that religion promotes social cohesion and stability, with the Lai people feeling united under one Church, one culture, and one denomination.

8.8 Scope for Further Research

The following research ideas offer potential avenues for further exploration and investigation, building on the findings and insights from the original study:

1. Investigate the impact of the LIKBK's gender policy on women's empowerment and gender equality within the organisation and in the broader community.
2. Explore the effectiveness of the LIKBK's development programs in addressing poverty and improving living standards among marginalised communities.
3. Conduct a comparative study of the LIKBK's approach to ethno-religious reform with other organisations, examining similarities and differences in their strategies and outcomes.
4. Develop and test a new framework for evaluating the success of ethno-religious reform movements, applying it to the LIKBK and other case studies.
5. Examine the role of leadership in shaping the LIKBK's policies and practices, including the impact of different leadership styles and approaches on the organisation's development and effectiveness.

6. Investigate the intersection of religion and development in the context of the LIKBK's work, exploring how religious beliefs and values inform and shape development practices and outcomes.
7. Analyse the LIKBK's engagement with local and national governments, examining the opportunities and challenges of collaborating with secular authorities to advance ethno-religious reform and development goals.
8. Conduct a longitudinal study of the LIKBK's impact over time, assessing the sustainability and long-term effects of its programs and policies.
9. Explore the potential for scaling up the LIKBK's model of ethno-religious reform and development to other contexts and regions.
10. Investigate the role of technology in enhancing the LIKBK's development programs and outreach, including the use of digital platforms for education, healthcare, and economic empowerment.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

(PURELY FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSE)

Schedule No: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____ To _____

Place: _____

By: _____

I. The Lai culture before and after the advent of Christianity:

1. Do you think that Christianity plays the major factor of cultural change in the Lai culture?

a) Yes ☐ b) NO ☐

2. If No, please mention why?

3. Do you think that cultural norms and values has been declining due to Christian teachings?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

c) Any other factor (specify):

4. Do you think that the introduction of modern education by the Christian Missionary is the key factor in doing away with myths, witchcraft, and superstition?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

c) Any other:

5. What will you choose between the traditional Lai marriage system or today's Christian marriage?

a) Traditional Lai marriage system ☐ b) Modern Christian marriage ☐ c) Any other

(Specify):

6. Do you think that divorce settlement according to the Lai Customary Law has undergone changes with the coming of Christianity?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

7. If yes, please mention how?

8. If no, please mention how?

9. Do you think the Lai customary law has been weakened with the advent of Christianity in the Lai society?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

10. Do you think Christianity is responsible for the changes in the customary inheritance law that favored only male line of inheritance?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

c) Any other:

11. In your opinion, does Christianity play the main factor for changes in the social status of women?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐ c) Any other Factor:

12. Do you agree that Christianity has weakened the social ties and “we feeling” among the Lai people?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐ Any other:

13. Do you feel that family bonds are stronger in the pre-Christian era?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

c) Any other:

14. Do you think that Christianity has outmoded the Lai traditional dress?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐ Any other:

15. Do you think that Christianity has undermined the Lai traditional dance?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

16. Do you think that Christianity is responsible for gradual disappearance of Lai language?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

17. Do you think that the attitude towards disease and sickness has undergone changes with the coming of Christianity in Lai society?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

18. According to your opinion, do you agree that Christianity has lessened the gap between rich and poor in funeral practices?

a) Agree ☐ b) Disagree ☐

c) Any other:

19.What is your opinion on the Christian Missionary's introduction of modern health facilities?

a) Beneficial ☐ b) Not Beneficial ☐ c) It undermines the traditional medicinal knowledges and practices ☐ d) Neutral ☐

20.Do you support the Christian Missionary that strongly condemned 'alcohol' (zu) which was closely associated with the Lai culture?

a) Strongly support ☐ b) Strongly oppose ☐ c) Neutral ☐

Any other:

21.Do you agree that the Lai culture has undergone modernization due to Christianity?

a) Agree ☐ b) Disagree ☐ c) Both ☐ d) No Idea ☐

22.In your opinion, do you think that abolition of chieftainship was beneficial for the Lai society?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

23.Do you think abolition of slavery was the work of the Christian Missionary?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐ Any other:

24.According to your opinion, social control was more effective in:

a) Pre-Christian era ☐ b) post-Christian era ☐

c) Any other:

25.Do you think that the early Baptist Christian Missionaries were giving half-hearted attention/ step- motherly treatment towards the Lai society?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

26.If yes, please mention why?

27.Do you think that the early Baptist Christian Missionaries were responsible for the problem of assimilation of the Lai people?

a) No ☐ b) Yes ☐

28. If yes, please mention how?

29. What according to your opinion is the most constructive role of Christianity towards the Lai Culture?

30. What according to your opinion is the most destructive role of Christianity towards Lai culture?

II. The LIKBK as an ethno-religious reform movement:

31.Do you agree that the LIKBK has emerged mainly as a reformed-response against the discriminatory treatment given by the early Baptist Christian?

a) No ☐

b) Yes ☐

32.If yes, please mention why?

33. Do you think that ethnic-based church is necessary for preservation of Lai culture?

a) Yes ☐ b) NO ☐

30. Do you think the LIKBK brings reunification and unity amongst the Lai People?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

34. If no or yes, please mention why?

35. Do you agree that preservation of Lai culture is central towards the emergence of LIKBK?

a) Agree ☐ b) Disagree ☐

c) Any other:

36. Do you think that the 'Lai sentiment' is central towards the emergence of LIKBK?

a) Yes ☐ b) NO ☐

37. Do you think that charismatic leadership plays crucial role towards emergence of LIKBK?

If yes, please specify the name of such leader/ leaders.

38. Do you think that 'fear of assimilation' was one of the main reasons for the birth of LIKBK?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

39. Do you think the Lai people are still facing a sense of deprivation and exclusion by the non-Lai despite all the protective discriminations policies like the sixth schedule and autonomy?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

40. Do you agree that the LIKBK's ideology is shaped by territorial identity or regionalism?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

41. If no, please mention why?

42. Do you support the LIKBK Church conducting service in Lai language? a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

43. If no, please mention why?

44. Do you think that the LIKBK should promote the Lai traditional dance in the Church function to promote Lai identity?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

c) Any other:

45. Do you think that observance of 'Lai Night' is helpful towards popularisation of Lai culture?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

46. Do you think the LIKBK's 'Lai Baibal Thiang' (Lai Bible) is helpful for reformation of Lai language? a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

47. What makes the LIKBK most exclusive?

a) It propagates the preservation of Lai culture ☐

b) It comprises mainly of Lai people ☐

c) It is absolutely free from outside control ☐

d) Cannot say ☐

48. In your opinion, the LIKBK plays most effective reformatory role in:

a) Identity and cultural reformation ☐

b) Socio-economic reformation ☐

c) Political reformation ☐

d) Spiritual revival only ☐

III. The Socio- economic transformation brought about by the LIKBK in Lai Society

49. Do you think the LIKBK plays a unique role in socio-economic upliftment of the Lai society?

a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

50. What according to you is the most distinguished role of LIKBK towards upliftment of health and wellness for the Lai society?

A) Establishment of hospital ☐

B) Occasional free clinic ☐

C) Discount for the poor and needy ☐

D) Establishment of Medical Board ☐

E) Any others: _____

51. Do you think the monthly contribution of one-tenth (tithe) by the Church members is necessary for the socio-economic upliftment of the poor? Yes ☐ No ☐

52. If no, please mention why?

53. What are the worth-mentioning tasks undertaken by Lairam Social Mission Department of LIKBK towards socio-economic upliftment of the Lai people?

