

**DYNAMICS OF CULTURE AND MORALITY IN SELECT
NOVELS OF LALHMINGLIANA SAIAWI**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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PHILOSOPHY**

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LALHMINGLIANA SAIAWI**

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Submitted

**In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in English and Culture Studies of Mizoram University, Aizawl.**

MIZORAM UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND CULTURE STUDIES
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **“Dynamics of Culture and Morality in Select Novels of Lalhmingliana Saiawi”** is the bonafide research conducted by Hmingsangzuali under my supervision. Hmingsangzuali worked methodically for her thesis being submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English and Culture Studies, Mizoram University. This is to further certify that she had fulfilled all the required norms laid down under the Ph.D. regulations of Mizoram University. Neither the thesis as a whole nor any part of it was ever submitted to any other University.

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DECLARATION
MIZORAM UNIVERSITY
September, 2025

I **HMINGSANGZUALI**, 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 do 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 English and Culture Studies**.

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(HMINGSANGZUALI)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. CERTIFICATE	i
2. DECLARATION	ii
3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
4. TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
5. BODY OF THE THESIS	
i. CHAPTER ONE	
An Author: Lalhmingliana Saiawi	1-33
ii. CHAPTER TWO	
Culture and the Mizo	34-68
iii. CHAPTER THREE	
Morality as Portrayed by Saiawi	69-105
iv. CHAPTER FOUR	
Women in Saiawi's Narratives	106-144
v. CHAPTER FIVE	
Conclusion	145-161
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY	161-174
7. BRIEF BIO-DATA OF THE CANDIDATE	v
8. PARTICULARS OF THE CANDIDATE	vi

Dynamics of Culture and Morality in Select Novels of Lalhmingliana Saiawi

Chapter I-

An Author: Lalhmingliana Saiawi

Lalhmingliana Saiawi was born on 1st January 1940 at Kawlkulh in Mizoram to parents Thlahaia and Lalruni. According to his autobiographical essay, his mother died on 13th March 1945 when he was a little boy and he fondly recalls that his mother, being uneducated, desired for him to be educated to his best calibre (Thukhawchang Vol. II 105). His father remarried and Saiawi became the eldest of ten siblings who all look up to him for his undying family principles. His self-given surname Saiawi was taken from his grandfather's name who had a deep and lasting influence on the author. Saiawi took great pride in acquiring the name and keeping the legacy of his family alive through his grandfather's name. He had high praise for his grandfather whom he strived to emulate in terms of integrity, sense of fairness, sound principles and strong values.

Saiawi had an impressive academic background that reflected the struggle of an aspiring young Mizo student during Mizoram's hard times in academics. However, he became among the few who made it to the ultimate definition of success when he secured a position as an IAS officer in 1964. His formal education started at the Kawlkulh Primary School in his hometown and from a young age he had to go out of his hometown to get his education. He received his middle school education at the Saitual Middle School which is a nearby town. In the year 1955, he completed his matriculation from Mizo High School in Aizawl. Having lived during a time and place when not only education but earning a living was nothing short of a struggle, Saiawi was unsure about his academic future and took a break after his graduation from high school. He recalls in *Thukhawchang Vol. I* that he had silently wished to further his education but was at a loss as to how and what to pursue as he was still young and uninformed. Following his friends, he applied for a scholarship offered by the Assam government to go to a veterinary college in Guwahati. He was selected for the scholarship and joined the college out of sheer convenience. It turned out that he had no particular interest in veterinary science and failed in his first year of college and decided to drop out. He then enrolled in Cotton College, Guwahati, with the aspiration to qualify for the Indian Administrative Service. He acquired his Intermediate of Arts degree in the first division in 1959. He continued to pursue a bachelor's degree at St. Edmund's College in Shillong in 1961 and graduated with a

degree in economics. He secured a position as a Junior Assistant in the Assam Electricity Board and held the position from 1961-1964. In 1964, he qualified for the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and was assigned to the Maharashtra Cadre and he joined the service on 18 July 1964. He served for thirty-two years till his voluntary retirement in March 1993. From April 1993 to March 1998, he served as a member of the Maharashtra Administrative Tribunal. He then worked at the Central Administrative Tribunal at Patna Bench from April 1999 to December 2001 (107-120). Saiawi married Lalthankhumi (Nupuii) on 6 January 1970 in the Dawrpui Church and together they have three children, the eldest son Ramdinsanga Saiawi, the middle Ramzausa Saiawi, and the youngest daughter Muanpuii Saiawi. Saiawi demonstrated profound interest in writing, as noted in a personal interview with Lalthankhumi. However, his strong sense of integrity and commitment to his professional responsibilities prevented him from devoting the time and attention to novel writing throughout much of his career (Lalthankhumi). As a man of commendable principles, he held on to his virtues in his service matters and did not unfairly favour kith and kin. He kept details of his experiences and observations during his service in journals which he often reproduced in the forms of essays and journals which were later compiled in book form. Saiawi was afflicted with health complications of the nervous system toward the end of his government job. His health condition turned worse in 2014 which affected his mobility and became reliant on the loving care of his family. In May 2016, he suffered a stroke that required urgent medical care in the ICU at the Greenwood Hospital, Aizawl. He was discharged from the hospital after his condition improved but suffered another medical emergency on 5 June 2016 which tragically claimed his life. (Rochharzela 23)

Saiawi was a deeply literary man, and in an interview by Vanlalchami and C. Lalawmpuia, he asserted that his love for writing started at an early age when he studied in class V at Saitual Middle School. His passion for writing and literature went beyond the artifices of the aspect of business which was apparent from his pioneering efforts. He denoted that he desired freedom with his books which was why he used his own hard-earned money to write his books and that he made a little

profit only later on (224). The literary scene in Mizoram during most of his writing career lacked proper establishment. Publication of books was not necessarily a lucrative business as many writers scrambled for financial support and publicity. The challenges Saiawi faced in gaining wider exposure and effective marketing for his books meant that his creativity and craftsmanship often went unnoticed by the general public. Despite the depth of his work, which intricately weaves meaningful historical elements into depictions of relationship dynamics within Mizo society, the appreciation for these narratives was largely confined to selective pockets of literary enthusiasts. This limited recognition underscores the struggle which many Mizo authors face in connecting their significant cultural insights with a broader audience, highlighting the need for greater visibility for impactful storytelling. The author was an avid reader and an even more inspired writer as reflected from his prolific literary production. He was a celebrated novelist, essayist, and well-known contributor of articles in reputed newspapers in Mizoram. According to the *Indigenous Writers of India Volume I: North-East India* "Saiawi has written more than one hundred articles in Mizo on various cultural, social, political, and religious topics, which have been published in several magazines and daily newspaper". His first article in Mizo was published in March 1957 for the weekly Mizo magazine Zoram Thupuan; his first two articles in English were published in a Bombay tabloid, The Daily, in 1994. (172) As the author asserted to be known as a novelist and a social critic, he had written nine novels, namely, *Lungrang Laiawrha* (1993), *Lungrang Hmangaihna* (1995), *Nukawki* (1996), *Keimah Unionliana* (1997), *Nukawki Fanu* (1998), *A Na Lua* (2002), *Tawitawkawn Chemângi* (2006), *Makpa Atan* (2011), *Chutiang pawh a ni lo ka nu* (2013). The select texts for the study in the thesis are *Lungrang Laiawrha*, *Lungrang Hmangaihna*, *Nukawki*, and *Nukawki Fanu*. His other works include compilations of essays and articles covering versatile topics from his insights about the Mizo language to Mizo social issues. Such non-fictional works published in book form include nine books in total, namely, six books in the *Thukhawchang* series published between 1989-2015, two books in the *Ka Lo Tawn Ve* series published in 1997 and 2010 respectively, and *Kan Ram Lamah* (1999).

As a consequential Mizo literary figure, Saiawi was very much ahead of his time because he had the foresight and courage to realize the merits of bringing autobiographical elements into his fiction and non-fictional works. These autobiographical elements greatly contribute to the depth and insight about human relations because the author did not shy away from sharing many details which are unpleasant yet important from his experiences. His reflections on life are extensive and are not confined to particular and domestic concerns as he invariably incorporated Mizo historical, social and cultural elements in his writings. Appraisals of his many qualities may be many but all agree that Saiawi is uniquely original in his writing. He has a particular style of narration marked by straightforward language and in certain instances could be described as stoic and abrupt because he did not believe in embellishing and inflating his statements. From his style of language, it is evident that Saiawi was a dignified man who truly believed in the quality of substance in texts and the quality of truths offered by a narrative rather than in romancing the readers by language alone. The context to his principle for freedom in writing in favour of representing social realities in his writings provides important insights into the moral climate of Mizo society. Such need to assert his voice in portraying authentic human experiences could be presumed from the censure he faced from the Synod Bookroom. The reason for his exclusion in selling his novel *Keimah Unionliana* by the seller was the author's inclusion of physical intimacies between romantic partners outside of marriage and the author states in the forwarding of his *Thukhawchang vol. II* that such details are realities in romantic relationships and that omission of such vital part of human realities concerning romantic relationships is a great error. He further claims that even if the seller requested him to take out scenes of intimacy for the sake of selling his books he would promptly decline the request because he stands by his writing further stating that he does justice to the veracity of human reality and would rather keep the integrity of the story in full even if it means that his books sell less. (x)

His courage and foresight in the matter prove that the author was ahead of his time to push against the pressure of conformity for the sake of financial benefit. It shows that the author was of sound principles which had nothing to do with his own

economic status. The author's portrayal of physical relations in his texts was frowned upon in their time when social and personal realities were not sufficiently explored and largely avoided. His act of standing by his writings poses an exemplary challenge to future generations of writers to free themselves of barriers that could compromise the authenticity and truths about life in their narratives. Saiawi's description of physical intimacy is tastefully incorporated within the framework of his stories that call for such need and such descriptions generally have a larger message about the powerful influence of eroticism. His narratives in such matters are non-judgemental and straightforward and he never dwells too long in describing unnecessary details that could be considered unsavoury and crude. Physical intimacy possesses multifaceted implications within the narrative arts. The author endeavors to elucidate upon the subtle complexities inherent in such instances as they are manifested in Mizo culture, considering both their constructive contributions to the strengthening of interpersonal relationships and the potential harm arising from the pursuit of intimacy solely for hedonistic gratification. Saiawi is often noted for his sense of responsibility and accountability with which he handled his freedom of writing. As much as he was fiercely protective of his writing liberties, he handled criticisms of his writings with grace and humility. He had a sharp intellect in producing many consequential issues in Mizo society and many noted him for his visions and hopes to better the Mizo society. He shared his observations about life and knowledge from experiences freely with his readers and his active years as a writer span a long time which made him one of the most prolific among Mizo writers since he wrote about topics with such varieties, he came quite under a lot of scrutiny from lovers of his works and scholars. He was also very open about the feedback he received from his readers and other writers. Regarding feedback about his simple and direct way of narration he stated that he never intentionally did so either in the hopes of making his language stand out or to mark his signature writing style to assert his identity as a writer saying, "I write as I talk and my readers like that." (Vanlalchami and C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau 226). This observation about Saiawi's rambling style of narration is evident in his other works as well which as he had stated earlier he wrote as his everyday conversational language which endeared him to his readers. A Mizo author, who authored *Rambuai Literature* (2014), C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau

claimed that Saiawi exempted his characters from the horrors of *rambuai* in the novels of *rambuai* era in *Lungrang Hmangaihna*, *Keimah Unionliana* and *Nukawki Fanu*. Vanchiau commented in the *Zolife* magazine that Saiawi's primary characters did not face the worst of the *rambuai* period implying his wish for Saiawi to narrativise the painful but crucial part of Mizo memory by bringing it a lot closer than Saiawia had written. Saiawi responded by stating that the most painful experiences of many Mizos caused him so much pain and that prevented him from even making his characters suffer rape or murder. He further empathised with the victims of such crimes by expressing his desire for justice by law for the victims. (Vanchiau 79)

Saiawi's writings are inspired largely by the author's strong family values. The author was essentially a very committed family man which is reflected in his texts where family dynamics and relationships are among the favoured themes. In his non-fiction, he writes about human emotions and qualities in the hopes of strengthening relationships. In his fiction, he dramatises family dynamics and these domestic relationships take centre stage and any other relevant themes such as social awareness, historical influences and ethnic identity discourses are subsidiary components. He makes his writing intimate and relatable to the readers which serves the author favourably because his family stories capture the heart of the readers which consequently allows the readers to contemplate upon other important social and cultural concerns of the Mizos. Family values and social bonds serve as guiding principles for the Mizo society to navigate life and Saiawi lived the principle and echoes it in his writings. The author's passion for showcasing the significance of exploring one's roots and identity makes his works enduring and timeless. His works evoke thoughts about the sense of being and belonging for the Mizos as he tackles Mizo identity discourses from many aspects including the time spent outside of Mizoram during his government service for the large part of his life. In many of his essays and articles, he pays homage to his Kawkulh roots and emphasizes the impact of his hometown during his formative years. He passionately writes for the Mizos and tries to uplift society by empowering their narratives and providing valuable and constructive social criticism. He writes inclusively and with humility by putting

himself within the Mizo collective and not from an outsider's perspective. He was proud of his Mizo heritage and asserted his roots wherever he went both nationally and internationally and he has tried his best to instill this sense of pride in his children and extended family as well.

Saiawi had his literary beginnings in the non-fictional genre and his interest in writing started as early as his high school days when the author was studying in the tenth standard in the year 1955 but he did not publish his works until 1958 when he contributed numerous essays and articles for the Mizo Zirlai Pawl's magazine (Thukhawchang Vol. I iii). He compiled his essays and articles into a book and published it in the year 1986 which became the start of the Thukhawchang series. The series contains an eclectic mix of themes and topics. The author writes with great liberty about any subject that fancies his interest. The timeline of his non-fictional works are as follows-

1. *Thukhawchang vol. I* -1989
2. *Ka Lo Tawn Ve vol. I* - 1997
3. *Kan Ram Lamah* - 1999
4. *Thukhawchang vol. II* - 2003
5. *Thukhawchang vol. III* - 2008
6. *Thukhawchang vol. IV* - 2009
7. *Ka Lo Tawn Ve vol. II* - 2010
8. *Thukhawchang vol. V* - 2012
9. *Thukhawchang vol. VI* - 2015

In the first of the *Thukhawchang* series, Saiawi denotes the themes he covered in the book as humour, his travels, social and private life, nostalgia, and the gospel (v). Beyond these thematic explorations, the author's literary production encompasses a broad spectrum of subjects, including his reflections on literature, literary criticism, creative writing, and accounts of his experiences across various regions of India during his tenure in government service. He further addresses gender dynamics within Mizo society, offers pointed observations and critiques of certain governmental practices in Mizoram, and engages with issues surrounding Mizo

ethnic identity and the educational system, while providing incisive commentary on each. His works also highlight notable Mizo personalities, examine romance and interpersonal relationships, and social dynamics. His courageous comments and constructive criticisms for the betterment of the Mizos reflect his genuine passion for meaningful changes in many areas of Mizo social and cultural life.

His thoughts on Mizo cultural concerns are expansive which reflect his progressive principles of inclusivity. He voices out admirable messages of understanding and unity concerning the concept of what and who are 'Mizo'. His perspectives of the ethnography of the Mizos are inclusive of many tribes and clans that have similar roots but have become separated through the course of history. This idea of brotherhood and fraternity among similar ancestry is shared by many Mizos but he advises against forcing the idea on other tribes who do not want to subscribe to the term. He stresses upon the need to introspect within the Mizo society in terms of rendering selfless services and to keep alive the spirit of harmony and unity. He points out that he has never expected other tribes of the Northeast to speak the Mizo language if they do not desire to speak it. He substantiates his stance on the matter by saying "If they wish to identify as Mizo it is up to them and if they do not identify as such they are still our brothers and sisters by ancestry and we must never discriminate against them." (my trans.; Thukhawchang Vol. IV 114)

Saiawi has consistently articulated the underlying purpose of his social criticism and commentaries: the empowerment of Mizo narratives. His forthright observations and constructive critiques, aimed at the advancement of Mizo society, and testify to his genuine commitment in fostering enduring transformation within the social and cultural fabric of the community. His criticisms are neither malicious nor vindictive rather they are instructive and informative. The author makes sure that any of his given points are rendered with proper contexts and explanation. He also denotes appropriate autobiographical events including experiences of others, and significant incidents to demonstrate his points. Saiawi greatly emphasises his positive messages of cultural assertion and his exhortation for the Mizos to take pride in their identity. He expresses that Mizos have goodwill and benevolence toward other tribes

and cultures. He takes pride in the fact that Mizo society is a charitable society that is always ready and willing to extend support to those in need. He commends the Mizo ways of life from the cultural past by emphasising that an organic and true sense of kindred exists within Mizo culture and that members within the culture are concerned about the well-being of each other regardless of any differences (124). The author is assertive in his knowledge of the Mizo language. He is quite unapologetic about his style of narration and maintains that the chief purpose of writing is clarity of thought which is why his dictum of writing with a purpose makes his essays and articles carry layers of invaluable knowledge (Thukhawchang Vol. III 9). He generously shares his challenges and efforts in his writing process in the hopes of inspiring others in the many instances of his non-fictional works. He believes that the art of writing manifests differently for writers and disapproves of those who look down on writers who put in a lot of work. He presents himself as an example of a writer who acquired the art through hard work and hopes that his confessions would inspire individuals who idealise writers to recognize their own potential for literary creation. He asserts his message stating that “those who express that I am a good writer applaud, instead of deriding, the fact that my writing is from sheer hard work and will, hopefully, gives inspiration to those willing to follow my example to write as well.” (my trans.; Thukhawchang Vol. VI 53)

He dares to be vulnerable and he is often candid about details of his process of writing. He states that he is a meticulous writer which makes him rewrite the same material over and over again. He admits that he sometimes feels disappointed in some of his works and that some of his choice of subjects is not up to standard but acknowledges that such unpleasant experiences are all a part of writing. He confesses that the time, space, and efforts required for his writing prevented him from writing novels during the 28 years of his government job. He reiterates emphatically that his career as a writer is from his sheer effort and hard work and that those who are hesitant to write must take inspiration from him and courageously take that first step to write. He further explicates his passionate plea for the pursuit of writing stating that it is all for the development and expansion of Mizo literature. He is an avid advocate of the power of literature and he ardently encourages aspiring Mizo writers

to write profusely and consciously in order to empower the Mizo narrative. Through all of his struggles with writing and the modest market for Mizo books, Saiawi reaffirms his sense of fulfillment and gratification when he says in 1999, “Writing is among my top priorities, I am very grateful that I am able to continue writing” (my trans.; Kan Ram Lamah 69).

Beyond the meaningful social commentaries, Saiawi’s non-fictional works have literary value in that his imaginative and figurative essays demonstrate his excellent creativity. His essay “Hmangaihna” where he contemplates romantic love and marriage had been included in the higher secondary syllabi. Many of his essays are his self-reflections and take a confessional tone that allows the readers to have a glimpse of his consciousness. In an essay written during his high school days, he expresses humorously about his consciousness of his life reflecting an active and whimsical imagination such as his desire to excel in his studies, have a great social life, and his desire to charm the opposite sex (Thukhawchang Vol. I 16). In another of his essays, he recalls longingly the wonderful feeling of his Christmas and New Year holidays right after they were over. The holiday season makes him feel nostalgic and makes his mind wonder about the power of imagination. He reasons that imagination allows us places to escape the harsh realities of life and that such exercises in the imaginative world allow one to keep hope alive for the future (Thukhawchang vol. II 31). Saiawi also proves that he is a sharp and conscientious critic who often provides insightful observations on other Mizo literary works. He expresses the need for objective literary criticism and the importance of intellectual engagement and careful enumeration of literary works to bring out the best in Mizo literature. He points out that Mizo society has to progress in literary criticism and comments that he has witnessed cases where authors published their responses out of anger (1). Saiawi believes that literary criticism must be constructive and that the Mizo outlook on the matter must also progress and greater attention should be given to the matter. He has given his comments and feedback on Mizo songs and literary works in many instances of his non-fiction. His first concern in a literary text is that it must be captivating and that it captures the full attention of its readers. Saiawi explains that engagement is a great merit to a text because he claims that he has read

books that lack substance with immense interest because of the author's craftsmanship. (Thukhawchang Vol. IV 270)

The author carries over his principle of fairness and quality in his literary criticism as well as in book reviews. He condemns the practice of an overstatement of praises in book reviews and encourages reviewers to give an in-depth appreciation even if it requires the harsh truth. He believes that if such ethical practice prevails in reviewing books, it will elevate Mizo literature to new heights (275). Saiawi's remarkable principle in the matter is evident in his courage to defy prevailing Mizo literary norms of singing praises of an author's work regardless of their quality. His display of thoughts on the matter demonstrates his willingness to participate in a more ethical and intellectual pursuit of new truths in Mizo literature. The catalogue of the author's literary interpretation is also extensive and one of his appreciations of literary arts is Mizo songs. The art of singing is an integral part of Mizo culture and it has led to a great increase in artists and song composers. Saiawi's outlook on Mizo songs is quite progressive in the matter of selective singing by an artist. He is of the opinion that the practice of vilifying love songs in Mizo culture is unnecessary and detrimental to the progress of art forms. He states that the general perception of many Mizos in thinking that love songs have a bad influence is erroneous and the author wants to debunk the perception by explaining that romance and relationships form an integral part of human life and that we should be appreciative of the genre of love songs and their power of reflecting the realities of life (93). Saiawi acknowledges the contribution of songs in Mizo culture and renders his thoughts on different genres of Mizo songs. Of all the genres within Mizo songs, Saiawi proclaims *Puma Zai* as the greatest Mizo song. He attributes the genre of *Puma Zai* as a unifying agent among many Mizo tribes and subsequently, its influence of the Mizo language among the people who share the same ancestry (107). Though *Puma Zai* has been largely relegated in the present-day Mizo culture, its historical significance could be denoted in its powerful influence in negotiating Mizo culture with Christianity as well. Saiawi has incorporated the influence of *Puma Zai* in his novels which will be analysed in the study. The non-fictional works of Saiawi provide a blueprint and preservation of the author's consciousness. They display invaluable insights into the thoughts of a

literary man, a tireless pioneer of Mizo literature, and a dedicated Mizo who put his utmost in empowering Mizo society and its culture.

The reputable Saiawi, as a novelist, left a rich and significant mark in the genre of Mizo novels. His nine novels are noted for their originality and authenticity. Saiawi holds the art of writing novels in high esteem and has lent his thoughts on the process of creating a novel while acknowledging and praising the people involved in the process of publishing a book. On account of the lack of a proper publishing institution for the Mizos, any publication of Mizo books has to rely on charitable individuals to sponsor and publish books by Mizo authors and Saiawi gives their due commendation for their invaluable contribution toward the development of Mizo literature. As an avid supporter of Mizo literature, Saiawi mentions that he has self-financed the publication of his books even at times when he could not give time for their marketing which means that he lost money at the beginning of his publication. After his retirement from his government job, he could give more time to his books and slowly made some profit from them (Thukhawchang Vol. VI 60). Saiawi's novels capture the heart and continued interest of the Mizo people for their endearing and unassuming portrayal of Mizo characters. The author's integrity adds such impact in his novels making his novels embody the principle of 'instructing with pleasure'. The narratives in his novels share the same message of representing the many voices within Mizo society but all anchored within the organic Mizo culture. The author's preoccupation with portraying the authentic Mizo experiences elevates his novels as quintessential Mizo narrative. The historical veracity of his novels is the major element in adding gravitas and impact to his novels. He has reiterated often that he researches the authenticity of the historical times and period stories of his novels. He states in one instance that a great deal of freedom is given to novelists in narrating historical events and that they could make liberal changes to fit the mould of their works but he points out his differences from those novelists saying, "I have written nine novels, I only write about verifiable facts that I think are authentic, I never take the liberty of changing historical facts to fit the stories" (my trans.: 61). As the author's primary concern is to depict Mizo narratives in his novels, they are heavily infused with Mizo ethnicity which forms the fundamental significance in

Saiawi's novels. Since Mizo ethnicity is the culmination of the evolution of historical events and changes in culture, Saiawi's novels could be categorised within the historical genre and the settings signify period pieces in Mizo's history. The primary plotline usually deals with domestic stories that intertwine with one another. The majority of his novels are family sagas and develop within the fictional Mizo universe depicting the ordinary lives of Mizo characters and their relationship dynamics. The plot development of the series *Lungrang Laiawrha* and *Lungrang Hmangaihna* explores the life of the titular character Lungrang Laiawrha and the lives of his succeeding generation of family. Within the Lungrang series, *Ana Lua* and *Makpa Atan* narrate the sub-plots of the primary Lungrang series tracing the stories of secondary characters and they also offer details and contexts to certain events and lives of primary characters that are not included in the primary plotline.

The first of the series *Lungrang Laiawrha* explores the genesis of the Lungrang clan starting from Chhuhathangi, also known as Chhuahi, who later becomes the matriarch of the family. She is the beauty and pride of Saihum village but is found pregnant out of wedlock. Her lover dies in a tragic tiger attack in his village named Sekawt. The child born out of the unfortunate circumstance is Laiawrha and his mother makes sure that he carries his father's clan name Lungrang which is a lesser-known clan. Lungrang Laiawrha grows up to be a wonderful young man with sound character and he is an eligible bachelor in his village. He is embroiled in a messy relationship between two beautiful young women Sakawlhi and Laleni. In the second novel in the series *Lungrang Hmangaihna*, Laiawrha ends up with an unlikely match with Sakawlhi who surprises everyone given that she used to be an aggressive child in the past and hence the nickname Sakawlhi. The couple's marriage is filled with love, trust and loyalty even though they have a rocky start because Laiawrha had impregnated Laleni as the result of his intimacy before his wedding to Sakawlhi. Sakawlhi accepts Laiawrha's illegitimate son Darchhuana and brings him up as her own. The couple also has a daughter named Darkungi and the novel continues with the stories of the siblings. Darkungi marries an IAS officer Zochhuana amidst much drama because Darkungi is not in love with the man but she eventually loves her husband deeply after she realises how good a man her husband

is. They have twin sons Vaizinga and Zorama, and a daughter called Hmangaihi. The family reside in different parts of India because of the father's government job. The story of the couple is loosely based on the author's life. In another storyline within the novel, Darchhuana has an eventful life on account of his unfortunate marriage to a woman named Hazel. She is a highly educated woman of the time and grew up in a privileged background where she is afforded an excellent education outside of Mizoram. She is unfaithful to her husband while Darchhuana is away on a business trip. The couple separates for a while because her mother-in-law Sakawlhi catches her in a compromising circumstance but Darchhuana eventually takes her back and she reveals that she has become pregnant. When she delivers a baby girl named Darsawiveli, it is revealed that the baby is of a different race which confirms her infidelity and Darchhuana divorces her. Darchhuana falls in love with a college student Mazami who had stayed at their home during his first marriage. He realises his feelings for Mazami not long after his marriage implodes and they are married in a happy wedding and they find out that Mazami is actually Laiawrha's long-lost father's niece.

In the novel *Ana Lua*, Saiawi explores in detail the tragic story of Darchhuana's first wife Hazeli. After the failure of her first marriage, Hazeli marries a non-Mizo and her marriage to the man is shrouded in mystery. She becomes a victim of 'bride burning' and loses her life in a tragic turn of events. Even as her daughter is not accepted by Darchhuana as his daughter, his family do not want the innocent child to suffer the consequences of her mother's wrongs and welcomes her within the Lungrang clan and name her Darsawiveli. Darchhuana and Mazami have four sons; identical twins Darliantuala and Darthangvunga as the eldest, the middle child Darkawlchhuna, and the youngest Darnghilhlova. When they grow up, Darsawiveli becomes pregnant with Darthangvunga's son and the two are very much in love with each other. Darthangvunga is stabbed while trying to save a man who is attacked by two criminals. He dies shortly after it is revealed that Darsawiveli is pregnant with his child. The author has a conventional approach to story-telling about the social life of Mizo which reflects the usual archetypes found in most Mizo fiction about the tale of romance and intimacy, domestic squabbles, the hardships of

providing for one's family, and moral injustices in Mizo society. Nevertheless, his ingenuity is best seen in his authentic portrayal of the dynamics of history and Mizo identity, a celebration of Mizo sense of communality, and Mizo women's experiences. The subtle nuances of his portrayal of moral issues such as illicit affairs, corruption, and Mizo women's experiences are masterfully inscribed within the complex social dynamics, which are narrated in a structured manner for the Mizo readers.

The author stresses upon his art of characterization by saying, "My novel deals with characters rather than plot, not to preach but, to express characters" (Zoramdinthara 204). While the author emphasises upon the significance he gives to his characters, the plot of his novels is loosely formed and lacks proper structure. The titles also indicate the author's emphasis on characters in his novels as his novels are mostly entitled by characters' names except for *Chutiang pawh a ni lo ka nu*. He employs an omniscient narrative style where he reveals details of the characters' stories in a controlled manner shedding light and keeping the readers in the dark as he pleases. The author has complete control over the pace of his stories and often includes unrelated topics to the plotline which could sometimes become distracting and tedious. Saiawi is noted for his objectivity in his portrayal of moral issues which is one of the most important aspects of his novels. He narrates the lives of his characters without inserting his own moral ideas which has been acknowledged as a new way of writing novels in Mizo literature because the major strand in Mizo novels is overt didacticism (Zadeng 85). This morally neutral stance of the narrator proves an immense benefit in depicting social realities that evoke thoughts and provide a deeper understanding of humanity. The author chooses characters that are relatable to ordinary people because his characters are an eclectic mix of everyday people in Mizo society. They are flawed human beings faced with life's many struggles and victims of humiliating failures according to the moral and social laws of their communities and of their times. However, their success stories are met in the form of familial, social, and romantic relationships. The select novels *Nukawki* and *Nukawki Fanu* rely upon this principle of redemption through relationships and the author interweaves the narratives with the Lungrang series through marriages.

The two novels are women-centric as they explore the life story of the female eponymous character Nukawki. Within Saiawi's discourse on Mizo culture, his focus on gender dynamics pertains to Mizo women's experiences in a patriarchal society. Saiawi is known for his extensive portrayal of Mizo women and their experiences. He offers a plethora of Mizo women's experiences in his novels, which are filled with primary women characters, and most, if not all, of the female characters navigate their life's journey within a deeply patriarchal framework, and their self-realisation is intricately determined by their male counterparts. Though the author entitles *Lungrang Laiawrha* and *Lungrang Hmangaihna* based on the male primary character Laiawrha, he advances the narratives primarily through female characters such as Chhuhathangi, Sakawli, Laleni, Hazel, and Darkungi. The novel *Nukawki* and its sequel *Nukawki Fanu* recount the tumultuous life of the eponymous female character Nukawki. The author's celebration of Mizo women is apparent from his portrayal of a vast array of their experiences and thereby exposing their strength and resilience through their many challenges. In a patriarchal society such as the Mizo's, the subordinate position of Mizo women is projected through nuanced and layered practices. The first novel *Nukawki* begins with the pitiful status of Nukawki's mother Thangvungi who is raised by her mother. Thangvungi could not find a good match for marriage because of the fact that she was brought up by a divorced mother and she married a widower with a son. Thangvungi is fearful of not having a son and harbours resentment towards her stepson but gives birth to a son after having four daughters of which Nukawki is the eldest. Nukawki grows up to be an excellent student and becomes the pride of their village Mualnuam. She is forced to leave school by her father because of a rumour that she has lost her character. A particularly aggressive man named Chhungbuluka takes advantage of her sexually and she becomes pregnant. After the pregnancy, Nukawki loses her dignity and purpose of life. She finds hope in her daughter Nunnemi but Nunnemi is taken away by the father's family and they flee from the village. Nukawki moves away to Aizawl to rebuild her life where she rekindles romance with her first and true love Lianhawla who is a divorced man with a son named Ropianga from his previous marriage. The two marry at the end of the novel. In the sequel *Nukawki Fanu*, the couple live through *rambuai* and Nukawki starts her own business during her husband's

imprisonment. The business thrives and she becomes the matriarch of her family. After her husband's release from prison, they seek for her long-lost daughter who tragically dies just before they reunite. Nukawki mourns her daughter immensely but she slowly recovers from the loss after she has a son. The couple's happiness is short-lived because their son dies as a child when he is hit by a drunk driver. After the tragic ordeal, the couple is blessed with a daughter Zochhuanawmi. As time goes on, Nukawki's stepson Ropianga grows up to be a fine gentleman and takes on their family business. Saiawi blends the Lungrang family with that of Nukawki when Ropianga falls in love with Hmangaihi, the daughter of Zochhuana and Darkungi from the Lungrang series. The novel ends on a very happy note.

The novels of Saiawi are filled with the exploration of numerous Mizo women experiences especially in the story of Nukawki. The two novels depict the gender imbalance between Mizo men and women which is rooted in the traditional Mizo society. As the beginning of the story takes place around the 1940s and spans decades indicated by the exploration of Nukawki's children, the series provides informative insights about the systematised structures at play. Besides the life of Nukawki, there are plenty of women characters such as Makuki, Dari, Thangvungi and her mother, who do not have a fair shake in life to counter the pitfalls of societal retribution due to unfortunate and circumstantial events in their lives. These women sorely lack systematic support to rise above their circumstances and are trapped in unhappy positions such as loveless marriages, abusive relationships and the absence of a sense of self. One of the recurring themes in Saiawi's novels is the Mizos' interaction with the advent of modernity where the author depicts the difference in social mores between the rural and urban communities both subtle and overt. In the case of gender concerns, these differences also have great implications on women where the attitude of subordination of women assumes subversive and refracted forms in the urban/modern Aizawl and more traditional and systematic forms in rural places in Mizoram. This intersection of the modern and the traditional forms the core element in Saiawi's novels and the genesis of it could be traced to the colonial period in Mizoram when interaction with other cultures was invasive and repressive. Such

an imperialistic introduction to modernity is portrayed by the author as having dire consequences in a simple and effective way vis-à-vis the family stories.

The confluence of cultural changes had important historical elements within the colonial period besides modernity such as the introduction of Christianity and its attributing enterprise i.e. the introduction of formal education. Such a blend of cultural changes necessitated painstaking negotiation for the Mizos which Saiawi narrativised in the select novels. Saiawi's interest in the evolution of Mizo culture is a favoured theme in his novels where he placed his stories in particular periods when historical changes happened in Mizo society. His novels *Lungrang Laiawrha*, *Tawitawkawn Chemângi*, and *Chutiang pawh a ni lo ka nu* are situated during the transitional period of the advent of Christianity during colonial Mizoram. His last novel *Chutiang pawh a ni lo ka nu* covers four generations starting from the pre-colonial Mizoram to the immediate post-colonial Mizoram where the author explores Mizo social life in a loosely formed plot. The novel serves as a repository of historical Mizo social and cultural life. It has no structured plotline except for the accounts of the characters living their ordinary lives, particularly of their relationships, marriages and family stories. The author's central focus is the exploration of the ethos of the times in which the characters lived and to take the readers back in time to acquaint them with Mizo customs and traditions.

