

DANCES IN MIZORAM: A HISTORICAL STUDY

BY

LALHMINGHLUI

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY & ETHNOGRAPHY

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
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**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY & ETHNOGRAPHY
MIZORAM UNIVERSITY
AIZAWL: MIZORAM**

Phone: 0389-2330531/0389-2330410

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

Dated: 31st January, 2020

Place: Aizawl

(PROF. K. ROBIN)

Supervisor

DECLARATION

I, Lalhminghlui, hereby declare that the subject matter of the dissertation entitled **“Dances in Mizoram: A Historical Study”** is the record of work done by me, that the contents of this dissertation 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 dissertation has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other Universities or Institutions.

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

Dated: 31st January, 2020

Place: Aizawl

(LALHMINGHLUI)

Candidate

Department of History & Ethnography

Mizoram University

(PROF. K. ROBIN)

Supervisor & Head

Department of History & Ethnography

Mizoram University

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LALHMINGHLUI

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY & ETHNOGRAPHY

MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

AIZAWL, MIZORAM

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It is hereby certified that the M. Phil dissertation entitled "**Dances in Mizoram: A Historical Study**" is the result of Master of Philosophy research programme and have not taken recourse to any form of Plagiarism in any of the chapters of the dissertation, except for quotations, from published and unpublished sources which are clearly indicated and acknowledged as such.

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Department of History & Ethnography

Mizoram University

(Prof. K. ROBIN)

Head & Supervisor

Department of History & Ethnography

Mizoram University

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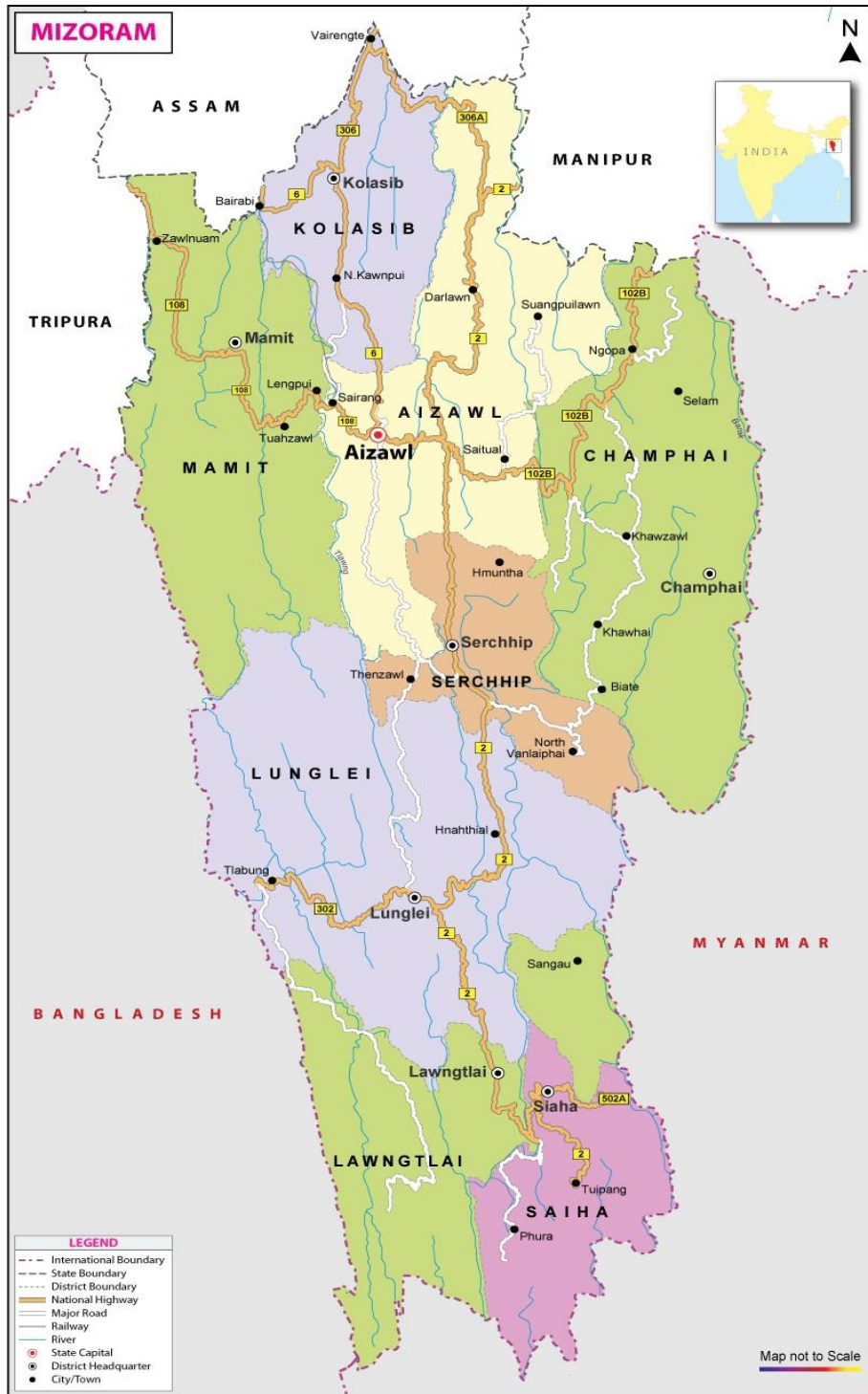
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ABBREVIATIONS