A) Establishment of schools ☐

B) Appointment of missionaries to mission fields ☐

C) Establishment of Lairam Motherless Home ☐

D) Establishment of Lairam Rescue Centre ☐

E) Any others: _____

54. Do you agree that 'a handful of rice contribution' has aided towards upliftment the poor and the needy?

Yes ☐ No ☐

55. Please mention the valuable contribution of 'Christian Education Committee' of LIKBK towards the upliftment of the society?

- A) Imparting Christian teachings ☐
- B) Establishment of Mission Schools ☐
- C) Establishment of library and archives ☐
- D) Organises programmes like training, seminar and retreat ☐
- E) Any others: _____

56. Please mention the contribution of Communication Committee under LIKBK for the Lai welfare?

57. 'The Lairam Motherless Home' being the only motherless home in Lawngtlai district, do you think that it is able to suffice the needs of all motherless children in Lawngtlai?

- a) Yes ☐
- b) No ☐

58. Do you agree that the LIKBK serves as a 'social enterprise'? a) No ☐ b) Yes ☐

59. If yes, please mention the specific contributions:

60. Do you think the 'The Lairam Rescue Centre' is helpful towards combating addiction and HIV/ AIDS in Lawngtlai district?

- a) Yes ☐
- b) No ☐

61. Do you agree that the LIKBK serves as a 'sub-altern Church' that accumulates the downtrodden section of the Lai society? a) No ☐ b) Yes ☐

62. If yes, please mention how?

63. According to your opinion, LIKBK serves as a 'social capital' mainly through:

- a) Creating comprehensive livelihood development project ☐
- b) Self-help group ☐
- c) Micro financing ☐
- d) Employment generation ☐
- e) Any other _____

64. The LIKBK serves best as a 'leadership training centre' by generating mostly:

- a) Pastors ☐
- b) Politicians ☐
- c) Leaders of civil societies ☐
- d) Social workers ☐
- e) Any others: _____

65. Do you agree that the LIKBK serves as an important agency of socialization of the youth?

- a) Agree ☐
- b) Disagree ☐
- c) Neutral ☐

66. The LIKBK plays an important function of employment generation mainly by:

- a) Recruiting persons in the office of the LIKBK ☐

- b) Self-employment through self-help group ☐
- c) Through micro-financing ☐
- d) Lairam multipurpose training centre ☐
- e) Comprehensive livelihood project ☐
- f) Any other _____

67. In your opinion, which plays the most effective role in the socio-economic transformation of the Lai society?

- a) The LIKBK ☐
- b) The civil societies like YLA, LSA and LWA ☐
- c) The politicians ☐
- d) Others _____

IV. LIKBK And its political role:

68. Do you agree that religion and politics are closely related? a) Agree ☐ b) Disagree ☐

69. Do you agree that the LIKBK plays a crucial role in political reformation of LADC? a) Disagree ☐ b) Agree ☐

70. If agrees, please mention how?

71. Do you think that religion and denomination are associated with electoral politics voting behavior? a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

72. During election, which factor influences you most regarding your voting behaviour?

- a) Tribe ☐
- b) Region ☐
- c) Religion / Church denominations ☐
- d) Political party ☐
- e) Personality of the candidates ☐
- f) Any other _____

73. Do you think the LIKBK upholds human rights and democracy? a) No ☐ b) Yes ☐

74. If yes, please mention how?

75. Do you think that the Church is responsible towards maintenance of political stability and resolution of political conflict when the situation calls for?

- a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

76. Do you think that it is appropriate for the Church leader to contest in politics?

- a) Yes ☐ b) NO ☐

Any other:

77. How do you think the Church should play a role in politics either directly or indirectly?

- a) Directly ☐ b) Indirectly ☐

V. The profiling and dynamic role of the sub-members of the LIKBK:

Personal details:

78. Age Group: a) 18-25 years ☐ b) 25-40 years ☐ c) 40 years and above ☐

79. Marital Status: a) Married ☐ b) Unmarried ☐ c) Divorced ☐

80. Gender: a) Male ☐ b) Female ☐

81. Educational Qualification: _____

82. Tribe: _____

83. Sub-tribe: _____

84. Native Village: _____

85. Occupation: a) Employed ☐ b) Unemployed ☐ c) Self-employed ☐ d) Any Other:

86. Monthly Income (in rupees):

- a) Below Rs 50,000 ☐
b) Rs 50,000 – Rs 1,00,000 ☐
c) Rs 1,00,000 – Rs 1,50,000 ☐
d) Rs 1,50,000 – Rs 2,00,000 ☐
e) Rs 2,00,000 – Rs 2,50,000 ☐
f) Rs 2,50,000 – Rs 3,00,000 ☐
g) Rs 3,00,000 and above ☐
h) No income ☐

87. Land possessed (in hectares):

- a) Hectare 1 – 10 ☐
b) Hectares 10 – 20 ☐
c) Hectares 20- 30 ☐
d) Above 30 ☐
e) Landless ☐

88. Number of members in the family: _____

89. Language spoken in the Family: _____

90. Are you more comfortable speaking in:

- a) Lai Language ☐ b) Mizo Tawng ☐ Both ☐

91. Position held in the Church: _____

92. In which group do you belong in the Church?

- a) Pa pawl ☐
b) Kohhran Hmeichhia ☐
c) Thalai pawl ☐
d) Kohhran Upa ☐
e) Pastor ☐
f) General body ☐
g) Women Theologian ☐

Personal preference and attitudes towards other denomination and non-Christians:

93. Do you consider yourself Lai or Mizo? a) Lai ☐ b) Mizo ☐

94. What according to you constitutes Mizo?

- a) All persons inhabiting Mizoram ☐
b) All Chhinlung chhuak / Zo hnathlak ☐
c) Only Lusei tribe ☐
d) Only Mizo speaking groups ☐
e) Anybody who identify themselves as Mizo ☐

95. How likely are you to marry the non-Lais?

- a) Very likely ☐

b) Not so likely ☐

c) Absolutely not ☐

d) Neutral ☐

96. Preference of life-partner:

- a) LIKBK ☐ b) BCM ☐ c) Presbyterian ☐ d) All Christian ☐ e) non-Christian ☐ f)

Any Others: _____

97. Preference of neighborhood:

- a) Christians ☐
b) Same denomination ☐
c) Non- Christians ☐

d) No preference ☐

98. Preference of friendship:

a) Christian ☐

b) Same denomination ☐

c) Non-Christian ☐

d) No Preference ☐

100. What is your level of comfortability with the non-Christians?

a) Comfortable ☐

b) Not so comfortable ☐

c) Absolutely not comfortable ☐

d) Neutral ☐

101. How comfortable are you with the Lusei (Mizo)?

a) Comfortable ☐

b) Not so comfortable ☐

c) Absolutely not comfortable ☐

d) Neutral ☐

102. Do you consider that comparing to other tribes, your tribe is being discriminated and neglected in Mizoram? a) Yes ☐ b) Not so much ☐ c) Not at all ☐

Contribution of the sub-groups towards socio-economic upliftment of the Lai society:

103. According to your opinion, please mention the most significant contribution of the following sub-groups towards socio-economic development of the Lai society:

- a) Pastors:
- b) Church Elders:
- c) Deacons:
- d) LIKBKHP (Women Wing):
- e) LIKBKMP (Men wing):
- f) LIKBKTP (Youth wing):

VI. LIKBK and its gender policy:

104. Do you think women should have equal responsibility with men in decision making of the Church? a) Yes ☐ b) No ☐

105. If no, please mention why?

106. Do you agree that the LIKBBK gives equal opportunity for women? a) Agree ☐ b)

Disagree ☐

If disagree, please mention why?