The same purpose of invoking Mizo cultural past could be found in *Tawitawkawn Chemângi*, a reimagined non-fictional Mizo village Tawitawkawn where the author recollects the past Mizo cultural life. The titular Chemângi is an ordinary village woman in Tawitawkawn and Saiawi creates the character out of personalities of the past told by his elders (72). Her life story reflects an ordinary but self-assured middle-aged woman who loves to indulge in traditional camaraderie with company. She defies the forces of Christianity for a long while but ultimately converts to the new religion. This period piece also echoes Saiawi's other novels in its intent on portraying an authentic and vivid image of the past Mizo social and cultural life during a momentous period when Christianity was intrinsically changing the fabric of Mizo's cultural foundation. In this work, Saiawi adds his personal

comments and thoughts about the Mizos' reaction to Christianity stating that the religion had its appeal because the primal religion was detached and obscure for the Mizos and the ideals of Christian charity are aligned to Mizo morality. He acknowledges the presence of political elements in the introduction of Christianity but asserts that the ultimate acceptance of the religion continues to be genuine. (78-79)

In Saiawi's novel *Keimah Unionliana*, the eponymous character Unionliana is a product of post-colonial ambivalent influences of Mizo culture. His life demonstrates the failure of conviction exhibited by many who were influenced by the uncertain and ever-changing culture of his time. The novel depicts the protagonist's two marriages where the author depicts the power of physical intimacy and sex in a relationship. Saiawi's principles about pre-marital sex, infidelity and marriage converge in the life of the protagonist who falls prey to lust over love. Though Unionliana hails from a respectable family and makes a fine man of himself from his education and ultimately building a successful business, he does not possess real principles projected through his weak morals about physical intimacy. He marries his first wife primarily out of his sense of obligation because he sleeps with the woman. His wife, on the other hand, loves him dearly but after having built a marriage with children he cheats on his loyal wife with his first love from high school. The second marriage does not fare much better either where there is frequent domestic violence committed by both parties. By the end of the novel, Unionliana reflects upon his marriage with the help of his first wife who is happily married to a much less successful man than him. His marriage mends after he is reacquainted with Mizo Christian morals. The novel depicts the author's conservative Mizo principles that include righteous living through the realisation of Mizo ethnic identity and the true Mizo Christian way of life. Saiawi often invokes traditional Mizo moral sensibility in his novels, and that much is expressed in his statement about fiction writing where he states in his essay that a novel is not merely a long story but an art form that can render reflections to life, romance, relationships, marriage, family, the social life and the ethnic life. The interconnectedness through relationships forms the basis of existence and one must always strive to strengthen their relationships with loved

ones (Thukhawchang Vol. IV 273). The dynamic of the individuals and their relationship with their community also plays a crucial role in his narrative. The primary characters are framed in such a way that their individual crises are presented through the social and moral codes of their time. The author showcases the social mores and ethos of the Mizo past from recent history to accounts dating back to World War I. He narrates his stories with ease of diction and the knowledge of the Mizo sense of identity. He puts his primary focus on framing the authentic Mizo society and his characterization contributes immensely to that factor. He has often contextualized his characters' experience in relation to the dynamics of the Mizo society and its experiences. The author puts great care in framing his characters while denoting detailed family history, documenting extensively their life experiences, and presenting their unique role in the plot of the story. His commitment to characters is apparent from his meticulous portrayal of both primary and secondary characters. The author even gives his characters unique names that stand out from the usual Mizo names. These names are mostly a literal reflection of their circumstances in life. Saiawi comments about the origin of his unique characters' names saying, "I have difficulty in picking appropriate names for my characters, for fear that people bearing the name may think I am using their name. That is why I often explain the meaning of the characters' names and the circumstances under which they were named" (Vanlalchami and C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau 225). Beyond the author's intent in coining names for such purposes, the act of naming carries considerable symbolic weight, as names represent a person's unique identity. It is therefore significant that, within the narrative, the use of nicknames supplants given names, resulting in the emergence of new identities for the characters. This phenomenon underscores the intricate interplay between personal and social identity among the Mizos. Character names such as Laiawrha, Sakawlhi, and Nukawki are nicknames given by their communities. Laiawrha is a literal term for the condition in which he was born vis-à-vis with an umbilical cord around his neck, and the name Sakawlhi means a 'beast' which is given to her on account of her bullying habit during her childhood. The fact that these names completely overshadow their given names is quite plausible, and such nicknames are beyond the control of the individuals and are quite common practice in Mizo culture especially in the past. In

the present study, narratives of the past will be contextualised using experiences of Saiawi's characters from the select texts to study the cultural relevance of the historical genre in Mizo literature. The characters will act as focal points in the deliberations about the larger cultural ethos and social issues. Without grounding the study in specific individual experiences, it runs the risk of generalising and conceptualising narratives about experiences and struggles in forging Mizo cultural identity. These characters, in their historical time and location, not only represent the cultural past but provide insights about the present-day perceptions of the past which convey knowledge about significant discourses from their portrayal of their interactions with changes through history.

In her text on narrative theory, Mieke Bal, a Dutch cultural theorist, propounds on Foucault's dismissal of the author denoting his "psychological idea of the author, of the authorial intention, and of the historical author as 'origin' of the work" which reflect the location of the author as the centre of all meanings in texts. She continues reasoning Foucault's theory that such placement of the author in the core of any textual reading is primarily based on the readers' projection of their need to have a point of reference to make their own semantic grounds on which the text makes sense to them and that "Foucault's alternative is a radical proliferation of meaning, where the author/work becomes a fluctuating function always interacting with other functions in the larger discursive field." She acknowledges the merit of Foucault's theory but expresses the problems of such limitless possibilities of interpretations of a text by stating that such freedom warrants the invisibility of shifts in power relations thereon (13). Her solution to the problem is to ground oneself in certain limits but "not limits that can be authenticated through appeal to the author, even when interpreting 'author' in the widest sense of the historical context" (14). She proposes a strategic and fundamental reading of texts that examine the existing political basis of the present established cultural structures. The novels for close study shall examine established cultural structures by identifying the foundation of political agents that hold the power of control within Mizo culture and denoting their influences. It will analyse the historical journey of the Mizos according to prevailing narratives as given by scholars and historians and put them in context to the select

texts and determine the power of influence of significant agents that are at play in bringing about social changes in Mizoram. The historical timeline in which such social changes occurred entails agents that determine the course of discourses in ethnic and cultural identity formation, moral constitution and gender dynamics.

The select author's emphasis on the significance of characters provides the much-needed juxtaposition of important larger themes revolving around collective constructions of Mizo social and cultural life. These individual characters that are placed in the heart of a lively and functioning community within Mizo society and their interaction with the collective that is represented are vital yet indistinguishable whole. Social and historical aspects of the texts presented from the collective communities such as Saihum, Mualnuam and Aizawl ground the symbolic cultural representation of Mizo society. They also denote cultural variations between the functioning spaces of time and region within Mizoram and these variations constantly change affecting the ascription of cultural identity which in effect influences the contours and boundaries of inclusion and exclusion for the Mizos. The characters' narratives in the select texts are not distinctive for their uniqueness; rather, their narratives achieve significance from their interplay with the Mizo community. The majority of his principal characters navigate their lives at the periphery of society, where they continually negotiate the tension between prevailing societal norms and their individual circumstances. Laiawrha is an illegitimate son who experiences marginalization as a direct consequence of his birth status. His identity and social status greatly suffered from the societal opprobrium during his formative years. His mother Chhuhahthangi, also called Chhuahi, endures the scorn of society because she bore a son out of wedlock. Her unfortunate fate negates the facts of the genuine affection and love which she has for the father of her child. Both mother and son are compelled to navigate life at the margins, deprived of many of its comforts, as they inhabit a precarious space between those accepted by society and those relegated to its periphery. Laiawrha's wife Sakawlhi earns an unfortunate reputation as a ferocious bully in her childhood. The stereotype follows her well into her youth which greatly damages her sense of self-worth and self-esteem. As a consequence, she becomes increasingly reticent and reclusive throughout her young

adulthood. Though it is a shock to society that Laiawrha chooses to marry Sakawlhi—given his status as a highly eligible bachelor in the village—his choice to wed her rather than Lalen, a cheerful and sociable romantic interest, reveals a deeper sense of solidarity. Laiawrha's sympathy for Sakawlhi arises from their shared experiences of marginalisation, positioning their union as an act of mutual understanding and resistance to prevailing social expectations. The couple shared their societal approval from their union. However, Sakawlhi's reliance on the validation that marriage provides is heightened due to her gender, compelling her to endure a host of challenges, including Laiawrha's infidelity. Nukawki's eventful life exemplifies a transformation from a succession of tragic experiences, which initially renders her a pitiable figure, to that of a resilient and accomplished woman. She falls prey to a disreputable man named Chhungbuluka who takes advantage of her sexually. She shares the same predicament as Chhuahi when she is pregnant out of wedlock. Subsequently, her child is taken away by the father and his family, who abscond from the village, thereby exacerbating her marginalisation and deepening her social isolation. Her narrative thus serves to further illuminate the theme of marginalisation and the potential for personal growth in the face of adversity.

Saiawi's intent on characterising nuanced, heterogeneous, and complex experiences of many ordinary Mizos who are challenged with various forms of marginalisation signifies the author's sense of social and moral responsibility. He emphasizes the importance of love and genuine concern for one another when making moral judgments, especially amidst life's inevitable challenges. Through his works, Saiawi advocates for empathy and compassion as foundational values within Mizo society. He states, "The quality of our character and sense of goodwill far outweigh physical appearances and wealth in the test of true humanity" (my trans.; Thukhawchang vol. II 98). Saiawi's narratives illuminate the harm inflicted by social systems that persecute individuals confronted with adversities beyond their control. By situating his novels in different historical periods of Mizoram, he sheds light on the social and cultural norms that give rise to these systems and traces their evolution throughout Mizo history. While societal attitudes toward marginalized groups have gradually improved with the advent of Christianity, education, and modernity,

significant gaps remain. Systemic and effective support is still lacking in crucial areas such as economic aid, constructive avenues for self-expression, equal opportunities, and greater visibility for the disadvantaged. Even when Saiawi's characters overcome their marginalization within the traditional Mizo social structure, they must still contend with the ongoing historical changes of their era. Their struggle does not end with acceptance by the community; instead, it is complicated by the broader transformations in society, which present new challenges and require constant adaptation. In *Lungrang Laiawrha*, the author foregrounds the story with the events of World War I. The war sets a ripple effect even in the remote small Mizo village named Saihum. Saihum is in trepidation over the impending recruitment of Mizo men to fight war in France. The village setting is a typical Mizo rural village during the British colonisation. Amidst the throes of unease over the news of wartime conscription, impressed labour, and the divisive tension that arose over the advent of Christianity, the author introduces the story of a beautiful maiden named Chhuahi and subsequently, the story of Laiawrha unfolds.

Mizo narratives during British colonisation were overwhelmingly constructed through the lens of colonial authority, thereby silencing and distorting authentic Mizo voices. The British had misrepresented the Mizos, lacking any genuine understanding of their cultural, historical, or social realities. Colonial accounts branded the Mizos as lazy, savage, treacherous, and uncivilized, and projected Mizo society as fickle and capricious—deliberately reinforcing stereotypes. The emerging Mizo ethnicity fostered a warring culture among the various tribes and sub-tribes, a tendency the British perpetuated through overtly pejorative characterizations that undermined their civic and social principles. The British sought to rationalize Mizo civic principles and dismissed Mizo culture as merely a byproduct of their agro-economic practices. They condemned both shifting cultivation and the strong sense of autonomy among the Mizos, interpreting these traits as the root causes of political instability. Vanlalchhuanawma denotes that the “nomadic way of life” of the Mizos was “one of the last defences of the people against British control and the consequent westernisation” (29). He further illuminates upon the fact that each Mizo sub-tribe possessed distinct dialects and local customs, which they sought to emphasize for

their own reasons. The British, adept at 'divide and rule' tactics, exacerbated identity confusion among the sub-tribes by partitioning the Mizos through political boundaries (38). The colonial assumptions and misrepresentations about Mizo culture and traditions entrenched layered negative biases, fueling sweeping generalizations and internalized deprecation that persisted long after British rule ended in Mizoram. Saiawi's narratives offer an authentic and nuanced portrayal of Mizo society, illuminating the social, cultural, and moral dispositions that underpin the construction of Mizo identity.

Saiawi also undertakes a nuanced examination of the inception of formal education during the colonial period and traces its subsequent evolution while highlighting how educational reforms both reflected and shaped the trajectory of Mizo cultural development. By situating the emergence of formal schooling within the broader context of colonial intervention, he elucidates upon the complex interplay between external influences and indigenous agency in the ongoing transformation of Mizo society. His commentary foregrounds how educational policies and institutions became pivotal arenas for negotiating cultural identity, social mobility, and the preservation or reimagining of traditional values. In *Lungrang Laiawrha*, the residents of Saihum are yet to recognise the value of education in its infancy and thus there is only a primary school in the village. This limitation forces the titular character, Laiawrha, to undergo only a brief period of formal education, despite his excellent academic performance. The lack of educational infrastructure in the village not only restricts his personal growth but also highlights the broader challenges faced by many children in similar rural settings. In the sequel *Lungrang Hmangaihna*, the Lungrang couple desire better for their children's education, despite the humble state of formal education in Saihum. Hence, they decide to leave Saihum to seek for better educational opportunities. This decision necessitates considerable personal sacrifice, as they relinquish the familiarity, security, and social bonds of their established community. Accompanied by their two children—Darchhuana, the elder son, and Darkungi, the younger daughter—as well as the grandmother, Chhuahi, they relocate to Aizawl with the assistance of Laiawrha's cousin, Lawmawmi, and her husband. Upon arrival, the family rents a modest house

on the outskirts of Aizawl, marking the beginning of a new chapter in pursuit of educational advancement.

In Aizawl, Laiawrha witnesses the uninhibited, excessive, and extravagant behavior of the city's Mizo youth, which are especially evident in the nightlife scene. Rampant drunkenness, licentiousness, and drug abuse have begun to erode the traditional values of honor, service and social responsibility once associated with Mizo youth. The author's distress in the matter is evident as he suggests that the Mizo youth of the time have misinterpreted modernity, allowing it to manifest in destructive ways. This shift in social norms presents a stark contrast to the values upheld in rural Mizoram and further complicates Laiawrha's journey as he navigates a rapidly changing society. One night, as Laiawrha returns from a visit to his cousin's house, he encounters three drunken men, one of whom attacks him. The assailants immediately flee without revealing their identity. Deeply indignant at the unprovoked attack, Laiawrha frequently revisits the site at night, hoping to confront his attackers, but his efforts are not met with success. A month later, Laiawrha is arrested on suspicion of murder when the man who attacked him that night is found dead. In court, Laiawrha denies the charge but admits that the attack left him seeking justice. The two friends of the deceased accuse Laiawrha of murder, claiming they saw him repeatedly visiting the scene at night in apparent pursuit of revenge. Based on this circumstantial evidence, the court sentences Laiawrha to seven years' imprisonment. The news devastates his family, who struggle to cope with the injustice and its consequences. Darchhuana, acting on his uncle's advice, decides to appeal for his father's bail. He takes the case to the High Court, where Laiawrha is ultimately set free due to lack of evidence. The family's perseverance and belief in Laiawrha's innocence are vindicated, bringing relief after a period of hardship and injustice.

The interweaving of character stories with historically momentous events is a defining feature of Saiawi's narratives. By blending personal journeys with the broader currents of history, Saiawi creates a richly layered tapestry that highlights the impact of social and political change on individual lives. In the intergenerational

narrative of the Lungrang series, Saiawi explores the *rambuai* era from a second-hand perspective through Darkungi and her husband, Zochhuana, who is posted in Rajasthan during this period. The autobiographical elements within the Lungrang series lend greater impact to its narrative, as Saiawi himself was posted outside Mizoram (in Maharashtra) and resided with his young family during the *rambuai* era (Thukhawchang vol. IV 181-196). This personal parallel enriches the depiction of displacement and distance, allowing Saiawi to infuse the narrative with authentic emotion and insight. This approach allows the author to examine the far-reaching consequences of historical turmoil, not only on those directly involved but also on families living at a distance. The first hand experience of *rambuai* is detailed in *Nukawki Fanu*. The eponymous Nukawki, after enduring many hardships, marries the love of her life, Lianhawla. The newlywed couple enjoy a period of happiness, but their marital bliss is cut short by the onset of *rambuai*. It is the year 1966 on the advice of her husband Lianhawla, Nukawki, her sister-in-law Zopari, and Zopari's children flee from Aizawl to Mualnuam. Zopari's husband joins the mutiny, and Zopari is visited by her husband and his underground army friends in Mualnuam. The next day, Nukawki's house is surrounded by soldiers who demand the insurgents be handed over. When Zopari waves a white flag of surrender from the window, she is fatally shot and later laid to rest at Mualnuam. Nukawki returns to Aizawl with Zopari's children and rebuilds their business. She and another sister-in-law, Liankhumi, travel to Baroda to appeal for Lianhawla who had been imprisoned but are unsuccessful. By the end of 1969, Lianhawla is released along with others charged with war crimes. Zopari's husband is implied to have died in battle and is never found.

Margaret Ch. Zama, in her forwarding notes on *Rambuai Literature*, explains the significance of the *rambuai* genre of writing. She states that it is the responsibility of writers to reflect objectively and comprehensively the authentic Mizo narratives for future generations. Moreover, she asserts that it is paramount to recognize that the 'voiceless' also have narratives, and writers must be the conscientious 'voice' for the same (x). By weaving together personal stories and broader historical events, Saiawi's *rambuai* narratives capture both the immediacy of

individual experience and the enduring impact of social and political change. The traumatic and dehumanising experiences endured by many Mizos during the *rambuai* period have largely remained undocumented, as the profound psychological distress and social stigma associated with their suffering inhibited the articulation and dissemination of their narratives. Furthermore, the intensely political nature of the period exerted significant pressure on public discourse among the Mizos, particularly by affecting those who bore the brunt of its hardships. Beyond their consequential role in reshaping the Mizo political and historical landscape, *rambuai* narratives exert an invaluable and complex influence on the fabric of Mizo cultural discourse. Most prominently, the struggles experienced during the period of unrest signify the consolidation and affirmation of cultural identity among the Mizos, facilitated by the collective memory of shared trauma. Saiawi's portrayal of *rambuai* narratives conveys an empowering message of Mizo cultural resilience through the solidarity demonstrated by the community in confronting the horrors of that period. He highlights the harrowing personal losses and suffering experienced by the Mizos, while simultaneously emphasizing upon the enduring sense of unity fostered by mutual understanding and acceptance of cultural fellowship. This collective spirit provided the necessary strength to withstand the extraordinary challenges of the era.

Culture is formed from history and narratives of that history continually change which indicates the contingency of cultural identity. Thus it is impossible to posit that cultural identity is a fixed concept and along with changes within history it faces continual transformation influenced by time, geographical location, power dynamics, history and culture. In the attempt to define the conceptual cultural identity, it is important to consider that “far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (Hall 70). Saiawi's narratives illuminate the complexities inherent in the formation of Mizo cultural identity by examining the intricate social dynamics pertaining to Mizo cultural memory. Assmann and Czaplicka denote, “Cultural memory works by reconstructing, that is, it always relates its knowledge to an actual and contemporary

situation” and that it is anchored in enduring symbols and repositories of collective remembrance, each historical moment interacts with these elements in distinct ways—through appropriation, critical engagement, preservation, or transformation—thus continually reshaping and reinterpreting the past in light of present needs (130). Saiawi represents the realistic experience of Mizo people through his writings, both fiction and non-fiction. His acute nostalgia about the Mizo cultural past is discernible in all his texts, where he meticulously recreates Mizo communities of the past to reflect upon social responses to powerful historical agencies that undermined their existing systems of social and cultural structures. As asserted about the author's primary concern on the representation of Mizo culture, Saiawi crafts his novels with an earnest reflection of Mizo cultural ethos that echoes the idea that "identity is our spiritual, intellectual and emotional portrait" (Paleczny and Zieliński 354). His approach to fiction writing displays modern techniques in which he moves away from the traditional hero worshipping to denote the narratives of the ordinary Mizo and yet his focus on signifying momentous changes in Mizo history in his fiction captures the essential uniqueness of Mizo experiences. His contribution to Mizo literature marks a new chapter in which such thought-provoking subjects concerning Mizo social, historical, and cultural issues are put to the forefront. His masterful blend of history and its people generates new possibilities in Mizo literature to challenge the norm in writing and has continued to inspire generations of Mizo writers to reflect authentically and seriously engage in narratives that proudly represent the Mizo voices.

Glossary

Note- Translation of book titles has been done by me for the sole purpose of the research.

A Na Lua - An Unbearable Pain.

“Chutiang pawh a ni lo ka nu” - It is not so Mother.

“Hmangaihna”- Love.

Ka Lo Tawn Ve - My Experiences.

Kan Ram Lamah - In Our Home State.

Keimah Unionliana - I am Unionliana.

Lungrang Hmangaihna - The Love of Lungrang.

Lungrang Laiawrha - carries the name of the eponymous character which translates as *Laiawrha of Lungrang clan.*

Makpa Atan - For a Son-in-law.

Nukawki - carries the name of the eponymous character Nukawki.

Nukawki Fanu - Nukawki's Daughter.

Puma Zai – a traditional genre of Mizo songs that is usually accompanied by dancing. Its popularity became controversial during the period of influx of Christianity in the early 1900s.

Rambuai - a period of political unrest in Mizoram during 1966-1986, meaning a 'troubled land'.

Tawitawkawn Chemângi - carries the name of the eponymous character Chemângi, a resident of Tawitawkawn village.

Thukhawchang - Discourse

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Chapter II- Culture and the Mizo

The social history of the Mizo people has undergone various changes that influence the collective identity. The idea of cultural identity, which is controversial and disputed in and of itself, is of inherent concern for Mizo society in an increasingly globalized world. The collective identity of its people is faced with the challenge of negotiating its cultural identity with modernity and westernization in the midst of social changes influenced by its ethnic history. Consequently, there have been numerous attempts to revisit the ethnic past in order to assert the collective identity as "Mizo." Saiawi's novels are best located in their social and historical contexts due to their significance in reflecting Mizo culture and history. The dynamics of culture and ethnic identity are generally expressed in the premise of their interaction with a larger group. It cannot be evaluated in isolation from its conceptuality because various factors such as "language, religion, culture, appearance, ancestry, or regionality" actively interact in the process (Nagel 153). The ethnic identity of the Mizo has undergone significant evolution accentuated by the political, linguistic, cultural and religious life. Saiawi brilliantly captures the internal processes of cultural change along with foreign influences that have shaped Mizo cultural identity. The Mizo cultural identity is intrinsically tied with its ethnic description as their ethnic ties in terms of ancestry, language, shared history and traditions greatly influence their cultural environment. Ethnic identity is generally defined by the sense of delineation among social groups that focus on differences in terms of border, territoriality, identity, lineage and heritage. Peter Wade comments on the basic premise of ethnicity by explaining ethnicity as "a social construction that is centrally about identifications of difference and sameness" but acknowledging that the lines of demarcation exponentially become blurred in the modern context due to the production of differences in other areas such as race, gender and class. He highlights how the evolution of the term came to signify minor groups due to the various social changes influenced by postcolonial discourse and negative connotations of terms such as 'tribe' and 'race', ethnicity has taken their place as a more appropriate terminology (15). Ethnic identity in the contemporary world has become a mode of affirming the sense of identity for minor groups to navigate the complexities of multiculturalism.

Saiawi's novels are steeped with the author's passion for the assertion of Mizo cultural identity. His novels are interconnected through generational plotlines denoting the significance of heritage and lineages in Mizo social system. The first of the select novels LRL that opens during World War I could be interpreted as the search and desire for identity during the colonial period in Mizoram. The illegitimate origin of the title character, Laiawrha, alludes to the loss of Mizo's pre-colonial identity and independence. The Mizos were unable to assert their identity due to systemic control during the colonial era which parallels his mother Chhuahi's, intense search for Laiawrha's father, which ultimately results in a dead end in the novel. However, the author is never completely pessimistic about the fate of the Mizos. His hope of a better future for the Mizos despite harrowing tragedies in its history is suggested by the ultimate closure that the mother and son finally get when they find the father's family by the end of the second book LRH. The select novel NKK opens during World War II and coheres with the beginning of LRH where the author explores in both novels about Mizo's interaction with the advent of formal education. The introduction of education and literacy indicates the beginning of Mizo interaction with modernity. Saiawi depicts the cultural milieu concerning education and the limitation of advancement and progress through education during British colonization in the two novels. The latter half of LRH and NKF document Mizo's social and political awakening during the immediate post-colonial period that leads to the political unrest of 1966 known in Mizo as *rambuai*. The period of *rambuai* was one of the darkest periods in Mizo history with tales of horrible sufferings of civilians from both the Indian army and the MNF that lingered painfully in the cultural memory of the Mizo people. Saiawi depicts the war experience to showcase the problems and difficulties faced by the Mizos in forging cultural identity in modern times. This chapter will follow the chronology of Mizo historical events and their impact on the portrayal of Mizo culture from the colonial era as portrayed in LRL and the difficulty of redefining cultural identity due to colonisation followed by the onset of modernity as depicted in LRH and NKK. It will follow through to the evolution of a more modern Mizo cultural identity that culminated in *rambuai* as seen from LRH and NKF. It will trace these historical events to determine and attempt to locate their impact in forming a collective identity for the Mizos.

During the pre-colonial era, the landlocked hill ranges of Mizoram had limited access and contact with the rest of India due to its inaccessible and steep terrain. The ancestry of Mizo is denoted as 'Tibeto-Burma of Mongolian race' (Lalzama 12). The ethnicity of Mizo has been a source of many discussions among scholars and historians. The term's origin and the boundary between the groups of people it refers to—their culture, history, and migratory timeline—as well as the many tribes and their settlements, often determine the term's difficulty. Modern Mizo scholars have often expressed the difficulty of tracing the ethnography of the Mizo people as written documents are few and they are mostly official documents during the British colonization, and the Mizo scholars who wrote on the subject during the first half of the 20th century had to rely on oral narratives and this itself posed a huge challenge to put multiple histories within a single framework. The historical origin of the Mizo has been theorized repeatedly with sources from myths, folklore and selective historical texts on Southeast Asia. James C Scott in his anthropological text *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* proposes that the hill tribes of Southeast Asia from Vietnam to northeast India had developed their unique system of social organization, culture and oral tradition in order to assert their independence from the large state of Han-Chinese. He further states that these hill people were attacked by the descendants of the Ming and Qing dynasties. The hill people of Southwest China were subjected to multiple wars and the tribes of these regions migrated westward, and Mizo ancestors were alleged to be among those who fled the region (x). In a collaborative work “Rethinking Ethnicity and Gender” it is explained that ethnicity is generally applied to describe “the process of group formation and the use of cultural symbolism as a source of identity for groups and individuals” (Barot et al. 2). The term 'ethnicity' has replaced gradually and effectively the uses of other related terms like 'race' and 'tribe' due to their contentious connotations, especially in colonial contexts. The same can be said of Mizo identity where under British colonization, the derogatory nomenclature attached to Mizo people as 'tribals' connoted their backwardness, barbarity and uncivilized cultures as reflected by Major Mccall, the Superintendent of the Lushai hills between 1932-1942, “The [Mizo] people are traditionally nomadic and mentally

volatile, characteristics which militate against easy reconciliation to the static conditions of living under the PAX BRITANNICA.” (Lushai Chrysalis 29)

Barot et al. assert that although ethnic groups themselves frequently make a primal case for their existence, a thorough historical analysis of the group in question may demonstrate that ethnic identities are determined by a specific set of political and economic conditions (3). The statement is a loaded claim for the Mizos whose economic and political circumstances consisted of hegemonic control by the British at the end of the 19th century. Mizo society and culture were subjected to changes in the administrative structure during colonial control, as the western model supplanted tradition. Due to the relatively quick introduction of Western government, the replacement of the ancient form of administration caused a major sense of displacement. For the Mizos, western culture was not only foreign but difficult to adapt within Mizo cultural sphere and there was no space for Mizo culture to thrive under the repressive structures of British control. As Zothantluanga Ralte reflects about the Mizos during the British colonization stating that the Mizos were "confused and bewildered by the double-pronged onset of the British Government on the one hand, and on the other, the proselytizing missionaries" and asserts that these forces of control "hampered the natural and primordial growth of the Mizos" (212). Thus, positing that Mizo identity is solely a result of their pre-colonial history would be incomplete and misleading without accounting for the colonial and post-colonial eras and the ultimate integration into the Indian Union thereafter. However, identity in any shape and form begins with the study of its origin and its natural evolution and Mizo identity is no different. The pre-colonial era forms the initial and subliminal stage of their identity formation and due to the disruptive nature of British colonization in all aspects of function; identity formation among the Mizos took a unique form of hybridity which necessitated constant negotiation between the pre- and post-colonial models of function. The select novels of Saiawi trace the development of Mizo identity formation by way of story-telling to emphasize what Assmann and Czaplicka called "fixed points" which are described as "fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites,

monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)" (129).

As mentioned previously, the genesis of the Mizo ethnic formation could not be determined but their migratory patterns carry substantial import of which Sangkima comments that the Mizos left southern China, but it is unknown when and how they got there. But one thing is for sure: they migrated south. Long years of battling against adversaries and natural adversity are chronicled in their migration history (14). This migration is believed to have led the Mizos, previously known as Lushai, to the present-day Mizoram at the beginning of the 18th Century (19). The formerly called *lusei* which translates to 'long head' or the anglicised term 'lushai' group was the dominant tribe regarded as the 'ruling class' of tribes made up of sub-group of clans. They also referred to themselves as *duhlian*. The secondary 'lower class' called *lu tawi* translates to 'short head' and consists of other sub-groups of clans. The former class of clans was the ruling class of which Sailo was the most dominant followed by Pachuau, Chhangte, Chuaungo, and so on (Lalzama 15-16). The misnomer Lushai, to describe all tribes and clans that resided within the region, was adopted by the British due to those clans being the ruling class and mistook the term as inclusive of all Mizo tribes. The term 'Mizo' could be translated as 'hill people' and opinions on the origin of its usage differed as it dates back to the oral tradition but it is agreed among the general population that it signifies a much larger group of people from different ethnic backgrounds than Lusei. In terms of the Mizo pre-colonial ethnic identity, the idea of solidarity could be located in these autonomous, sovereign and independent settlements under their respective Mizo chiefs. It is also important to take into consideration the significance put by the Mizo people of bloodlines, clanship, and shared history of migratory past. However, even these relations were superseded by their loyalty and sense of belonging to their immediate community under their respective Mizo chiefs. The challenge of establishing Mizo identity as a cohesive group during pre-colonial Mizoram has been articulated by recent Mizo scholars. Since shifting forms of farming, or *jhum*, were widely used in pre-colonial times and required migration, the autonomy of each settlement and the nature of the agrarian economy served as the foundation for the

migratory history in Mizo society. Their sustenance, survival against attacks from enemies, and protection from natural disasters and animal predation all depended on their social dynamic within their respective communities. Therefore, it was essential to have a correct hierarchy built on loyalty and trust across all segments of their community.

Mizo political history took an unexpected and irrevocable turn by the 19th century which was when the British occupied the Lushai Hills. The advent of British forces inside Mizoram saw a few sporadic attacks by the Mizo during 1871-1872 called *Vai Len Vawikhatna*. Mizoram was officially under the British rule in consequence to the 'Chin-Lushai Expedition 1889-90' which was met with resistance by the Mizo chiefs (Reid 11). The Mizo chiefs who had enjoyed their respective autonomy were reluctant to relinquish their rule and put up their utmost resistance against the British. Mizo chiefs bravely resisted the British rule from the beginning but to great costs both personally and collectively. When the chiefs' rule was overthrown, the British adopted a system of indirect rule through the Mizo chiefs which was resisted by some chiefs to the extent of losing their life in prison. The resistance of the Mizo chiefs lasted a period of time when the last Mizo chief to submit to the British was documented as Kairuma in the year 1896. (Lalthangliana 200)

The political tension between the British and Kairuma marked the final capitulation of Mizo chiefs to the British which was documented by McCall who recalls that many *mithan*, or hill cattle, were captured, and Kairuma's hamlet was torched because the original fine had been increased and had not been paid. With wisdom, Pu Kairuma Sailo gave up, all fines were paid, and guns were turned in. The Lushais settled down to accept the new circumstances with stoic wisdom after this, which was their final act of defiance against British power (Lushai Chrysalis 64). When the imperialist rule was established, they exerted control over all aspects of social hierarchy by controlling the chiefs and destabilizing social order by breaking trust and natural bonds. Traditions and customs slowly gave way to westernization and the Mizos grappled to adopt foreign cultural ideals within a matter of five decades leading to hybridity and ambiguity. Under the imperialistic British rule,

Mizo chiefs exploited their status and power leading to nepotism and abuse of power. Even if the Mizos people sued their chief, the British would always side with the chief, and so the Mizo citizens were powerless. The chiefs were aware of this hegemony and subverted it for their personal gains. There were those who taxed *fathang* excessively, when government officials visited their village they often took eggs and chickens without paying for them to greet them and forced villagers to build the chief's and their mistress' residences (LRH 181-182). Generations of trust and concord between the Mizo's governing class and the general populace were destroyed by this subversive practice. Following the general public's loss of trust in their chiefs, these chiefs came under widespread criticism and blame. Essentially, the only natural hierarchy in Mizo's social and cultural structure gradually deteriorated, which was damaging to the people's sense of collective identity. The reputation of Mizo chiefs did not recover and P. Lalnithanga documents that chieftainship was abolished on 1st April 1955, in accordance with the provisions contained in the Lushai Hills (Acquisition of Chiefs' Rights) Act, 1954. (118)

McCall writes that the annexation of the then Lushai Hills was brought under the provision of the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation 1880 and was declared as an 'Excluded Area' in 1936 (Lushai Hills 2). The British considered their indirect rule through the Mizo chiefs to be most effective and provisions were made to ensure the absence of Mizos in the larger political arena. Other provisions were also made to limit the residence of foreigners within the area except for a few petty trading enterprises (Lushai Chrysalis 65). The colonization of Mizoram served as mere administrative convenience which is apparent from the British's general insensitivity and lack of knowledge about the existing social structures and cultural mores of the Mizos. Major McCall denotes a scathing remark on Mizo's landscape and its people, "Here was no land flowing in milk and honey, no glittering outcrops to raise thoughts of mineral wealth, no telling indications of reservoirs of endless oil. Barren, mountainous, and severe, in any case commercially uninspiring, Lushai had been rejected for so many years." (65)

The disinterested attitude of the British resulted in a stringent and demeaning form of control. The colonial rule brought about drastic changes that influenced the

ethnic descriptions of the Mizo people in manners that were foreign to them. It could be interpreted that Saiawi alluded to an identity crisis that developed during British colonisation from the life of Laiawrha who has an illegitimate origin. His father, Darkhuma, passes away tragically before he could formally propose to Chhuahi. The mental and emotional distress of the mother takes centre stage in LRL denoting her angst for Laiawrha's identity because Mizo society is patriarchal in nature. She desperately tries to seek out Darkhuma's family to form an alliance so as to give Laiawrha proper identity through lineage but her efforts are all in vain because Darkhuma's family has moved out of their village without a trace. Chhuahi often has nightmares that she dreams of what looks like Darkhuma's mother and sister. In the dream, she tries to catch up to them as they are about to vanish on a street corner, but she is completely unable to run. "Wait for me," she yells, but they continue to move as though they could not hear her. Despite being unable to move her legs, she continued to scream in agony. She shouts till her mother wakes her up (LRL 52). The search for Laiawrha's identity through lineage echoes an uncanny resemblance to Mizo's sense of dispossession during colonization. Joy L.K. Pachuau observed how British colonization changed the course of Mizo culture wherein, "...the fluidity and movement of and between 'tribes' that had always been a feature of the Mizo past was forced to come to an end" (16). Their cultural identity forged through generations of shared memory and social bond was uprooted from the position of power which was enforced through Mizo chiefs during the time. Much like the character Laiawrha who has to navigate the margins of society as an illegitimate child, the Mizos had to 're-orient' their whole cultural constitution to accommodate the British rule. The result was the emergence of a dispossessed culture that was strange to the locals. The Mizos were left to deal with a newly established identity with all its 'foreignness' and 'otherness' which resulted a 'hybrid nation'. The experience proved to be incredibly disturbing. As Homi Bhabha asserts in *Location of Culture*, "identity is never an a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality" (73); the Mizos began to face the problem of locating the 'image of totality'.