Col. : Colonel

Dr. : Doctor

Etc. : Et cetera

ft : Foot

i.e., : Id est (that is)

Lt. : Lieutenant

Chapter I: Introduction

1.1 Introduction:

Dance is basically a moving and expressing form of art which is performed in a rhythmic way to music within a given space. It is a form of expression and communication and has always been an important means of social interaction in various communities all over the world.¹ Dance is not merely a display of self, a show or showing but a form of participation in culture and a way of creating culture.² Dances are strongly interlinked with the culture and society since the prehistoric time. It even acts as a major activity in the traditional societies. In theoretical literature, dance is also sometimes defined as any patterned, rhythmic movement in space and time.³

An analysis of the nature and origin of dancing involves a consideration of three questions: *What is dancing?*, *When did man first begin to dance?* and *Why?*. The questions are clear-cut but the answers can only be described as hazy. The following definition of dancing given by A.E. Crawley, however, has the merit of being both simple and non-controversial and in addition, gives a meaningful answer to the question- *What is dancing?*. “Dancing, in its proper sense, consists in rhythmical movement of any part or all parts of the body in accordance with some scheme of individual or concerted action.”

No one knows for a certain as to when man first began to dance or why. It is not improbable that dancing preceded speech, according to a theory proposed by Langer⁴ who traces origin of dance to the spontaneous, self-expressive movements and gestures of man which functioned as symbols of communication long before language. Other theories go even further back in the history of mankind, tracing dance and its basic circle

¹ This implies since the prehistoric period.

² Sondra Horton Fraleigh, *Dance and the Lived Body: A Descriptive Aesthetic*, Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh, 1987, P.23.

³ Roger Copeland and Marshall Cohen, (ed.), *What is Dance*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 1.

⁴ Susanne Katherine Langer, an American philosopher, writer and educator.

to form to man's animal ancestors, particularly the lively and playful circle dances of the apes. Following this line of thinking, the origin of dance appears to be traceable back to the very origin of mankind.

The question *why* can also be answered only in theoretical terms. Many theorists take the view that dancing is an instinctive mode of muscular reaction whose function is either to express feeling or emotion, or at times, simply to express 'excess energy'. In the latter case, dancing is seen as an aspect or development of physical play. These views are supported by well-observed studies not only of animals but also of birds and insects. Courtship dances, where male dances to attract and rouse the female are common in the bird and insect kingdoms and at other times, there seem to be clear instances of dances which are simply an expression of play, individual or group. Dancing is also often seen as an aspect development of physical play.⁵

Dance is also performed by various animals such as bees, birds and mammals but they always performed individually. Rock art and other artifacts with scenes of dancing served as records of the dance. Ancient dancing scenes were also depicted on stone, pottery and other archaeological objects as well.⁶ There are numbers of different types of dances all over the world and these dances represent the values of tribal, regional, ethnic or religious groups. Just like there are different types of dances, there are also different types of dancers who performed in the various events which maybe cultural event, entertainment purpose and so on. Dances also have various origins and are almost always linked to their traditions and myths. This is even clearly evident among the dances of the various tribes of Mizoram where the various traditional dances originated from their traditional beliefs and practices which will be focused in-depth in the later chapters.

⁵ France Rust, *Dance in Society*, New York, Routledge, 1969, p. 9-11.

⁶ Yosef Garfinkel, 'Archaeological of Dance', in Kathryn Soar and Christina Aamodt (ed.), *Archaeological Approaches to Dance Performance*, Oxford, Archeopress, 2014, p. 5. Available from: Research Gate, (accessed 19/3/2019).

Oral traditional is an important form of passing down the art of dance from one generation to another⁷ which happened to be the same for Mizoram as well due to the fact that Mizoram have a recorded history which dates back to only a century or so.⁸ Dance has been used as a method of communication even before they used spoken language and writing. All around the world, it also appears that dance was used to teach basic life skills such as hunting, war and spiritual or religious for ensuring the continuation of the tribe through fertility dances and also for acknowledging personal community achievements, recognize victories or defeats in battles, celebrate life events such as puberty, courtship, marriage, healing and death, even though, it may vary according to the traditions of the various tribes. Regardless of the variations, it can clearly be said that dance has been playing a huge role in the various events and stages of human communities since the early period and this is also still evident in the present, though not as much as earlier times.