108. Do you think women should be ordained as Pastors? If no, please mention why?

a) Yes ☐

b) No ☐

109. Do you think women should be assigned as Church elders? a) Yes ☐ b) No

Appendix 2: Research Diary

1.11. 2021

Today is our orientation day for the PHD scholars of sociology. Professor Mohanty has advised us to keep a research diary.

12.11.2021

I visited the Aizawl Theological College Library, searching on writings related to my topic. However, most of the writings are ecclesiastical

29.1.2022

My sample size comes to 379 including:

1. LIKBKHP (Women wing)
2. LIKBKTP (*Thalai pawl*)
3. Men-wing (*Pavalai pawl*)
4. Women Theologian
5. Deacons
6. Pastors
7. Church-elders.

4.2.2022

Women theologians are chosen for the case study.

19.2.2022

I visited Tribal Art Centre at McDonald Hill.

23.2.2022

The synopsis title is renamed as ‘Socio-cultural transformation through ethno-religious reform movement: A study of LIKBK in Mizoram’, with HOD’s assistance.

5.4.2022

Research proposal has been approved in the BOS today.

4.10.2022

For my first interview, I visited Reverend. Zionvarmawia, the Administrative Secretary of LIKBK at Aizawl. It was such a productive session.

5.10.2022

I interviewed church elder by the name Thawngliana Vuangtu at Mission *veng*. Being a native village of *Bualpui NG*, the place where the first ethnic based church was established, it was a very informative session. He even lent me a book on LIKBK.

6.10.2022

I interviewed C. Ngunlianchunga, a Church-elder, and a Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) at his quarter. It was a very informative session pertaining to the political role of LIKBK.

10.10.2022

I interviewed another ex-MLA cum a church-elder, Mr. Zothangliana at *Chawnpui* locality. Most of the persons that I have interviewed so far had commonly stressed on language assimilation that the Lai people are facing.

25.10.2022

Master schedule is prepared.

12.12.2022

KII questions are framed.

20.4.2023

I have covered around 150 samples.

8.5.2023

Done with interviewing the church-elders, and my next step is to interview the men-wing. However, if chance occurs, I will interview some women-wing simultaneously.

12.8.2023

Visited *Lairam* Christian Medical College (LCMC), the Hospital has at present employed 96 staffs including 4 doctors.

20.8.2023

Visited the *Lairam* Handloom initiated by the women-wing.

1.11.2023

I am done with collecting the required samples.

5.11.2-23

As of now, I am targeting the women theologians for a case study.

11.11.2023

I am working on translation of all the marked-quotes from the interview sessions. I have around 481 quotes altogether.

4.12.2023

My next step is to do coding and tabulation.

20.12.2023

I am finally done with coding, and taking a break with the coming festive occasion.

10.1.2024

I have now finalised the coding. Owing to my large sample size amounting to 379 in total, it is very time-consuming.

5.2.2024

I am starting to write my Chapter I, that is, the introduction chapter. I don't find it that difficult to write this chapter, as it was already detailed in the synopsis.

9.2.2024

My chapter II is almost done. Since we are well-trained by our HOD, the review of literature is not that difficult.

15.2.2023

I am working on my Chapter III, that is, methodology chapter. Even this Chapter is not that difficult, as we underwent a rigorous training from the HOD.

20.2.2024

I am now working on Chapter IV; the chapter deals with the Lai culture in the pre and post Christian eras. I have incorporated both the qualitative and quantitative findings.

2.3.2024

I am working on the Chapter V, dealing with the LIKBK as an ethno-religious movement. I am validating this argument, searching all the classic works on social movement theories, Charles Tilly, Blumer, Rao, Smelser, and even Gramsci etc. are very helpful for my study.

10.3.2024

I am drafting out a table, as advised by Professor Mohanty, for the causes, the stages, and the outcomes of the movement.

15.3.2024

I am working on my Chapter VI, that is the socio-economic and political outcomes of the LIKBK movement.

25.3.2024

Writing the findings are not that difficult. However, contextualising the findings need extensive readings.

30.3.2024

Chapter VII is drafted. All the respondents speak highly of the women-wing.

4.4.2024

I am working on my Chapter VIII. It deals with macro implications of the micro-studies. However, all the things that I have written still needs to be finalised by the HOD.

1.5.2024

I am done with all the chapters, accept the Conclusion chapter.

10.5.2024

I am working on the referencing section, following APA stylesheet.

1.6.2024

Re-interviewing of some respondents are carried out through telephone.

30.8.2024

I am working on the last Chapter, that is, conclusion chapter and contextualising each finding.

1.9. 2024

All the Chapters are completed and finalised.

9.9.2024

I am working on the cover page, acknowledgement, declaration, list of tables and figures, references, the appendix etc. trying to meet all the formal requirements for pre-submission of my thesis.

Appendix 3: Case Study Questions

Case study was undertaken to explore the experiences and perspectives of women theologians, guided by the following research questions:

- 1.Name:
- 2.Age:
- 3.Educational Qualification:
4. Married / Unmarried:
5. Position held in the Church:
6. Year of service in the Church:
7. Do you think that women theologians in the Church are enjoying equal status with the male theologians?
8. Do you think that women theologians equally qualified to be ordained as Pastor?
9. What are your dreams/ wishes for the women theologians?
10. How did Christianity play a role in the upliftment of the status of women?
11. Among the women-wing undertakings, what do you think are the most worth-mentioning points that have enhanced the status of women?
12. Comparing to male theologians, do you think that women theologians are discriminated in the church?
13. In what capacities do women theologians typically serve within the Church?
14. Please mention the specific problems that women theologians are facing in your Church?

Appendix 4: KII Questions

KII was carried out among the prominent political leaders like the Village Council (VC), Member of District council (MDC), Executive Council (EM), and leaders of Young Lai Association (YLA) by employing the following questions:

1. *LIKBK Kohhran Lai Culture / hnam ziarang a chawikan dan kawng han sawi teh?*

(In what ways does the LIKBK serve as a custodian of Lai culture?)

2. *LIKBK in khawtlang ah hmasawna a thlen dan sawi ta che?*

(In what ways does the LIKBK contribute to the socio-economic development of the Lai people?)

3. *LIKBK hian Lairam politics ah hian chanvo/pawimawhna a neih dan han sawi teh?*

(Does the LIKBK hold a unique influence or play a significant role in shaping the political landscape and decision-making processes within the Lai community?)

4. *LADC politics hi LIKBK hian a tha zawng a a siamthat dan han sawi ta che?*

(What are the ways in which the LIKBK contributes positively to the political dynamics of the Lai community?)

5. *Ruihlo do kawngah hma a lak dan*

(What initiatives and programs do the LIKBK implement to address and combat drug and alcohol addiction within the Lai community?)

6. *Mirethei te a tanpui dan*

(How does the LIKBK demonstrate its commitment to social welfare and compassion by serving the poor and needy?)

7. *Raltlan te a tanpui dan*

(What role does the LIKBK play in providing aid, advocacy, and support services to refugees?)

8. *Khawtlang hruaitu (VC, YLA leh LSA) te nena hna an thawho dan*

(How does the LIKBK foster and maintain strategic relationships with the Village Council (VC), Young Lai association (YLA) and Lai Students association (LSA)?

10. *LADC te nena LIKBK te an thawhho dantlangpui*

(What is the nature of the partnership and collaboration between the LIKBK and the Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC)?

11. *Hnam hnuaiahnung (Bawm, Chakma, etc) te dawmkan kawnga a hmalakna*

(How does the LIKBK work towards the holistic development and upliftment of underprivileged tribes like the *Bawm* and *Chakma*?

12. *Zirna lama LIKBK hmalakna te*

(What are the steps taken by LIKBK towards upliftment of education?)