During pre-colonial Mizoram, identity consciousness was ascribed among those who resided in the same locality regardless of differences in tradition and cultural practices among different clans. The key factor in fostering collective identity could be traced to the nature of the power dynamic in their respective settlements with the village chief on top of the hierarchy, which the order of power descended to his council of ministers of which each was individually known as *khawnbawl upa* or *zalen*. The village chief held supreme power in the village and in his own land, his words were law. He owned everything that was in the village. He had the authority to ask his subjects to provide him with everything he required. He had to decide all issues and disagreements. To put it briefly, he ruled his own village (Sangkima 35). The sovereignty of Mizo chiefs signified the sense of autonomy and solidarity of the dwellers in the villages which greatly determined the outcome of any endeavours, and each enjoyed full autonomy to rule their communities. Their territories were never clearly marked, they lived in any desired location, and when the land became less fertile they shifted their settlements to any other choice area. The chief held the ultimate power in the matter. The community's harmony or otherwise primarily relied on the chief's rule (Siama 19). Thus the 'fluidity' asserted by Joy. L.K Pachuau could be seen in the freedom of migration with which the Mizos under their respective chiefs undertook to seek for better agricultural prospects. Just like the village chief enjoyed unrestricted freedom, *khawnbawl upa* enjoyed great privileges unparalleled by none other than the chief in all areas of functions such as domestic, agricultural land and in the jungles. However, the village hierarchy did not exist solely on the whims and indulgence of these authoritative figures. The social structure of these villages was cultured in that hierarchy existed to maintain proper order for their survival. It was evident that an assembly of the chief and his council of *khawnbawl upa* held ultimate power and control over all matters ranging from security and safeguarding their territory to domestic squabbles which made it imperative for the ruling class to be mindful of public opinion and temperament. Social interests took precedence over individual ones as a result of their encouragement of customary laws and the functions that each member played in the greater fabric of the community.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the Mizos prioritise group identification over individual identity, which defies the majority of research, especially those that focus on the Western worldview, which emphasizes individual identity. This intrinsic interdependence of social members indicates that an individual in a socio-centric society will define their identity and sense of self in terms of their community. The difference in the conception of identity between the East and the West is asserted by Fatehi and Teymournejad stating that most Westerners view their 'self' as an impermeable, free agent who can move between groups and situations without substantially changing, regardless of the situation or specific relationship. It is possible to detach the 'self' from its environment. People are interrelated, flexible, and conditional in the eyes of Easterners and many others. The individual is a part of a network of relationships, including those within the family and society. Purely independent behavior is impossible since the person is primarily recognized by these ties (191). In his essay "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity", Satya P Mohanty remarks on the concept of cultural identity in a multicultural world. Despite the difficulty in outlining and specifying cultural identity, he describes the usefulness of identity markers on how cultural groups are established and how to participate in the method of its construction. He underpins the importance of reassessing identity construction from "the relation between personal experience and public meanings-subjective choices and evaluations on the one hand, and objective social location, on the other" (29-30). One of the essential identity markers in the assertion of ethnic identity is the connection that is made to the people's geographic location by the fortification of social ties among groups in a particular geographic area. Saiawi's narrative puts attention to this particular detail. The small regional locales of Saihum and Mualnuam offer insightful Mizo cultural ethos of the past. Saihum, which is made up of about eighty households, is described as a pristine hillside village where there is no such thing as harsh hot summers. In fact, it could get very cold, especially after winter rains. The air is clean, its water source is pure, and is located in a remote terrain with bountiful food production...the land is lush, teeming with wildlife and fresh water sources to explore, and its residents are healthy which is denoted in their rosy complexion (LRL 7). The description suggests a rustic and simple life unfettered by modern problems. Saiawi's portrayal of rural life is an embodiment of

the genesis of a time and space well lost in the Mizo past yet continues to be the driving force in the ongoing process of Mizo cultural life. It is portrayed as the manifestation of both the reminiscence of the cultural history and social life intended to juxtapose with the inevitable changes in contemporary cultural life. The eponymous novel NKK is also set in a rural area called Mualnuam which is described as being located away from any main road. It is a five-day journey from Aizawl by foot, and the village is still very backward. Though it is made up of around a hundred households it still does not have Middle school. (24)

The simplicity of life is reinforced heavily in the author's period novels and the localities in which they are set denote the characters' geographical ties with their sense of cultural and ethnic identity. These fictionalised landscapes represent the typical Mizo villages of the past in aspect to their connection to their natural environs. In the past, their livelihood depended directly from the soil of their land. Natural cycles of seasons, soil fertility, changes in rainfall and other natural occurrences, big or small, played a crucial role for their sustenance and cultural life. Their interactions with wildlife were complex and could turn perilous for either man or beast. As such, prowess in hunting was one of the hallmarks of greatness for men in the society, and for these essential connections, the Mizos revered and also feared nature which was why their cultural and religious practices had organic ties to the natural world. The British annexation of Mizoram was so powerful and decisive that it caused major disruptions to the natural growth of these cultural and religious practices. It was only toward the end of colonization that there was political and social awakening that emphasised upon the need to reinforce ethnic and cultural identity, and there came about a conscious zeal and effort to reclaim and revisit the pre-colonial Mizo cultural history. This also brought about the concerted effort to build the character of inclusivity and broadening of Mizo ethnic description and Saiawi was among such writers who aimed to empower the post-colonial Mizo's narrative to form an inclusive society. He wrote in 2019 saying that even in the modern times, lineages and ancestry are still put impetus in forging kinship and, in spite of this fact, it is fortunate that conflicts of an ethnic nature never appeared among the Mizos. (Thukhawchang Vol. IV 112). His texts serve to uplift and

empower the narratives of the Mizos to counter the unfairness and injustices endured by the Mizos during the colonial rule. The central premise of his stories denotes the powerful narratives, particularly those of the common people, and they tell of genuine Mizo experiences about those who lived through historical and cultural upheavals. The novels *LRL* and *NKK* are situated in colonial Mizoram and the stories convey nuances that shape Mizo ethnic identity. In these texts, the exploitation of the common Mizo people through impressed labour is one of the many evils of the imperialist rule. The routine practice of impressed labour during the rule was a nuisance for the Mizos. In order to illustrate the exhausting activity, Saiawi places the Mizos in the context of their year-round manual labor at their jhum and their expected active manual duty to the British. He claims that in order to level out rocky terrain for their army parade grounds, the British forced Mizo natives to perform hard labor and forced them to construct their government and army barracks. They also made the Mizos to pave all the major roads (LRH 190). He describes the pitiable state of the Mizos during their oppression stating that the Mizos were rendered completely powerless. They had to suffer injustices in silence like a bull in a torrent. (LRL 6)

Despite having little exposure to other cultures during the colonial era due to the Lushai Hills' status as a "Excluded Area," Saiawi portrays shifts in Mizo's perspective. As Saiawi notes multiple times in the texts, the westernization of Mizo culture and tradition was the cause of these shifts in perspective. The events and participation of the Mizos in the two World Wars are significant in Saiawi's narrative because of the mode in which the events provided empowering perception on the colonial and postcolonial discourses for the Mizo. The image of the British as an unchallenged authoritative figure and hallmark for racial superiority was slowly destabilized by the events of the World Wars. The author's intent for the incorporation of the two wars locates to the promotion of strengthening confidence among the Mizos in order to contextualise their identity on a larger global level because "the way we make sense of [experience] can in fact create a new experience" (Mohanty 34). In the opening section of *LRL*, two men engaging in a conversation display their apprehension about an impending announcement to call

for Mizo volunteers to fight in France during World War I. One of these men has a son named Huliana who is later recruited to fight in the war. The dangerous expedition is met with fear and the public's dismay becomes palpable on account of rumours spreading wildly about the dangers of fighting the war in France. Some believed that it was next to impossible to survive among the flying bullets of the white men and some even considered migrating to Burma to avoid going to France (LRL 5). Saiawi describes detailed narratives of those who fought in the World War I by sensitizing the story of Huliana who comes from a respectable family. By spring of 1917, it is time for Huliana and two other men from Saihum, Ngengchhuna and Vawmkapa, to leave for their expedition at France. They are given a ceremonious farewell in their village. The three fictional volunteers are based on the actual story of the Mizo men who were enlisted in 1917 under the Lushai Labour Corps. The people of Saihum are confident that the united force of some 2000 Mizo men would be invincible at war. There are no conversations following the three men's safe return, save for the courageous men's testimonies of their experiences in battle. McCall recounts the momentous return of Mizo soldiers, who were greeted with great enthusiasm and warmth as they returned to Aizawl. The Battalion Band piped them in, and thousands of people gathered at the parade area in order to greet them with cheers. Two thousand twenty-nine of the two thousand and hundred men who set out returned. (Lushai Chrysalis 292)

When the novel NKK begins, the author denotes World War II as a backdrop for Nukawki's journey. The first statement describes the Japanese invasion of the neighboring state of what was then Burma and the valor displayed by the Mizo volunteers who fought for the British. The events of the two wars marked the Mizos' first exposure to an international arena and their return to Mizoram was emphasized with the broadening of Mizo outlook and the desire to advance the Mizo in tandem with the rest of the world. Such an exodus had never occurred in Mizo history, once the war ended and as many of these combat heroes returned home, the people's narratives and way of life changed significantly. The Mizos entire way of life was profoundly impacted by the sharing of new experiences with the outside world. (Zaihmingthanga 4). These ventures in global events consequently resulted in the

Mizos' desire to change and expand their cultural horizon leading to a more widespread acceptance of the contentious conversion to Christianity. In addition to the religious mission, literacy and education were complementary to the teachings of the Christian missionaries. Thus, the nature of cultural influences was complex because the initiation of the Mizos to modernity was deeply entrenched with hegemony. The prospect of empowering the Mizo narrative through education and knowledge was heavily determined by the politics of colonisation. The mode of adopting Christianity within Mizo culture entailed the negation of Mizo tradition and culture which was symbolized by the men cutting off their long hair. Mizo braves who return from the war all cut their hair short and others follow the trend but those who did not convert to Christianity still tied their hair in a traditional bun. Vawmkapa converts to Christianity on his return but Ngengchhuna is still against it (LRL 47). So in the mind of the Mizos, the act of negating Mizo culture was related to modernity and Christian religiosity was symbolised by the cutting of the hair. Within the paradigm of the colonisation of Mizoram, the introduction of Christianity marked the strongest and lasting impact on Mizo culture. Ultimately, Christianity subsumed Mizo native religion which necessitated a rigorous and sometimes confrontational negotiation to nativise or adapt the religion in order to align with the Mizo cultural constitution. The cultural climate and social response to the introduction of Christianity and the forms of negotiating efforts of the Mizos will be further explored in the succeeding chapter. With the increasing spread of Christianity, education closely followed the phenomenon. The advent of education gained attention due to its empowering qualities and yet its poor execution for the masses is evident from all measures. Saiawi observes changes in cultural temperament towards perception regarding measures of excellence after the introduction of education in his novels. The characters in his novels who are introduced to the aspects of education during colonisation have very limited excess to the same with no scope of going beyond the primary school level. At the time, the public held educated people in high regard. The Mizos comprehended the role and power of education in the political climate and numerous efforts were given in the form of community initiated private schools in remote areas like that of Saihum and Mualnuam. The access to education was still so limited that those who were willing

to advance beyond primary and middle school levels were met with the sad reality of its futility.

Saiawi's depiction of education's function in Mizo society includes subtleties about the political environment and contributing elements that support its inception, acceptance, and development. The British missionaries F.W. Savidge and J.H. Lorrain established the first educational endeavour in Mizoram as an extension of their Christian mission, seeing that literacy and education were essential to the dissemination of their Christian teachings. By the spring of 1894, the two missionaries had finished creating the Hunterian or Roman script for the Mizos (Lalthangliana 220). The written script was first taught to a few local chiefs, namely, Khamliana, Suaka and Thangphunga, and with the help of these three literates, translation of the Bible, rendering of Mizo grammar, and Lushai into English Dictionary were undertaken. In the beginning, the effort on literacy was a small venture and the attendees were mostly Mizo chiefs and their sons. Major J Shakespeare built a small kutchra hut for the purpose as he deemed vital to educate the chiefs and their sons for administrative purposes (Lalhmuaka 22). " I am convinced that it is better to uphold the government of the chiefs and to govern through them, rather than to try to govern without them," Major J. Shakespear wrote in his note at the end of his service on 22 March, 1905. Based on this perspective, he offered recommendations for the education of sons of the chief. He strongly opposed the establishment of multiple small hamlets and he did not advocate the custom of further dividing territory among the chiefs' sons because each chief had set boundaries. A chief's son may be given hamlets inside his boundaries if he so desires, but this should not absolve him of responsibility for enforcing the law and collecting house taxes. (Reid 61)

After their tenure under the Arthington Aborigines Mission ended in 1897, Lorrain and Savidge guided and trained their successor D. E. Jones for three months and left Mizoram. Their successor D.E. Jones was sent by the Welsh Mission and with the help of a Khasi couple Mr and Mrs Rai Bhajur started their evangelical work where "preaching and education were the major means of work aided greatly by the limited medical knowledge of Jones in the early days. An enthusiastic and

adventurous Edwind Rowlands joined Jones and Bhajur at the end of 1898” (Lalsangkima Pachuau 74). With Edwind Rowlands working at the first official school founded on February 8, 1898, and D.E. Jones working in the church, the missionaries divided their works of Christian education and mission. In 1901, a number of lower primary-level schools were founded in several rural communities. In 1903, the first Lower Primary exam was administered. Sir Bamfield Fuller, the Assam Chief Commissioner, visited Aizawl in 1904 and approved the transfer of government schools to Christian missions after observing that Christian mission schools were more effective than their government counterparts. In 1906, middle school was implemented, followed by high school in 1944 and college in 1958. The Mizos were very open to education, and as a result, many schools were established in various villages. Some of these schools were founded and supported by the local communities before being taken over by the government. Mizoram had two high schools, six middle schools, and 230 elementary schools when it gained independence from the British (Lalthangliana 221-22). In LRL, the village of Saihum had very few Christian converts and because of this the village was neglected academically and it did not have any schools (78). The people of Saihum were, therefore, very optimistic about the construction of a school in their village and are in agreement that they should have one when they learn that *Zosap* would be visiting. Hopefully, the majority of them expect to have schools set up (81). The author reveals the inadequate and insufficient nature of education even after the much awaited school is established. The titular Laiawrha is among the first batch of students in the primary school and though he is an excellent student, he could not continue his studies beyond the school. Higher education is out of his reach because people who want to study despite living in poverty must travel far to attend schools, which discourages parents from sending their kids away to some other villages. The character Laiawrha denoted the experience of many during British colonization. The hard work and aspirations of excellent students were never fully realized and the little academic knowledge they acquired did not have much impact in the larger scheme of things.

Throughout the colonial era, the Mizos' perception of the educated class and the educational system in general was distorted because the colonial government had no intention of developing the educational system beyond what was necessary for their political gain. The lack of career options from the education system dissuaded the general public from enrolling in schools. The outright imperial messages promoting the superiority of the white race could be seen in some of the texts retrieved during colonization as stated in the line "The white race is the wisest, they also rule over all" (Lalthangliana 224). Both Saihum and Mualnuam are depicted as small villages with few resources where modernization hasn't had a significant impact on people's quality of life. Even though the stories take place in different historical periods, they both have only primary schools. This is because the latter is set during the end of colonization, which is a sign of the slow advancement of education, particularly in rural areas, during the last stage of colonization and the start of post-colonial Mizoram. Saiawi's primary characters who pursued academic success are thwarted from higher academic success because schools were impoverished and so few at the time. Despite this hegemonic control and its consequences in the education system, the hopes for education persisted within Mizo communities and Saiawi implies that the role of education was one of the forerunners in bringing modernity in Mizo society due to the openness of Mizos towards education. In the immediate post-colonial Mizoram, education advanced slowly and even middle schools made their way to rural areas which is represented by the village of Mualnuam. The character Nukawki is regarded by her community with great respect and status because she is one of the few educated people in the village. Despite having few professional options, Nukawki's life demonstrated that the educated class was respected in their community. The circumstances around Nukawki's discontinuation of high school education reveal the paradoxical nature of tradition and modernity where the evolving Mizo cultural landscape toward modernity is viewed with suspicion and ambivalence. The villagers from Nukawki's hometown question Nukawki's character beginning with the simple act of watching a movie with friends at Aizawl leading to her father's disapproval of continuing her studies. Her father tells her not to forget that she was of rural upbringing and that he had heard of Nukawki as keeping company with a nasty-looking fellow (NKK 36).

The incident conveys that the idea of modernity and progress was a contentious issue which signified the hesitation and reservation toward modernity, largely symbolised by the institution of formal education. There was a lot of suspicion around education mainly because it was viewed as actively playing a role in the hegemonic control of Mizo culture. The act of negotiating modernity with Mizo traditional culture was a struggle mainly because forces of change came directly from the colonial power. Those that rendered enthusiastic participation were the youth but the incongruent mode and manner with which modernity entered Mizo culture led to the ideals of overcorrection and negation among the Mizos like that of Nukawki's father. As Nukawki is forced to return to her village she initially looks down on the backwardness of her village and thinks that men from her village do not compare to those from Aizawl, she feels condescending towards her suitors (NKK 40). This attitude of deprecation toward Mizo social life could be traced back to the colonial influence in the minds of Mizos to develop the attitude of cultural inferiority. Although she is deeply distressed that she is unable to complete her matriculation, she is able to escape the domestic constraints of Mizo society when she is employed at the primary school in their town. She has a lot of energy and a strong sense of purpose, but sadly, they are short-lived because she has no chance to improve her education or job. When she loses the respect of her community due to an unfortunate turn of events she moves to Aizawl to escape her difficult situation but she has no other means to support herself and she becomes a vendor.

By the end of World War II, Mizoram had significant exposure to other cultures especially those who resided in the state's capital. The interaction of the Mizos with other cultures led to the broadening of outlook and possibilities which was why the framework of progress shifted from a more traditional to a modern and multi-cultural model. The social atmosphere that looked toward modernity in post-independence Mizoram is portrayed by Nukawki's admiration as well as jealousy of the wife of her love interest Lianhawla. Makuki, who grew up in a convent was very westernised in her manners and speech, is the image of a well-adjusted matron of the house (NKK 29). The development of formal education was slow and impoverished but a small class of people could afford quality education and it was usually those

that came from affluent families like Makuki's whose father was an unnamed government officer. As Mizo culture slowly evolved to negotiate modernity, education came to the forefront in bringing significant changes in Mizo society. In the pre-colonial era, the Mizo cultural frame of excellence was signified by the cultural practice of *thangchhuah* which was a religious practice that was believed to implicate an individual's afterlife. Those who were able to complete the daunting stages of rites were greatly celebrated and they enjoyed an undisputed level of respect in their community. Even in the afterlife, they were believed to occupy a different realm of abode called *pialral* or 'paradise' as opposed to the *mitthi khua* or 'village of the dead' for the common people. The practice of *thangchhuah* had a two-pronged categorization, *ram lama thangchhuah* and *inlama thangchhuah*. The former entailed bravery and skills in hunting different kinds of animal. The pre-colonial Mizo were often subjected by the natural world and those who could protect the people from terror of animal attacks and enemies were greatly valued in their communities. The latter was achieved by the amount of wealth possessed by them. The society at the time was purely agrarian with no monetary system which denotes that there was a limited scope of amounting great wealth and the only few who could accomplish it were regarded with respect. The ceremonies for the rites of passage entailed elaborate stages of communal significance with grand feasts occupying an important part. With the onset of westernization and Christianity, the negation of pre-colonial tradition and religious belief necessitated an adoption of new set of principles to determine excellence. Saiawi brings out cultural changes in Mizoram with regards to the influence of education that opened up new opportunities as office workers. The gradual shift from the agrarian culture to a career-oriented society was fostered with the introduction of education. As asserted by Zothantluanga Ralte, "However, local educational practice took such a turn that Mizos came to believe that education and Christianity necessarily entailed securing of 'salaried jobs' thus substituting the grind of cultivating a hard agricultural land" (212). Mizo society had thus far relied on the egalitarian culture with set roles played out by each individual in the society but the advent of formal education set new structure of social hierarchy where 'salaried class' "has the power and the means to secure middle and higher education for his children" which was not afforded by people who dwelt in rural

areas (213). The onset of modernity facilitated social mobility for those who excel in academics despite the questionable quality of education offered during the time. In practice, excellence in academics slowly replaced tradition to attain social mobility. The quality of education was questioned on grounds that western form of education did little to uplift the quality of life for the general population because “the aims of education did not result in the application of knowledge for the upliftment of the masses. Since education curriculum neither fulfilled nor met the needs of the Mizos.” (212-213)

The incongruity between education and Mizo culture could be located to the fact that the mode in which knowledge was imparted was far removed from Mizo culture. The curriculum was never designed to suit the context of Mizo culture and the students had to learn without proper understanding of what was taught. Nonetheless, Mizo people gave their unwavering support and adherence to education as seen from the characters in Saiawi's texts. In LRH, Laiawrha's couple are willing to move away from Saihum to Aizawl for the better prospect of their children's education. They leave everything they know including the comfort of their home, their friends and family to start afresh as a struggling family who live in the periphery of the village. This migration to Aizawl represents the experience of many rural families who had faith in the possibility of better life through education. Mizo culture was irrevocably shifted toward modernity where, in spite of the many flaws existed within the system, those who wished to advance within the system had to make sacrifices like Laiawrha and Sakawli. Along with developments in educational fields, Mizoram saw avenues of progress in economy through trade and private businesses. A large number of private businesses expanded rapidly with the opening of trade route to neighbouring states. Political administration entered democratic system where private businesses and office working class slowly replaced the traditional agrarian system. Saiawi narrates upon the alteration of Mizo cultural life after the end of British colonization by providing glimpses of the arrival of modernity on a larger scale within Mizoram. Aizawl, the capital, became the hub of cultural influence for the rest of Mizoram. The main characters all move to Aizawl in order to try their luck, and Saiawi highlights cultural shifts in the city's work,

lifestyle, and social dynamics. By contextualizing the nature of societal shifts that aid in creating avenues for these characters to advance, he chronicles the main characters' journey from impoverished origins to varying degrees of prosperity. The progress in trade and commerce was made possible with the construction of inland roads and increasing contact with the neighbouring states. By giving the Mizo people the tools to acquire riches and prestige, the ongoing expansion of businesses helped them deal with the problems of modernity. During a period when access to wealth, power, and influence was limited, trade and business emerged as alternatives to hard manual labor and upward social mobility. Laiawrha's family makes their fortune from his mother Chhuahi's business which she founded with funds from her brother, who is well-liked by people from remote communities because she is courteous and has a natural understanding of business. Since she believes that Aizawl products alone were insufficient for her business, she even ventures outside of Mizoram with other people. (60)

The wealthy business class quickly climbed to the upper echelon of society and Saiawi highlights the privilege of one such wealthy businessman in Aizawl. Laiawrha approaches the man to make ties with him in accordance of Mizo tradition at the time of his daughter's wedding. The man puts down the status of the Laiawrha's future son-in-law who happens to be an IAS officer. He passionately argues as to how inconsequential IAS officers are, and this opinion deeply hurt and disheartens Laiawrha and he cancels the wedding. The businessman's audacity demonstrates the degree of self-assurance and influence that the wealthy possessed. The two occupations represent Mizo society's main social mobility structures following the arrival of modernity. In order to move away from the old structure of economics, they highlight the main vocations which are accessible to the general public. These structures of social mobility, particularly of government jobs and businesses, became enduring social norms in Mizoram to become measures of success and position that the general population strive to achieve. Even the titular Nukawki's strength and heroism is demonstrated through her journey as a successful businesswoman. During wartime Mizoram, Nukawki braves through immense danger and risks to rebuild and further their family's business in the absence of her

husband. Nukawki's success and ultimately her family's preservation from war are made possible through her business and she becomes symbolic as a female success story in a patriarchal society. Saiawi's narrative on Mizo cultural history covers a wide range of events that impact social changes. For him, the political, cultural, and social aspects and their intermingling through the course of Mizo history reveals the Mizo effort to restructure its identity. As such, his narrative in many of his writings emphasises the political fervour and the consequential secessionist ideals of the educated class of the Mizo toward the end of British colonisation. Saiawi explores aspects of the political uprising through many of his characters about the uprising and the fast acceleration of political tension culminating in horrible events that took the public by surprise and the harrowing consequences that befell on them. The political background that culminated in the revolt could be traced shortly after India's independence in 1947. After independence, there was an awakened interest in the collective Mizo identity and the political events that ensued thereafter ignited a zeal to attain separate nationhood. The first political party named Mizo Union was formed in the year 1946 at a time when the educated class became concerned about the future of Mizoram due to the uncertainty of political administration by the end of British colonization. Other political parties started to form after the end of British colonization when participation in a larger political structure became a possibility. Any efforts to mobilize the people to address their discontent in matters relating to civic rights were met with imprisonment during colonization. After the independence of India, Mizoram had a separate advisory council with 36 members and in 1952 it became an Autonomous District under the Assam government.

At the time of India's independence, the issue of integration into the Indian government clashed with the people's opinion and the Mizo Union party that advocated for the alliance with the Assam government gained majority support with the promise of economic support. The Mizos were immensely disappointed after the integration because of the overwhelming imbalance of power. They felt neglected on account of economic support that never materialised to build a better infrastructure and strengthen the political role of the Mizo people. The state's 1961 decision to make Assamese the official language was seen as disrespectful to the Mizo and

intensified feelings of discrimination in the political sphere. The discontentment of the Mizo people reached its climax with the coming of *mautam* which occurred periodically due to the flowering of native bamboo in the area causing the booming of the rat population that ravaged crops. The Mizos had experienced this ecological event that occurred roughly around every 50 years or so that caused widespread devastation multiple times and seared into the cultural memory. The coming of another *mautam* was anticipated before the event of famine in 1959-60 and appealed to the Assam government to institute strategies to respond and manage the famine. The concern raised by the Mizo people was ignored and received scepticism from the Assam government. When the famine struck Mizoram, the meagre response and relief triggered a spirit of increasing dissension in Mizoram and a new political party called Mizo National Famine Front (which later became Mizo National Front) was formed to address the matter of famine relief efforts.

The new political party gained traction on its secessionist ambition from those who were already on the fence about joining the Indian Union. The continual frustration and disappointment on the level of political participation after the integration into the Assam state reached its climax due to the *mautam* which augmented the zeal to explore alternative political actions. The Mizo Union called for separate statehood for Mizoram appealing for political autonomy from the rule of the Indian Union while the Mizo National Front (MNF) aimed for complete independence of Mizoram from the Indian Union. The Mizo National Front submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India on 30th October 1965 appealing for “freedom and independence” (Lalnithanga 125). The movement of dissension gained momentum spearheaded by the MNF that led to an armed revolt against the Indian government in 1966. At midnight of 28th February 1966, an armed revolt took place that started with the looting of government treasuries which provoked the anger of the Indian government. Saiawi reflected the sentiment of the then India Home Minister Gurjari Lal Nanda threatening “Mizo marauders shall pay” as quoted in a national newspaper (Thukhawchang Vol. IV 181). On 2nd March Mizoram was declared a “disturbed area” under the Assam Disturbed Area Act 1955 and the Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers Act 1958 (Lalsangkima

Pachau 88). The revolution of MNF was retaliated by the Indian government with a full-blown military attack that wreaked havoc and destruction in Mizoram. The period of the struggle is termed *rambuai* in Mizo meaning a 'disordered state', a term which has no implication of any political attachment. The turbulent political climate between the 1960s and 1980s profoundly impacted Mizo society, weighing heavily as a period of collective trauma and suffering. The bombings of the jet fighters, burning of villages, displacing entire towns and their people, rampant physical assault, persecution, and rape were among the many agonising *rambuai* experiences of the Mizo people. The Mizos had resented the intimidating warfare approach of the MNF, while their appeal on the grounds of ethnocentric identity attracted the public at the beginning of its activism. However, the public soon became victim of rampant violence and terrorism. The military response to the insurrection by the Indian Union put the public in throes of persecution from both forces, which resulted in a period of misery that claimed the lives of many Mizo civilians up until the signing of the Peace Accord in 1986. Narratives on *rambuai* have been rendered into a sub-genre as *Rambuai Literature* in which *rambuai* fiction accounts for a sizeable contribution in Mizo Literature. C. Lalawmpuia Vanchiau, a Mizo writer of repute, in his anthology called *Rambuai Literature* (2014) documents that fiction focusing on *rambuai* is estimated to be around seventy books (111). Among notable *rambuai* fiction writers the likes of K C Lalvunga, James Dokhuma, C. Laizawna, C. Lalnunchanga and many others, Saiawi was also an important author who raised consciousness about the significance of *rambuai* narratives. His works containing *rambuai* narratives include LRH, NKF, and *Keimah Unionliana* (1997). Being an avid advocate of inscribing the tale of Mizo ethnicity in his narrative, his fiction on *rambuai* incorporated aspects of the personal and the socio-political in the events in and around the revolt. As tragic and painful experiences of the collective Mizo during the period, Saiawi's narratives reveal, as many other writers of *rambuai* literature, an engagement of and about truths and meaning pertaining to its cause, the nature of the people's sufferings, and the hope of healing. Moreover, discourse through such narratives provides modes of its documentation and knowledge about the historical event that become tremendously consequential in the identity formation of the Mizos.

In LRH, the author narrates the events of *rambuai* from a second hand perspective. This approach of narration causes a degree of obscurity as to the depth in which Mizo civilians endured hardships yet the autobiographical element embodied by the character Zochhuana could be found in *Thukhawchang Vol. IV*. In the essay the author narrated his *rambuai* experience from Maharashtra much like Zochhuana who observed the war from outside Mizoram. During the uprising in Mizoram, Saiawi was posted at Maharashtra and although he did not endure horrible ordeals of the uprising, being Mizo, he refused to address Mizo victims as “they” but “us”. (181). His engagement in the story of LRH reveals his attempt at making sense of *rambuai* from the aspects of the political and the historical. He explores the sense of loss and suffering from the aspect of the personal in *Keimah Unionliana* and NKF. The author takes great liberty to explore *rambuai* as the collective experience of Mizo people and to judiciously educate others about the same. The very act of revisiting *rambuai* era has layered nuances for the Mizos and Saiawi’s narrative has a deep and lasting impact on Mizo society that provides a study about the nature of historical events and their contribution to determining the outcome of identity construction which in the words of Mohanty “in them, and through them, we learn to define and reshape our values and our commitments, we give texture and form to our collective futures” (43). Discourse on *rambuai* signifies the impact of collective memory in restructuring and reshaping the course of Mizo ethnic and cultural identity and, most importantly, the significance of narrative as a mode of healing and to find meaning amidst the trauma. Characters in his novels NKF and LRH are shown with their distinct challenges that disrupt their lives, and how they confront loss and their strength to rebuild their lives in war-torn Mizoram. The politically charged tension in 1966 Mizoram presides ominously at the opening of NKF. On the night of 28th February 1966, Nukawki and Zopari wait for their husbands' return anxiously from their unknown whereabouts. Nukawki's unease is apparent even as her mind wanders frantically and she anxiously recalls her husband’s ominous statement “In case anything happens in the future Zopari is your younger sister, I often tell her to mind your bidding”, and try as she may, sleep evades her. (138)

On 1st March 1966 they hear the news about the bombing of the Government Treasury building and government workers were all sent home. The MNF political party had secured a powerful presence and their political goal to fight for independence was loudly made to reverberate throughout Mizoram. The public was torn between the two political parties MNF and Mizo Union. The intense rivalry between them created a divide among the Mizo people. This tension often led to physical attacks that alarmed the public. Members of the political party were often accused of physical assaults and even murder. The MNF continued their assaults on the Assam rifles and the Indian government responded with the mobilization of armed forces from the Indian Air Force, Indian Army, Assam rifles, and Border Road Task Force. On 3rd March 1966, the governor implemented curfew over Mizoram, restricting civil movement. The ensuing chaos in the city is depicted with vivid horror that instilled fear and trepidation in the masses and in a short while, the streets of Aizawl were all deserted, and silence commenced in the air (NKF 144-145). Saiawi offers the narrative of civilians who were subjected to the atrocities of war and he makes it his primary focus to tell the stories of the common people and their helpless predicament. His narrative on the war experience is given solely through the lens of ordinary Mizo men and women. The characters' limited political engagements regarding the uprising are in tune with the general population that had no active involvement in the armed rebellion. He explains in NKF that by 4th March 1966, most people were afraid to stay in Aizawl and fled to rural villages, and other Northeast regions, namely, Silchar in Assam, Shillong in Meghalaya, and Churachandpur in Manipur. As they moved out, army from Assam Rifles shot them (148). The poorly organized and inadequately armed militants were met with overwhelming force by the Indian government, resulting in devastating consequences for the Mizos. The Indian army responded to the uprising with such a degree of fatality for the civilians that would go down in Mizoram history as one of the most painful cultural memories. In LRH, Saiawi paints a horrific picture by narrating the fatal bombings in Aizawl. Not long after the attack on the Treasury, three planes flew over Aizawl and the civilians were impervious to their danger. Many believed that the planes were going to survey the area and leave, but these planes rain down bombs in Aizawl while producing a level of devastation that the Mizos had never seen

earlier. Three other planes take over and carry on the aerial assault as soon as the first three depart. Bara Bazar in Aizawl had been reduced to ashes. (232)

The situation outside Aizawl did not fare better, the army burnt down villages they believed harboured the MNF militants. They persecuted innocent civilians for information and many were either killed or maimed in the process which Saiawi has depicted through characters like Mualnuam Village Council President, Zopari and her husband. There are numerous stories of those who are brought in for questioning and never return. Mizo women suffer rape, sexual assault, and psychological abuse. In NKF, Nukawki's best friend and sister-in-law Zopari is shot and killed by the army because her militant husband had visited her the night before. When Nukawki is finally able to join her friend at Mualnuam she is devastated to learn about the incident that claimed the life of her friend. Such personal loss was a frequent experience for the people who had lived through *rambuai*. Saiawi captures the fear and feeling of displacement by narrating the poignant details of those who went through the agony of loss and trauma. The sense of displacement and confusion ignited by fear played a corrosive role in Mizo society amid turbulent military and political events. Through the character Zochhuana and his family in LRH, Saiawi narrates the horrible events from a different perspective. Zochhuana has been following the political events from his residence in an unnamed district in Rajasthan. He could only get glimpses of the news about the revolt in Mizoram from the All India Radio News and through letter correspondence with his friends. Zochhuana's retrospection and discourse regarding the political climate leading to the revolt reveals the issue of non-representation and negligence of the Mizo in the political sphere. He recollects past dialogues with leaders from both the Mizo Union and the MNF in which the former views activism relating to the secession from the Indian Union unthinkable while the latter strongly vouches for the secession. However, they all have the common view that the Mizos lack proper representation in the political sphere leading to their negligence. Despite their differences on grounds of political ideology, their conversations reveal that the general discontentment stems from the political marginalization of the Mizo people. The issue of representation/non-representation, and visibility/ invisibility forms the core of the political events during

rambuai. Apart from the discourse of Zochhuana, the author provides subtexts through an omniscient narrative to throw light upon the lack of representation pertaining to the plight of the Mizo. He points out the visit of Meghalaya Member of Parliament, GG Swell and Members of Legislative Assembly, Hoover Hynniewta and Stanley Nichols Roy, at the height of the conflict. Saiawi commends the bravery of the politicians for risking their lives to investigate the events of *rambuai* and their representation of the Mizo at the Lok Sabha and the Assam Legislative Assembly. He vehemently emphasizes upon the lack of knowledge about the Mizos and their sufferings as exhibited in the parliamentary houses. He reveals that the wartime acts, or the 'draconian laws' as they are called, ensured the obscurity of all the pain and terror endured by the Mizo from any kind of representation that the situation desperately needs. (LRH 171)

In the text, Zochhuana's visit to Zialung offers stories of incredible horrors endured by the civilians because Zialung has experienced the worst of the battle where many lost their lives. He narrates that Zialung has been merged with four other villages and has expanded more than twice its former area. In order to better their control, the government merges villages into clusters leading to a decrease in cultivable lands, so it is impossible to sustain a large number of people who rely on agricultural land with no proper roads. In addition to the disruption of their farming operations, their men are frequently detained and beaten, which has a significant negative impact on finding their sustenance. Due to restriction of movement and curfews, famine follows in Zialung and their only source of employment is manual labour entailing the risk of their life in the hands of the army (255). The period of *rambuai* lingers painfully in the cultural memory of the Mizo so much so that the war narratives are relegated from public discourse and mostly confined to political engagements. Even the residents of Zialung underplay the horrors of war. There are those captured and killed, but the people are afraid to speak about them (256). Informants on both sides had been shot down ruthlessly to arouse fear and to demonstrate the "fungibility of victimhood", the interchangeability of circumstances for the witness to these killings (Nayar 24). One of the attacks claimed the life of Zochhuana's friend, which deeply sadden him. The villagers' emaciated appearance

conveys a depressing tale of their hardship. They continue to chat heartily and laugh despite this (LRH 255). However, the villagers of Zialung are ominously silent about their sufferings because "trauma is sometimes nearly if not totally unspeakable" (Pederson 336). For Saiawi, the act of narrating rambuai atrocities is a conscious choice to bring out the unjust horror that the civilian victim had to endure. The author works to elucidate upon the history and context of *rambuai* and locates the centrality of the suffering in the realm of the social because the civilian lot was the space where the real horror was fixed. His narrative on *rambuai* attempts to convey that which defies common memory, narrative, representation, and cognitive processes. The idea of narrating the unnarratable, verbalizing the unthinkable, and making sense of the incomprehensible are all significant issues raised by trauma narratives. (Schönfelder 30)

As asserted by Erin Peters that "contemporary responses to the disabling nature of psychological trauma demonstrate an inadvertent recognition of the therapeutic value of attempting to construct a publicly available trauma narrative" (80). The art of narrative demonstrated by the select author indicates the significance of trauma narrative in providing modes of constructing collective identity through the process of navigating adversities of *rambuai*. The aftermath of the war and its psychological effects on the individual convey its import to the psyche of the collective through the shared experience which was manifested as an unhealed wound for the Mizo people. The act of narrating *rambuai* experiences provides impactful ground on which the Mizo as a collective could find space to negotiate meaning and quite possibly healing. LRH and NKF offer testament to the vital role of representation, narration and the search for new truths about *rambuai* in the current of cultural identity for not only the past and present generation but for posterity of the Mizos which is why revisiting the painful experience of rambuai serves emblematic for the Mizos as didactic message, therapeutic effort, and their ethnic description. The select texts reveal multiple agents at play in forming Mizo ethnic identity. The colonial period as depicted in the texts brought innumerable changes in Mizo society. The sense of autonomy that had served as their greatest asset in defence and survival in times of war, calamities, and fraught against the

elements was challenged and brought to an abrupt end under the British rule. The sense of communal bond that was specific to regional localities was further strengthened to include a larger group of people as a consequence of colonisation. The need to foster a sense of solidarity carries over to the modern time when ethnic diversity is greatly challenged and the conscious effort to unite under the aegis of Mizo identity is amplified at the cost of losing some of its diversity. This perceived sense of communality has been instrumental in the preservation of ethnic identity for the Mizo.