13. *LIKBK in Lai tawng/ literature a tih hmasawn dan*

(How does the LIKBK promotes the Lai literature?)

14. *Hming* (Name):

15. *Khawtlang a nihna chelh* (Position held in the society):

16, *Kum* (Age):

17. *Veng* (locality):

Appendix 5: Fieldwork Pictures

Picture 1: LIKKBK Mian Office



Picture 2: Lairam Higher Academy of science (LAHAS)



Picture 3: New Vision English School (NVES) at Mautlang Village



Picture 4: New Vision English School (NVES) at Sumsilui Village



Picture 5: Interview with H. Lalrinsangi, woman theologian



Picture 6: Interview with Mr. C. Ngunlianchunga, Member of Legislative Assembly cum LIKBK Church-Elder at MLA House, *Tukhuahtlang* locality, Aizawl



Picture 7: Interview with Mrs. K.R.Chhingpuii, church-elder at MLA House, *Tuikhuahtlang* locality, Aizawl



Picture 8: Interview with Reverend Zionvarmawia, LIKBK Associate Secretary (AS)



Picture 9: Interview with Mr. Zothangliana, ex-MLA cum Church-Elder at Chawnpui locality, Aizawl

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1	Disciplining The Female Voice: A Foucauldian Analysis of the Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Church's (LIKBK) Gender Dynamics	International Journal of Religion (IJOR). Vol. 5(8). 850-861. 2024	e-ISSN: 2633-3538	Single author
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2	Gender Roles and Discrimination: A Study of The Attitude of The Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Church (LIKBK) Towards Women's Participation	Two Days International Conference on Gender Sensitization: Rights, Policies, and Issues. 5 th -6 th , June	Cluster University Srinagar	International

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2	One Week Online FDP on New Reforms in Higher Education with Reference to NEP. (27 July-2 August, 2022)	K.R.Mangalam University, Gurugram	2022
3	Professional Lectures 2023 Event, (25 January, 2023)	Academy of Integrated Christian Studies (AICS)	2023
4	Webinar on Research Methodology, (22 October, 2021)	IQAC Livingstone Foundation International College	2021
6	One Week Online Skill Development Programme (SDP), (26 th -30 th July, 2021)	Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Mizoram University	2021
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ABSTRACT
**SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH ETHNO-
RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT: A STUDY OF LIKBK IN
LAWNGTLAI, MIZORAM**

**AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
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**SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH ETHNO-
RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT: A STUDY OF LIKBK IN LAWNGTLAI,
MIZORAM**

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Submitted
In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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This thesis explores the *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran* (LIKBK), an ethnic-based Christian church in *Lawngtlai*, southern *Mizoram*, established in 1999 by the unification of two earlier churches, *Isua Krista Kohhran* (1970) and *Pawiram Baptist Kohhran* (1982). The LIKBK is a legitimate expression of the *Lai* people's ethno-religious identity, preserving and celebrating their unique cultural and religious traditions. With 30,692 members, it is the predominant church in *Lawngtlai*. Using Gramsci's theory of hegemony, the LIKBK is seen as a counter-reaction to colonial and Christian hegemonies, establishing a distinct *Lai* Christian hegemony.

The study is organised into eight chapters, each contributing to a nuanced understanding of the movement's significance, which are put forth as follows:

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter defines and contextualises religion, highlighting its dual role in promoting both peace and conflict. It explores this paradoxical role at various levels, from global to local, focusing on the LIKBK, an ethno-religious reform movement in *Lawngtlai*, *Mizoram*, India. By examining the complex relationships between religion, peace, and conflict, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how religion can be both a source of harmony, and a catalyst for conflict and social movement.

Statement of the Problem

The religious landscape of *Lawngtlai* mirrors the global, Indian, and *Mizoram* trends, where religion can be seen as a dual-edged sword - capable of fostering harmony and cooperation, yet also potentially fuelling conflict and division. Christianity brought improvements in education and health, but also contributed to the erosion of traditional *Lai* culture and values, which were further compromised by British colonisation in 1899, leading to the decline of tribal traditions and loss of cultural practices. The arrival of Baptist missionaries introduced Christianity to neighbouring areas, but none were assigned to the *Lai* people, resulting in their language not being written down. Christianity spread to the *Lai* areas through the *Mizo/Lusei* community, leading to the adoption of the *Mizo* language and a decline in the use of the *Lai* language, with only 20.96% of the *Lai* population speaking it (2011 Census of India). The first church was established in 1910, but it took 41 years for each village to have a full-fledged church,

showing a slow Christianisation process. Besides, the *Serkawn* Baptist Church's neglect and the parent church's refusal to send missionaries to *Lai* brethren in Burma deeply hurt the *Lai* community. This led to their separation from the mother church and the establishment of the LIKBK on November 27, 1999, as an effort to revive and preserve their ethnic culture and identity.

Research Question

Upon these background studies, the research thus attempts to answer questions like:

1. Is Christianity responsible for the drastic change experienced by the *Lai* culture?
2. What are the basic reasons that led to the formation of LIKBK?
3. Is LIKBK an ethno-religious movement?
4. Is the LIKBK successful in its mission to reform the *Lai* culture?
5. What are the positive outcomes of LIKBK in terms socio-economic and political reforms?

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter II delves with thorough review of literature, so as to guide the study, and to ponder upon the research gap. The review of literature section is broadly divided into three parts- the theoretical perspectives, the thematic review and methodological review. After conducting a thorough and meticulous examination of existing literature, a significant research gap has been identified, indicating an area that requires further investigation and exploration:

1. All the available literatures that had been reviewed were mostly from the developed countries and mainland India and only a few studies are seen in North-east or in the *Mizo* context which have their particularities.
2. Amongst the few literatures available in the *Mizo* context, studies have been done mostly from other disciplines and not from sociological perspective.
3. Moreover, the study area chosen for the study, that is, '*Lawngtlai*' with a flourishing dominant majority denomination called LIKBK has hardly been

academically explored from any discipline and are found left out in the academic literature.

4. A sense of social transformation brought about by LIKBK as a form of non-assimilatory ethno-religious movement in the *Lai* dominated population in *Lawngtlai* is yet to be explored.
5. The past studies conducted on religion in *Mizoram* are ecclesiastical in their approach. The missing sociological perspective needs to be carved out.
6. Since most of the studies that had been undertaken in the past on the study of 'Religion' were conducted on the theological perspectives, it has thus become very crucial and challenging to study 'LIKBK as an ethno-religious movement' from the sociological perspective.

Chapter III: Methodology

This study uses an exploratory-descriptive design with an ethnographic-historical approach to examine the LIKBK population (30,692 as of 2021). A sample size of 379 is selected using the Cuemath formula, and stratified random sampling is used to allocate participants to seven sub-groups: general body (183), pastors (1), church-elders (8), women-wing (71), youth-wing (93), men-wing (22), and women theologian (1). Participants are further categorised by residence (rural, urban, periphery), gender, and education level to analyse variations in opinions. The interview schedule consists of 109 questions, including open-ended and close-ended questions, with a mix of nominal, ordinal, Likert scales, and dichotomous questions. The study has five objectives namely;

1. To study the *Lai* culture before and after the advent of Christianity.
2. To study the role of the LIKBK as an ethno-religious movement.
3. To study the socio-economic and political transformations brought about by the LIKBK in the *Lai* society.
4. To examine the role of sub-members of LIKBK in bringing about social transformation in *Lai* Society.
5. To examine the macro implications of this micro study.

The study collected primary data through interviews, telephonic interviews, personal observations, oral histories, note-taking, audio recordings, and case studies,

particularly of LIKBK women theologians. Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted with Village Council Members and MDC members of LADC. Secondary data sources included colonial accounts, missionary reports, published and unpublished theses and articles, newspapers, internet and social media sites, census records, church meeting minutes, LIKBK's Annual General Assembly Reports, government records, and statistical handbooks. Due to the scarcity of studies on LIKBK, the researcher relied predominantly on primary, first-hand data.

For quantitative analysis, following established frameworks (Busenitz et al., 2000; Fogel, 2001; Manolova et al., 2008; Pou & Mishra, 2013), the research used Likert scales including open-ended and close-ended questions, with a mixture of nominal, ordinal, Likert scales, and dichotomous questions, so as to enable the data to analyse quantitatively. Additionally, percentages and frequency analyses were used to examine the data to assess how well the data aligns with the research objectives.

CHAPTER IV: THE PRE AND POST CHRISTIANITY LAI CULTURE

This chapter offers comprehensive comparisons of the *Lai* culture in the pre-Christian era and the post-Christian era in various aspects of culture. The main findings of this chapter may be summed up as follows:

***Lai* Social Norms and Values:** The advent of Christianity has led to a significant decline or dilution in the traditional social norms and values of the *Lai* community. Christian norms and practices have replaced or modified the traditional ones, resulting in a loss of cultural identity and heritage.

***Lai* Marriage System:** The *Lai* marriage system has undergone significant changes with the influence of Christianity. A mixed form of marriage has emerged, which combines elements of both Christian and *Lai* traditional marriage practices. This has resulted in a compromise of traditional cultural practices and customs.

Divorce Practices: Divorce practices have also been impacted by Christianity. While rural areas still adhere to the traditional *Lai* Customary Divorce Law, urban areas have adopted more modern and westernised practices. This has resulted in a dichotomy between rural and urban areas.

Status of *Lai* Women: Christianity has improved the status of *Lai* women, especially through modern education. Women are now more empowered and have greater access to opportunities. However, they still face inequality and limited inheritance rights, indicating that there is still work to be done.

Funeral Practices: Christianity has significantly impacted *Lai* funeral practices, reducing economic disparities and promoting a more egalitarian approach. This has resulted in a more inclusive and compassionate approach to funeral rites.

Family Bonds and Social Ties: The influence of Christianity has weakened traditional family bonds and social ties. While the *Lai* family bond remains intact, the sense of community and social cohesion has been eroded. However, it is noteworthy that the *Lai* people still fosters a relatively closer family bond as family and clan are still the crucial votebanks in matters of political elections.

Cultural Heritage and Assimilation: Christianity has led to assimilation issues, resulting in the near extinction of *Lai* language, dress, and dances. The *Lai* community is at risk of losing its cultural heritage and identity. However, the respondents are all thankful that the LIKBK has actively taken up the initiative to popularise the *Lai* culture.

Impact on *Lai* Authority: The traditional *Lai* authority structure has been impacted by Christianity, with British hegemony replacing traditional *Lai* chieftainship. This has resulted in a loss of traditional leadership and governance practices.

Discriminatory Practices: The missionaries' half-hearted attention to the *Lai* community's needs and concerns has contributed significantly to the assimilation problems faced by the community. This lack of attention has resulted in a lack of understanding and respect for *Lai* cultural practices and traditions.

CHAPTER V: THE LIKBK AS AN ETHNO-RELIGIOUS REFORM MOVEMENT

Chapter V is dedicated to the study of the LIKBK movement, the causes, the stages and the ideology and role of leadership that had effectively made the LIKBK movement successful. Upon asking the question, 'Is LIKBK movement an ethno-

religious reform movement?’ The study validates that the LIKBK is a true reform movement that has successfully undergone all the essential pre-conditions for a successful social movement, like the causes, the stages, presence of clear ideology and role of able leaders. The main arguments and key findings of the Chapter are put forth as follows:

Causes of the LIKBK Movement: Countless factors had played to the cultural erosion of the *Lai* people, such as Christianity, the British colonial rule, the BCM hegemonic rule etc. which had ultimately led to the *Lai* ethnic consciousness, which are put forward as follows:

Christian hegemony: The introduction of Christianity has led to cultural erosion in the *Lai* community, replacing traditional customs and practices with Church activities, and marginalising indigenous social control mechanisms, resulting in a decline of *Lai* cultural heritage and identity, exemplifying Gramsci’s (1970) cultural hegemony.

British hegemony: The colonial legacy perpetuates divisions, fueling ethnic consciousness and the LIKBK movement, which seeks to reclaim rights, identity, and unite fragmented tribes. The arbitrary division of territories fragmented the *Lai*, leading to cultural erosion and adoption of various names. This colonial legacy perpetuates divisions, fueling ethnic consciousness and the LIKBK movement, which seeks to reclaim rights, identity, and unity, demonstrating Gramsci’s (1971) hegemony, where a dominant group exercises power through coercion and consent.

BCM hegemony: The Baptist Church of Mizoram’s (BCM) neglect and hegemonic control over the *Lai* people led to feelings of marginalisation, prompting the establishment of the LIKBK church as a counter-hegemonic movement to reclaim autonomy and cultural identity. The BCM’s restructuring and indifference to *Lai* concerns solidified its grip, forcing *Lai* elders to create their own church as a means of resistance and self-empowerment, illustrating Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony.

Fear of assimilation: The introduction of Christianity in Mizoram has threatened *Lai* identity, culture, and language, leading to a decline in *Lai* language usage and a fear of assimilation. This fear has driven the emergence of the LIKBK, an ethnicity-centered church, as a response to cultural erasure and loss of distinctiveness. Theories

by Blumer (1995), Turner and Killian (1957), and Oberschall (1973) emphasise the role of fear of assimilation in triggering social movements, resonating with the LIKBK movement's goal of reclaiming territorial rights and cultural identity.

Political factor: The creation of the *Lai* Autonomous District Council (LADC) in 1972, granting autonomous powers, has been crucial to the LIKBK movement's emergence, which complements the LADC in preserving *Lai* identity and autonomy. The emergence of the LIKBK movement aligns with the theoretical perspectives of (Tilly, 1978; Tarrow, 1994; McAdam, 1982; and Gamson, 1975), who collectively emphasise the significance of political factors as a crucial catalyst for the birth of social movements.

The Revival Factor: The *Lai* people's spiritual revival in the 1960s sparked a passion for missionary work, but the Baptist Church of Mizoram's (BCM) unsupportive stance and rejection of their appeals led to the establishment of their own ethnic-based church, LIKBK. The emergence of the LIKBK movement resonates with the theoretical perspectives of Stark (1984) and Beckford (1989) who collectively highlight the significance of religious issues as a catalyst for social movement emergence, across both modern and pre-modern societies.

Identity issues and sense of deprivation and exclusion: The *Lai* people's experiences of humiliation, ridicule, and exclusion by the *Lusei/Mizo* tribes and Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) led to feelings of deprivation, inferiority, and marginalisation, fueling their desire for autonomy and self-governance. The LIKBK movement mirrors Reetz's (1993) observations of colonial India, where ethnic and religious identity issues drove nationalist movements, similarly fueling the *Lai* people's quest for identity preservation and social change.

An Element of Ethno-religious Reform Movement: The study of LIKBK is validated as an ethno-religious reform movement through the following arguments:

Regionalism: The LIKBK movement embodies Shils' Primordial Approach (1957) and Barth's (1969) 'strong primordial attachment', highlighting the deep connection between individuals and their land, religion, and kinship ties, which fuels ethnicity and ethnic movements, evident in LIKBK's regionalism and ethno-nationalism.