The widespread transformation due to colonisation, integration into the larger Indian Union and the influence of modernity is still a continuing discourse in Mizo ethnic study. Saiawi offers the legacy of those who represent the indomitable spirit of Mizo culture by depicting the stories of ordinary people who most embody the Mizo cultural life. Saiawi has laid out the intricacies of social changes and influences by providing his narratives through family dynamics, especially on issues concerning the turbulent political climate during colonisation and *rambuai* as they become important influences that are embedded in the discourse of Mizo ethnic and cultural roots. These historical narratives and their ethnocentric elements form a vital component in the development of collective identity. Saiawi's powerful narrative provides a powerful insight into the reflexive quality of cultural life in Mizo society and the import of these historical accounts on identity formation in Mizo culture.

Glossary

Note- Titles of select texts will henceforth be abbreviated as- *Lungrang Laiawrha* (LRL), *Lungrang Hmangaihna* (LRH), *Nukawki* (NKK), and *Nukawki Fanu* (NKF)

Fathang - “a tax or tribute paid usually to a chief consisting of one or more dawrawn baskets of unhusked rice.” (Lorrain 134)

Khawnbawl upa - The term *Khawnbawl* is a verb indicating “to act as an adviser, minister, or elder to a chief, etc” (257) and the term *upa* translates to “an elder”. Thus the term *Khawnbawl upa* is made up of a noun form for a Mizo chief's adviser or minister.

Mautam – The term as a verb form implies “to die down simultaneously as the mau bamboos do periodically about every fifty years after flowering and fruiting. This occurrence is followed by a plague of rats which devour the rice crops and cause a famine” (309). It is also used as a noun form indicating the natural phenomena and the subsequent famine that resulted from it.

Vai Len Vawikhatna - The phrase signifies the attack by a foreigner. The term *Vai* indicates people that are non-Mizo and the phrase could be translated as the ‘first war of the British on Mizo.’

Zosap – *n.* a missionary. (*Lit.* The Lushais’ Sahib.) (570). It denotes the Mizos’ affectionate term for the Christian missionaries.

Zalen - *n.* “a village elder whose privilege it is to be among the first to choose land for jhooming purposes; a freeman; one who is free to do very much as he wishes, or who is free from being under authority; one who enjoys the freedom of a village, town, city or country” (557). The title indicated the freedom and authority enjoyed by the ministers of Mizo chiefs.

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Chapter III- Morality as Portrayed by Saiawi

The evolution of Mizo cultural life is greatly contributed by its moral practices from time immemorial. Alongside its cultural development, religious and social beliefs and practices constitute essential components in informing the Mizo's cultural life. The regional uniqueness of the Mizos lies in these incredible dynamics of its culture and morality. The Mizo cultural landscape as it exist today owes its advancement to its moral heritage right from the time before Christianity and modernity entered Mizo society. Saiawi recognises these indispensable elements of social and moral life of the Mizos and incorporates these elements in his texts. He dramatises Mizo social conventions and religious development through his characters and makes them interact with significant historical moments in Mizo history in his text. This chapter will study the development of Mizo cultural life through the lens of its interaction with Mizo sense of morality and the development of religious life as presented in the select texts. It will approach the interplay of culture and morality in terms of their relation to ethnic identity, and also with the dynamics pertaining to the individual and the collective.

Mizo cultural identity is shaped by ethnic description which the same forces of cultural events and historical moments determine their sense of morality. Since morality and religiosity are so integral to Mizo ethnic identity, they serve as key pillars for navigating both natural and external shifts in culture and religion . Since Mizo ethnicity is formed from socio-centric principles, morality also becomes a collective practice. Saiawi provides a close look into the evolution of the binary between morality and cultural identity by depicting how the Mizo people respond to monumental changes from their past such as the social climate during the introduction of Christianity, and its underlying political ambitions leading to the resistance of the religion, the ultimate conversion to the religion and finally its negotiation with Mizo ethnicity. Saiawi depicts the advent of Christianity in such works as LRL and *Tawitawkawn Chemângi*. His other works such as LRH, NKK, NKF, and *Keimah Unionliana* denote Christian morality in practice as it seeps into the social and cultural mores of the Mizo people. His incorporation of Christian morality in these texts is mostly indirectly suggested through the characters' response to moral issues and the author's enactment of moral justice. Among his texts, *A Na*

Lua is his only novel where the author explores outside the Christian paradigm. It explores the tragic life of the primary character Hazel where she marries into a Hindu family and her subsequent demise. The author gives a veiled description of her life and the circumstances around her end is shrouded in mystery. The omnipresence of morality in all aspects of human pursuits makes it one of the crucial elements in literature. The complications and issues conveyed in literature and narration often present moral dilemmas which Podjman reflects that in order to help us understand and feel the subtleties that are essential to resolving complex moral issues—possibilities that we would not have thought of in our abstract thinking about moral dilemmas—literature particularizes general difficulties and brings them home to us.

(4) The select texts of Saiawi show facets of the moral proclivity of the Mizo through the characters' intrigues and complications. His chosen themes of personal dilemmas consist of the underlying Mizo morality fostered extensively by the cultural changes in Mizo society. Beyond their uniquely personal predicament, the author's intent on exposing authentic human experiences in his narratives sheds light on the issue of the dynamics between culture and morality in Mizo society. His truthful portrayal of real-life crises and complications about the vulnerable victimized by their social circumstances and society provides a poignant narrative which is worthy of reflection.

The select texts of Saiawi enumerate historical events that contributed significantly to the formation of the Mizo identity. The concepts of 'good' and 'evil' are important agents in executing moral order in every part of social functions. This dichotomy of morality and society is an effective agent in establishing stability in the operation of society through religion, civic functions and education. The autonomous self-governing Mizo villages in the pre-colonial Mizoram had no pressure or immediate need to form a unanimous and ubiquitous Mizo identity but lineages and ancestry formed important components in establishing a primordial collective identity for Mizos even during those times. The concept of morality is an ambiguous philosophical discourse which is summed up by Podjman as the study of "good and evil, and right and wrong action" (1) or in a social context, "defined as a set of cultural elements that define the nature of commitment to a particular course of

behaviour” (Wuthnow 66). Deliberations on the concept could be vastly varied and layered ranging from its epistemological study, religious implications, and linguistic connotations to its functions in the society. An important consideration made of the study is its subjectivity on both levels of the individual and the collective as stated by Bernard Williams that the vocabulary of "right" and "wrong" might be viewed as a tool for achieving consensus, identifying those who disagree, and so on; yet, the fact that all we have are people's opinions about various behaviors, personalities, societal structures, etc., remains the same (17). The interrelation between an individual and their collective societies played an intricate role in shaping and moulding the evolution of morality as asserted by Barbara Herman “Moral action is an element in the complex human psychology that concerns what we can care about and the sorts of things that affect our carings given the ways we live with other persons. Human agency is deep, incarnate, and social. That affects what morality can be, and what philosophical questions it makes sense to ask.” (67)

This dichotomy of individuals and their societies creates different moral perceptions and practices. As Richard A. Shweder observes that among Western adults moral actions are regarded as 'objective' and 'imperative' and the moral is considered categorical, virtue is seen as not needing argument because doing what is right is seen to speak for itself and points out that such practices that arise from moral beliefs posit "external facticity" (42). Regardless of issues and matters that arouse moral convictions, practices and beliefs concerning morality carry the same intensity across cultures. Thus, the reaction between culture and morality is an inseparable force of human society that determines different levels of changes and social disposition in a society. Religious beliefs and practices are informative of the cultural mores of the Mizo people. It could be said that these beliefs dictated all walks of their lives. Mizo Christianity of the present day owes its formation to its complementary blend of ethnic elements and religious roots which necessitated continual negotiation from the time of its inception. So it is vital to study the pre-Christian Mizo religious beliefs because they provide colours and contours to how the Mizos perceive the notion of religiosity and thus morality itself. The structure of Mizo morality that predated the advent of Christianity in the form of social customs

and traditions continues to inform the Mizo ethnic identity as well as the underlying principles with which social morality is exercised in Mizo society. James Dokhuma, the esteemed Mizo scholar, defines *sakhua* as a belief in certain supernatural force more powerful than human beings that acts not only during one's lifetime but also in the afterlife. (43)

The term *sakhua* is made up of two words *sa* which means a 'divine creator' from which all races are created and *khua* which means 'a guardian and benefactor'. The amalgam of the two came to signify the worship of a supernatural benefactor and the worship of *sakhua* was deeply associated with their clan identities. The term itself carries over, after Christianity, to denote 'religion' in the Mizo language. An important detail of the practice of worshipping *sakhua* was that it was considered a private affair. The reason is that beliefs concerning *sakhua* were tied with specific clans and these differing clans had separate *sakhua* that came with different forms of practices specific to their clans. The practice of *sakhua* was performed only about once or twice a year and beyond the specificity of rituals, belief in their benevolent gods in the category called *pathian* was regarded with inclusivity of the whole of their community. The pre-Christian Mizo religion is believed to originate from their society with an egalitarian purpose at its core. B. Lalthangliana reflects the practice of *sakhua* as a cultural experience because he believes that the core principle seems to be honouring of the braves for their heroism which is needed for their collective survival, and honouring of those who could provide for the society at large (46). Contrary to the imperialist's perpetuation of Mizos as 'savages' and 'head-hunters' whom "even the 'chaff' of the village girls may send a body of young men off on the warpath for heads" (Reid 3), social structures of the Mizos followed cultured systems of function with a strong base of moral beliefs and code of ethics. Collective survival was the strongest moralising agent which was evident in the way traditional laws and customs were practiced. The traditional practice mandatory for all male youth to sleep at the village dormitory called *zawlbuk* until they were well into married life provided a very effective informal education where male youth and men learned heuristic knowledge passed down from the elders in the village. It was the training ground to acquaint men with

noble ways of conducting themselves in their society and how to correctly apply their service to the community. Most of all, they were trained to be ready to protect their village at the earliest signs of war from man and beasts at all times. In this form of practice, learning was intuitive and social which helped in preserving knowledge through experience that continually worked to construct and re-structure customs and norms. The zeal in which the Mizos committed themselves to learning was reflected in the practice and consequently even after colonization when the advent of education was greatly welcomed. The Mizo's expectations from formal education to meet the need of their natural curiosity about the world and hopefully advance their society was largely unrealised under the British rule. As documented by Major McCall regarding their considerations about opening schools beyond primary level he states that until those who have been given an opportunity to study in advance of the Primary themselves create among their fellows the industry and activity which alone can justify any extension of Education there is no case for giving higher education to meet a need which does not exist-almost the encouragement of a gamble. (The Lushai Hills 225)

During the colonial rule, the tradition of *zawlbuk* was still retained but the reality of its practice was a mere shadow of its former glory. Consequently, the tradition was slowly relegated and substituted by the western model of education. The core principle of socio-centric learning, which formed the foundation of traditional Mizo education and communal cohesion, was systematically undermined during the colonial period. Saiawi vividly illustrates this loss in his depiction of Saihum village, where the men's attempts to safeguard Chhuahi's dignity are hindered by the diminished authority of the *zawlbuk*. Their conversations at *Zawlbuk* reveal their ire toward the man when he makes a contemptuous comment that he could defile her if he so chooses. However, they are placated by their elders and they refrain from touching the government employee. They worry that the administrator would punish the entire hamlet if they got aggressive (LRL 13). Admonishments of *zawlbuk* members and its guests were well thought out before they were carried out and must always be executed with the advice of the elders and, on serious occasions, the village chiefs. The incident revealed that the repressive control during the

colonial rule had a negative impact on the underlying structures of Mizo traditional moral codes of ethics by undermining the authority of traditional laws which is personified by the Circle Interpreter who abused his position in the colonial administration. At a later stage of the colonial rule, the British administration recognised that Mizo traditions and customs had meaningful roles in making Mizo society civilized and cultured all along, such as the tradition of keeping Zawlbuk and abiding by the Mizo code of ethical conduct called *tlawmngaihna*. The former was no longer a viable option by then because of the irrevocable nature of social changes brought upon the Mizos as a result of colonization and Christianity. The everyday life of the pre-colonial era was adapted to encourage self-sufficiency, a reiteration of the basis of collective survival. Failure to meet the essential needs of their respective household entailed shame and disgrace; which manifested ranges of subtle to severe humiliation from their community. So every family worked yearlong exhausting manual labour to earn their keep enough to last the next year. Men, in the workforce as well as their role as protectors of the community from enemies, dominated the social structure where their contribution to family and society was given primacy above all. Thus, social and moral laws were patriarchal. The survival of their society at the time relied on a simple agrarian practice as an economic base with imminent threats of ethnic wars between tribes for land, resources and other civil interests. Social laws were typically instated to safeguard the security and the autonomy of their villages. To a great extent, the issue of moral rightness or wrongness was determined by factors such as their village's economic interest and unity in protecting their villages from enemies.

As social harmony and unity were crucial for their security, codes of ethical conduct were stressed in every aspect of their lives. Every member of the community was obligated to follow social laws and civic norms. Their beliefs and religious practices also reflected ideals of collective interest. Mizo beliefs regarding supernatural forces, religion and the afterlife were intrinsically tied to their socio-economic life and almost all of their cultural practices like festivals and social celebrations had religious elements. The three primary festivals *Chapchar Kut*, *Mim Kut*, and *Pawl Kut* all have Mizo pagan elements. These festivals were celebrated

according to the timeline of their agricultural activities. As rice was and still is the staple diet for the Mizos and the cultivation of rice dictated their work culture in the past. Each household was responsible for their self-sufficiency and they diligently worked in the jhum to produce enough food to last another cycle of rice crop which was roughly about a year. Festivity happened during small intervals of breaks from their agricultural work and the names of these festivals rightly reflect their agricultural work and among the festivals, *Chapchar Kut* enjoyed the grandest of celebrations. It was usually celebrated during March when primary weeding and clearing of jhum sites ended before they could start another crop of rice. *Mim Kut* was a festival dedicated to the dead. The festival lasted three days during which families made offerings of an assortment of foods to their departed loved ones. They usually gathered together in solemnity, sang songs of mourning that were dedicated to the dead and drank *zu*, the traditional alcoholic Mizo rice drink. The last festival *Pawl Kut* highlighted the strong social bond shared among the Mizo society. The festival was a time for sharing and celebrating togetherness in their community. It demonstrated the charitable spirit of the Mizos wherein there was a passionate will to share the best of their foods and harvest with other members of their society who might not be in a position to enjoy them. A tradition called *chhawnghnawh* was very popular where they gathered together and brought cooked meat, eggs, and other food items and participants were hand-fed. This tradition was also practiced during *Chapchar Kut* but during *Pawl Kut* they went above and beyond with the tradition by bringing the best of their foods usually meat and placing them in a small makeshift hut built on their village chief's ground. These food items were accessible to any who wished to take them. It was celebrated by donning their best attire and feeding others in the tradition of *chhawnghnawh*.

Within and outside the religious practices of *sakhua*, Mizos believed in the existence of various supernatural beings. A variety of supernatural beings believed by Mizos as interacting with humans such as *pathian* or 'god' consisted of a category of benevolent beings that were helpful to humans. Other categories of supernatural beings include *huai* or 'spirit' which consist of fearsome beings that inhabited caves, rivers, trees, etc. (Zawla 42-45). These spirits were believed to dwell in the jungle

and were called *ramhuai*, a term that carries over in Mizo Christianity as ‘agents of evil’. These are only selected few among the supernatural beings believed to exist by the Mizos to contextualize the indigenization of Christianity. In the pre-Christian Mizoram, the day-to-day functioning of the Mizo people was tied to their beliefs concerning these supernatural forces. Thus, it could be claimed that, even if some of their beliefs were not strictly religious in the proper sense of the term, these behaviour-modifying beliefs were implemented within their cultural norm to maintain order and to provide explanations for calamities, diseases, and natural disasters. LRL is situated during the transitioning period to Christianity and the Mizos attempt at negotiating the new religion within their cultural framework. Right from the opening of the novel, Saiawi incorporates the tension of religious conversion among the residents in Saihum where he highlights in a dialogue regarding the recruitment of men in the village to fight in France in World War I. Haulaia implies that there must be a political benefit in converting to Christianity stating that there would be no volunteer brave enough to enlist, and if forced to go by means of coercion God's people such as his friend would be protected by the Christian missionaries (1). Since the practice of *sakhua* was inextricably tied to clan identity the concept of religion was further connoted with Mizo identity and conversion to Christianity was problematic for it signified the disruption to their ethnic ties.

The idea that there is an ‘objective truth’ to moral attitudes seems to question an individual’s adjustment in society because those attitudes are often influenced by an individual's circumstances in certain group environments. As expressed by Williams, in moral philosophy, the role of rational thinking in individual’s moral judgements is overestimated because individual’s attitudes are “modified by factors such as the desire to conform with one group or nonconform with another- the groups themselves not being chosen in the light of moral reasons, but rather determined by the individual’s situation and needs” (18). Due to these social factors, moral philosophy could not ascertain how much of an individual’s attitude is involved in culturally subjective moral convictions because it is not quantifiable. This consideration of the limited role of rational thinking is echoed in moral

psychology where Jonathan Haidt, a well-known moral psychologist, expresses “The first principle of moral psychology is intuition come first, strategic reasoning second” (82). If morality as a concept, but not the conviction, is contingent from society to society it is crucial to consider its interaction with culture and vice versa. A study on culture without accounting for its sense of morality would be an oversight of its vital building blocks because morality dictates heavily on the way people conduct and interact in their society. A social group functions primarily on given principles and ethics which outline its cultural disposition. In his study, Parish reveals an interesting notion that highlights the importance of interpersonal relations in the study of morality. He expresses that studies in morality that focus solely on an individual's psyche fail to recognise the role of its relationship to culture, language and experience because “people forge the terms of their mutual existence, develop and deploy their psychological capacities as cultural and existential selves”. (32)

The interpersonal relationship within a social group forms the foundation of both morality and culture which shows its intrinsic nature responsible for both its necessity and existence. In analysing the processes of culture-morality dichotomy, one significant aspect that implicates the premise is its connection to identity and sense of self. This notion of identity implies both an individual's identity and group identity which often becomes contradictory to one another. Moreover, the very existence and need for morality could be largely attributed to the need to balance the ambitions of the two i.e., the individual and their social group. Similar to the dynamics between culture and morality, the dichotomy of individual-social identity is very hard to demarcate and they often run paradoxically. Parish insists that interpersonal experience frames the mode and manner of social interaction that converge with subjectivity wherein the reaction either agrees or disrupts social subjectivity which he terms as “intersubjectivity”. He believes that morality cannot be separated from this intersubjectivity and asserts that an individual's interaction with the social and the cultural is mediated by a person's sense of self which makes morality a lived experience and not merely conformity to existing ethical codes of conduct claiming that “morality is grounded directly in experience as well as derived

from social and psychological processes; that it depends on the relationship of culturally grounded ethics with concepts of the person". (33-34)

In the convergence of various social, political and economic elements within culture, practices revolving around morality and identity do not exist outside of lived experiences; a study on a particular society's evolution has to account for the interaction of all these elements. It is important to give cultural contexts to the influences of morality to culture which ultimately implicates the idea of selfhood. In the context of Mizo culture, morality is expressed largely in terms of the collective that requires social and civic responsibility in all the layers of social functioning. In such ethnic groups as the Mizo with their ethnic ties to its particular migratory history and self-reliant small community culture, the function of the community revolved around their survival as groups. In such instances, moral responsibility is put toward the collective over the individual. Ethics concerning their civic life was instituted in the form of cultural and traditional practices that evolved from their lived experiences through the years. As Jarrett Zigon, a social theorist, philosopher, and anthropologist asserts that "anthropological analyses of moralities" contain fragmented discourses because a single social setting or circumstance cannot be viewed as being made up of a single totalizing moral discourse; rather, it must be viewed as a collection of various deterritorialized aspectual traces of discourses and practices, from which a distinct variety of ethical practices arise during times of crisis (18). The concept of morality for the Mizos also constitutes piecing together elements from the historical, social and cultural events. These influences on moral discourses that transpire in moments of crisis could be analysed from the evolution of Mizo cultural identity which the previous chapter asserted. Moreover, considerations of the dynamics between Mizo culture and its moral disposition consisted of "kinship, religion, emotions, violence, and suffering" (17). One of the most crucial events for a significant change in morality is the introduction of Christianity during British colonization. The advent of Christianity and its eventual widespread adoption had a profound and transformative impact on the cultural life of the Mizos. The introduction of Christian beliefs and practices permeated existing social structures, necessitating a significant reconfiguration of tradition and social norms. This

transformation was particularly complex given the deeply ingrained communal ethos that characterized Mizo society, where social cohesion and collective identity were central to everyday life. The pervasive influence of Christianity, thus, required not only the adaptation of religious practices but also a broader reconstruction of cultural values and social organization. This process was fraught with challenges, as the integration of a new religious framework initially generated tensions and uncertainties within the community. Over time, however, the Mizos negotiated and reconciled these changes, ultimately reshaping their cultural identity in ways that reflected both continuity and adaptation.

The advent of Christianity in Mizoram was a subsequent expedition that followed closely after the British colonization. The first Christian missionaries J. H. Lorrain and F. W Savidge reached Mizoram in the year 1894, around four years after the British annexation of Mizoram. In order to convert Mizos to Christianity, Christian missionaries realized the necessity to introduce formal education which became a double-fold mission. The two missionaries took the task of rendering the Mizo language into a written script which became the foundation of Christian mission work in Mizoram and by "the beginning of the twentieth century, Christians were few but these few were confident. They were known for their zeal to spread the Gospel and for their strict code of behaviour" (Pachau 75). The propagation of Christianity in Mizoram during the colonial period was characterized by a series of sporadic revival movements that were distinctly imbued with Mizo ethnic attributes, making the new faith particularly resonant among the Mizos. These revival movements not only facilitated the rapid dissemination of Christian teachings but also enabled the adaptation of religious practices to align with indigenous cultural sensibilities. As a result, Christianity gained significant traction within Mizo society, as evidenced by the remarkable increase in the number of adherents: from 7,423 Christians in 1913, the figure more than doubled to 16,035 by 1918. This period thus marked a pivotal transformation in the religious and cultural landscape of Mizoram (78). The Mizo's effort to negotiate the new morals with that of the traditional could be seen in the constant revisions and indigenisation of Mizo Christianity. During the time of its initial introduction, the new religion had impactful changes in Mizo

society that permeated through all aspects of Mizo culture. The worldview was also accompanied by a whole host of challenges and modifications. Written through 1939-1944 in his *Lushai Chrysalis*, Major McCall observed with their colonial interest about the Mizo attitude toward the introduction of Christianity and stated that the Mizos retained a cultural respect and some pride in their ancestor, social relations still being, in a measure, maintained on a well known and firm basis of age-long custom and practice. (29)

The Mizos had experienced ambivalence and displacement as a result of the new religion and its practices, which presented particular difficulties because their execution altered not only their religion but also their culture and customs. The British rule took the opportunity to enforce their colonial exertions on the Mizos through the Christian missions as reflected in the so called “village codes” introduced by the British under the Government Notification dated 25. 3. 1937 which required the Mizos to “bow to the authority of those who introduced [Mizos] to Christianity and that [Mizos] shall be disloyal to them if [Mizos] do not submit to the discipline which it is their prerogative to demand” (McCall, *The Lushai Hills* 32). The political nature of the introduction of Christianity was viewed with extreme suspicion and resistance by the Mizos particularly because of its implications to their cultural identity. Saiawi denotes in his texts the tension within Mizo communities about Christianity. He depicts the Mizo’s hesitation and reservation in those texts that are situated during the early and middle 1900s Mizoram. In *LRL*, he examines the initial phase of Mizo’s acceptance of Christianity, noting that approximately twenty households in Saihum had already embraced the new faith. He further observes that a significant number of others exhibited keen interest in Christianity. This nuanced portrayal emphasizes upon the gradual and complex nature of religious transformation within the community, highlighting both the spread of Christian influence and the coexistence of curiosity and hesitation among the local population during this formative period (*LRL* 16). The story of Chemângi of Tawitawrawn village, that takes place in 1930, narrates the life of the titular character’s unapologetical lifestyle. The author depicts her as a force of defiance against the cultural invasion in the beginning of the text. The character is an elderly Mizo

woman who drinks and dances in the traditional Mizo's get-together which is often at the chief's house. She refuses to convert to Christianity and insists that she will keep many Mizo customs forbidden by the church. She openly criticises the stringent religiosity of the Christians in her village and says that she will allow bachelors to freely court her granddaughters within the Mizo norms. She ultimately gives in to societal pressure and attends a Sunday church service where the author humourously describes her awkward and unconventional attendance in the church. For the Mizos living under colonial rule, the struggles and hardships of their day-to-day life were pressured by the ever-looming possibility of political persecution. The colonial rule ushered in significant changes to social administration, many of which actively suppressed the cultural expressions of the Mizos. These administrative reforms not only altered traditional modes of governance but also imposed new structures that often conflicted with indigenous customs and practices. The subsequent spread of Christianity further compounded these challenges by relegating numerous long-standing traditions to the margins, frequently dismissing them as pagan and incompatible with Christian doctrine. This process of religious and cultural re-evaluation hindered the initial acceptance of Christianity among the Mizos, as many individuals were reluctant to abandon practices deeply embedded in their communal identity and heritage. In LRL, Saiawi conveys the apprehension of the Mizos toward the new religion in several instances where certain Mizo customs and traditions were replaced by practices deemed worthy of Christian values. Many Mizo customs and traditions were negated on grounds that they have Mizo pagan elements which as depicted in the celebration of *Chapchar Kut* at Saihum before widespread acceptance happened in Saihum. They celebrate *Chapchar Kut* joyously and they donned their best attires. Young men and women dance the traditional *chai* at the chief's ground with great pomp and some of those that had embraced Christianity also participated in the celebration (LRL 32). Saiawi's representation of the early Christians nuances the apprehensive circumstances of the early converts who were navigating an uncharted territory of Christendom. The clash along religious lines in itself became political and tension within communities differed across different villages and in some cases, these converts were met with downright hostility from their communities. Vanlalchhuanawma comments, "The natural response of the Mizos

was seen in their indifference, repulsion and open retaliation through different forms of persecution of the converts” (127). This constant friction between the church and Mizo traditional cultures has persisted throughout Mizo cultural and religious history.

Saiawi depicts the life of early Mizo Christians through the characters Huliana and his family. Huliana’s father Chhunthuama is the minister in their congregation. Their family is well-to-do and well respected not only in their Christian circle but throughout the village. The life of practising Christians and their interaction with the church is depicted after Huliana’s return from his military enlistment in France during World War I. Upon his return, the widespread acceptance of Christianity among the Mizos had reached a level that enabled the construction of a formal church building. Unfortunately, Huliana’s friend reveals that he had secretly slept with a prostitute in France and thus incurs the church’s condemnation. Huliana’s encounter with a Caucasian sex worker soon became known to the church, which, despite community tolerance, could not condone the incident. The repercussions cast uncertainty over his impending marriage to Lianngovi, as their wedding—already publicly announced according to church tradition—was subsequently stripped of proper Christian rites. Deprived of both a formal ceremony and parental approval, Huliana and Lianngovi proceeded to marry privately. Chhunthuama’s absence from the occasion further underscored the family’s disapproval. With the marriage unrecognized by the church, congregation members were prohibited from attending, resulting in a modest and understated union in place of a potentially grand celebration (LRL 50-51). The practice of Christianity in Mizoram was initially marked by obscurity and ambiguity, as even its fundamental tenets were unfamiliar to many. Saiawi illustrates this through Chhuahi’s delayed conversion, which occurred years after the end of colonization, and through Laiawrha’s experiences as a young boy navigating new social dynamics while adapting to the evolving religious landscape. Saiawi narrates that Chhuahi’s faith on God was not very profound. She cannot fathom the idea of what others called Jesus and the Holy Spirit. However, she believed that religion was the path to go to heaven in the afterlife. Laiawrha was even more clueless about the whole thing (66). The

social environment during the time of Chhuahi's conversion reveals an important aspect of Christianity in Mizoram. Early Mizo Christians devoted considerable effort to adapting the religion, making its practices and teachings more accessible and relevant to the broader community. This effort involved a somewhat more flexible approach toward integrating cultural practices, though such adaptability remained quite limited in scope in the beginning. In order to truly intergrate the religion within the Mizo cultural ethos, there were several attempts to negotiate Christianity to fit their cultural and ethnic life. The most significant component of their negotiation was spiritual revivals which Saiawi has incorporated in his narratives. He depicts the cultural impacts of these revivals on the occasion of Chhuahi's conversion. Saihum was enveloped with spiritual revival and God-fearing place, even as people in the village were seized with an extraordinary spiritual fervour. Their congregations were driven with enthusiastic singing; their singing was accompanied by traditional drums which had never been used in their church...Whenever they sang and dance to the gospel, they were so energetic and full of zeal that they repeatedly sang over and over again which became exhausting for the traditional drummers and they had to constantly take turns. (LRL 64)

Spiritual movements, called revivals with elements of the pre-Christian Mizo ethnocultural past, was documented as far back as the famine of 1911 and 1912 by Vanlalchhuanawma who notes that Mizo people longed for their lost traditions that had been suppressed by Christianity. The general populace still found *Tlanglam Zai* more appealing than Christian preaching, even during famine. Due to its impact, Christians gained the confidence to write their own hymns with original melodies for their worship and revival meetings (195). The spiritual revivals entailed different forms of demonstration, especially in songs and dances that had deep ethnic qualities in them and revealed the Mizo people's desire to renew and negotiate their pre-Christian era practices. However, the spontaneous revival of cultural practices within the church came with opposition. Lalsangkima Pachuau reflects on the earlier Christian church's issue with the revival of *Puma Zai* and its ethnocentric appeal among the non-Christian Mizos and points out the church's concern about its potential power to sway the public away from the church due to the enormity of the

movement on grounds of Mizo ethnic assertion. He notes that the church took strong action to stifle long-standing traditions and behaviors among Christians. In several instances, the church abandoned and distanced itself from several widely accepted customs (100). The history of Mizo Christian revival movements comprised complex and ever evolving attempts at bridging the gap of cultural differences between the Western Christian model and the Mizo ethno-cultural identity. Saiawi documents the initial stage of these spiritual movements to highlight their significance in commencing a series of movements that focus on empowering Mizo ethnicity and thereby vindicating the Mizo core values and their sense of being. In the process of negotiating Christianity with Mizo culture, the inception of modernity through Christianity brought about complex social-moral issues which the Mizo had never experienced before. Moreover, the replacement of the traditional governing system with colonialism and the subsequent democratic system uprooted the security of moral order in Mizo society which then necessitated constant re-structuring and Saiawi reflects upon the social evils that came with the change in a cultural climate where the Mizos were left to their own means to restructure an entire moral system. He denotes how the Mizo society grappled with new problems such as alcoholism, corruption, idleness, unemployment and identity crisis, especially among the Mizo youth. Transition to Christianity and its problem of negotiation is symbolically exemplified in the tradition of drinking *zu*.

The Mizo alcoholic rice drink called *zu* constituted a central role in the Mizo community during festivals and on joyous occasions. The custom of drinking *zu* among Mizo men and women in accompaniment with Mizo songs and dancing was one of the few recreational activities in Mizo society. Saiawi depicts the tradition of drinking *zu* as a favoured pastime among married men and a few older women who had not been converted to Christianity. His depiction suggests that the tradition of fellowship with drinking *zu* and singing folk songs was within the accepted social norms in the pre-Christian Mizo society and that such tradition was exercised responsibly. He acknowledges a few cases of undesirable consequences to drinking where he states that, in the past, there had been cases of fights breaking out and drunken altercations. Even though these occurrences were uncommon, they did exist.

Physical altercations between adults are seen as unusual in Mizo society (LRL 11). This depiction of customs around the drink *zu* revealed the discrepancy between the custom and complete abstinence promoted by the church. The prohibition by the church concerning Mizo customs and tradition is described by Pachuau in the following lines. "The word 'ban'- which suggests a formal prohibition- is quite fitting to the church's position on alcoholic beverages, participation in the feasts and festivals, and to any practices that have connections with the Mizo primal religion" (Pachuau 100-101). The issue displays the contingency of moral beliefs through influences of culturally specific historical events as seen from the prohibition of *zu* by the church and how it became a moral issue and how it started to be abused by the Mizos. Thus, it is fair to estimate that the tradition of drinking traditional alcohol which had been a central part of the Mizo tradition became a moral issue denoting the implication of historical events that shaped the evolution of morality in Mizo society.