Ethno-nationalism: The LIKBK movement exemplifies ethno-nationalism, as described by Pannikar (2011), where an ethnic group seeks control over its political, economic, and social matters, often aspiring for statehood.

The Centrality of *Lai* Sentiments: The *Lai* community's strong ethnic pride and consciousness led to the birth of LIKBK, with 72% of respondents identifying *Lai* ethnic sentiment as the key factor. This supports the arguments of Udeagha and Nwamah (2020) and Mate (2018) that ethnic sentiment is a decisive factor in the formation of ethnic movements and religions.

Reformed Response Against the British Hegemony: The LIKBK movement is a response to colonialism's cultural assimilation and oppression, which threatened the *Lai* people's identity, language, and traditions, echoing Reetz's (1993) notion of an 'anti-colonial struggle' that characterised Indian nationalist movements.

Reformed Response Against the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) Hegemony: The study found that 85% of participants (348 persons) believe that the LIKBK movement emerged as a response to the discriminatory treatment by the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM). This supports the arguments of Gramsci (1970) and Torres and Young (1992) that social movements arise in response to the hegemonic culture of the ruling class.

Reformed Response Towards Preservation of *Lai* Culture: The *Lai* people seeks to create an indigenous church to safeguard and revitalise their cultural heritage from further assimilation which has been eroded by British colonialism, Christianity, Westernisation, and modernisation. This aligns with Siddiqi's (2014) and Singh's (2014) views that reform movements serve as a shield against non-indigenous influences.

Stages of the Movement: Employing Blumer's (1995) stages of successive social movement stages, the LIKBK movement may likewise be classified as follows:

The Preliminary stage (1889-1970): The LIKBK Movement's preliminary stage (1889-1970) was characterised by growing discontent and feelings of deprivation among the *Lai* people. This stage aligns with Blumer's (1951) 'unrest stage' and

Smelser's (1962) frameworks, where collective discontent laid the groundwork for a social movement.

The popular stage (1970-1982): The popular stage of the LIKBK movement saw the emergence of sectarian churches declaring independence from the Baptist Church of Mizoram (BCM) and *Lakher* Pioneer Mission. Various churches were formed, including *Isua Krista Kohhran* (IKK), *Lairam Baptist Kohhran* (LBK), and *Pawiram Baptist Kohhran* (PBK). This stage aligns with Blumer's (1951) 'popular stage,' where people feel a sense of independence and detachment from the current condition, leading to declarations of independence from the parent church.

Emergence of Ideology and Leadership: The LIKBK movement's trajectory aligns with Blumer's framework, illustrating how charismatic leaders can crystallise popular ideologies and drive social movement momentum. The movement's popular stage was characterised by the rise of prominent leaders, including *Mr. T. Hranghluta*, *C. Ngunhaia*, *B. Siamhranga*, *C.T. Luaia*, *C. Hniartura*, *A. Lalchhuana*, and *L. Chinzah*.

The Formalisation Stage (The formation of IKKL, 1999): After years of discussions, the two *Lai* ethnic churches, IKK and PBK, merged into a single entity, '*Isua Krista Kohhran Lairam*' (IKKL), on November 27, 1999. This aligns with Blumer's (1995) description of a social movement's formalisation stage, where a clear ideology, constitution and framework emerge to address existing issues, solidifying the movement's approach to achieving its objectives.

The Stage of Institutionalisation of the Movement (The Birth Of LIKBK, 2004): As described by Smelser (1965), the final stage of a social movement is characterised by formalisation, where collective behavior gives way to organised structures, accepted norms, and a bureaucratic setup. The LIKBK movement thus, matches with Smelser's (1965) description of the final stage of social movement which is marked by high level of formalisation of the movement that takes the shape of institution.

CHAPTER VI: THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATIONS BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE LIKBK IN *LAI* SOCIETY

Chapter VI is dedicated to answer the research question: ‘What are the positive outcomes of LIKBK in terms socio-economic and political reforms? The study concludes that the LIKBK does not only bring cultural reforms, but also significant socio-economic, and political reforms. The main findings may be summed up in two heads:

8.5.1. Socio-economic transformation

The LIKBK has brought about numerous socio-economic transformations, which can be summarised as follows:

LIKBK and Upliftment of Health and Wellness: The LIKBK has significantly impacted socio-economic development, particularly in health and wellness, through initiatives like establishing a needed hospital, conducting free clinics in remote villages, and offering discounts to the poor and needy, aligning with Walumsibi's (2022) vision of the Church as a ‘field hospital’.

Monthly Contribution for the Socio-Economic Upliftment (*tithing*): Similar to Ajah's (2013) findings, the practice of *tithing* has significantly contributed to the socio-economic development of the *Lai* society. *Tithing* has enabled the LIKBK to initiate development projects, accumulate wealth locally, and retain funds for community use.

Role of *Lairam* Social Mission Committee of LIKBK: Citing Wry, T., & York, J. G. (2017), who postulate that the Church is a potential source of social enterprise activities, the Committee plays crucial role in driving socio-economic development by innovative initiatives like the setup of a Motherless Home, Child Adoption Centre, *Lairam* Multipurpose Training Centre, Charity Shop, Comprehensive Livelihood Project, and The *Lairam* Rescue Centre to combat drug addiction.

Communication Committee for Upliftment of the *Lai* Literature: In addition to launching key initiatives like the *Lairam* Offset Press, *Lairam* Bookroom, and Stationery, the committee's Literature and Publication Board has played a vital role in

revitalizing *Lai* literature and language. Drawing from Vanlalzauva (2022), who envisages the church as a crucial centre for learning, the study of LIKBK aptly qualifies this statement.

Role of Christian Education Committee (CEC): Following Magdelaine (2015) who validates the Church as a valuable learning centre, the LIKBK proves to be a crucial promoter of modern education along the lines with bible teachings. The establishment of Mission schools (New Vision English Schools), and *Lairam* Higher Academy of Science (LAHAS) stands out as a particularly important initiative.

Rice Contribution for Socio-Economic Development: The '*buhfaitham*' initiative, where LIKBK Women's Wing members contribute a 'handful of rice', has been a significant financial source for the Mission Department, substantially supporting LIKBK's mission works within and outside the region, mirroring the findings of Vanlathanpuui (2019) and Ganesh (2009) who identified 'handful of rice' as the main earner of church treasury.

The LIKBK as A Guardian for The Poor: The LIKBK plays a vital role as a guardian for the poor, particularly supporting disadvantaged tribes like *the Bawm*, *Chakmas*, and *Brus* through charitable initiatives, providing essential assistance such as food, clothing, medical aid, establishment of schools and new churches in these areas demonstrate its commitment to marginalised communities. This aligns with Soundararajan's (2020) concept of the 'sub-altern church' and Durkheim's (1893) idea of the euphoric function of the Church, which was well appreciated by the respondents in this study.

LIKBK as a Leadership Training Centre: The LIKBK plays a crucial role in leadership development, nurturing future pastors and leaders who make a significant impact in civil society. Leaders emerging from LIKBK assume key roles in organisations like YLA, LSA, and LWA. This aligns with Wright's (2024) advocacy for the Church as a centre for leadership training.

LIKBK and Employment Generation: The LIKBK has played a vital role in addressing unemployment by generating employment opportunities for both educated

and uneducated individuals. The study similarly concludes in line with Ryan (1984), who posits the Church as a problem solver of unemployment in the African region.

8.5.2 Political Transformation

The political significance of LIKBK in the *Lai* political affairs are summed up as follows:

Political Reformation in LADC: The LIKBK's establishment has driven political reformation in the *Lai* Autonomous District Council (LADC), the highest political institution in the *Lai* territory, by complementing its existence and serving as a watchdog to ensure free and fair elections. The study supports Habermas' (1991) idea that diverse voices can shape democratic deliberation and outcomes, highlighting the crucial role of civil society organisations like LIKBK in advocating for social justice and promoting democratic values.

The LIKBK as a Decisive Vote Bank: The LIKBK wields significant electoral influence, as evidenced by the findings, where religious affiliation emerges as the second most crucial factor in voting behaviour. This study supports Green et al., (1996) who posits how individuals often align their voting preferences for those candidates in harmony with their religious values and moral beliefs.

The LIKBK's Dual Role Towards Human Rights and Democracy: The LIKBK emerges as a champion of human rights and democracy, upholding non-discrimination and unity in diversity by treating all tribes, including marginalised communities, with dignity and respect. This aligns with research by Gibbs and Deborah (1999), Rychetska (2022), Intan (2018), and Davila (2009), highlighting the Church's role in addressing human rights and democracy, particularly in developing countries.

LIKBK and its Gender Policy: The LIKBK church, despite its humanitarian work, has a gap in gender equality, failing to ordain women theologians as pastors and rarely having female church elders. This perpetuates gender inequality, silence, and exclusion, raising questions about its commitment to gender equality and human rights, aligning with the findings of Weisner (2023) and Zarzozuali (2024).

CHAPTER VII: THE ROLE OF SUB-MEMBERS OF LIKBK IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF LAI SOCIETY

Chapter VII explores the specific socio-economic contributions of six fellowship departments within the LIKBK institution, which include *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran Hmeichhe Pawl* (LIKBP / Women wing), *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran Thalai Pawl* (LIKBT / Youth wing), the Pastor wing, the Church Elders wing, *Lairam Isua Krista Baptist Kohhran Mipa Pawl* (LIKBM / Men wing) and Deacons. Women-wing scores the highest when it comes to the contribution to socio-economic development, followed by youth-wing, Pastors, Church-elder, men-wing, and deacons respectively.

This study, building on Lumintang and Daliman (2023) and Kariuki (2018), highlights LIKBK's sub-groups' contributions to socio-economic development, showing the church's evolution in collaborating with organisations to implement community development programs, improving surrounding communities' well-being, and underscoring its importance as an agency of socio-economic development, demonstrating its vital role in combating poverty and driving community development.

CHAPTER VIII: CONCLUSION

This final chapter synthesises the key takeaways from the study, revisiting the research questions and objectives that guided the inquiry into the LIKBK movement. The study begins by providing a chapter-wise summary of the findings. It then delves into the macro implications of the micro studies undertaken. Additionally, the study offers suggestions for future research.

The macro studies examine the broader implications of the preceding chapters being studied. Drawing from (Huber, 1991; Cicourel, 1981; Zald, 1979 and McCarthy, 1977), who advocated for theories that bridged the gap between micro-level interactions and macro-level social structures and transformations, the macro implications of the micro studies are put forward as follows:

The LIKBK as the *Lai* Counter-Hegemonic Struggle

The emergence of LIKBK was a counter-hegemonic response to British and Christian hegemonies, particularly the BCM's dominance and economic exploitation, catalysed by the fear of assimilation. The movement's nature, understood through Melucci's (1996) concept of 'appropriation of identity', drives the *Lai* people's struggle for independence, centered on preserving their identity through promoting their language, traditions, and culture, showcasing a new social movement solidifying their autonomy.

***Lai* Cultural Change - Westernisation vs. Modernisation**

Srinivas (1966) posits that while Westernisation can lead to cultural loss, modernisation can bring both positive and negative consequences. The impact of Christianity on *Lai* culture reflects this dual dynamic, with both Westernising and modernising effects, resulting in beneficial and detrimental cultural changes.

The LIKBK: The Custodian of *Lai* Cultural Reforms

The introduction of Christianity significantly impacted *Lai* society, affecting core cultural elements like language, attire, songs, dances, and festivals. In response, the LIKBK was formed to preserve and promote *Lai* cultural identity. This aligns with findings from Melucci (1996) and Hefner (1998), who noted that social movements, including religious groups, can serve as guardians of traditional practices and culture, working to preserve and promote cultural identity.

The LIKBK's Socio-Economic Outcome

The LIKBK embodies a quintessential social enterprise. Key characteristics that qualify the LIKBK a true social enterprise include:

Mission Driven: The LIKBK, akin to social enterprises, is guided by a clear social mission and charity works, that define its identity and purpose (Dess, 1998; Mair & Schoen, 2007).

Financial sustainability: Like social enterprises, the LIKBK prioritises social impact while also seeking financial sustainability through diverse revenue streams (World

Bank, 2019). Most of LIKBK's projects are self-sustaining, providing employment and contributing to the community's socio-economic development.

Innovative Solutions: Social enterprises are renowned for developing innovative approaches to address social or environmental challenges, often leveraging entrepreneurial methods, technology, or creative business models to create scalable and sustainable solutions (Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, 2019; Nicholls, 2006:12). The LIKBK is a shining example of this, demonstrating exceptional innovative skills through its diverse range of projects like *Lairam* Motherless Home, the *Lairam* Adoption Centre, the *Lairam* Christian Medical College, the *Lairam* Rescue Centre (specifically designed for drug addicts), and the *Lairam* Handloom, among others.

Double or Triple Bottom Line: The LIKBK, similar to social enterprise model, adopts a triple bottom line approach, measuring success by financial, social, and environmental outcomes (Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, 2019; Perrini, 2006). It prioritises positive outcomes in all projects, addressing social issues like care for motherless children, addiction, and HIV/AIDS, while also promoting environmental sustainability.

Stakeholder Engagement: The LIKBK, like social enterprises, engages with diverse stakeholders, including customers, beneficiaries, investors, employees, and the community, prioritising transparency, accountability, and collaboration (Dart, 2004; O'Donohoe et al., 2014; World Bank, 2019). Its ventures involve various stakeholders, ensuring transparency through regular auditing and checking by the General Assembly.

The LIKBK's Political Outcome

The findings on LIKBK's political influence can be understood through the lens of Habermas' (1991) 'Public Sphere' theory, which highlights the crucial role of civil society in facilitating public debate, scrutinising power, and advancing social justice, which are put forward as follows:

Public Sphere and Communicative Action: Habermas (1991) emphasises the importance of open and inclusive dialogue, where diverse voices, including religious ones, can contribute to democratic deliberation and decision-making. Likewise, the study reveals that the LIKBK and LADC are collaborating closely on various critical issues, such as environmental protection and the war against drugs. This partnership demonstrates the LIKBK's commitment to not only promoting the interests of the *Lai* community but also contributing to the broader social and political good.

Post-secular Society: The LIKBK's influential role in the *Lai* political landscape aligns with Habermas' concept of a 'post-secular' society, where religion continues to shape public life. LIKBK's impact on political reforms, particularly in promoting transparency and accountability in the electoral process through the *Mizoram* People Forum (MPF), and its members holding high political offices, validates Habermas' theory. This demonstrates the significant role religion can play in shaping political leadership and decision-making processes, contributing meaningfully to ethical and moral discourse in pluralistic societies.

Religion and Human Rights: The LIKBK's commitment to human dignity, justice, and solidarity aligns with Habermas' pluralistic approach to human rights, promoting equality, mutual understanding, and respect for diversity through inclusive practices and initiatives, embodying communicative action and fostering democratic deliberation.

Implications on Gender Policy

The LIKBK has made progress in gender equality, but still perpetuates discrimination, limiting women theologians to coordinator roles, prohibiting ordination to Pastor, and underrepresenting women in leadership. This mirrors broader societal issues and is consistent with findings of (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2012; Kanter, 1997; Acker, 1990) on gender stereotypes, bias, and discrimination in organisations, including religious institutions, hindering women's opportunities and advancement.