In his contemplation of the relationship between religion and morality, Norenzayan, a professor of psychology at the University of British Columbia, asserts that the relationship is "culturally variable" from which he infers that religion is not required for morality, and unity in a society that fosters moral concerns is a "cultural evolutionary process." Moral feelings that support prosociality originated independently of religion, and secular organizations can serve social monitoring tasks (365). In pre-colonial Mizo society, morality was not necessarily equated with religiosity but the introduction of Christianity made it synonymous with one another. In pre-Christian Mizoram, social solidarity was heavily promoted for their collective survival and despite differences in religious practices of *sakhua*, these religious beliefs were regarded as only extended parts in the construction of the unique whole among people with shared ancestry. However, after the advent of Christianity in Mizo society, it became an agent for morality and affirming ethnic identity primarily from many years' worth of negotiating efforts with the pre-Christian Mizo social principles of function and traditional values. A close study of Mizo adoption of Christianity reveals the role of cultural artefacts that worked heavily in the incorporation of Christianity as the predominant moral institution but also continue

to function as the primary factor of achieving social solidarity among the Mizos. Although the influence of the Christian religion contributed to major changes in Mizo society, the force of cultural changes is not completely reliant on religion in its entirety. The evolution of Mizo cultural life has been shaped by a complex interplay of social interactions, political dynamics, traditional beliefs, historical events, and encounters with other cultures. As a communitarian culture, the consolidation of Christianity in Mizoram can be understood as a process in which the religion was gradually integrated with indigenous cultural practices. Historical developments indicate that the growth and acceptance of Christian churches in Mizoram were closely linked to this synthesis of religious and cultural identities.

As Norenzayan elucidates, the evolution from a smaller group of society to an extensively larger anonymous group had led to the attribution of morality to religion in order to maintain social order and states that the association between religion and morality is a cultural phenomenon that has developed throughout time in particular regions. It was more probable that cultural variations of gods that aided in the development and growth of social solidarity would spread. While there are inherent elements in both what we refer to as "religion" and "morality," the association between the two seems to be a cultural development rather than a fixed aspect of humanity's genetic heritage (375). This assertion fits the Mizo society's religious evolution in that the pre-Christian era saw the practice of morality through communality and kinship more than religiosity which changed after the introduction of Christianity. In the pre-Christian era, religious practices were an extended part of cultural life but were never the foundation of moral perception because religious practices were private affairs and those practices differed among clans and any moral acts were practised more along the lines of kinship, and familiarity. As Saiawi has demonstrated, the small Mizo village Saihum is on the precipice of massive cultural and religious changes because of the introduction of Christianity, the new religion infiltrates the very core of the social fabric which recalibrates the very notion of morality and altruism. Saiawi's depiction of changes in Mizo history reflects an authentic portrayal of how pervasive the influence of Christianity was, right from its inception. The evolution of Christianity implies certain modifications of Mizo ethnic

description as the religion has been continually adapted and negotiated with the Mizo culture to become an agent of solidarity in the face of exposure to different multicultural influences and modernity.

Even before the amalgamation of Christianity and morality, Mizos were deeply moral in that they abided by both social norms as well as beliefs in the supernatural in all manners of social functions and interactions. They did not simply make decisions but observed customs and norms of kinship as well as supernatural beliefs in most if not all of their choices such as deciding on the location of their jhum, building houses, and paving new roads, to name a few. This abiding sense of morality carried over to the new religion with the same sense of zeal and commitment to religiosity. Among the Mizo writers, narratives on storytelling are heavily driven by this consciousness of religiosity in which moral supervision is heavily indicated by the modes and techniques of their narratives. The changes in moral beliefs after the advent of Christianity also express the cultural, social, and political influences on the Mizo sense of morality further revealing the quality of the transitory nature of morality itself. Outside of Mizo moral religiosity, societal norms and conventions exhibit the pertinence of moral elements that originated from tradition. In fact, the contribution of such non-religious and traditional ethics such as the sense of community, reciprocity, and kinship are the driving factors in modifying religious institutions that had led to the assertion of ethnic identity as seen from the negotiating efforts from the many revival movements in the church in Mizoram.

In the deliberation of moral influences in collective settings such as society, religion, and formal institutions, another important factor is the aspect of moral subjectivity. The concept focuses on the idea of personhood. Historical events permeated influence through the socio-cultural foundations of Mizo culture and also restructured the concept of self and individuality. Thomas E. Sanders, a scholar of Native American culture, examines the misalignment between Western conceptions of selfhood and their beliefs about God. He highlights the inherent tension within the Western tradition, particularly the conflict between the communal roots of the Judeo-Christian tradition and the individualistic ethos of the Hellenic heritage. Sanders notes that this dissonance gives rise to competing ideologies: one prioritizes

responsibility to the collective - where serving the city-state equates to self-service - while the other frames law as an expression of one's capacity to love fellow tribesmen, with the group's ultimate purpose being to serve God. In this latter context, self-realization is achieved through communal conduct rather than personal innovation (256-257). Thus the constant push and pull of contradicting ideologies also influenced Mizo society after the introduction of Christianity. In the cultural realm, the concept of Christianity seeped into the fabric of Mizo society with a sweeping force that restructured their system of ethics and morality. Many social conventions and traditional practices that persisted after this impact saw the modelling of Mizo cultural perceptions toward Western ideals. However, there lay the problem of disjuncture between tradition and the ensuing emulation of Western culture. What was conceived out of a negotiated Western ideology, which in itself evolved in a plethora of variations and cultural nuances in many cultures, was negotiated within Mizo society from its ethnic and socio-centric ideology. For the Mizos, the metaphorical 'winds of change' in the cultural sphere was eventually enveloped with Christian ideology. The widespread acceptance of Christianity became the ground of commonality to forge a collective identity necessitated by the overwhelming displacement felt by the Mizos during colonization and to cope with the imminent threat to their survival. The acute awareness of the fragility of their survival and hopes for quality of life were primary concerns for the Mizos where Christianity became an important thread to communicate these concerns. The section in LRL where the three recruits are about to go to war in France reveals the vulnerability of the Mizos. One of the recruits' mother is particularly distraught and insists to her husband to convert to Christianity because their God is good and that their hymns are very profound implying that she yearns for comfort and safety for her son through the religion. (LRL 19)

Christianity, together with other Western institutions such as formal education and business enterprises, played a pivotal role in the modernization of Mizo society. Its integration into indigenous culture compelled the Mizos, particularly the youth, to navigate and reconcile Western ideologies with traditional values, resulting in the emergence of new and experimental ways of life. The

influences of modernity did not always equate progress but entailed numerous problems for the Mizos which the author interprets as the beginning of the dissipation of moral principles. The decline of morals among the youths in the modern Aizawl is depicted as wayward and unruly. They love alcohol and become rowdy even as they drink in abundance. The author asserts that young women seem to become more coquet and flirtatious, they seem like they prefer inebriated men who donned dishevelled hairstyles (LRH 61). The episode that deals with Laiawrha's incrimination case denotes how he is victimised by such unruly young men from Aizawl's night scene. He is bullied and assaulted after which the attackers run away. The incident deeply angers Laiawrha. He goes back night after night to confront the one particular unnamed character who had laid hands on him. His night time vigilance reveals unsavoury parts of nightlife in Aizawl where vices that have entered the Mizo society over the course of tumultuous changes that ushered in modernity are exposed under the cover of darkness. Saiawi describes the grim side of the nightlife by suggesting excessive indulgence in alcohol, substance abuse and indiscretion in sexual acts. The ensuing Laiawrha's criminal case happened a month later when his attacker had been murdered under mysterious circumstances. Out of suspicion, Laiawrha is incriminated with circumstantial evidence corroborated by the friend of the victim and other witnesses during his search for his attacker. In court, Laiawrha is given a chance to plead his case and he proudly claimed that he had fully intended to avenge the wrongs committed to him, he stated that the attacker died at the hands of other persons before he could act on it. He had searched for him many nights but failed every time and he had given up on the matter. The court rules Laiawrha guilty and charges him with "culpable homicide not amounting to murder" (LRH 73-74). His family appeals at the High Court successfully and the court sets him free. From the story of Laiawrha's criminal proceedings, Saiawi explores the challenges of modernity which requires a reorientation of conduct in a formal setting. Laiawrha's innocence is inferred from the soundness of his character but since his formal education is very limited his ignorance almost leads him to a tragic punishment. Laiawrha is portrayed as a simple village man with limited educational background and the author juxtaposes his dilemma with the sophistication of the judiciary system that was newly instituted in Mizo society. The Mizo society that had

relied on the traditional court comprising of the Mizo chief and his council of *khawnbawl upa*, or ministers, in matters relating to civil and criminal cases, is introduced with a Western model of the judiciary system. As Laiawrha has grown up in a small Mizo village that is still steeped with tradition, he is unable to fathom the seriousness of his accusation as is apparent from his refusal to hire a qualified and efficient lawyer because he believes that his innocence is self-evident and that it would be enough for the court.

Formerly, the Mizo society functioned as a valid indicator of veracity in matters relating to even serious crimes and Laiawrha was comforted with the thought of the assurance of the society's perception of him even after he was brought to the police station. The author provides Laiawrha's conventionality from his manner of speaking inside the court that could be interpreted by the court as wilful, volatile and possibly dangerous which is corroborated by the circumstantial evidence provided by the witnesses. However, Laiawrha's indignation stems from the fact that he is being incriminated in a case that involves a man who assaulted him with no provocation. His pride is deeply hurt by the event of his attack and he becomes defensive of his dignity. The circumstances thrown to Laiawrha reveal his sense of Mizo traditional values regarding personal freedom and the dignified way of life but with the imposition of the modern form of the judiciary system, Laiawrha struggles to comprehend the new and foreign system of justice. He believes that an honest man's word of faith is enough to prove his innocence and thus suffers the lack of understanding of the gravity and implications of his words when he takes the stand inside the court. Saiawi frames the imprisonment of Laiawrha as an indication of the change in the social hierarchy in Mizo society and the complete transition of power from the conventional Mizo social structure to a newer and Western model but the author is empathetic to the plight of Laiawrha and provides justice when he is set free of all charges at the High Court. This episode in Laiawrha's life reflects cultural changes where the modern system replaces traditional ones. His incarceration demonstrates the struggles of Mizo society to adopt the modern model of justice where social qualification is no longer viable in the court of justice. Modernity and its secular ideals slowly replaced the traditional mode of civic administration in Mizo

society. This particular influence of change in the cultural domain immensely impacted Mizo culture where there existed tension between secular ideals and traditional Christian morals. The role of social changes especially of the agents of modernity in shaping perception regarding social principles and moral beliefs signifies the degree to which the socio-centric and the individualist principles react to each other. The elusive notion of the good life is situational and contingent even within a particular society. Edmunds reflects on the influence of modernisation as "modernisation, through its fracturing of the past, has demarcated particular notions of the good and of a good life as key to the continuity of a culture". The contradictory ideal between modernity and tradition is implied when she reflects that modernity creates a new moral source by placing secular humanity—rather than religious convictions—at the center of moral judgment and behavior. The fundamental moral precept of respecting the connection of our shared humanity comes from this new moral source. She continues by stating that by underpinning concepts of personhood, equality, freedom, justice, and rights in our contemporary, globalizing society, the idea of respect for the bond of common humanity unites all people beyond cultural boundaries. (20-21)

Thus, the contention between modernity and Mizo Christian morals lies at the fundamental and ideological level. The select author's portrayal of the changing social life is mainly from the influences of modernity after Mizo culture has immersed increasingly in globalisation. The observable changes as presented in the select texts are the liberty and freedom in which the younger generation interprets the concept of an individual-oriented ideology of modernity which is often at loggerheads with the ethnic and religious Mizo morality, which is deeply socio-centric. The structure of moral precepts of modernity which is derived from Western cultures that differ from the socio-centric cultures is explained by Jonathan Haidt. He propounds that the majority of world societies have favored the sociocentric solution, which prioritizes the demands of organizations and groups over those of individuals. The individualistic response, on the other hand, puts people first and views society as a tool to serve them (17). He asserts that the primary difference between Western culture and the rest of the world is that, the former is an individualistic society

whereas the majority of cultures around the world develop socio-centric morality. Since the concept of morality is abstract and ambiguous, it leads to the difficulty in specifying its content of functioning. The theories of ethical conduct in social settings could be encapsulated in the principles of altruism. The notion of duty and freedom is correlated with the idea of repressing ego and self-serving tendencies in most cases of moral philosophies. The problem with equating morality with altruism is the ambiguity and contingency of what is considered altruistic. Shweder points out the problems of defining the laws of ethical conduct, legitimate or abstract, by stating that such laws do not explain the exact obligations of living an ethical life, what kind of society should be established, or what kinds of interpersonal interactions are appropriate (44). The differences in cultural beliefs and practices affect the laws of ethics which necessitate any study on morality to locate the central focus on specific social and cultural settings.

The contemplation of the 'good' in moral studies generates numerous definitions depending on the aspect of its approach. The religious answer places the ultimate good on God and that achievement of goodness is through the exercise of both reason and intuition. The philosophy of Nietzsche equates goodness to power and the will to power. The utilitarian approach defines 'good' to be "a state of a definable, natural property. It refers to pleasure or the object of desire—good is a functional term which refers to the satisfaction of our desires, the pleasure we feel when satisfied" (Podjman 1). Though the concept of a 'good' life is conditional and provisional, there is much to be learnt about the human condition and commonality across cultures as well as distinctive features of mini-narratives within a culture. The study of such ideals of society also sheds light on social issues and their implications. The multiplicity of influences through agents of the social, economic, cultural and political dictates that alternative and oppositional ideals of moral conviction could emerge in the process. In the deliberation of commonality in the idea of the desired life, the very existence of multiple realities suggests the impossibility of identifying a specific ground of connection. The progression of Mizo culture, in relatively recent times, has to negotiate with influences of modernity and globalisation in greater frequency where the fraught history of its ethno-centric religious life continues to

counteract and often negates modern influences. Saiawi's narrative reflects the evolution of socio-individual dynamics where the conventional and ethnic Mizo ideologies reign supreme. He provides convincing circumstantial stories in which the characters are placed. These circumstances are varied because the author touches on various social themes while framing personal stories. Even complications within the personal are made up of social and moral issues because of the socio-centric nature of Mizo culture. In a socio-centric society like the Mizo's, what is considered personal is also relative and subject to social qualifications. Thus, the characters' journeys toward the realisation of selfhood are always contingent and provisional, depending on the social climate of their specific communities. Their identities are deeply interwoven with their social and ethnic lives proving that identity for the Mizos could neither be wholly personal nor individualistic.

The intricate complexities of cultural nuances provide grounds for examination of how identity construction functions in a society. The construction of the collective Mizo identity that has been formed through the struggles and challenges of historical, political and religious fronts has been a result of continuing discourse in the attempts to define Mizo ethnic identity. This struggle to delineate collective Mizo identity in fractured and sometimes contradictory discourses on account of Mizo's tumultuous historical past has a direct bearing on the concept of the self for the individual because "individuals often self-consciously adopt and adapt tradition as an element in their discourse about who they are or want to be, utilizing tradition in the symbolic construction of their identity" (Jones 134). The fact of the assertion could be seen from archetypal pattern of Mizo identity assertion from its ethnic roots in Mizo writings of which Saiawi is one among many. Discourses reflecting the idealisation of Mizo identity could be seen from these writings which reflect the hopes of navigating the moral realities of the impact of modernity and multiculturalism in a globalised world. This instructive element in Mizo's writing documents individual experiences that are deeply entrenched within the cultural narrative. In the select texts, the plights of the characters are strongly interlaced within the Mizo cultural fabric of which moral affinities are tied with the collective Mizo ideology. Shweder asserts that "the moral realm is a public, collective realm,

where one is not free to choose, where what one does is not thought to be exclusively one's own business" (42). The causality that connects social changes to culture and morality is one that is very complex. In analysing this complexity of linkage, the select texts provide a magnified overview of these dynamics from the lives of the characters as they intermingle with the intricacies of social relations. The primary indication of change can be found in the evolution of identity constructs and within any identity shared by a collective of people, there exist multiple discourses regarding the shared identity leading to an undercurrent of tension within. Identity constructs are susceptible to change by the influence of social, political, and historical changes which ultimately reveal the explanation of an individual's identity from these experiences of changes. The passage of historical timeline in the select texts has a direct bearing on the evolution of identity ascription of which the characters' assertion of individuality becomes more pronounced and differentiated from the traditional collective identity.

Primary characters that belong to the colonial era and immediate post-colonial times rarely break away from tradition and conventional norms and those that come after, express readiness to break away from convention at times of extremity in circumstance. Chhuahi and Nukawki are two female characters who are in the same predicament of bearing an illegitimate child. The story of the former takes place during World War I and the latter well after World War II. Their journeys to redemption provide a contrast in lieu of the times they live in. Chhuahthangi has no means to break away from the restriction of conventionality and she and her son stay with her family bearing her shame and pain in bringing up her son. In spite of numerous tragic events in her life at the time, Nukawki is able to break away from her society metaphorically and literally. She moves away to Aizawl in a symbolic choice of asserting her individuality. The lives of the two women denote socio-economic changes in Mizoram where at the time of Chhuahi's adversity Mizo society is still purely agrarian, she has no opportunity to provide for herself and her son whereas in Nukawki's time, social changes allow Mizo society to venture out into other economic pursuits like business, entrepreneurial enterprises and even government jobs. Social changes are also observable in the father and son Laiawrha

and Darchhuana which represent the contrast between the traditional and the modern. Laiawrha's decision to take his family and move out of his grandparents' home is within the Mizo norm where men in Mizo society are expected to move out once they are married and have a family of their own (with the exception of the youngest male sibling or an only son). However, Darchhuana's decision to move out from his parent's home with his estranged wife once he is aware of her pregnancy is outside the traditional Mizo norms because he is an only son. His wife Hazel does not accept Sakawlhi since she is not Darchhuana's biological mother and Sakawlhi accuses Hazel of committing an extramarital affair with one of Darchhuana's business friends. In Mizo society, to move out from one's family for an only son or the youngest son is not socially acceptable and the couple's action would be unthinkable within the realm of the past Mizo social norms.

The gradual change in social convention is implicated by the assertion of individuality of characters which indicates that social mores are also slowly changing. As society faced transitions like the Mizo did toward modernity on foundational levels it impacted perceptions of self-identification as a result of new dynamics within the socio-cultural life of the society. The very idea of progress changed because new practices let outdated ideas become obsolete, and these small adjustments create the foundation for new categories to emerge in practice, new self-definitions to solidify, and significant institutional change to take place (Todd 430). The texts for study, demonstrate from individual experiences as to how individual subjectivity interacts with society to reveal the complexity of identity formation. Individual characters challenge and test the limits of social convention to define their uniqueness in a communal-driven society. It is within this tension and conflict of interests that implies the complexity of self-identification because individuals internalize values and distinctions that make up the social environment, and then they act spontaneously in accordance with these distinctions to replicate the social structure whose meanings they have internalized (433). The concept of morality becomes subjective under the circumstances. The restructuring of the social and cultural fabric by historical events in Mizo society forged the path for individuals to exercise their moral subjectivity with the opening of new possibilities which often

led to vices and corruption. New ventures in the economic arena and interaction with other cultures further expanded the worldview of the Mizos with the coming of modernity at a time when ethnic identity was perpetuated with the ideals of primordial inherent identity.

Therein lies the contention between the ideals of ethnicity that insisted on promoting the inherent Mizo identity where the past Mizo culture and convention were invoked extensively to counter the inevitable socio-cultural changes influencing the essentialist conception of individual identity. In LRH, Darchhuana could be placed within the complexity of the modern age that asserted individuality within a conventional set-up. His character breaks the traditional mould of a virtuous character where his struggles reflect moral complexities by virtue of him being located in a transitioning period of modernity. Darchhuana excels in his studies but is unable to pursue his academic goals because of his father's imprisonment. Instead, he works for his uncle, a government contractor. While working for his uncle, Darchhuana finds out that he has to resort to corruption in order to amass wealth. His uncle advises him about the trick of the trade by stating that if Darchhuana wanted to become rich he must dare to be unethical. He taunts him by reasoning that the exceedingly wealthy rarely get rich within the bounds of the law and so in order to become rich Darchhuana must emulate him in terms of inflating expenses to the government (LRH 78). The author renders context to Darchhuana's job by explaining the time when Mizoram was recently conferred the status of Union Territory and for those who were in a position to exploit government funds, there had been a lot of funding given to Mizoram for economic and infrastructural development of the region. The abundant flow of money started to corrupt many. Darchhuana was among those that unethically profited the most from the flow of money. Saiawi condemns the widespread corruption and states that it stands to reason that religious people must be disgusted with such corruption. However, they are among those who think that people who do not benefit unethically are fools. At the very least, devoutly religious people and leaders of churches must abstain from bestowing adulation to corrupt people because the government funds are for the welfare of society, and they should be aware that such corrupt people rob the people

(273). Saiawi treats the character as a didactic medium to reveal his own moral accord where retribution is given to the character by means of his personal life. Darchhuana's character is made complex by his unethical means of acquiring wealth yet he has deep family values and so he is made to pay for his acts of corruption in the form of unfortunate personal ordeals. Due to his determination to succeed, Darchhuana barely has a social life and does not take a romantic partner even after he is in his thirties. His retribution comes in the form of his relationship with a woman named Hazel. He is very taken with her because she is beautiful, well-educated and modern. The two marry in a lavish wedding and Hazel seems to fit well with the family at the beginning of the marriage. She is helpful in hosting her husband's colleagues and has a knack for entertaining them. However, Sakawli catches Hazel in a suspicious circumstance with one of Darchhuana's colleagues leading to the couple's separation. Saiawi evades the truth about Hazel's infidelity and it is not clear if Hazel has indeed committed an extramarital affair. The family reconciles after the news of Hazel's pregnancy. It is only after Hazel delivers a baby that reveals the truth. When Darchhuana goes to see the baby at the hospital, he gazes contemplatively at the baby, then he goes home without returning to Hazel implying that the baby is of a different race (309). The fact that Darchhuana leaves abruptly suggests that the race of the baby confirms Hazel's infidelity. Darchhuana cannot forgive Hazel and divorces her but his family later accepts Hazel's baby as part of the Lungrang clan and gives her the name Darsawiveli. Darchhuana agrees to officially document the baby as his but makes it clear that he cannot accept her. Darchhuana's family remain close to the baby and her mother even after the divorce.

Saiawi provides a redemptive arch for Darchhuana by making him fall in love with Mazami, a college student from a small village who has stayed at their home during his wife's pregnancy. Hazel has dismissed her during one of her emotional outbursts and Darchhuana feels sorry for the girl and has brought her to his parent's house. Not long after his divorce, Darchhuana falls in love with Mazami and she refuses his affection at first but soon reciprocates his feelings. The two are married in a happy wedding. Mazami is actually Darchhuana's second cousin, as Saiawi reveals later and during a chat between Chhuahi and Mazami's father, the latter discloses that

Mazami's grandmother and Darchhuana's late father are siblings. Darchhuana's story reveals the corrupt and unethical side of individuals in Mizo society where such corrupt individuals rarely face appropriate justice. It reveals the tolerance of the Mizo society towards such unjustified behaviour because not only is Darchhuana exempted from facing justice but he even thrives to become a respectable member of his community. In the constant interplay of Mizo culture with its morality, the principle of identity is strongly affected by both in determining the cohesiveness or unity between the individual and the society. Political and social transformations in Mizo society have significant repercussions for social order and ethical life. Within the context of ethno-social dynamics, cultural identity emerges as a by-product, and thus moral qualities must serve as its primary foundation and means of validation.

The individual experiences of the characters depict the move toward subjectivity in the modern times. In the convergence of tension between ethnicity and modernity, the individual's moral identity shifts toward goal-oriented values. The shift to urbanization that offers opportunities to venture out of traditional modes of sustenance also means that individuals have to take on the challenges of navigating innovative ways of earning their means which expands the multiplicity of experiences. In such a social climate, moral identity becomes personalised and thereby oscillating between a spectrum of good and bad within the internal processes of ascribing meaning for the individual and so "claiming a moral identity is not restricted to meanings of being a good person; rather, it involves meanings that fall within the full range of being a good and bad person" (Stets and Michael J. Carter 193). In examining the relationship between the private and the communal, self-preservation emerges as a fundamental concern for individuals. When confronted with circumstances that fall outside their established standards of moral identity, individuals risk a loss of self, increasing the likelihood that they will act according to personal motives rather than communal expectations. On the other end of consideration, it is significant to examine to what extent a society tolerates different individual behaviours because it reveals the modes and manners in which moral perceptions change over time. As asserted by Stets and Carter about the discrepancy between moral reasoning and moral actions stating that advanced moral development

and moral behavior have not been found to be strongly correlated by studies, indicating that moral action is influenced by variables other than moral reasoning (194). The claim is an insight into the mechanics of moral identity where the authors assert that an individual's moral actions correlate with the individual's sense of moral identity meaning that the greater the individual puts impetus in his or her sense of righteousness there is greater chance of more upright actions. In the present study of character analysis, there is a clear indication that ethnic and cultural elements play significant roles in the conception of social morality but for the characters in the more recent Mizo society, ethics becomes increasingly a subjective and personal issue. This evolution of moral conception in Mizo society is influenced by changes in social, political, economic, and cultural structures. Saiawi offers the explanation to such factors as the result of the many attributes of the modernising impacts of education, the shift of economy from agrarian to business model, and the Mizo intergration to the Indian Union leading to the shift from tradition to the modern form of government.

As Shweder expresses that the ultimate vindication of personal moral identity is by that of social acceptance and states that “the distinction between self-constructed virtues (and vices) and socially-constructed virtues (and vices) is defined by reference to the irrelevance or relevance of collective representations in the acquisition of moral ideas” (58). He propounds that the concept of personhood depends on how others treat the individual. The right to protect oneself from harm is granted by others because the state of personhood is constructed by others. In the same line of consideration, the range or degree to which personal rights and freedom could be asserted is determined by its social disposition. So for the Mizos as presented in the select texts, the concept of identity is a combination of ethnicity and religiosity which is continually evolving with major influencing agents within Mizo culture such as modernity and globalisation. In effect, the concept of self is defined within those borders and any form of individual self-assertion is deeply in relation to the collective standards of qualification. In spite of this social nature of Mizo morality, the reality of the gap between the experiences of the social and the individual is still a problematic issue wherein the discrepancy between the two could

result in social harm and increase in vices. This issue could pose further damage in undermining the moral authority of the society which results in many forms of corruption and anarchic tendencies. The select texts studied in the thesis present the need for Mizo society to reinforce its cultural and moral institutions by focussing on education toward the multiplicity of experiences in light of the increasing awareness of self and individuality. In this complex relation of the social and the individual, Mizo society is continually subjected to negotiate newer and more modern forms of influences. Saiawi demonstrates the need for narratives to educate the masses regarding the evolution of Mizo culture and its corresponding agents such as its history, politics, and morality to give a more comprehensive overview of Mizo cultural identity formation.

Glossary

Chai - n. “the name of a dance in which young men and women form a circle round a man who serves out beer, and others who play drum and beat the horn of a gayal, etc.” (Lorrain 54)

Chapchar Kut - The term *Chapchar* referred to the felled foliage and wood to clear the jhum for cultivation and this jungle debris would later be burnt once they dry out. The term *kut* refers to 'a festival'. It was a festival celebrated during the interval between clearing and burning of weeds in the traditional slash and-burn method of agriculture.

Chhawngahnawh - It was a custom practiced within Mizo festivals entailing the act of feeding boiled rice, eggs and meat to unsuspecting participants amidst great merriment.

Mim Kut - The namesake *mim* is a type of maize and the festival was celebrated in honour of the dead. It usually fell in the month of September.

Pawl Kut - a harvest festival usually celebrated with a feast.

Tlanglam zai - a form of Mizo folk song performed in accompaniment of folk dance.

Tlawmngaihna – n. qualities of “self-sacrifice, unselfishness.” (Lorrain 513)

Zu - Mizo traditional alcoholic rice drinks. The modern usage denotes all alcoholic drinks in Mizo language.

Zawlbuk – n. “the large house in a Lushai village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night.” (562)

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Chapter IV- Women in Saiawi's Narratives

Saiawi is known for his extensive portrayal of Mizo women and their experiences. His texts comprise primary female characters which many Mizo women can relate to. Since Mizo society is inherently patriarchal, social structures are constructed from traditions and customs that continue to reinforce the gender gap. Modernity and education have been instrumental in raising awareness about gender equity in society and the need for representation and acknowledgement of the contribution of Mizo women. There remains a long journey to educate the public about the heterogeneity of womanhood and gender roles. The diversity of approaches and theories about what constitutes 'womanhood', 'femininity', and gender studies have resulted in a vast body of knowledge prompting redefinition, reclamation, empowerment, and activism. The subordination or 'othering' of the female gender as Beauvoir stated in *The Second Sex* about the 'othering' of woman as she "is consigned to the category of Other; the Other encompasses woman" (81). This description of the relegation of women in the margin signifies a complex system of oppressing and silencing women which is rooted in the cultural, the political, the social and physiognomic disposition. Focus on women's struggles for equality and autonomy invariably places the roots of gender disparity between men and women in the biological, psychological and material answers.

In analysing texts through the lens of gender studies, it is impossible to escape the ethnic and cultural context in which the texts are located because the very idea of a woman and feminism has become contradictory, divided, and fractured. Additionally, it has grown, changed, and become stronger. In fact, it is no longer possible to characterize feminism as a theory that suggests a single, cohesive line of thinking. Instead, feminism should be viewed as a discourse that discusses a number of related concepts (Tolan 319). Appertaining to this idea, this chapter will deal with an analysis of Saiawi's representation of Mizo women's experiences. It will locate the female characters in their historical moment in time and trace the evolution of Mizo women's role and status in their society. It will further delve into the complexities of their relations with the opposite sex and highlight the degree to which their disparity manifests in their lives. It will examine the aspect of women's representation while specifically locating the study to Saiawi's narrative that highlights relevant issues

that are unique to Mizo women. The cultural evolution of Mizo society foregrounds the role and status of Mizo women in society. Mizo society has always been inherently patriarchal and women in the society assume secondary status in most if not all of the social functioning outside of their domestic spheres. Before modernity entered Mizo society, accepted social norms for Mizo women were solely confined to the domestic sphere. Gender roles in Mizo society were stringent and absolute during the agrarian-based economy in the Mizo past. Many of the preconceptions about women's roles from those times persist to date. Any social and cultural titles were reserved exclusively for men, and women are expected to play supplementary roles to them. The expectations for women in society were particularly customised to accommodate men. In fact, women's worth for their family had been formerly accounted for by the bride's price, which they would amass at their wedding, and the only respectable form of formal participation in social institutions for women in Mizo society was marriage. The restrictive gender-specific upbringing for Mizo women was commented on by Vanlaltlani explaining that Mizo women had limited choices on important matters involving life and must always seek out the consent of her parents and brothers. If she was to marry a good husband, she had to be diligent and kind, most of all, she had to mind her manners at all times with men and she must treat all her suitors equally, and be able to submit herself to the guidance of the man (20-21). Her statement reveals the margin on which Mizo women existed in society and provides knowledge about the limited space to define their womanhood. The woman's space in Mizo society was domestic-bound and restrictive which often entailed numerous sacrifices of their aspirations and desire. Gender roles had been forceful and restrictive which after the onset of modernity became relatively flexible but the underlying force of authority remains the patriarchal system. These roles nuanced the subliminal message of superior/inferior dichotomy. Gender definition of the opposite sexes was often ascribed based on the superiority of the male over the female indicated by derogatory phrases denoted in common parlance such as, "women's intelligence does not measure far", and "women and crabs have no religion". (Sangkima 31)

The many-faceted qualities of womanhood have been portrayed in countless literatures over the years. Deliberations on the nature of women have resulted in multiple representations of women's narrative and in the present chapter, the division of gender in Mizo society that entailed its unique evolution will be analysed in relation to Saiawi's texts. The role of Mizo women has been evolving along with its ethno-cultural history right from the pre-colonial to modern times. Perhaps, gender distinctions have been asserted most in the biological argument that refers to women's role in reproduction. The 'idea' of a woman based on her biological dispositions has conjured myths and conceptions to determine her place in society but these narratives are never from the woman. As Simone de Beauvoir theorises about gender dynamics in the primitive hordes to state that giving birth and nursing are natural processes rather than occupations; hence, the woman has no reason to assert a greater purpose for her life; instead, she obediently accepts her biological fate. She is doomed to domestic labor because housework alone can coexist with the responsibilities of motherhood; it keeps her trapped in a cycle of repetition and immanence; day after day, it repeats itself in the same way from century to century; it creates nothing new (*The Second Sex* 75). Literature focusing on empowering women is fairly recent phenomena in Mizo culture. Women's presence in social and formal settings is largely dictated by customs and tradition as asserted by Irene Colbert, in her contemplation on Mizo's customary laws, "most of the customary laws in respect to women are inspired by the belief in male dominance and female inferiority with the norms and attitudes of patriarchy which affected the status of women" (1). Women are taught to stick to 'their place' and not to upset the gender hierarchy of a patriarchal system. The upbringing of a girl child reflects some very particular set of rules and always focuses on their role in the domestic space by reinforcing the idea of women as the 'weaker sex'. Deliberations of women's studies in Mizo society have more or less led to the pre-colonial Mizoram and its socio-economic structure. The context for understanding why Mizo women occupy a subordinate role in society is reasoned invariably, but essentially points to the system of Mizo agrarian economic system and Mizoram's rough terrain that called for protection against the elements and wild animals. It is ingrained in the cultural subconscious about women's inferior physical strength in order to perpetuate the

preconception that a woman must be protected and sheltered. This principle of protection extends to discursive narratives about the need to confine the prospects of women within the restrictive bounds of their physical and reproductive attributes. The assertion promotes the image of women as incapable of finding meaning and individuality, that women have no equal ground to assert their identity as autonomous beings.

The Mizo men's role as protector was heralded as transcending the basics of mere existence which echoes Beauvoir's rationale that a warrior's sacrifice to put himself in harm's way demonstrates that life must serve purposes far higher than itself and is not the ultimate worth for humans. The worst affliction a woman can have is being excluded from warrior missions. Man elevates himself above animals by risking his life, not by giving birth, which is why the sex that kills is considered superior throughout humanity (*The Second Sex* 76). Male supremacy on account of their physical exploits in warfare reveals the role of society in constructing the ideals of superiority. As Virginia Woolf highlights gender differences in regards to wars waged in the name of patriotism, she implies that women could not share the same ideology of proving one's prowess by physical act and suggests that women must exercise indifference claiming that "psychology would seem to show that it is far harder for human beings to take action when other people are indifferent and allow them complete freedom of action, than when their actions are made the centre of excited emotion" (201). The evolution of Mizo women's status in their society runs parallel to the historical events in Mizoram. The radical restructuring of the Mizo social system due to colonization and the introduction of Christianity brought about certain changes in the gender dynamic in Mizo society. The widespread adoption of Christianity and its subsequent supplementary ventures in the form of formal education slowly transformed Mizo social structure to be more accommodating of Mizo women's identities and provided visibility. The modernizing effects of Christianity for the Mizos benefitted women in many respects where their social and religious participation garnered more meaningful recognition. The most notable transformation for Mizo women was the overall change in perception regarding women's worth and value in society which became very empowering for Mizo

women to explore deeper into the concept of identity and autonomy. Their contributions to religious platforms and the churches provided a more accepting environment for Mizo women to earn visibility. This newfound sense of value for Mizo women was soon overshadowed by the realization of a universal and pervasive patriarchal structure in the Western model within Christianity. The early Mizo Christian women discovered the ever-present 'glass ceiling' within the church hierarchies best epitomized in the impossibility of women achieving ordination in the church. Mizo women found themselves in the quandary of achieving some degree of freedom in the church only to be confronted with the same patriarchal system that set back their emancipation. Lalthlamuani comments that despite the new religion's enormous egalitarian influence, the church's strict stance against women's ordination demonstrates the domination of the fundamental patriarchal structures of society. Therefore, neither the old parameters of action nor the traditional framework of authority have been able to be replaced by modern influences under Christianity. (151)

In context to Mizo women's experience, the pre-colonial social structure of Mizo society continues to inform and shape the fate of Mizo women in many ways. The select texts of Saiawi as period novels provide great insights into the mechanisms and systems within the cultural mores of the Mizos to frame gender roles and their works. For as long as the known history of Mizo society, Mizo women have always been working tirelessly for their families. To get ready for the day with their entire family, they got up before the sun came up. Her husband and her family didn't get out of bed until she finished cooking and cleaning the rice for them, removing the husk by hand in a large mortar, and fetching water from the community spring. Following the meal, she had a long day ahead of her working on her family's jhum with her husband, and she made dinner when they got back. Commenting on the strict gender roles, Lalrinchhane explains that the household chores were not performed by men. Their primary motivation for acting in this manner was their fear of being labeled "hen-pecked," which prevented them from ever lifting a finger to assist their wives with any household chores. Males focused their energies on hunting, creating homes, and defending themselves. Even in jest, a

guy will not touch what is regarded as a woman's work (35). The social dynamic concerning gender in Mizo society promotes the participation of women in all social activities as a tradition. Social events both formal and informal require the presence and contributions of women and thus gender gap takes a more complex and often subliminal form. Women were not barred from participation in these social events but stringent roles or 'women's place' are instituted to suppress and limit the reach of women so as not to compete for a more equal share of recognition with the men. Thus the many contributions of women do not receive recognition or equal acknowledgement. In a social structure that is designed to limit the capability of women, it is inevitable that proper knowledge or understanding about women also becomes limited. Even if such issues are addressed it is usually by the men speaking for the women which often leads to typecasting particular traits or characteristics allegedly as 'feminine' for the women in the Mizo society.