Observance of *Lai* Night: Its Implication

The LIKBK observes '*Lai* Night' every Saturday, where members wear traditional *Lai* attire and conduct the service entirely in the *Lai* language, promoting pride in *Lai*

heritage, community unity, and cultural identity. The observance of *Lai* Night fosters unity, strengthens social bonds, and showcases *Lai* cultural practices, reaffirming individuals' connection to their roots. Clifford Geertz's concept of 'thick description' (1973) is highly applicable to the study of *Lai* Night, where the observance of this cultural practice is not just a superficial activity, but a complex web of meanings, symbols, and interpretations that reveal the deeper cultural significance and identity of the *Lai* community.

LIKBK and its Implications on Issues of Reunification and Unity

This study finds that the LIKBK promotes unity among the *Lai* people, with 85% of respondents believing it fosters a renewed sense of unity among various *Lai* ethnic tribes, promoting social cohesion and stability, contrary to the global notion of religion being a source of conflict. This echoes Durante's (2015) findings on ethnic-based churches promoting integration while preserving heritage. The study concludes that LIKBK brings unity, reverberating Functionalist exponents like (Durkheim, 1912; Parsons, 1967; Bellah and Hammond, 1980) who argue that religion promotes social cohesion and stability, with the *Lai* people feeling united under one Church, one culture, and one denomination.

Scope for Further Research

The following research ideas offer potential avenues for further exploration and investigation, building on the findings and insights from the original study:

1. Investigate the impact of the LIKBK's gender policy on women's empowerment and gender equality within the organisation and in the broader community.
2. Explore the effectiveness of the LIKBK's development programs in addressing poverty and improving living standards among marginalised communities.
3. Conduct a comparative study of the LIKBK's approach to ethno-religious reform with other organisations, examining similarities and differences in their strategies and outcomes.
4. Develop and test a new framework for evaluating the success of ethno-religious reform movements, applying it to the LIKBK and other case studies.

5. Examine the role of leadership in shaping the LIKBK's policies and practices, including the impact of different leadership styles and approaches on the organisation's development and effectiveness.
6. Investigate the intersection of religion and development in the context of the LIKBK's work, exploring how religious beliefs and values inform and shape development practices and outcomes.
7. Analyse the LIKBK's engagement with local and national governments, examining the opportunities and challenges of collaborating with secular authorities to advance ethno-religious reform and development goals.
8. Conduct a longitudinal study of the LIKBK's impact over time, assessing the sustainability and long-term effects of its programs and policies.
9. Explore the potential for scaling up the LIKBK's model of ethno-religious reform and development to other contexts and regions.
10. Investigate the role of technology in enhancing the LIKBK's development programs and outreach, including the use of digital platforms for education, healthcare, and economic empowerment.

Main Findings

1. The most discriminative role played by Christianity as mentioned by the respondents are the discriminatory roles played by the early missionaries where no missionary was assigned for the *Lai* people.
2. Absence of Christian missionary had led to the issue of grave language assimilation as there was no missionary to reduce the *Lai* language to written script.
3. Absence of exclusive *Lai* script has led to inevitable adoption of *Mizo/Lusei* language, thereby leading to the loss of typical *Lai* language.
4. Since education and gospel were introduced to the *Lai* people by the *Mizo/Lusei* Christians, and not directly from the white Christian missionary, availing education and converting to Christianity basically means surrendering the *Lai* identity and adopting the *Mizo* culture as an alternative.

5. The most hard-hit parts of the *Lai* culture includes the *Lai* language, festivals, songs, dances, thereby shaking the very core of *Lai* culture.
6. Declaration of alcohol (*zureu*) as a sin by Christianity has led to the loss of *Lai* traditional dances and festivals.
7. However, Christianity's constructive roles are seen in declining gap between the rich and poor in funeral practices wherein death has no longer been an expensive affair as it was in the past. The status of women has been uplifted by Christianity, especially in realm of education. However, this transformation remains limited when considering issues of equal opportunities in politics and religious institutions. It is noteworthy that women still encounter barriers to assuming leadership roles in these domains. Despite their pivotal role as primary earners for church treasuries, prestigious positions such as church elder and pastor continue to elude women within religious institutions. Additionally, when it comes to *Lai* Customary Law of inheritance, women are still sidelined.
8. It is noteworthy that the *Lai* people still fosters a relatively closer family bond as family and clan are still the crucial votebanks in matters of political elections. However, the sense of community and social cohesion has been eroded.
9. The *Lai* marriage system has undergone a significant changes whereby a mixed form of marriage is the first choice among the respondents, that is a blend of traditional form of giving bride-price is still followed along with Christain church marriage.
10. There is no fixed price for bride-price, and largely differs from clan to clan. Overall, the bride-price is comparatively higher than the *Lusei* tribe, typically ranging from ₹5000 or more.
11. Christianity has not much altered the *Lai* Customary Law. Even though slight changes have been seen in the *Lai* Customary, however, they still follow the *Lai* Customary Marriage practices like '*Hmaitlam*' (giving money to the bride's family as a gesture of apology when the lovers eloped due to disapproval by the family), '*tang phah*' (the practice of giving cloth to the husband's aunt) and '*phunthawh*' (the

principal bride-price given to the bride's family without which the groom's future children will not be able to take the father's name).

12. Christianity has a positive influence in the divorce settlement. While rural areas still adhere to the traditional *Lai* Customary Divorce Law, urban areas have adopted more modern and Westernised practices.

13. The LIKBK is a true ethno-religious movement which is validated through the sociological analyses of any successful movement, that had passed through Blumer's (1995) stages of successive social movement stages. The LIKBK movement is efficaciously classified into The Preliminary stage, The Popular Stage, The Formalisation Stage, The Stage of Institutionalisation of the Movement.

14. By employing the classics of Marx, Gramsci and Melucci, the study concludes that the 'BCM Hegemony' serves as the main catalyst for the formation of LIKBK whereby the *Lai* people asserted their identity through the LIKBK, trying to supplant the BCM hegemony with the *Lai* hegemony. It is thus viewed as a counter-hegemonic struggle against the BCM hegemony.

15. The LIKBK movement exemplifies a reformative social movement, as categorised by Aberle (1966), seeking to effect targeted changes within the existing social structure to benefit the *Lai* community. Unlike revolutionary movements, LIKBK aims for incremental changes, preserving *Lai* culture and asserting ethnic identity, rather than fundamentally overhauling the system. The LIKBK endeavours to reform the *Lai* culture, which was threatened by assimilation into *Lushei/Mizo* culture and Christianity, thereby addressing specific issues and injustices faced by the *Lai* people.

16. It has been detected that the LIKBK not only initiated cultural reforms, but also socio-economic and political reforms in the *Lai* society.

17. The LIKBK's role in promoting human rights is complex, while it excels in humanitarian work, inclusive membership, and advocating for the needy, but falls short in gender equality, notably in ordaining women theologians as pastors and appointing female church elders, revealing a gap in its gender policy despite its commendable efforts in other areas.

17. Prior to the establishment of LIKBK, tithes were remitted to the BCM church, but with the emergence of LIKBK, the tithes are now retained and utilised within the *Lai* district, resulting in a substantial accumulation of wealth and subsequently contributing to the socio-economic development of the region.

18. Based on the measurement tools employed, it is evident that the women-wing makes the most significant contribution to the socio-economic development of *Lai* society. However, upon further examination of the women-wing and comparison with previous studies, it becomes apparent that despite their substantial contributions to the church's treasury and socio-economic development, women are still underrepresented in top leadership positions within the Assembly.

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