Education about gender disparity is still very limited and inadequate leading to widespread ignorance about the need for space and autonomy for women to assert their womanhood and identity. Strong patriarchal social systems side-line women's experiences where women struggle to define themselves in the margin revealing the suppression of their innate qualities to achieve a dignified sense of self. Considerations about gender dynamics often focus on the label of women as 'the weaker sex' and suppression of their individuality often came under the banner of an all-encompassing term 'protection'. The widespread perception of women as weak and helpless and cannot do or be without the help of men encourages masochistic tendencies in many men. In Mizo society, strong patriarchal morals about gender roles still lead to demoralizing and demeaning attitudes toward domestic work and child care, the two domains dominated by women. Traditional gender roles continue to persist in Mizo society even though education on gender studies makes headway with the efforts of Mizo women and men. The preconceived notion of women as lacking the ability to reason and think beyond their emotions influenced the general perception about Mizo women in pre-colonial Mizoram. The stereotype persisted well after the numerous cultural changes in Mizoram. Gender disparity is difficult to quantify mostly due to the variations of social and private circumstances but an

informative structure in Mizo society is the specificity of gender roles that are instilled in any Mizo born and bred in the society. The ideals for Mizo women are set by the men who envisioned ideal woman through traditions and cultural practices propagated by them based on their ideals of masculinity. The hetero-normative dichotomy between femininity and masculinity propagated the 'othering' of Mizo women because historically, the identity of a Mizo woman exists only in subordination to that of a man.

The select texts of Saiawi offer arrays of Mizo women's experiences as the texts are filled with primary women characters yet most if not all the female characters' navigated their life's journey in a deeply patriarchal framework and the concept of self-realisation was intricately determined by their male counterparts. Though the author named both LRL and LRH, based on the male primary character Lungrang Laiawrha, he advances the narrative forward through his primary female characters such as Chhuahi, Sakawli, Laleni, Hazel, and Darkungi. The novel NKK and its sequel NKF are both named after the protagonist Nukawki which revolves around a female-centric plots. The author's celebration of Mizo women is apparent from his portrayal of a vast array of their experiences and thereby exposing their strength and resilience through their many challenges. The author's engagement with female representation comes in different forms of relationships. The primary aspect of his representation is through romance and marriage where he explores relationships shaped by varying circumstances. His concern over humanity deals heavily with the interaction between the opposite sexes and his narrative on the issue offers insights into the complexities of life. The author made the readers aware of the inequality in gender in many of his writings. In his essay in *Thukhawchang Vol. II*, he denotes the unfairness of the Mizo women's predicament from the tragic life of one female distant relative that taught him about the harsh realities of Mizo women in their society. This personal experience motivated him to advocate for women where he states that in Mizo family and community he vouches for the dignity and status of women and that he loudly reiterates his stance in the matter. One of the reasons for his view comes from the life of Mankimi who despite her good character was dealt a tragic hand (127). In LRL, the tragic romance between Chhuahi and

Darkhuma is the genesis of the primary plotline in the story. This particular narrative showcases the victimization of women in the event of an illegitimate pregnancy. In the event of pregnancy out of wedlock, moral judgement falls heavily on Mizo women and they are ostracized and condemned unfairly relative to their male counterparts. Nukawki also faces the same predicament and has to rebuild her life numerous times due to her unfortunate circumstances. The author's compassion for the plight of women who fell out of society's favour highlights his narrative. His message of women's empowerment came in the form of the female characters who overcame the burden of marginalization to rebuild their lives. He purposefully frames his primary women characters as excelling in their society before their fall from grace so as to bring out the irony and fickleness of Mizo women's position in society. Their redemption and reclamation were laden with enormous obstacles which often claim the identity and selfhood of many Mizo women.

Gender disparity is most apparent in the Mizo perception of premarital sex. In the pre-Christian era, premarital sex signified a status symbol for unmarried men and this particular status was believed to carry over into the afterlife. The Mizo's past belief in the afterlife featured a supernatural being named Pawla who was believed to shoot the souls of the departed with a slingshot and unmarried men who had slept with many women were believed to be spared of the attack. The belief about the afterlife was particularly hostile toward women, especially concerning women who died in childbirth and the term for such death is called *raicheh*. It was believed that such women were inundated with dense thickets and bushes all along their path to the 'land of the dead' and due to this belief, it was customary to bury an axe alongside them so that they could clear their path (Siama 54). The life of Dari who dies at childbirth in LRL depicts the transient nature of women's status in Mizo society and is described as every bit a disgraced woman morally and by social law. She is marginalised and looked down upon because she has no living family and lives with relatives. However, she is devoutly Christian and is respected for her evangelical activity where she moves around communities preaching and immersing herself in spirituality. Her disgrace comes when she becomes pregnant illegitimately and her pregnancy is perceived as hypocrisy by the Christians and she falls out of favour

with her community at Saihum, especially among the Christians. As is tradition, she leaves the child at the father's once the child is weaned off. It comes as a shock when Lianawka, a divorced bachelor with children wishes to marry her. He turns out to be the elder brother of Chhuahi, especially, as he is the youngest son. The alliance is met with disapproval because according to Mizo's customary law, he holds claim to the majority of inheritances from the parents and is expected to care for the parents till death. Dari is thus seen as unsuitable for such a significant status and Lianawka's family is troubled that he had chosen to marry a woman like Dari. She is scorned by the Christians and to have her hold proper status in the family is greatly disapproved by his father and mother (LRL 117). The family is unable to dissuade Lianawka and the two marry in a proper Christian wedding. Dari is diligent and kind to the family which is viewed with a certain degree of scepticism at first but she proves her worth as time goes on. Yet, tragically, she never gains the love and affection of her husband who is still pines for his first wife. The conditional and fleeting status of Mizo women is thus revealed by the author even as Dari is redeemed as a woman with status in the eyes of her community. Though she could not win the love of her husband, her loneliness as an orphan eventually fades away when she becomes a part of her husband's family (122). In marriage, the burden of conceiving a child falls heavily on women and their worth is weighed by their ability to bear children. So the pressure to provide the family of their progeny looms large in the psyche of women. Dari is also anxious and burdened with the uncomfortable pressure of childbearing as she is unable to conceive a child for two years after their marriage. Other female characters like Sakawlhi and Nukawki are also dealt with the same ordeal. In a dialectic discourse by Simone De Beauvoir concerning the definition of the problematic concept called 'woman', denotes that one of the rhetorical definitions that 'woman is a womb' could be appropriately applied to the case of these women in the texts (*Woman and the Other* 280). The timeworn and much-exhorted ties given to women with that of childbearing are very burdensome where women attribute identity solely to their reproductive capacity. "Woman has ovaries, a uterus: these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with her glands." (282)

Even in pregnancy, Mizo women have terrible struggles and Saiawi comments on the delicate vulnerability of women during pregnancy when Dari becomes pregnant after a great deal of anticipation. During colonial Mizoram, the agrarian economy did not exempt women from hard labour at their agricultural lands and Dari is no exception and the author states that heavily pregnant Mizo women in the past were not relieved from the back-breaking agricultural work. Though Dari's tiresome manual labour is a great burden she is no worse off than her peers and Saiawi comments that at times there were vulnerable women who were heavily pregnant and who carried heavy loads at their back, and they suffered from fatigue due to the sloppy terrains (LRL 124). In a tragic turn of events, Dari dies at childbirth and their daughter dies a month later. Her death is a poignant reminder of the disheartening manner in which Mizo women who died at childbirth were treated. Dari's burial rites had to be completed quickly on the day of her death as opposed to a traditional funeral the day following, indicating the disheartening perception toward women. Such beliefs exemplify a disproportionate gap between men and women in Mizo society. Like many other Mizo women, Dari's society expects her to cater to the unfair expectations of women to exclusively uphold chastity until marriage and be a dutiful wife and if she does not fit the mould, she becomes a social pariah. Societal judgements on women rely heavily on a generalisation of women regardless of their specific circumstances as seen from the life of Dari. She turns to religion but is prejudiced after she becomes pregnant with an illegitimate child. Her whole life is controlled by perception of her made by others, and she is helpless in all her major life events. Her loveless marriage provides her redemption and comfort but it does not give her real power to lead her to self-discovery due to deprivations and dependency. Even her death is treated with fear and superstitions targeted only to women. By comparison, men in the pre-Christian era measured their masculinity by their prowess in sexual exploits and it was considered a symbol of virility if an unmarried man slept around with multiple women. In Mizo burial rites, dead unmarried men who slept with multiple women donned different traditional adornments as badges of honour. K. Zawla describes details of such tradition where a man would wear a pair of rooster tail feathers or rectrices on his head if he had slept with a sibling; if he had slept with a mother and her daughter, he would wear a single

black hen tail feather. One hornbill tail feather was worn by a man who had an affair with the chief's daughter (47). This practice has filtered into the psyche of the Mizos even in contemporary times where it is almost as though sexual promiscuity is acceptable for males. The definition of masculinity and femininity becomes very homogeneous and restrictive. Saiawi's representation of women who fail to uphold society's expectations concerning chastity reverberates painfully as truth regarding the plight of many Mizo women and the consequences endured by such women. They are viewed with scornful apprehension and are expected to carry out their lives with a degree of self-awareness of their disgrace and if not they are constantly reminded either verbally or through actions.

Saiawi's representation of Mizo women is nuanced and diverse. Elements of social reality added depth and richness to his narratives because even women who go through the same predicament do not react similarly and have their unique journey to redeem or explore their identities. Chhuahi and Nukawki display marked differences in how they respond to the challenges of carrying and bringing up illegitimate children without their partners. Chhuahi bears her heartache and disgrace in silence and dedicates her whole life to parenting her child, while Nukawki faces the additional trauma of being separated from her child and puts up an incredible fight to reclaim her space. Both women are beautiful and the source of pride for their respective families. Chhuahi embodies an ideal Mizo woman who is patient, kind, well-mannered, obedient and treats all her suitors with the same grace as per Mizo custom. Her fall from grace comes as a shock for everyone including her family. Similarly, Nukawki whose good reputation comes from her educated background and cultured manner is met with a harsh turn of fate once she is impregnated by Chhungbuluka.

The author's message regarding women's empowerment comes from the searing storytelling about the struggles of the two women in the face of adversity. The circumstances of the two women are very different and unique to the characters. Nukawki is not in love with Chhungbuluka but Chhuahi has fallen deeply in love with the father of her child. Chhuahi is the only daughter among four siblings. Though she has many men courting her at home as it was the tradition back at the

time, she never gives anyone a cause for concern regarding her modesty and chastity and she is prudent and well-mannered. Due to her beauty and good character Chhuahi enjoys exceptional affection and love from her parents and brothers. After the news of her pregnancy out of wedlock is revealed, retribution is hurled in heaps from her parents and her community. Her father's hurtful slurs demonstrates the gravity of her situation. He furiously claims that if the man had been in his grasp, he would like to strike him and his daughter to death. He vows to never accept the child from such union. He wishes them to marry quietly without any proper marital rites and that they should stay far away from his sight because Chhuhahthangi had brought filth into their home (LRL 35). Up until her pregnancy, Chhuahi has been a well-behaved daughter who never brings shame and dishonour nor behave unbecomingly of a lady according to society's measure. Her only fault is that she has fallen in love and expresses her love to a man of her choice. As she is dealt with a cruel fate where her lover dies in a hunting exploit, she cannot recover from the loss amplified by her disgrace in her society. She keeps chasing the shadow of her lover by insisting on keeping the clan name of her lover alive through Laiawrha. She keeps inquiring about the whereabouts of her deceased lover's family in her desperate attempts to keep his memory alive. It could also be interpreted as her struggle to forge a new identity through her lover because she cannot have an identity of her own. It is only by forming a proper alliance with his family that she hopes to form a fraction of an identity that is acceptable to her community. In a patriarchal Mizo society, Chhuahi's desperate attempts to seek out the man's family signals the flimsy thread in which women's identity hangs. She feels that she and her son threaten the delicate balance of power in her household. She believes that she unintentionally commits harm to her family and runs the risk of breaking up the harmony of their big and organic family. She silently bears the pain of watching small complaints about her and the fact that her son is being intentionally neglected, but she could not help wishing that her mother would care for her child more (41). Her father and brothers give her sustenance but treat her with unforgiving abandonment and she faces the harsh realities of being a single parent. Her economic dependence made her life worse because Mizo women were not entitled to any physical property according to the Mizo custom and so she is completely reliant on the men in her life. She had planned

to elope with her lover knowing that he would not be accepted but Darkhuma died before he even knew of her pregnancy. Her misfortune incurs the stigma of a sexually gullible woman vindicated by a strong force of moral order. As the story develops onto the next novel LRH, Chhuahi's presence eventually fades into the background; quiet and overshadowed. Not much could be heard of her voice and she takes on a passive role throughout the novel due to the sensitive and delicate status imposed upon her in terms of family dynamics.

The pregnancy of Chhuahi displayed an injustice that is located firmly in terms of her gender and the arrays of moral restrictions that come with an illegitimate pregnancy. The particular moral status given to circumstances of pregnancy out of wedlock by Mizo society could be strenuous and sometimes fatal for women because as Barnett et al. asserts that "the distribution of power is undergirded by the moral order, as the moral order coordinates action to generate uneven access to power across social locations." They further claims that this uneven distribution of power is related to the dynamics between stigma and power (450). Chhuahi could not escape the stigma that comes with her biological attributes instituted by a social system that runs on oppressing women on the grounds of their biological differences because their reproductive function has put women at a decided disadvantage by binding them to the home and linking them to the body. Man would thus views himself as superior to women in the same way that he views himself as superior to nature (Tolan 321). The domestic sphere that engulfs the entirety of Chhuahi and many women's lives is perpetually categorised as a private domain, sanctimonious and out of reach for the public and, thus, authority reigned supreme for the male members of the family and that would exacerbate the oppression of women. As Chhuahi is embroiled in the unfortunate position of being stigmatised due to her pregnancy the environment in which she has brought up her child becomes indifferent and her ability to nurture her own well-being is greatly impeded because a person is generally positioned lower in a social ladder as a direct result of effective negative labeling and stereotyping. The stigmatizer associates the individual with unfavorable traits that diminish their status (Link and Phelan 371). The degraded status of Chhuahi negatively impacts her life to be side-lined and marginalized in her family

and community which is manifested in the repression of her ability to thrive and gain her autonomy both psychologically and economically because "people's efforts to cope with stigma may have untoward consequences that are seemingly unrelated to the stereotype" (379).

The titular Nukawki's eventful life offers a powerful narrative of her journey to fight for her identity. Her formative years are spent on education during the initial stage of post-colonial Mizoram. In context to the historical ethos of education, Lalhmuaka, a Mizo author who has documented the history and development of education in Mizoram, describes the attitude of girls' education during the colonial period as an apathetic attitude of parents towards educated women which lasted for a long time; even as government jobs were far out of reach during the reign of the white people (34). Though there is little documentation about the growth of girls' education, the Christian missionary known for his academic pioneering among the Mizos, D. E Jones records that "in 1899, there were 56 students of which 6 were females, and in 1900, there were 11, in 1901, 20 and in 1902, 40 female students" (Khaute 36). By the time of India's independence, girls' education in Mizoram made progress through various provisions made by the government amidst various apprehensions in the line of traditional concerns among the Mizos. Nukawki's academic endeavours were also ultimately thwarted due to rumours accusing her of losing her morals at the cinema. The scene of her father's objection to the continuation of her studies details a poignant tale of an unfulfilled dream. Neither she nor her mother has the power to dissuade her father's command where the father has an absolute resolve due to a rumour. Her father's opinion that education damages morals and values is a shared belief among other Indian communities even as Tania Sarkar points out the findings of the Adam's report during the mid-1830s concerns Bengali communities on the neglect of girls' education, where one of the concerns expressed was of that of "sexual intrigues, since a literate woman could write and make secret assignations of an illicit nature" (320). The sentiment is echoed in LRL where Saiawi contextualises gender disparity in enrolment in schools during colonial period and explains that a girl child was useful for doing domestic work and parents did not want to spare them from their usefulness at home and it was a general

opinion that education for girls was unnecessary. Women at Saihum express their concern about sending their daughters to school saying that their young girls had bad habits when they are educated because they would write love letters to boys. If the young men send them such letters, it is acceptable but when young ladies do the same, it was wrong, and they created an iota of embarrassment (112). It is under such apprehensive conditions for girls' education that Nukawki discontinues her studies. Thereafter, Nukawki loses her drive and half-heartedly proceeds with her life. Her status improves when she secures a teaching job in a middle school and she acquires a newfound sense of purpose and she enjoys being a teacher immensely. Before she sleeps at night, she thinks of her students and the school and its grounds, she often dreams about them in her sleep, and her younger siblings tell her that she would even sleep-talk about them. Her students also improve drastically in academics (NKK 45). The circumstances in which Nukawki gets pregnant is all the more tragic as she is on her way to assert her individuality and Saiawia hints at Nukawki's attraction to Chhungbuluka as he is good-looking but the man has a reputation for being volatile, hot-headed and tactless. Nukawki's first encounter with sexual experience is with Chhungbuluka who takes advantage of her willingness to explore her sexuality with small physical touches, but she refuses to sleep with the man. When the man eventually rapes her she is filled with self-loathing and remorse. She becomes guilt-ridden and puts the blame on herself which resonates with the universal phenomena of self-reproach that stems from victim-blaming described in Murray's "Rape Trauma, the State, and the Art of Tracey Emin" where she reflects upon the work of prominent researchers of Rape Trauma Syndrome, Dr Fiona Mason and Jan Welch in the *British Medical Journal* "[E]arly symptoms include anxiety, fearfulness, self-blame and guilt, disbelief, physical revulsion and helplessness" (1640). The tragic incident reveals deep injustice against women concerning sexual violence, "violence and stigma work together in a context of inequitable, gendered power arrangements as mechanisms of social control that maintain the inequitable distribution of power" (Barnett et al. 460) and the context in which power is applied here is further explained as "the ability to achieve desired ends, including when that means overcoming others' resistance" (450).

Nukawki, then, yields to the persuasion of Chhungbuluka after the terrible incident. The mental trauma and her isolation ultimately push her to the arms of the perpetrator leading to her pregnancy. As Murray points out the psychological trauma of rape victims such as "dependence, low self-esteem, learned helplessness, and other personality deficits" (1634), Nukawki is young and helpless in her situation and as she internalises her guilt, it drives her to her offender when he flatters her with false modesty. Nukawki's reunion with her offender carries with it her fear of public humiliation and feeling of being trapped in the psychological trauma of rape. As she is still a young, impressionable woman who has little knowledge about sexual violence and gender inequality, she confronts her situation by projecting hopes of redemption with him as a coping mechanism.

This may be associated with Stockholm syndrome which is a complex concept that was first applied to a psychological disorder involving captor-captive situations where captives bond with their captors "in an effort to save their lives or make their ordeal more tolerable" (Adorjan et al. 454). The term came to signify wider pathological identifications and the experiences of women who are forced into such circumstances were denoted as "battered women, those who have experienced sexual or physical assaults, abused children, incest victims, prisoners of war or political terrorism, cult members, concentration camp prisoners, slaves and prostitutes" (455). The condition is a certain form of brain-washing or mental conditioning of the extreme case. Adorjan et al. denote that Dee Graham, a feminist psychologist, promoted the idea that behaviours exhibited by battered or abused women who denied that they were being abused fitted the description of the Stockholm syndrome (461). Moreover, the condition can be validated by societal acceptance of reasoning the acts of the abuser as that of love and affection. The act of intimacy between Nukawki and Chhungbuluka after the latter had raped her previously throws light on the fact that Nukawki's loneliness and mental trauma which she suffers privately has led to the perpetrator successfully brainwashing her and convincing her that he has real affection and love for her. When her first love Lianawka, a man of integrity and character, expresses interest in Nukawki she is overjoyed but soon learns the gendered norms of the society. Chhungbuluka exploits

their relationship when Nukawki has a better option of marrying a man of good stature and character. He publicly shames her by calling her his woman and pulling up her skirt in her workplace and in front of her young students no less. He boastfully announces that Nukawki is his woman and that she is not as good a character as their society perceives. She becomes a public disgrace and loses all her former glory which translates to the loss of her future prospects both in career and romantic relationships. Thus, when she finds out that she is pregnant with Chhungbuluka's child Nukawki salvages hope through her child. The ensuing tragedy of her daughter's abduction by the father's family becomes the final blow to her because the manner in which the father claims ownership of their daughter is deceptive and insidious. His family sends two women as intermediaries and these women insist that the father's family want to see their granddaughter for the last time before they migrate to Burma. Nukawki's worst fear becomes true when they take the child with them to Burma and Nukawki is helpless in getting back her daughter because according to Mizo customary law, "children belong to the father (Section 91:41). Illegitimate children also belong to the father (Section 107:53,54)." (Colbert 7)

After all the unhappy incidents, Nukawki remains defiant and she moves to Aizawl to escape the traumatic events in her life. Her life at Mualnuam had been filled with harrowing experiences and disappointments and so she decides to try her luck in finding better options and work toward a better life. Nukawki contemplates about how she would earn a living in Aizawl. As she had not given all her earnings to her family and has saved a small amount for herself, enough to rent a small basement room, she took courage because people from rural areas often live in Aizawl to earn a living and she is not afraid to do the same. She tells her father about her decision to which her father expresses remorse saying that Nukawki has always been obedient and yet she has suffered much. He is now ashamed to claim paternal authority over her. However, he gives her his blessings to pursue what she feels is best for herself and he gives her some money to start over (NKK 109). Nukawki's venture to Aizawl reflects her strength and endurance in the face of a string of adversities. Her bravery in her attempts to rebuild her life offers an empowering message on the strength of women. In Aizawl, Nukawki has great support from her

former school friend Zopari and with the help of her, she is able to find a small room to rent. She earns her living by becoming a street vendor. After she learns the ropes of the business, she becomes quite profitable and earns much more than she did when she worked as a school teacher. She dares not hope to rekindle her relationship with Zopari's brother and shies away from his presence at first. However, her love for him remains in her heart but Lianhawla is angered by Nukawki's scandal with Chhungbuluka. Her fight to create her own destiny must have impressed Lianhawla who eventually warms up to her and he then passionately claims her love for her. So when he opens his heart to Nukawki she is ecstatic and she is finally united with the man of her dreams.

As asserted by Simone De Beauvoir, "humanity is man" because man defines woman not in herself but in relation to him; she is not considered an independent entity (*Woman and the Other* 282). The subordination of women as 'other' incites ideas that women are possessions. The complete domination of women manifests projections of the male psyche about women objectification as in she is merely what man commands. Her identity is always and solely tied to her biological constitution and thus she becomes mere object. She is characterized and distinguished in relation to man. She is the incidental, the unnecessary rather than the necessary whereas man is "the Subject, he is the Absolute" (282). The 'othering' of Nukawki is built up by an unfortunate chain of events that reveal harsh truths about gender inequality in Mizo society and the general lack of support and education given to women. The stringent patriarchal norms prevent her father from believing Nukawki's rationale that she did go to the movies but accusations of her losing character due to that action in the incident was unjustified. The incident that led to her discontinuation of studies deprived her from getting the necessary means to acquire knowledge which would ultimately help her assert her voice. The harrowing ordeals with Chhungbuluka signify the oppression of women on many levels. She is rendered silent due to her trauma of rape and fear of stigma. The continued alliance with him to conceal and regain her bearing reveals women's vulnerability and helplessness in claiming justice in their society. Nukawki's silence after the rape represents the experience of numerous women who go through such trauma inflicted by men. She

bears her shame, guilt and reproach in silence because the structure of male dominance is so powerful and inescapable and in such instances many women often choose silence. The issue of sexual abuse by means of public shaming is portrayed in the text in terms of her public humiliation by Chhungbuluka who claims her as his 'property' by calling her 'his woman' implying that she is 'unclean and unworthy' of other men. Even when her daughter is taken away without her consent, she cannot do anything. Nukawki's life reveals the many layers of oppression of Mizo women where they cannot claim their dignity and self-worth which is primarily vindicated by the Mizo customary laws.

The ordeals of Chhuahi and Nukawki reflect a much wider spectrum of women's issues concerning the fluidity of women's position in their families. The injunction set by Nukawki's father against her continuation of schooling offers insights into the perception of women seeking autonomy via a career as the family is the first institution to break down when women start to feel their own way and want to affirm some autonomy for themselves, some freedom to choose, and the ability to fulfill their individuality. This is a regular occurrence throughout history and around the world (Jain and Banerjee 411). Both Nukawki and Chhuahi live with their families after they had children. The economic status of these women thus greatly determines the quality of their life and autonomy because the economic features of the wider world, such as the unequal distribution of economic power and advantages associated with ownership, capital access, responsibility, and gender, are present in such households. Inequality within a family increases with decreasing resources (414). Nukawki and Chhuahi are unable to come out of their dependence because they are not entitled to the status of economic independence. Chhuahi relies on her family during the upbringing of her child, all the while enduring being in the margins within the family dynamics. Nukawki has a source of income from her teaching job which gives her the necessary facilities to forge a better status in her home for her and her daughter but once the child is taken away from her, she is too distraught to pursue further career options and resigns from her job. Nukawki's discontentment regarding the discontinuation of her academics symbolises the hopes and aspirations

of Mizo women to liberate themselves from the usual social constraints and to achieve greater freedom for themselves.

The role of stigma in a gendered specific application reveals unequal weight against women. The characterisation of Chhuahi and Nukawki has shown how stigma or the threat of stigma on women is linked with moral order executed in favour of female control in a social setting. There are other female characters in the select texts whose lives indicated the influence of social control by means of stigma against women in subtle and nuanced structures. Various forms of typecasting of women imbued in social norms generate adverse effects on the psychology and well-being of women and hamper their capacity to lead fulfilling lives because they are denied full forms of social acceptance. The process of stigmatization has predisposed structures inherent in society which ultimately revealed that it is a social construct. In any collective setting such as social and cultural, the will to categorize persons is deeply inherent and intuitively. This will to categorise members in a society is usually very strong. Any character attributes must align with accepted conventions as Goffman explains, “not all undesirable attributes are at issue, but only those which are incongruous with our stereotype of what a given type of individual should be” and thus stigma refers to “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (3). In Mizo society, the control over women is largely exercised in the form of stereotyping certain women as domineering and angry. The label given to women who often exhibit anger-fueled outbursts comes with a certain form of opprobrium as seen from Sakawlhi. She is typecast as a bully and her nickname means someone with aggressive traits. In her childhood, Sakawlhi is depicted as aggressive and physically violent which often upsets the gender hierarchy among boys and girls. Her mother Vungkhami is described as a bold and dangerous woman, who is said to have no sense of abashment and people claim that her daughter takes after her traits. (LRL 87)

The name Sakawlhi is a label given to her by her community, which also translates as 'beast'. The name had stuck for life and Saiawi does not reveal the real name of Sakawlhi and the character assumes her identity from the wretched label. Such overt labelling of women was an accepted norm back in the day and it was

unfair and dehumanizing for an individual. However, this phenomenon of nicknaming was not particular to gender and this can be perceived from the nickname of Laiawrha, but the implications on the female gender were far more damaging to their future prospects. It is apparent from the life of Sakawlhi who grows up as a reticent and shy person withdrawn from society. She has no friends, she does not go outside, and on her way to work at their jhum, if she does not have her mother as her companion, she walks alone (132). Sakawlhi is bound by the label and becomes helpless in shedding her ill-repute. The typecasting of women especially in relation to their perceived threat against masculinity is usually responded with hostility and intolerance and many women could not escape this aspect on their own. As Goffman states, the manner in which society considers the stigmatized individual is not fully human. Based on this presumption, we engage in many forms of discrimination, which effectively, if unconsciously, diminish her opportunities in life (5). Sakawlhi becomes a social pariah and has dismal prospects of finding romantic partners and most importantly deprives her of leading a well-rounded and quality life. Due to her label her name the other attributes that are quite unconnected with the original claims of stereotyping are all added to her character in order to tarnish her reputation further and no one would dare take her as a wife. Her aggression in the past is never forgotten and also she has another undesirable attribute for men; she is tall and surpasses all the men in her village in height. No one wants to have a wife they could not have authority over and they especially do not want to marry someone physically taller than them (132). The description of Sakawlhi's ordeal depicts the fragility of manhood in Saihum and thus it becomes a shock that the titular character Laiawrha marries Sakawlhi. The gender dynamic between Sakawlhi and Laiawrha reveals a sad imbalance. She needs Laiawrha to rescue her from her predicament and even in their marriage Sakawlhi goes through the humiliation of Laiawrha's infidelity which eventually led to an illegitimate child. Before their marriage, Sakawlhi had a formidable competition in the form of Laleni who is beautiful and the most popular girl in the village. Laiawrha had been interested in Laleni whom most of the young men vying for her attention, for she was outgoing, sociable and confident. She personifies all the character traits that counter Sakawlhi's personality. Laleni has been in love with Laiawrha but due to her

outgoing and assertive nature, the people in the village paint her as careless and immodest around men. Though there is no evidence of her immodesty, those rumours hurt her reputation much like Sakawlhi. Laiawrha and Laleni had been in a relationship and were already in the process of getting married but the rumour that Laleni had aborted a child in liaison with another from another spread throughout the community. The rumour angered Laiawrha and he had called off the wedding. The pitiable status of Sakawlhi and her dependence on Laiawrha signifies many aspects of deep-seated gender inequality in Mizo society. She has no other means to redeem her bad reputation as a bully and she has to live all her life with the wretched name they brand her with for the rest of her life. She could not separate the image created for her from her childhood, thereby, subsuming her identity. Thus, unsurprisingly, she needs a man to 'save' her and bestow her a new identity as an act of self-preservation. However, her new identity as a wife comes with a price. When she finds out that Laleni is pregnant with Laiawrha's child, she has no choice but to accept the child because "a wife can learn to overlook or rationalize her husband's faults, including infidelity-she has to accept that she would be infinitely worse off without him" (Srivastava 433). To add to her woes, she suffers from a miscarriage early on in their marriage even as there is an ever-looming pressure to carry progenitors. As hurt as she is, Sakawlhi could not even bring herself to divorce her husband because in Mizo tradition, even if a man had an extramarital affair, the Mizos would not consider him an adulterer since they deemed that men could not commit adultery. On the contrary, it was believed that adultery was the most terrible offense a woman could commit, and it would even lead to divorce. (Lalrinchhane 36)

On the other hand, Laleni's life does not fare better than Sakawlhi's. Even though it seemed like that her life is full of promises, an assertive woman like her who confidently takes her bearings in all kinds of situations could not thrive in a restrictive society. Much like Sakawlhi, she suffers from the ill-repute by her fellow villagers leading to the loss of her love interest Laiawrha. Her desperate attempt to win him back causes her to get pregnant out of wedlock and she has to go through the same process of guilt and shame as Laiawrha's mother, Chhuahi. Life of a single parent especially for the mother was difficult and brutal, and it was considered to be

a normal practice for the mother to leave her child in the care of the father's family. Consequently, when Lalení leaves the child to the father, most of the care and parenting falls in the hands of Sakawlhi. These primary female characters are not given a fair chance to succeed on their own and have to lean on male characters for survival. Their journeys before they form alliances with their male counterparts, namely, Laiawrha for both Chhuahi and Sakawlhi and Lianawka for Nukawki, are all beaten down by a patriarchal social system that oppresses women by degrading them on grounds of their biological attributes and by suppressing their intellectual prowess through gender biases. These women could only thrive when they are in a more supportive environment. Their true capacity and resilience are depicted to their family in times of crisis, and this provides a glimpse of the real capacity of women to achieve great things when given proper support and social status. Chhuahi has earned a matriarch status by bringing up Laiawrha. With the money she receives from her family, she opens a small shop that becomes the mainstay and a major source of income for the young family. As the young family begins to settle down at Aizawl, both Chhuahi and her daughter-in-law Sakawlhi, make primary contributions to their family's success. During Laiawrha's imprisonment, Chhuahi runs a successful business that contributes enormously to their family's welfare. Sakawlhi is a daily wagger and she also keeps a garden of her own which provides for her family. The family's move from the small village of Saihum to the state capital Aizawl reveals nuances of the Mizo's transition from the traditional to modernity and its impacts upon Mizo women. The city of Aizawl has gone through numerous changes and the cultural scene oversees a significant transition to modern and new ways of life. Modernity in terms of its innovation and perception influences cultural perception and the Mizo social structure also witnesses drastic modifications, and provide advantages for women in opening opportunities for economic independence. Sakawlhi proves herself worthy across the years as testified by her parenting of Darchhuana and Darkungi. Chhuahi too can support her family in the absence of Laiawrha because of the opportunity provided by businesses and, gradually, the family's business was booming up to the point that Laiawrha found himself less meaningful in the family.

Nukawki's courage and resilience shines through in the darkest period of Mizoram. In the sequel NKF, Nukawki has to fight for her family's survival during *rambuai* and to rebuild their life in the aftermath. She and Lianhawla have been married only for a few months when war breaks out in Mizoram. Nukawki, Lianhawla's son Ropianga, Zopari and her children flee to Mualnuam and at Mualnuam, Zopari is killed by the army and Nukawki loses her beloved friend and sister-in-law. She mourns the loss terribly. While she is away, her husband has been taken as a war prisoner. After their return to Aizawl, the responsibilities of providing and rebuilding the family's business fall on Nukawki. She takes the family's business into her own hands and achieves great success. When she first visits the site of their shop as war subsides, the building has been burnt to the ground. She rebuilds it from the ground up and shows her business acumen and bravery when at the risk of her life. Those who travelled for business during the time are in great jeopardy where there are heavy restrictions enforced by the army and the possibility of violence looms large. Nukawki applies for a driver's license for her brother-in-law and she goes to Silchar to personally purchase business items. Saiawi comments that her womanhood no longer gives her comfort from anyone, she thus becomes brave (NKF 187). The lives of the primary female characters denote their unfair struggles against patriarchy and their inability to forge their identities on their terms. Their success stories come under duress of either violence or incrimination both of which are rooted in the domain that were historically governed by men. The political scene and judiciary system are all male-driven activities which cause great upheaval in their families. In the absence of paternal figures in the two families, the women have to fight for their family's survival and come out successfully. However, the female characters are not given a fair chance to thrive outside their domestic confinements. Their successes are achievable only during isolated cases of extreme and inevitable turmoil that exempt them from gender roles which brings to light the onset of modernity as the harbinger of gender-neutral roles such as various entrepreneurial businesses in Mizoram. Of the select texts, the female entitled novels NKK and NKF are more female-centric and depict the Mizo women's experience more extensively. Nukawki's maternal lineage reveals the plight of women, both overt and nuanced, in Mizo society. These layers of oppression imposed on Mizo women display elements

of male chauvinism where a man's word dictates the fate of a woman often for the worse. Nukawki's unnamed grandmother had been accused of infidelity by her husband because her husband was a jealous man, and he accused her of adultery, encouraged by idle gossip, and despite the false accusation, he divorced her on the grounds of adultery. The majority of the community believed that she did not commit adultery saying "Sue your husband! Turn to the chief and his minister's court", but she did not dare do it. She had been pregnant at the time, her husband claimed the child was not his, she dared not contest even that. (NKK 23)

The subordinate status of Mizo women is strongly enforced by patriarchal customary laws. As pointed out by Colbert, a woman who commits adultery in Mizo society may lose her good reputation and is referred to as a *uire* (adulteress). In such instances, she must leave the home empty-handed and without any claims to her own property, including her children. The public humiliation and status of disgrace she endures are sanctioned by Mizo customary laws, which possess a pronounced patriarchal undertone. Notably, the consequences for men committing the same offense are hugely disproportionate. If a husband is unfaithful and the couple divorces, the wife is entitled only to one-third of their income (limited to movable goods), unless they are a joint family, in which case she may keep only her personal possessions. This disparity highlights gender biases embedded in traditional Mizo law and social practice (7). The fact that the grandmother had chosen not to present the injustice meted to her in front of the traditional court (comprised of all male members, the chief and his council) carried weight and brought to light the fact that women's dignity hung on a thin thread. The silence of the victim represents psychological oppression where women who have been conditioned by society to the superiority of men since time immemorial have no mental facilities to stand up for themselves in times of need especially when social structure is deeply patriarchal in itself. And thus consequently, Nukawki's mother Thangvungi is marginalised before she is born. Her background is described as very unfortunate because of what had happened to Thangvungi's mother. Children of single mothers are viewed with prejudice and daughters especially are depreciated by unmarried men. She is attractive and bears good character but Thangvungi is not necessarily fortunate in the

prospect of romance (NKK 17). Due to the stigma of being the daughter of a single mother, she does not have good prospects of marrying well and when an older widow with a son asks for her hand, her family agrees very easily. The character of Thangvungi is complex and particularly vulnerable. She is portrayed as being spoilt by her mother and so she becomes lazy. She has deep mistrust in her relationship because her husband is still hung up on his deceased wife and he often beats Thangvungi. However, the main anxiety of Thangvungi is on account of Mizo customary law that dictates all rights to male offspring to inherit property, and this makes her cold and harsh toward her husband's son Chuaubawiha. The issue of property rights deeply distresses Thangvungi who births four daughters consecutively. As Mizo women are not entitled to inherit any property or assets, all her husband's physical properties are to be handed down to her stepson Chuaubawiha. She fears that if she did not provide a son for her ageing husband, she would also lose her status. She feels apprehensive about her future and wishes to secure her future by giving birth to a son. Saiawi explains that as her husband is much older than her, she fears he might die before her, and that Chuaubawiha would drive her out along with her daughters, so she wants to punish him when he is still a little boy. Had she not been afraid of her husband, she would have mistreated the boy (22-23). She is jealous and prejudiced toward the child. When Nukawki reaches eleven years old, Thangvungi is blessed with a son for her fifth child. She feels less threatened in terms of her status with Chuaubawiha and her husband also treats her better and does not beat her as much.

Saiawi depicts the eventual changes within the family dynamics regarding the stepmother narrative. In comparison, the more modern setting in LRH and NKF depict the break away from the female anxiety of Mizo customary inheritance laws from the characters of Sakawlhi and Nukawki who both cared for their stepchildren. Sakawlhi brings up her husband's illegitimate son Darchhuana as her own and she is very affectionate towards him and truly loves him as her own. She suffers a miscarriage and is very anxious to have a child of her own but she does not demonstrate any frustration towards the boy. She insists on enrolling him in school during his childhood despite the child's wild defiance against it. She is resolute in

giving the best opportunity for the boy even though she is accused as being overbearing. Much like Sakawli, Thangvungi's daughter Nukawki cares for and brings up her stepson Ropianga from her husband's previous marriage. Nukawki loves him as her own and this is reciprocated by the son which earns Nukawki much respect from everyone. The author highlights the positive change in Mizo women's attitude towards such a vital family dynamic to denote the impact of modernity in advancing the cause of Mizo women. With the changing times, Mizo cultural disposition towards the role of women in their household became much more respectful. The reassurance of women's status in their domestic realm gives more confidence to assert their sense of self which brought about a positive impact in exercising their moral judgement. The development of modernity and its many attributes such as new possibilities in economy, social hierarchy, and governmental system resulted in cultural changes that left a little more space in which Mizo women could advance their status. Mizo women took full advantage of the changing cultural shifts to assert their identity and mobilised women's causes through various women's organisations such as Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual Pawl (MHTP), Puitu Hmeichhe Pawl (PHP), Young Women's Christian Association-Aizawl (YWCA-Aizawl), Mizoram Hmeithai Association (Mizoram Widow Association), Women's Institute for Social Development of Mizoram (WISDOM) and Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP). The erstwhile Mizo Hmeichhe Tangrual Pawl (MHTP) established on 6th July 1974 under the State Social Welfare Advisory Board (SSWAB) evolved to become the present day Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP) that translates as United Mizo Women Federation and it is the largest and most visible among the Mizo women's organisation. (Sinha and Colbert 75-76)

Years later when she gets much older, Thangvungi suffers from a mysterious mental disorder. In addition to the woes of her failing health, her illness provokes gender concerns for Nukawki. Her mother's condition makes Nukawki reflect on the unfairness of her mother's life and the many injustices she had endured from her father including verbal and physical abuse. However, she is surprised to note that her father has been taking good care of her mother and is quite inseparable from her. Nukawki has conflicting thoughts about her mother's condition because she feels that

her mother is cowardly and insecure, and that she often took the blame even when she was right. She had endured her husband's abuse for a long time and Nukawki partly believes this to be as to why she suffers mental illness. She is disappointed with her mother and sometimes thinks that she does not deserve her pity (NKF 247). A particularly poignant episode involves Nukawki's anger toward her mother, Thangvungi, who committed suicide due to mental illness. Thangvungi's condition made her unpredictable and nearly mute, requiring constant supervision. Nukawki is deeply distressed when her mother jumps out of a window while Nukawki is watching over her, evoking conflicting thoughts and emotions. She contemplates the stigma associated with mental health and suicide, and worries about how this may affect society's perception of her own young daughter, Zochhuanawmi. This episode highlights the enduring social stigma surrounding mental illness and suicide in Mizo society, as well as Nukawki's hope that such prejudices will not be passed on to the next generation.

The predicament of Thangvungi reveal the many ways in which the Mizo social system enforced unforgiving patriarchal ideals on women and how such social norms manifested culturally unique forms of stigma on women. Thangvungi is marginalised even before birth and she eventually lives out her life in a loveless marriage in which the threat of losing her status in the family is a reality for many Mizo women. She serves as a significant example of a battered woman in her marriage and she endures her husband's verbal and physical assaults as she has internalised patriarchal ideals of society and fears being stigmatised. Her daughter Nukawki who has witnessed her mother's ordeals while growing up is angry at her mother's failure to assert her identity. Thus, the importance of gender education becomes apparent in the lives of the mother-daughter duo and Nukawki, who has put up an incredible fight to assert her identity despite the many challenges in her life, wishes for her mother what she has strived to achieve her whole life, namely, a voice of her own.

The more traditional of the two women Thangvungi represents the conventional mode of thinking where complete subservience to their male counterparts was a considered norm while the opposite carried stigma wherein

“dominant cultural beliefs link labelled persons to undesirable characteristics-to negative stereotypes” (Link and Phelan 367). She brings to light the fact that women often stay in abusive marriages because they are given the primary responsibility of keeping their family together while men have a detached yet ultimate authority over the family. So in case of divorce, the wife is often seen as “the one who has “broken” the home even when it is the husband who has left the marriage” (Barnett et al.458). In a traditional setting, the all-encompassing Mizo societal norms and customary laws that prevented women from gaining proper autonomy exposed women to a vulnerable position in which no Mizo women could achieve dignity and social status outside of marriage, and this led to many women being trapped in abusive marriages.

The pre-modern Mizoram saw several forms of demoralizing attitudes toward women which often found articulation in day to day conversations as narrated by Saiawi in NKF. Nukawki’s brother Rotlinga has a wife named Rammawii who is about three years his senior and his father-in-law told Rotlinga’s father in good humour that his daughter was very fortunate that Rotlinga wanted to marry her after she had carried his child out of wed-lock. He also adds a very demeaning comment that, in case his daughter does not know her place in the home of her in-laws, her husband must beat her at times when the occasion calls for it (NKF 236). The dialogue reveals the deep-seated and rampant misogyny validated by social norms. The conversation is not an isolated narrative but a representational piece on how men used to degrade women in a typical household in the past Mizo society. These demeaning practices toward women lead to recurring patterns of women victimisation. Much like Thangvungi, Rammawii’s eldest sister Zatuaki is also victimised unfairly in their marriage. She is sneeringly judged by the villagers as a dim-witted woman. Men in her village joke that if they are desperate to secure a wife they must go and marry one of Zatuaki’s sisters and if they fail they could even marry Zatuaki (237). Zatuaki is approached for marriage by a divorced man with three children. In the marriage, Zatuaki is happy and very acquiescent to her husband and his family. Her obedience and willingness are taken advantage of and scorned by her in-laws and her stepchildren. When she becomes pregnant, she is not given much care so she starts to stand up for herself and talks back to her family at times. In one

of her arguments with her mother-in-law, she is divorced by her husband. She is very distraught and starts to talk to herself and this is seen as a sign of her failing mental health. In a relatively modern Mizoram, women's issues took on a different and more subtle nuance. The major shift in areas such as the economy, system of government, and education transformed Mizo society into a modern culture and gradually women's oppression changed from overt suppression to a more subtle nature. Introduction to education and Christianity paved the path to progress for women to achieve economic emancipation which, unfortunately, did not always ensure the end of discrimination on the grounds of their biological differences. At the same time, the evolution and consolidation of Mizo ethnic identity emphasized the importance of traditional values which permeated through the ongoing gender dynamics in Mizo society. To a great extent, these traditional values reinforced gender roles that confine women in the domestic sphere where Mizo women had to navigate the complex fabric of gender biases in day-to-day social functioning, formal institutions, relationships and the workplace. The conditional freedom of Mizo women as commented by Khaute shows the lack of biological emancipation where she explains that despite being frequently constrained by traditional customs and responsibilities, Mizoram women have learned to properly balance tradition with modernity, which has mostly enabled them to climb the economic emancipation and independence ladder. (38)

In the select texts, the characterisation of two female characters Makuki and Hazel portray the pessimistic representation of educated women. These two women are highly educated and have received their education outside Mizoram, which indicates their exposure to other cultures. The didactic overtones of loyalty to Mizo ethnicity seem to make them out as negative characters in their portrayal. They are problematic characters that provide insights into the issues of traditional values against modernity on account of their multi-cultural influences and education. Their actions and character also convey a sense of Mizo moral values on gender concerns for beyond their education the two had wildly differing personalities yet they suffer consequences of the choices made by them. Makuki is the first wife of Nukawki's husband Lianhawla. She represents the modern woman in the post-colonial Mizoram.

She comes from an affluent family and grew up in Darjeeling where she receives quality education till B.A. The author observes the prevailing norms for educated women at the time explaining that unmarried women who were educated thought only of marrying well and even if they secure a government job they never thought of career advancement (LRH 28). Saiawi's comment reveals the predicament of educated women which entailed sacrificing their career opportunities lest it might threaten prospects of marriage or emasculate their husbands. Srivastava comments on the ever-present glass ceiling for women in their career pursuits which often comes in the form of fragile masculinity. She states that a woman is frequently expected to set aside her professional goals in favor of maintaining harmony at home, particularly if those goals necessitate being apart from her spouse. Though clinging to financial independence for its own sake can be interpreted as an act of defiance (as a reflection on the husband's manhood and ability to provide) working spouses are not always frowned upon (433). Makuki does not want to work in a subordinate government jobs and what she has really striven to be a teacher. She had agreed to marry Lianhawla at her parents' behest and she entered into a marriage of convenience. The author does not directly narrate the details of the marriage but hints that Makuki is unhappy and detached. After the couple have a son, Makuki divorces Lianhawla much to the surprise of those who know them because her husband is head over heels in love with her and she has earned respect as a married woman (NKK 28). Saiawi provides in the sequel NKF the real reason why Makuki divorced her husband amidst the chaos of *rambuai*. Makuki and their son found shelter at Lianhawla's home and that night, Makuki reflects upon her relationship with her former husband. During the marriage, she had dreamt of opening a school but she fulfilled her dream only after the divorce because she felt that her husband would not approve of her aspiration. She had opened a very successful school and parents were lining up to seek admission for their children in her school, but despite her fortune, Makuki felt lonely at times. She reflects on her failed marriage and her regret amplified during *rambuai* when all was in a state of pandemonium and her husband became their happy refuge.

Makuki blames herself for their divorce and recollects the manner in which she had disappointed him. She had married him out of her compulsion and she had always been cordial and polite to her husband but she never felt any real affection toward him. She never felt any connection with her husband and did not appreciate all the ways in which her husband made efforts to mend their relationship. When her husband suggested divorce out of frustration she did not strive to maintain the relationship but now that circumstances had changed she deeply regretted the end of their relationship. She tried to rekindle their romance that night even though he was already married to Nukawki but he refused. Saiawia's didactic message from the life of Makuki reveals the typecasting of women aspiring to have a career. She is portrayed as a sophisticated, highly educated woman of class but her façade of refinement and class does not give her a sense of fulfilment even after she fulfils the one dream that she has. Her character portrayal suggests the ambiguity of the modern woman's struggles for liberation. Makuki wants to be free of the shackles of marriage and domesticity in order to pursue her dreams which she feels does not materialize due to her marriage but she does regret her divorce. In Saiawi's texts, this narrative of the unhappy housewife syndrome seems to haunt highly educated women like Makuki and Hazel. Incidentally, they serve as anti-thesis to their male counterparts. Both their husbands' second wives Nukawki and Mazami have a more traditional upbringing and their educated status is far limited as compared to theirs. Thus, the conventional wives are portrayed as thriving in their marriage and having a happy union.

Two female characters Hazel and Mazami appear in the life of Darchhuana to serve as specific didactic characters to portray the struggles and intricacies of a lasting relationship. The marriage between Darchhuana and Hazel is shrouded with the message of the wicked woman who disrupts and severs family bonds. Hazel is portrayed as worldly and educated and has a certain level of knowledge about class and modernity. She is supportive and helpful in her husband's business at the beginning of their marriage. She is also extravagant and easily spends large sums of money for herself. She is cordial to Darchhuana's family but she harbours resentment towards her mother-in-law over the fact that Sakawlihi is not Darchhuana's biological

mother and she is always indifferent and cold toward her. She has a knack for her husband's business and exploits her husband's trust by sleeping with one of his colleagues. When her mother-in-law catches her with the man in a suspicious manner she is dismissed from the house. Darchhuana believes his mother's side of the story and the couple are separated. A few weeks later, Hazel's mother persuades Darchhuana to come see her and convey her version of the event. Following the visit, the pair gets back together. Sakawlihi, however, had some extremely harsh things to say about Hazel and was unable to accept her back into the family. Darchhuana leaves his parents' home and wants to be with his wife again. In the meantime, Mazami, a college student, assists the couple with their household chores and she has a pleasant disposition and is a beautiful woman. The estranged families reunite after Hazel discloses that she is pregnant. Hazel has an opulent household and lives a very privileged life and as time passes, she becomes more and more domineering and controlling. Hazel throws Mazami out of the house during one of her outbursts, but Darchhuana takes her to his parents' house instead. The premature birth of a girl by Hazel makes it obvious that the child is not Darchhuana's, and the fact that the child belongs to a different race and is revealed from the colour of her skin. This establishes that Hazel had indeed committed adultery and Darchhuana promptly files for divorce. Not long after the divorce, Darchhuana displays passionate interest in Mazami. He has known her for quite some time at that point but Mazami is hesitant about a relationship in the beginning. Unlike Hazel, Mazami is responsible and prudent and cautious of Darchhuana's advances and protects her dignity at all instances. Darchhuana keeps trying to win her over and eventually confesses his love for her. Mazami responds by stating it was deeply flattering for a man of his stature to evince such interest in her, and that she too is also in love with him. Soon, the two are happily married. American feminist Betty Friedan reveals in her provocative text *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) that there was discontentment and misery among the suburban housewives in the 1960s who were highly intelligent and well-educated she states that they possessed unique intelligence and skills that were fostered by at least the rudiments of higher education. However, their suburban housewife lifestyles prevented them from fully utilizing these gifts (257). Friedan's seminal work

transcends cultural specifics to apply to the modern-day women's problem which is also reflected in the lives of Makuki and Hazel.

The cultural uniqueness of the two women could be found in their tendency for multiculturalism which also became a source of psychological displacement in Mizo society where cultural solidarity is greatly moralised. The author's portrayal of these characters has a marked contrast to the characters of Nukawki and Mazami. Darkungi, the daughter of Laiawrha, is portrayed as a happy housewife who despite the rocky start in her relationship later enjoys a blissful marriage. However, the author does not indicate in any way that Darkungi is a driven person, either toward a career or professionalism. Before marriage, she enjoyed college life not for the sake of academics but for the company of her friends and the co-curricular activities in and outside her college. She has no economic pressure to earn her keep, unlike Nukawki. She enters into marriage with the attitude of a dutiful wife which proved to be propitious. As Toni Morrison asserts regarding the art of writing politically that, "it should be beautiful, and powerful, but it should also *work*. It should have something in it that enlightens; something in it that opens the door and points the way. Something in it that suggests what the conflicts are, what the problems are. But it need not solve those problems because it is not a case study, it is not a recipe" (303). Saiawi's texts document various Mizo women's experiences and in contextualising them from their historical timeline, it becomes apparent that progress toward women's emancipation in Mizo society is still very much a work in progress. Mizo women's status has changed along with the evolution of Mizo society as seen from the influence of education, modernity and Christianity in transforming and expanding Mizo women's spaces. However, the underlying patriarchal structures that pervade social and moral system within the society continue to limit the possibility of women's emancipation. Saiawi, like many Mizo writers, asserts the traditional role of Mizo women as the righteous path for women that could be seen from the lives of all the primary characters who all find their meaning and identity within the domestic confines of existence. However, the author's representation of Mizo women's experiences is pluralistic and myriad and it provides insightful information about Mizo cultural norms and historical influences that manifest as oppressive structures

for women's welfare. It reveals nuances about the struggles of Mizo women to adjust to a patriarchal society.

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Chapter V- Conclusion

Mizo collective identity is largely shaped by the events stated by Saiawi. Saiawi was a conscientious writer whose preoccupation lay in the expansion of cultural knowledge for and of the Mizo people. He has laid out the intricacies of social and cultural changes and their influences by providing the macrocosm of family dynamics on issues concerning the oppression of the Mizo people during colonisation, their post-colonial struggles and their attempts at navigating the turbulent political climate during *rambuai*. The inevitable cultural transition to the western model during colonisation has led to a hybrid identity of the Mizo because of the irrevocable nature of the changes instituted during the period.

The legacy of the colonial period in terms of the ideological shift in fields of religion and academics has tremendous influences on Mizo culture. The drastic and swift transition to the western model with limited knowledge during the colonial period had led to an identity crisis in the cultural sphere wherein the Mizos struggled to negotiate alongwith various cultural shifts that followed the end of colonisation. Such issues are vividly seen in the heart of the domestic intrigues of Saiawi's texts. The power of narrative demonstrated by the select novels provokes consciousness-raising cultural reflections toward the formation and transformations on account of continual reconstruction of Mizo culture. Ethnic identity as it evolved in Mizo society has layered uniqueness in qualities by virtue of these pivotal transitions during the course of its formation. The general conception about Mizo ethnic and cultural identity as represented in narratives perpetuate the prevailing conventional discourse that Mizo identity is inherent and primordial. On analysing historical events, the context of Mizo cultural identity formation is inundated with political influences which reveals the contingency and situational nature of its evolution. Saiawi's texts reveal the paradoxical quality of Mizo cultural identity where there is a constant push and pull between the idea of the absolute through the primordial argument and the active performances of agents of politics in the lived experiences of the people. The select texts provides an overview of these dynamics between ethnicity and cultural influences and their role in framing the nature and course of direction in which the present understanding of identity and the general acceptance of and about Mizo identity came about.

The exclusively oral tradition of the Mizos before the latter half of the 20th century necessitated the reconstructions of the Mizo narrative past before the British colonisation which in many ways led to subjectivity and idealisation. The act of recollecting Mizo historical past also signified the post-colonial efforts of the Mizos to empower their own voices especially when narratives about and of Mizo people were heavily reliant on the imperialist's narratives and literature. The post-colonial reflections from the narratives of many Mizo scholars and historians have focussed upon authentic Mizo experiences during colonisation and their struggles and achievements. These powerful political narratives about the Mizo subjugation and most importantly, the empowerment of their ethnic identity inevitably required reconstruction of pre-colonial collective identity that had been largely misunderstood. The complex and intuitive Mizo culture was disrupted politically and exhaustively through culture and morality by the imperialists which resulted in the concerted attempts of the Mizos to reflect and embrace the past in alignment of their needs of their present changing times and its challenges. Thus, the prevailing discourses that emerged from these narratives generally focused on the spirit of unity and altruistic disposition of the pre-colonial Mizo social and cultural history. The conception that Mizo identity has always been primordial and innate reveals the instrumental value of ideals about the inherent connection that interweave members of the community to forge solidarity for self-preservation in the light of their politically fraught history. It also speaks volumes about the conceived or real threat that the people's culture might perish for good in modern times. The concern and anxiety about Mizo's posterity without proper legal protection is a very real threat presented in the mainstream discourse and Mizo scholar K.C Lalvunga (who wrote under the pseudonym Zikpuii pa) comments that Mizo people are, at present, being in a state of the threat of assimilation looming over them. If the protective fence Inner Line Regulation is discarded, other forms of defence become vulnerable (126). The Inner Line Regulation was introduced by the British under "section 2 of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873" and the purpose was that "initially, the Inner Line was created to maintain peace with the tribes. However, the provision had continued after the annexation of the Hills to the British territory. Further, the relevance of such a provision was felt and underlined by the Government of India for

protecting the tribals from economic, cultural and social exploitations.” (Zakhuma 46)

J. Zahluna corroborates the necessity of Inner Line Regulation stating that it acts as a powerful tool to stop the plains people, particularly traders and business classes, from taking advantage of the people of Mizoram. Additionally, the preservation of ILR keeps the hill tribes from being exploited economically and losing their ethnic and cultural identity (225). The line of separation provided by the regulation is symbolic of the cultural differences not only among the ethnic minorities in the northeast but also in terms of these minorities against the larger Indian cultural characters. In addition to these domestic cultural differences, the unique history of the struggles and negotiation of Western cultural influences by the Mizos (which could be largely attributed to colonisation and its corollary factors at play) in the introduction of Christianity and education all make up for the fact that Mizo cultural identity is formed as its own unique class of qualification. The Mizo's concern and apprehension about acculturation and assimilation in the face of tidal waves of cultural influences in post-modern times can both be a bane and boon for the Mizos. The modern Mizo social and cultural world become embroiled in its apprehension and anxiety of influence from other cultures which stems from decades of powerful domination and influence from other cultures both Western and domestic as presented in the study. There still persist largely within Mizo's discourse the zeal for self-preservation and reservation against influences from outside of its ethnic description which is justified in respect to its relatively small population and the particularity of its culture. However, this mindset easily promotes ethnic confinement within its cultural ambit and most likely hampers meaningful engagements with other cultures. As the metaphorical dust of historical struggles in the past has settled to free the Mizos to decide and determine their ethnic and cultural life, it would be detrimental to their self-preservation and posterity if society's willpower and discourses revolved within the same cultural orbit.

The primary space of contention with the concept of primordial or essentialist ideals of identity lies in the fact that in practice, such ideals gloss over fraught history and dismiss crucial historical events both negative and positive that had actively

worked in framing the unique collective identity. In her narrative theory, Mieke Bal echoes the need for authorless textual reading much like the significance of 'authorless' history. She asserts that her argument is not to "deny authorship but to emancipate both author and reader from the stronghold of a misconceived interpretive authority" and acknowledges that the author is "the historical subject who made the text". She emphasises that such a need for authorless interpretation lies in the fact that authority is a censorship issue and she explains that censoring forms of interpretation confirms, reinforces, and sustains art censorship, whether it be overtly political or covertly social. Making interpretation a privileged form of art processing subjects it to the same mechanisms of exclusion in a world where all people who do not fit into a self-asserting mainstream find it difficult to access writing and other forms of artistic expression due to institutional censors of art. (36)

The study has revealed that the idea of the predestined disposition of ethnic identity among the different communities of tribes and clans within the banner of Mizo was conceived through intentional assertion that had a political undertone and to strengthen collective bond wherein the narrative was accelerated by its history of effective domination during colonisation. Moreover, historical events are incorporated in Mizo narrative to corroborate the primary discourse of unity and the spirit of inclusivity of those that might not necessarily be identified by the term Mizo proper in modern times. They, however, concur with the idea that they originated from the same ancestors and the delineation is explained by Joy L.K Pachhuau that, at different times and locations, different "tribes" that were known as the "Kuki-Chin-Lushai" group during colonial times and that dispersed throughout parts of the modern states of Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur, and Assam, as well as Bangladesh and Burma, have either identified as Mizo or have been incorporated as Mizo (11). The concept of ethnic and cultural identity as asserted by Saiawi resonates, in many aspects, with the prevailing accepted perception of mainstream discourse such as the idea of Mizo identity as predisposed from the time of the pre-colonial era where migratory patterns and shared primary systems of settlement provided a conducive environment for acculturation between different clans and sub-clans that paved the way for a larger ethnic description under the term Mizo (LRL 4). His narrative

provides a careful examination of the past and includes the many implications of historical events which are needed for the avoidance of misinterpreting circumstances leading to a misplaced understanding of history that could prove detrimental to Mizo understanding of their identity and themselves.

The post-colonial Mizo discourse reflected the attitude of subservience to the British narrative about the Mizos and in effect led to the inferior self-image of the Mizos. The idealisation of Western culture dismissed, by large, the many efforts made the Mizos to reclaim their traditional heritage and customs long after colonisation ended. Saiawi's narratives are among those that eschew the totality of the imperialist initiatives and efforts in building modern Mizo society. Even the commendation of the pioneering acts of introducing formal education starting with the introduction of the written script of the Mizo language and the adaptation of Christianity came with them the uncomfortable realities about the process of aligning them to the Mizo culture. The initial attempt at defining Mizo cultural identity in the immediate post-colonial era posed reservations against shedding off many of the British influences in the cultural and religious domain. The dismantling of cultural and traditional modes of function during colonisation left the Mizos grappling with forging a collective identity from the fragments of Mizo cultural history. The many milestones achieved through the induction of institutions such as education, a new religion and a Western system of government that were hailed as harbingers of modernity had little influence on reinforcing confidence in the Mizo people in general because of the absence of real power of control in these institutions. Despite the oppressive society during colonial times, the actual practice of developing these institutions and many positive cultural changes were largely implemented by the Mizos themselves after colonisation ended. The realities depicted during colonial times, as shown in official and personal accounts of the British officials themselves, reveal that most of what had been heralded as noble quests of the imperialists were in fact proved as administrative conveniences without any purpose to progress beyond some very specific needs that needed to be fulfilled for successful ruling. The institution of formal schooling was not meant to reach extensive heights or be far-reaching for the Mizo society. During colonial times and the post-colonial Mizoram,

it was actually the Mizos themselves who rallied and mobilised for building up schools even in remote parts of Mizoram as the select author highlights the efforts of the Mizos hailing from the villages of Saihum and Mualnuam. Due to the lack of resources and political power in the impoverished state of Mizoram even the most promising students of these schools had no opportunities to make real differences in terms of career, political, and social prospects.

Recent post-colonial reflections on imperialist rule and its impacts are more critical in assessing colonial influences and the move towards an affirmation of Mizo culture in the modern intellectual Mizo discourse. K.C. Lalvunga acknowledges, in his deliberations of Mizo's social developments within a century, that the British colonisation brought about significant changes towards modernity which reinforced the importance of self-affirmation and self-sufficiency of which the latter had been an integral part of Mizo social principle. His appraisal becomes more critical and discerning when he conveys his assessment on the various administrative functions of the British stating that their government barely made attempts at the betterment of the Mizo public supported by the existence of only single administrators for each important public department i.e. agriculture, education, and Public Works Department (PWD). In addition, the government built hospitals only at Aizawl in the north and Lunglei in the south of Mizoram which, in his estimation, reveals the government's imperialistic attitude. He comments that even these insufficient vital public services were established for their own conveniences and such services would barely reach the Mizos. He states during the 60 years of British colonisation all they did for the Mizos was to force us to work and beat those who defied their command (81-83). The experience of the Mizos during the colonial era was heavily nuanced as reflected in the select texts. Though the introduction of formal education was initiated under the Christian mission in Mizoram, the real leap to extensive education of the masses came after colonisation ended. Saiawi employs juxtaposition of the rural and the urban through the academic journey of a few characters in his texts. In the process of their academic journey that requires migration from rural areas to the state's capital Aizawl, the author showcases changes in the cultural and moral climate of Mizoram. The characters from the two separate storylines of Laiawrha in

LRH and Nukawki in the eponymous novel NKK transition from their rural native village to Aizawl where the author brings out the impetus put to education and modernity by the growing conscious public. After the independence of India, Mizoram had larger exposure to other cultures and political freedom to determine its own cultural characteristics while relying heavily on the growing consciousness of its ethnic identity. However, the immediate post-colonial Mizoram faced difficult challenges on economic and political fronts.

The pressures of self-governance for an impoverished Mizoram in the aftermath of colonisation with the looming threat of famine escalated the frustration and disappointment toward the Indian Union which was politicised heavily during the time. Saiawi illuminates the fact that initial post-colonial problems lay within the Mizo anxiety of a domination from other cultures where two opposing factions appear in politics. This enhanced Mizo political discourse toward integration and independence from the Indian Union. The ideology of building a sovereign nation was adopted by the Mizo National Front (MNF) and this aspect was heavily forced upon the general public. They appealed to the masses about the political party's dictum as the only means of realising Mizo ethnic identity. The tension between the MNF and the Mizo Union resulted in bitter and often hostile course of actions and it resulted in widespread unrest in Mizoram which culminated in the fateful conflict of 1966. The political turmoil left a deep wound in the collective psyche of the Mizo people with tales of rampant assault, rape, famine and displacement looming large in its wake. The radical ideology about ethnic identity formulated during the time in the political domain greatly determines discourses in Mizo identity which is why Saiawi makes the political climate in and around the conflict one of the core themes in his texts. Retrospections by Mizo scholars and academicians scholars, including Saiawi, express their incredulity about the ill-preparedness and oblivion of the political activists about the fragile economic state of the recently independent Mizoram from the British rule in which the Mizo civilians paid a heavy price. However, the fervent political discourses during the time contributed an incredible amount of effort in affirming Mizo ethnic identity. In fact, many narratives celebrating the pre-colonial Mizo ethos and way of life were envisioned and perpetuated under the duress of

political tension. The dismal political condition of Mizoram at the time of independence was seen from the poor economic relief from the central Indian Union. Mizos were largely excluded from the greater Indian political discourse which called for the Mizo politicians to mobilise the collective voices to put pressure on the Indian Union.

Such efforts in gaining meaningful attention toward Mizoram's economic needs continually met with a dead end, which frustrated the Mizos, and the idea of secession from the Indian Union was very appealing in times of crisis. The execution of the idealists' politics proved very tragic as seen from the select texts and amidst the chaos, the collective will of the people galvanised the patriotic sense of recollecting the Mizo past. The pervasive idealisation of pre-colonial Mizoram ignited an impassioned sense of identity which penetrated all aspects of Mizo society including its culture, beliefs and religiosity. This constructed notion of identity helped in many ways to negotiate and revise the many customs and traditions, relegated by the imperialists, and to seek affirmation toward Mizo cultural practices and strengthening the Mizo narratives. The compulsion to reinforce ethnic identity that arose out of adversities has elements of morality in practice. Morality has an augmentative effect in allaying the ethnic discourse and one of the foremost influences that worked effectively in the Mizo cultural sphere is the church. Thus, the complementary functions of morality and ethnicity also work in tandem with the religious institution. The evolution of the Mizo Christian religion is a marked distinction that shares the uniqueness of the evolution of Mizo ethnic identity ascription and is thereby continually modified to align with the prevailing discourses within the cultural realm. Saiawi incorporates elements of Mizo Christian morality, especially in his appraisal of the tension between the traditional and the modern. In his portrayal, he criticises the prevalent and elusive concept of modernity as practised in the cultural sphere in post-colonial Mizoram which is inconsistent with the more traditional sense of morality validated by Mizo Christianity. There is a tone of disapproval in the author's appraisal of the newer generation's confusion about the idea of a 'better life' in terms of self-indulgences on substance and alcohol abuse. His social criticism focuses on the dissipating way of life adopted by the younger

generation and their disregard for the larger fabric of Mizo society. His portrayal of this negative change in the Mizo cultural life is indicated by the social life found in Aizawl city which is the centre and major hub of modernity. The comparison drawn by the author to the 'modern life' of Aizawl to the accepted norm within Mizo culture was the lack of moderation and restraint especially in the nightlife of the Mizo youth. He explains that such moral degradation of the youth was a direct affront to the treasured Mizo principles of social and familial obligations.

The social dynamics that are highlighted in the texts serves as contributing factors to define the Mizo sense of cultural identity and it is represented as the framework for the acclimatisation that took place within Mizo Christianity. The introduction to Christianity during colonial times was not particularly accepting of Mizo cultural practices and such practices and customs that have elements of pagan beliefs were completely rejected and excluded from the church. However, such omissions of vital parts of Mizo's cultural identity made it difficult for the Mizo people to embrace the religion as their own. Saiawi concurs that revival movements provided space for culturally participative actions in modifying the way that the Mizos practice the religion and ensured that the religion aligned with their cultural sensibilities. This process of nativising Christianity worked wonders for the Mizo people even as they embrace the religion. As stated by Saiawia in LRL, about his primary character Chhuahi's conversion during a time when spiritual revival took place in the village, a majority of the people in the village took interest and participated in the religious movement due to the power of its ethnic claims. The author's incorporation of Christian themes in the development of the story becomes more positive toward Christianity thereafter and his representation of Christianity is not so much an issue for the Mizo society rather the problem lies in the mode of its introduction purely because of its restrictive approach toward Mizo cultural practices. Another significant aspect of morality as manifested through social and religious dynamics in Mizo society is that it is acutely socio-centric. Saiawi's works also reflect the same sense of collectiveness that prevails within Mizo society but his narrative also presents changes in Mizo perception regarding social conventions that relegate Mizo tradition and customary laws. The onset of modernity as implied by

Saiawi entails the multiplicity of experiences made possible by the changes in Mizo economy, education, the church's evolution, and governmental system. Such influential institutions brought about a more modern outlook concerning identity that acknowledges the significance of individuality and the self. Though Saiawi is critical of some of the manifestations of such influences in the individuals, the overall premise of his texts present the uniqueness of each experience in such categories as the younger generation, the Mizo women, and the average man in the community. Saiawi's writings resonate with the everyday experiences of the Mizos specially in terms of the individual dilemmas against social norms within their immediate communities. Nukawki's dilemma with her father regarding the discontinuation of her education is situated in the realm of social convention. Her father's fears of condemnation that his daughter would incur shame because of her simple act of watching movies with her male friends represents one of the many ways in which modernity interacts with tradition. In a rural setting such as Mualnuam, social norms and conventions are also made moral issues. This tension between traditional and social conventions with that of influences of the modernity constitutes the primary element in the select texts which are located in post-colonial Mizoram. Saiawi's juxtaposition of rural way of life and the more urban capital Aizawl projects the complexity of Mizoram's transition to its modern era. However, the underlying force of collective identity forged through ethnicity and religiosity ultimately determine the outcome of the characters' journey and their realization of their sense of identity.

The intricate connection of the Mizos with their ethnic identity pervades through Saiawi's narrative in sections where he depicts the negotiation of modernity among the Mizos. He acknowledges the problem of negotiation in several instances such as the narrative of Darchhuana who achieves success through corrupt means highlighting the rampant practice of corruptions during Mizoram's status as Union territory. The challenging life journey of Nukawki also includes the murder of her son by a drunk driver who comes from a powerful family. The perpetrator evades authority but commits suicide. Saiawi reiterates in several sections of his texts about the vices that penetrates within Mizo society after the onset of modernity, highlighting the struggle for freedom among the youth amidst the confluence of

traditional and modern Mizo culture. He condemns the unbridled indulgence of many youths to vices such as drinking, sex, and crimes. He uses such negative influences to demonstrate the problems of negotiating modernity in Mizo culture. In the select texts, primary characters have little control over their reputation and the onslaught of social judgements when they commit acts that are not accepted within Mizo convention. Their predicaments reveal that the concept of the 'self' is not separate, isolated and autonomous in Mizo society. It is rather attached and interwoven into the fabric of society. Their respective communities act as moral agents that pronounce a spectrum of moral judgements based on the particular moral climate and social disposition prevailing within that community. Therefore, the concept of individuality becomes problematic whenever an individual commits actions that society regards as threats to itself. In such scenarios, the select texts detail the characters' difficult journey to redemption and reparation in their community. Though these characters fight for their place in society in their own unique ways they all fall within the generic description of the Mizo idea of sensible living. Their family dynamics position at the forefront and their acceptance into family dynamics and qualification to larger collective society ultimately becomes the measure of their self-worth and value as an individual.

As mentioned in the study, certain traditional practices become vilified and are made moral issues concerning beliefs and recreational activities like the drinking of traditional rice beer called *zu* and almost all other cultural celebrations of festivals in lieu of their connotations to paganism. Aside from Mizo religious practices, other social laws such as pregnancy outside of marriage that are depicted by Saiawi demonstrate how cultural response corroborates the Christian laws which meant that society's retribution in times of violation of any moral rules becomes more severe than in the pre-Christian era. Nukawki's terrible experiences conveys the unforgiving nature of her breach of moral rules regarding pre-marital sex. Her fall from grace begins with gossip about losing character by going to the cinema with boys and this makes her lose her chance of achieving academic success and her life goes downhill from the events that follow her discontinuation of formal school. She becomes vulnerable and is taken advantage of by Chhungbuluka leading to her pregnancy out

of wedlock. The simple way of life through family relations and informal social qualification is presented as the epitome of the ideal life in the select texts. The complications of life as they are portrayed reflect the need for a delicate balance of private and social life. Such intrigues that come out in the struggle to balance the private and the social often lead to negative reputation and stigmatisation (as that of Sakawlhi who is dubbed a bully), Laiawrha is mainly identified by his illegitimate status, Chhuhahthangi and Nukawki are victims of social reprobation due to their illegitimate pregnancies. Thus, the characters all struggle to achieve their place within social norms and their journeys toward redemption take place within the familial forefront. Consequent to their adaptation to their family values they are able to come out as dignified and respectable and this is denoted in the characters of Laiawrha and Sakawlhi who built a happy family and Nukawki is eventually reunited with her one true love and her fate turns around for the better.

The moral narrative of these primary characters that belong to the colonial and the immediate post-colonial era are portrayed as simple and straightforward. Their moral complications require conventionality and traditional norms to transform the status of the characters. Saiawi's interest and focus are primarily toward such values and morals that are informed by Mizo ethnic history as he regards them as central to Mizo values. Other aspects of influence such as formal institutions including education and career advancement are not explored in detail, although a few characters have involvements in small degrees. The author's portrayal of the more recent times especially that of the third generation that includes characters like Darchhuana and Zochhuana provides glimpses of the influences of modern institutions. Darchhuana is among those who benefit through corruption to amass wealth for his personal benefit. Unethical practices which he learns from his uncle are left unpunished and justice is met with only through his personal life which is ridden with an unhappy marriage. The absence of details of such vital influences as career choices that form the structure of Mizo society makes the texts limited in their scope of representing the vital elements of modern Mizo cultural life. Any economic success outside of formal institutions is accrued through family owned businesses such as Laiawrha's family in LRH and Lianhawla's family in NKF. Saiawi mainly

focuses on the family and social dynamics. One of the central themes that pervade through his texts is the gendered nature of the domestic realm and in effect, the author's works are teeming with stories of Mizo female experiences. Saiawi's advocacy for the cause of women is apparent from the strong female protagonists in his texts and the primary plotlines are developed mainly from the lives of the female characters. He denotes the many ways in which Mizo women in their society are at a disadvantage. Even in such female-driven texts, the women are represented as achieving an identity adjacent to their male counterpart. They are mostly if not all confined to their biological and domestic capacities. Strong female characters like Chhuhathangi, Sakawli, and Nukawki all have to rely on male figures for their redemption and success. Women who strive for an independence of identity in some degrees, such as Makuki and Hazel, are depicted with a didactic tone of unfulfilling lives with their choices.

The female stories in the select texts all dwell within the social realm and any attempts at success in their career are met with the threat of social opprobrium such as seen from false gossip about Nukawki while she is at Aizawl pursuing her academics, and the negative depiction of educated characters like Makuki and Hazel. Other female characters who acquired their education to a graduate level like Darkungi and Mazami are depicted as traditional model Mizo women who possess ideal qualities that are set for Mizo women but there is no mention of their aspirations other than their domestic life and being supportive of their husbands alone. Among the older generations of women are Chhuhathangi, Sakawli, Nukawki and several secondary female characters who have lived during times that have limited opportunities for women, are afflicted with various forms of depreciation of women vindicated by patriarchal traditions. Such gendered problems that occur in the text could be seen in how Mizo women are made to be completely reliant on male figures especially at times of pregnancy out of wedlock, they are not entitled custody of their children by Mizo custom, and they are also not entitled to any physical properties at their parents' homes or at their husbands' homes. They accrued social reproach in the event of divorce, they are victims of rampant physical and psychological abuse in their homes, they have generally more customary rules to

abide by in order to earn dignity, and they easily fall victim to different forms of sexual assaults. The section that depicts the frightening and tragic night of the sexual assault committed to Nukawki reveals the unsettling realities of such victims. The fear, guilt and shame as represented by Nukawki implicates the contorted practice of victim blaming and shaming that persisted in society that is primarily inflicted on women has led to a delay or absence of justice for the victim altogether. Saiawi's representation reveals that Mizo women are still largely perceived as the vulnerable weaker sex and that the only means of ascribing identity for themselves is in adjunct to the male figures. The Mizo women's experiences highlight the sore need for the revision of traditional and customary laws that are framed to accommodate the patriarchal system and to reform discourses regarding stereotypically demeaning perceptions toward women. The vulnerability of women is often the narrative exploited against women and reinforced through culture and social practices and this has led to the isolation of women's issues. In the Mizo ideals about women, the domestic and the biological are still continuous grounds on which Mizo women must negotiate with.

Modernity has ushered in many changes in Mizo society. This has led to an increase in the multiplicity of experiences of the Mizos where multi-discourse and multi-cultural interactions in various walks of life constantly blur the line of morals and ethics. The acute consciousness of religiosity sometimes confines Mizo fiction in a single moral dimension and leaves limited room to offer complex social and individual experiences on secular grounds. Such consideration throws to light the need to encourage the arts to make headway toward authentic representation of experiences on secular terms. The evolution of Mizo fiction is still relatively nascent and is continuing to determine its course of engagement toward genre variations that better reflect the diversity of human experiences. This ongoing engagement to narrative is most apparent in the historical genre where the act of remembering historical events projects greater assertion of the regional voices of such writers. The ever-evolving Mizo cultural proclivities are studied while bringing in influences from morality, historical events and Mizo women's experiences. These cultural influences were particularly chosen for their relevance in the understanding of Mizo

culture. The author's contribution to the Mizo mainstream discourse concerning Mizo identity is representational for its historical relevance and widespread acceptance within the Mizo society. His writings could be interpreted as the author's activism in asserting the collective Mizo identity through its cultural, ethnic, and moral history. Saiawi's representation of Mizo culture offered the intrinsic interconnectedness of Mizo people because his appraisal of historical events corroborated with the evolution of the cultural life. As Levy asserts that "only those preferences are to be taken seriously that pass some kind of test, in which we reflect critically upon them" (145), Saiawi's non-judgemental portrayal of experiences of the Mizos with all its merits and vices is greatly beneficial for its contribution toward the assertion of Mizo cultural uniqueness. The representational texts portrayed in the study reflect shared sentiments and render space for critical reflections that transcend beyond the present need in defining Mizo cultural identity and may provide its bountiful critical perspectives for the future as well.

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ABSTRACT

**DYNAMICS OF CULTURE AND MORALITY IN SELECT
NOVELS OF LALHMINGLIANA SAIAWI**

**AN ABSTRACT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY**

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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND CULTURE STUDIES
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND LANGUAGES
SEPTEMBER, 2025**

**DYNAMICS OF CULTURE AND MORALITY IN SELECT NOVELS OF
LALHMINGLIANA SAIAWI**

BY

HMINGSANGZUALI

Department of English and Culture Studies

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Submitted

**In partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in English and Culture Studies of Mizoram University, Aizawl.**

The evolution of Mizo cultural life is greatly shaped by social ethics and practices since the beginning of its known history and this thesis analyses the dynamics of culture and morality presented in the works of Lalhmingliana Saiawi within the ambit of select texts, namely, *Lungrang Laiawrha* (1993), *Lungrang Hmangaihna* (1995), *Nukawki* (1996), and *Nukawki Fanu* (1998). Owing to the contingency and subjectivity of the concept and practices of morality across different cultures, discourses concerning morality “reflected and refined social relations, centrally defining changed images of social subjectivity across time and place” (Goldberg 197). Mizo pre-colonial, colonial, and post colonial experiences play a crucial role in Mizo cultural description where major shifts in these historical moments are located outside of Mizo traditional discourse to a constructed one where moral agencies such as religion, education, and modernity are signified as cultural legitimation and justification. The Mizo socio-centric culture of the past is examined through the interplay of morality and historical influences presented in Saiawi’s works that resulted in a fractured and hybridised Mizo culture.

Lalhmingliana Saiawi was born on 1st January 1940 at Kawlkulh in Mizoram to Thlahaia and Lalruni. Saiawi was the eldest of ten siblings. His self-given surname Saiawi was taken from his grandfather’s name; a man who had a profound and enduring impact on the author. The author had an impressive academic and career background that reflected his industry and sincerity. He acquired his Intermediate of Arts degree from Cotton College in Guwahati in the first division in 1959 and continued to pursue a bachelor's degree at St. Edmund's College in Shillong in 1961 and graduated with a degree in economics. He was hired by the Assam Electricity Board as a Junior Assistant, a post he held from 1961 until 1964. Thereafter, he was posted to the Maharashtra Cadre after qualifying for the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in 1964, a post he held for thirty-two years up until his voluntary retirement in March 1993. From April 1993 to March 1998, he served as a member of the Maharashtra Administrative Tribunal followed by his work at the Central Administrative Tribunal at Patna Bench from April 1999 to December 2001. The author died on 5th June 2016 after suffering from health complications that afflicted much of his later years. Saiawi was an avid reader and an even more inspired writer

as reflected from his prolific literary production. He was a celebrated novelist, essayist, and well-known contributor of articles in reputed newspapers in Mizoram. His works in the fiction genre includes nine novels and, besides the texts selected for study, his other works are *Keimah Unionliana* (1997), *A Na Lua* (2002), *Tawitawkawn Chemângi* (2006), *Makpa Atan* (2011), and “*Chutiang pawh a ni lo ka nu*” (2013). His non-fictional works include compilations of essays and articles covering versatile topics from his insights about the Mizo language to Mizo social issues. Such works published in book form include nine books in total, namely, six books in the *Thukhawchang* series published between 1989-2015, two books in the *Ka Lo Tawn Ve* series published in 1997 and 2010 respectively, and *Kan Ram Lamah* (1999).

Saiawi's writings are inspired largely by the author's strong family values. The author was essentially a very committed family man which is reflected in his texts where family dynamics and relationships are among his favoured themes. His critical comments for the betterment of the Mizos reflect his genuine passion for meaningful changes in many areas of Mizo's social and cultural life. His core tenet of strengthening Mizo culture lies in the family dynamics and, in effect, he often writes about the complexities of human emotions in the hope of strengthening relationships. His fiction dramatises family dynamics with the central assertion on social relations and, through the process, he reveals his greater intent on related themes such as social awareness, historical influences and cultural discourse within the ambit of morality. Saiawi often invokes traditional Mizo moral sensibility in his novels and he expounds on the moral obligation of writers to give reflections on life, romance, relationships, marriage, family while reflecting upon the socio-cultural dynamics. He asserts that the interconnectedness through relationships forms the basis of existence and one must always strive to strengthen these relationships (*Thukhawchang vol. IV* 273). Morality and culture serve as guiding precepts for the Mizo society in order to navigate life and Saiawi lived the principle and echoes it in his writings.

In his texts, Saiawi has focused upon the evolution of Mizo moral climate where there is a great deal of engagement concerning moral judgements in terms of freedom, justice, fairness, harm, and advocacy of human rights. Thus, cultural contexts are under immense scrutiny with regards to moral responsibility. Such considerable interest in the interaction of culture and morality reveals the vital connection between the two concepts while signifying the contingency and subjectivity of the case. Mary Edmunds explains, “As morality is about choice and reason is about order, culture is about framing those choices and giving meaning to them and to the particular order that prevails. Culture mediates and makes meaningful the relationship between reason and morality” (12). Contemporary Mizo social issues are presented by Saiawi in his novels and these pertain to an increase in criminal activities, alcoholism, drug abuse, licentiousness, corruption, idleness, and identity crisis. His social criticism and commentaries reflect urgency and concerns for the social future of Mizo progeny. Saiawi’s texts offer valuable space for reflection in terms of their narration of Mizo cultural evolution where the author asserts his rationale on the grounds of historical evidences that resulted in discursive discourses in the Mizo cultural realm. His narration denotes the importance of reflection and the instructive qualities of cultural history in providing perspectives. As Isaac asserts, “cultural progress with respect to moral thinking must be able to account for nonarbitrary social change” (671), Mizo culture positions its unique mark by reasons of its traditional heritage which consists of pivotal changes due to various disruptions to its natural development. Saiawi denotes that the colonial period in Mizoram awakened the need for consolidation of cultural identity in the Mizos in order to counter the threat of their social unity. In *Lungrang Hmangaihna*, he illustrates that a constant subversion of Mizo traditional social hierarchy had occurred during the British colonisation. He denotes on how the British controlled the Mizo chiefs which had eroded and destabilised social order. (182)

He depicts in *Lungrang Laiawrha* as to how Mizo custom and tradition was severely undermined in the everyday social functioning of the Mizos such as the *zawlbuk* custom that was relegated during colonisation (5-11). The venerated *zawlbuk* custom, where Mizo men learned wisdom acquired through tradition that

had been passed down from the elders, was the training ground that acquainted Mizo men on the noble ways of conducting themselves in their society and on how to correctly apply their service to the community. The imperialist domination of Mizo social and political life was stifling the cultural growth of the people and they were constantly in need of aligning their tradition and custom with western sensibility without proper substituting systems to fill the void of their cultural repression. The threat to their cultural survival raised real concern and anxiety among the Mizos people who feared that the hegemonic rule put social relations at risk of dissension and discord. It was with the same unease, suspect, and apprehension of western influences that the Mizos responded to the introduction of Christianity. Some of the early Mizo Christians were met with downright hostility from their own community as Vanlalchhuanawma comments, “The natural response of the Mizos was seen in their indifference, repulsion and open retaliation through different forms of persecution of the converts” (127). This constant friction between the church and Mizo traditional culture persisted throughout Mizo Christian and cultural history. Saiawi incorporates cultural nuances of Christianity in several of his texts so as to reveal the deeper underlying social and historical implications for the Mizo through their struggle in adapting the religion within their cultural ethos. His novels *Lungrang Laiawrha*, *Tawitawkawn Chemângi*, and “*Chutiang pawh a ni lo ka nu*” are situated during the advent of Christianity during colonial Mizoram.

It was primarily through Mizo cultural influence to Christianity that Mizo ethnic identity awareness was reinforced in the Mizo consciousness which attests to the endurance of Mizo cultural discourse and of Mizo Christianity till date. As Lalsangkima Pachuau comments, “Christianity has been so closely interwoven with the Mizo cultural identity that it has become an important foundation of the Mizos’ self-understanding. The Mizo social norms and cultural values are now determined in a large measure by Christianity” (111). As a practicing Christian, Saiawi commends the religion for the Mizos but strongly criticises the attitude of many whom he believes follow Christianity merely as a product of cultural conformity and devoid of true conviction (*Tawitawkawn Chemângi* 75-79). Saiawi’s principles on Mizo inclusive culture emphasises more on Mizo traditional heritage because he considers

every individual as a moral agent who puts society at risk in the absence of moral and social responsibility. His acute awareness of the constructedness of Mizo cultural discourse is reflected in his sincerity of narration, strong working ethics, and honest living. His progressive approach to envision differently on secular terms against the dominant strains in Mizo narrative world allows his narrative to move beyond the overt religiosity of the narratives of many Mizo writers. His objective stance in his narrative engagement does not reflect an act of defiance or subversion but it denotes his pursuit of vital truths about Mizo cultural evolution. His principle intent that garnered upon Mizo cultural past appears to be an attempt to set right the perception that Mizo traditionality is the anathema of modernity, progress and advancement. In such spirit, he expresses his genuine fondness of *Puma Zai*, which was formerly attacked vehemently during the height of its popularity by the church due to its heavy pre-Christian influence, because he attributes this particular genre of Mizo songs as a unifying agent among the Mizos and subsequently, its influence of the Mizo language among the people who share the same ancestry (*Thukhawchang vol. IV* 107). Saiawi attempts to debunk the misplaced connotation of modernity and progress shared amongst the Mizos with that of the western culture that resulted in the continuing negation and deprecation of Mizo traditional culture. The bildungsroman *Nukawki* depicts the titular Nukawki's growth from her misplaced sense of superiority against the people in her rural home village Mualnuam. She is among the few who receive formal education and she looks down upon her peers because of this aspect. As her story develops further, she eventually transforms into a self-effacing strong woman who identifies within the Mizo traditional culture.

Saiawi's didacticism calls for change within Mizo discourse that becomes more and more fragmentary in our contemporary world and advocates for Mizo traditionality that is firmly rooted in communality and inclusivity. In his texts where he reflects on Mizo social life, there is a great emphasis on cultural assertion and an exhortation to take pride in Mizo cultural identity. He expresses that Mizo people have goodwill and benevolence towards other tribes and culture and he revels in the fact that Mizo society is a charitable society that is always ready and willing to lend a hand towards the needy. He commends the Mizo sense of communality from yore

because he believes that an organic and true kindred spirit exists in the fabric of Mizo culture and that members within the culture inculcate a sense of concern for the well-being of others regardless of differences (124). His passion for communal well-being reigns supreme in his *rambua*i narratives in texts such as *Lungrang Hmangaihna*, *Keimah Unionliana*, and *Nukawki Fanu*. The very act of revisiting rambua*i* era has layered nuances for the Mizos and Saiawi's narratives have a profound and lasting impact on Mizo cultural discourse because they provide an engagement of truths and meaning pertaining to its cause, the nature of the people's sufferings, and the hope of healing. Moreover, discourse through such narratives provides modes of its documentation and knowledge about the historical event that become tremendously consequential in Mizo identity formation.

Within Saiawi's discourse on Mizo culture, his focus on gender dynamics pertains to Mizo women's experiences in a patriarchal society. Saiawi is known for his extensive portrayal of Mizo women and their experiences. He offers a plethora of Mizo women's experiences in his novels, which are filled with primary women characters, and most, if not all, of the female characters navigate their life journey in a deeply patriarchal framework, and their self-realisation is intricately determined by their male counterparts. Though the author has entitled *Lungrang Laiawrha* and *Lungrang Hmangaihna* based on the male primary character Laiawrha, he advances the narratives primarily through female characters such as Chhuhathangi, Sakawlhi, Laleni, Hazel, and Darkungi. The novel *Nukawki* and its sequel *Nukawki Fanu* recount the tumultuous life of the eponymous female character Nukawki. The author's celebration of Mizo women is apparent from his portrayal of a vast array of their experiences and thereby exposing their strength and resilience through their many challenges.

Gender dynamics in Mizo society has evolved within an ethno-cultural history right from pre-colonial to modern times. Since Mizo society is inherently patriarchal, social structures are constructed from traditions and customs that continue to reinforce gender gap. The lives of Saiawi's female characters denote their unfair struggles against patriarchy and their inability to forge their identities in their

own terms. Their success stories come under duress of either war or necessities of survival. In *Thukhawchang Vol. II*, he denotes the unfairness of Mizo women's predicament especially in situations where women fall out of societal norms which he carefully and deliberately depicts in his novels. He passionately expresses his positive stance for Mizo women affirming that he fiercely advocates for their dignity and status in the society. (127)

His message concerning women's empowerment comes in the form of female characters who overcome the burden of marginalization to rebuild their lives. He purposefully frames these characters as excelling in society before their fall from grace so as to bring out the 'irony' and 'fickleness' of Mizo women's position. Their redemption and reclamation were laden with enormous obstacles which often claim their identity and selfhood. Certain gendered pre-Christian beliefs persisted even after the advent of Christianity alongwith many other beliefs that harbour stigmatisation of women in areas like education of the girl child, sexual assault, childbearing, extra-marital affair, divorce, custody of children, and property rights. The life of Dari, a devout practicing Christian, who dies at childbirth, or *raicheh* in Mizo, depicts the transient nature of women's status in Mizo society. Dari's burial rites had to be completed quickly on the day of her death rather than a traditional funeral the day following, indicating the disheartening perception toward women (*Lungrang Laiawrha* 116-125). His female characters have not been given a fair chance to thrive outside their domestic confinements. Their successes outside the domestic realm are achievable only during isolated cases of extreme and turbulent circumstances that exempt them from gender roles. The status of Mizo women have advanced, along with the evolution of Mizo culture, through the influences of education, modernity, and Christianity in transforming and expanding the space of Mizo women yet the underlying patriarchal structures that pervade social and moral systems within Mizo culture continue to limit the scope of women's emancipation.

Chapter I: An Author: Lalhmingliana Saiawi

The introductory chapter explores the life of Lalhmingliana Saiawi detailing his academic, career, and personal aspects of his life. It also explores his works by

categorising them within fiction and non-fiction genres. The exploration of his works include a brief overview and analysis of specific works identifying his moral principles from the narrative of Mizo cultural history. As a consequential Mizo literary figure, Saiawi's principle of objectivity and freedom of expression in favour of representing social realities in his writings provides powerful insights into the interplay of culture and morality in Mizo society. He voices out messages of understanding and unity concerning the ethnic description of 'Mizo'. His perspective of the ethnography of the Mizo people is inclusive of the many tribes and clans that have similar roots but have become separated through the course of history. This idea of brotherhood and fraternity among similar ancestry is shared by many among the Mizo but he advises against forcing the idea on other tribes who do not want to identify as such. He stresses the need to introspect within the Mizo society about how others perceive Mizos and how they must do better in rendering their services for the cause of others and keep alive the spirit of harmony and unity. (*Thukhawchang vol. IV* 114)

The Mizo cultural history has been fraught with myriads of struggles characterised with oppression, force, violence, and repression leading to monumental historical shifts which are all crucial cultural memories for Saiawi. His central concern that transpire out of the many struggles of the Mizo is the need to continue the constructed discourse on Mizo cultural consolidation that is governed by an ethical and conscientious understanding of Mizo traditionality. His cultural aspiration for the Mizo entails the reinforcement of social relations invoked through cultural memory that reflects tolerance, industry, perseverance, and social responsibility.

Chapter II: Culture and the Mizo

Mizo cultural identity is intrinsically connected with its ethnic ties in terms of ancestry, language, shared history, religion, tradition and customs. Peter Wade comments on the basic premise of ethnicity by explaining ethnicity as "a social construction that is centrally about identifications of difference and sameness" (15). Barot et al. assert that "ethnic groups themselves often present a primordial argument about their existence but a systematic historical examination of the group in question

may show that a particular set of economic and political circumstances determine ethnic identities” (3). The statement is a loaded claim for the Mizos whose economic and political circumstances were determined by the hegemonic control of the British.

Saiawi’s portrayal of the events and participation of the Mizos in the two World Wars in *Nukawki* and *Lungrang Laiawrha* are significant in Mizo cultural history because of the mode in which the events provided empowering perception on the colonial and postcolonial discourses for the Mizo. These ventures in global events consequently resulted in their desire to change and expand their cultural horizon leading to a more widespread acceptance of the contentious introduction to Christianity and formal education. It was toward the end of colonization that there was cultural, political and social awakening that emphasised upon the need to reinforce ethnic identity, and there came about a conscious zeal and effort to reclaim and revisit the pre-colonial Mizo cultural history. Saiawi also denotes in *Lungrang Hmangaihna* and *Nukawki Fanu* about the political transition of the immediate postcolonial Mizoram that ushered in a new era of uncertainty that eventually led to *rambuai* in 1966 which profoundly impacted Mizo society and weighed heavily as a period of collective trauma and suffering. The bombings of the jet fighters, burning of villages, displacing entire towns and their people, rampant physical assault, persecution, and rape were among the many agonising *rambuai* experiences of the Mizo people. The Mizos had resented the intimidating warfare approach of the political party in power, i.e the Mizo National Front, while their appeal on grounds of ethnocentric idealism attracted the public in the beginning of its activism. The military response to the revolt by the Indian Union put the public in throes of persecution from both forces, which resulted in a period of misery that claimed the lives of many Mizo civilians up until the signing of the Mizoram Peace Accord in 1986. Saiawi’s discourse on *rambuai* represents the impact of collective memory in reshaping and redefining Mizo ethnic and cultural identity through the medium of narrative art and most importantly, the significance of narrative as a mode of healing and to find meaning amidst the trauma.

The widespread transformations due to colonisation, integration into the larger Indian Union and the influence of modernity are still influential agencies in the Mizo cultural discourse. Saiawi emphasises upon the legacy of those who represent the indomitable spirit of Mizo culture by depicting the stories of ordinary people who most embody the Mizo cultural life. In 2019, he stated that even in the modern times, lineages and ancestry are still put as imperative in forging kinship but, in spite of this fact, it is fortunate that conflicts of an ethnic nature never reappear among the Mizos (*Thukhawchang vol. IV* 112). His statement denotes his positive appraisal of the contemporary Mizo society despite its ethno-centric warring culture of yore. He situates Mizo cultural development to the macrocosm of family and social dynamics, especially on issues concerning the turbulent socio-cultural climate during colonisation and *rambuai*, as they become important influences that are embedded in the discourse of Mizo ethnic and cultural roots. His socio-historical narratives and their positive cultural affirmation form vital components in the development of Mizo cultural identity.

Chapter III: Morality as Portrayed by Saiawi

This chapter analyses the development of Mizo cultural life through the lens of its interaction with the sense of Mizo morality and the development of religious life as presented in the select texts. It focuses on the interplay of culture and morality in terms of their interrelationship with ethnic identity, and also with the dynamics pertaining to the individual and the collective. The evolution of Mizo cultural life is greatly shaped by its moral practices from time immemorial. Alongside its cultural development, religious beliefs and practices constitute essential components in informing Mizo cultural life. Saiawi recognises the indispensable elements of social and moral life of the Mizos and incorporates these elements in his texts.

The concept of morality is an ambiguous philosophical discourse which is summed up by Podjman as the study of "good and evil, and right and wrong action" (1) or in a social context, "defined as a set of cultural elements that define the nature of commitment to a particular course of behaviour" (Wuthnow 66). Religious beliefs and practices are informative of the cultural mores of the Mizo people. It could be

said that beliefs and traditions dictated all walks of their lives. Mizo Christianity of the present day owes its formation to its complementary blend with cultural elements and religious roots which necessitated continual negotiation from the time of its inception. Evidences of the continual negotiation of Christianity with Mizo traditional practices could be found in various traditional elements with which the Mizo practices Christianity over the years such as the introduction of traditional Mizo *khuangpui* and *khuangte* for worship, dances, gospel songs, and the language of worship which are modelled out of the reminiscence of the organic Mizo cultural past.

In Saiawi's portrayal of a more modern Mizo history, the individual's moral identity shifts towards goal-oriented values. The shift to urbanization has resulted in opportunities for individuals to venture out of traditional modes of sustenance to earn their livelihood. Many innovations of modernity in the form of salaried jobs, private businesses, and competitive markets also resulted in a diversity of experiences and outlook that often negate the importance of social responsibility. This posed a significant threat to the traditional and socio-centric values that are deeply rooted in Mizo culture. Saiawi's narratives highlight the detrimental effects of a lack of moral and social responsibility, as it endangers social solidarity and harmony. His narrative illustration of Mizo cultural memories captures the strength and resilience of the people which have subsequently initiated cultural advancements but his narrative also provides caution against the harm of self-serving ideologies that could potentially destroy Mizo culture in the future.

Chapter IV: Women in Saiawi's Narratives

The cultural evolution of Mizo society foregrounds the role and status of Mizo women in society. Societal norms for Mizo women were solely confined to the domestic and biological space during the agrarian-based economy in the Mizo past. Historically, Mizo women's space was domestic-bound and restrictive, leading to significant sacrifices of their personal aspirations and desires. Gender roles were rigid and enforced strongly, which after the onset of modernity became relatively flexible but the patriarchal system remains the underlying force of authority.

Appertaining to this idea, this chapter deals with an analysis of Saiawi's representation of Mizo women's experiences that highlight relevant issues which are unique to Mizo women. It locates the female characters in their historical moment in time and traces the evolution of Mizo women's role and status in their society. It further delves into the complexities of their relations with the opposite sex and highlights the degree to which disparity is manifested in their lives.

The subordination of Mizo women is reasoned invariably but essentially points to Mizoram's rough terrain and its past system of agrarian economy that called for protection against the elements, wild animals, and warfare in order to perpetuate the preconception that a woman must be sheltered. This principle of protection extends to discursive narratives about the need to confine the prospects of women within the restrictive bounds of their physical and reproductive attributes. The Mizo men's role as protector was heralded as transcending the basics of mere existence which echoes Simone de Beauvoir's rationale that the worst affliction a woman can have is being excluded from warrior missions. Man elevates himself above animals by risking his life, and not by giving birth, which is why the sex that kills is considered superior throughout humanity (76). Male supremacy on account of their physical exploits and warfare formed the foundation with which Mizo society constructed the ideals of superiority and consequently constructed gender roles and in aligning with this principle, Saiawi's meticulous depiction of Mizo women's experiences are reflected through primary aspects such as romance and marriage where he explores the pitfalls of social stigma, economic dependency, deprivation of autonomy, misogynistic social customs and traditions that are imposed on Mizo women.

The primary characters, Chhuahi and Nukawki, along with secondary characters Laleni and Dari, all face the harsh reality of social stigma due to their pregnancies out of wedlock. This stigma highlights the struggles of women in a society that often judges them harshly due to their circumstances. Other female characters are similarly typecast; for instance, Sakawli is labeled a ferocious bully, while Vungkhami endures scorn because she was raised by a single mother. In a particularly humiliating incident, Nukawki is subjected to public shame by her

romantic partner, who, out of jealousy, claims he has defiled her and embarrassingly yanks up her skirt in front of her students. Such portrayals vividly illustrate the challenges faced by women in navigating their identities within a patriarchal and judgmental society. The process of stigmatization has predisposed structures that are inherent in society as Bruce G. Link and Jo C. Phelan explain, “dominant cultural beliefs link labelled persons to undesirable characteristics-to negative stereotypes” (367). Various types of societal typecasting rooted in longstanding social norms create negative psychological impacts that hinder women's ability to lead fulfilling lives because they are denied social acceptance. Goffman comments on the harm of stigma by stating that society considers stigmatized individuals as not fully human. Based on the presumption, we engage in many forms of discrimination, which effectively, if unconsciously, diminish women’s opportunities in life. (5)

Introduction to education and Christianity has greatly helped Mizo women to achieve economic emancipation which, unfortunately, did not always ensure the end of discrimination on grounds of their biological differences. The conditional freedom of Mizo women is echoed in these lines, “Though often bound by traditional customs and duties, women in Mizoram have learnt their way to carefully blend traditionalism and modernity, which have to a large extent made it possible to climb the ladder towards her economic emancipation and independence” (Khaute 38). The evolution and consolidation of Mizo ethnic identity emphasised the importance of traditional values which, in many ways, are exploited to promote overt patriarchal sentiments. To a great extent, this misplaced interpretation of Mizo traditionality reinforces the gender gap that continue to confine many Mizo women in a limited space where they have to navigate the complex fabric of gender biases in day-to-day social functioning, formal institutions, relationships, and the workplace.

Chapter V: Conclusion

The concluding chapter denotes Saiawi’s portrayal of the Mizo culture as driven by their struggles for survival. In the past, the many milestones achieved through the induction of institutions such as formal education, a new religion and a democratic system of government that were hailed as harbingers of modernity had

little influence on reinforcing confidence in the Mizo people in general because of the absence of real power of control in these institutions. The compulsion to reinforce cultural identity that arose out of adversities has elements of morality to account and give guidance to navigate the tension between the traditional and the modern. Saiawi's non-judgemental portrayal of Mizo experiences reflects the value of Mizo cultural wisdom situated in cultural empowerment, message of tolerance, social well-being and communality.

His portrayal of various vices in the Mizo social life is countered by his philosophy of taking accountability of action and sense of social responsibility while allowing his moral principles to reflect universal concepts of social ethics that regard every member of any society as vital building blocks of collective advancement. His focus on communality, which has been instrumental in the preservation of cultural identity for the Mizos, also highlights the continual need to reflect on cultural memory. This reflection is essential for informing wisdom and knowledge that contribute to the ongoing reconstruction of present and contemporary realities. By intertwining cultural memory with current experiences, there is an opportunity to foster a deeper understanding of identity, community, and the evolution of Mizo society. In like manner, the study underlines the importance of recognizing past narratives and their influence on contemporary dynamics, ensuring that cultural preservation remains a living and adaptive process amidst changing societal landscapes.

Glossary

Note: Translation of Saiawi's book titles has been done by me for the sole purpose of the study.

A Na Lua - An Unbearable Pain.

“Chutiang pawh a ni lo ka nu” – “It is not so Mother.”

Ka Lo Tawn Ve - My Experiences

Kan Ram Lamah - In Our Home State

Keimah Unionliana - I am Unionliana.

Khuangpui - n. a big drum. (Lorrain 266)

Khuangte - n. a tambourine, a tabret, a timbrel. (266)

Lungrang Hmangaihna - The Love of Lungrang.

Lungrang Laiawrha - carries the name of the eponymous character which translates as Laiawrha of Lungrang clan.

Makpa Atan - For a Son-in-law.

Mautam tam - bamboo famine.

Nukawki - carries the name of the eponymous character Nukawki.

Nukawki Fanu - Nukawki's Daughter.

Puma Zai - a traditional genre of Mizo songs that is usually accompanied by dancing. Its popularity became controversial during the period of influx of Christianity in the early 1900s.

Thukhawchang - discourse.

Rambuai – the period of political unrest in Mizoram during 1966-1986, meaning a 'troubled land'.

Zawlbuk - n. the large house in a Lushai village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night. (562)

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