India, being a diverse country with diverse cultural and ethnic tribes, has numerous forms of dances as well. This is evident especially in the mainland India and the tribal North Eastern states. At the same time, one of the most popular and major dances of Mizoram, *Cheraw*⁹ has been found to be somehow similar to Tinikling, a Filipino folk dance and other tribal dances of Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand and this is also one of the reasons why the dance is believed to be one of the oldest dances of Mizoram, if not the oldest.¹⁰ Besides, this also makes it debatable whether these dances have the same origin or not. It also further led to the possibility of the *Cheraw* dance being brought by the fore-fathers from their earlier abode in Central China.¹¹ There are also other tribal dances of India where bamboos are used in the dance but in a different way as compared to the *Cheraw* dance of Mizoram.

⁷ Since dance is a difficult art to capture as dance movements appears and disappear instantly.

⁸ H.G. Joshi, *Mizoram: Past and Present*, New Delhi, Mittal Publication, 2005, p. 9.

⁹ Contemporarily, it is commonly known as Bamboo Dance as bamboos are used as materials for performing the dance.

¹⁰ *Mizo Lam Thenkhatte*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, 1985, p. 161.

¹¹ Brigadier C.G. Verghese, R.L. Thanzawna, *A History of the Mizos (Volume-1)*, New Delhi, Bikas Publishing House, p. 25.

The mainland Indian dances on the other hand, which has thousands of year-old traditions of fine arts and classical and folk dances has some world-famous dance forms like Bharatnatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi and Odissi. But these dances and the dances of Mizoram do not seem to have any links or similarities in terms of their origin, customs, movements and the performance as a whole. All these Indian classical dances use basically the same ‘mudras’¹² as a common language of expression and are mostly performed in temples to entertain various God and Goddesses originally. With the passing of time, these dances also eventually evolved to include the expressions and themes from social life and experiences¹³ which seemed to be the same case with the dances of Mizoram.

1.2. Dance and their Origin:

Mizoram, formerly known as the Lushai Hills, district of Assam is located in the southern part of the Northeast India and is bounded by Assam, Manipur and Tripura on the north and part of western side and Bangladesh on the west and Myanmar¹⁴ on the East. Mizo¹⁵ is often used as a generic term for the habitants of Mizoram whose major tribes are Lushai, Ralte, Paite, Hmar, Pawi and Lakher. Besides these tribes, Mizoram is also inhabited by a number of other communities like Thado, Kukis and Chakmas.

As mentioned earlier, all the traditional dances have their own significances and of origin and myths and strong bearing in the society and this has to do with respect to all the tribes such as Lai, Mara, Lusei etc. Religious belief system, festivals, ceremonies

¹² Literally means seal, gestures or mark. It is a symbolic gesture often practiced with the hands and fingers that locks and guides energy flow and reflexes to the brain, employed in the iconography and spiritual practice of the Indian religions particularly Hinduism.

¹³ Cultural India, (website), 2008, <https://www.culturalindia.net/indian-dance/classical/index.html>, (accessed 19/3/2019).

¹⁴ Burma

¹⁵ Literally means hill people.

and dances are all closely inter-connected and are the mainstay of the tribal ethos, values and culture.

It is in this background that this research work attempts to focus on the traditional dances of the three major tribes i.e., Lusei, Lai and Mara.

LAI: The Lais are cognate ethnic unit, stemming from the Kuki-Chin group of Assam Burman, a branch of the Tibeto-Burman family and is one of the largest among the Zo ethnic groups who are broadly identified as conglomerate tribes of the larger Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic group. The so-called Zo ethnic groups, collectively known popularly as “Zo hnahthlak” in Mizoram traced their common origin to a mythological cave which is also known by different names such as *Chhinlung*, *Shinlung*, *Khul*, *Khur*, *Khurpui*, *Khurtu-bi-jur*, *khor* and *Puk* and is believed to be located somewhere in the present South China. As such, *Lai* and all its kindred tribes traced their origin to a mythological cave in South China and in course of time have probably moved to Myanmar. A noted historian from *Lai* community, Dr. Vanlalringa Bawitlung also mentioned about the *Lais*, further moving southward to Chindwin Valley and then proceeded to *Lai Tlang*¹⁶ which is also known as Chin Hills.¹⁷

Lais are also commonly known as Pawi which is believed to be the name given by the Luseis. They are also known as Chin and also Shendus by the British. Prior to their identification as Pawi by the Lusei tribes, there was no name or reference of Pawi as such.¹⁸ They called themselves Lai and most of them settled in the Chin Hills in Burma. It is said that the name Lai came from the river Lava which is located between *Tlang khua* and *Tiah dai* at Chin Hills.

Some of the leading Lai or Pawi clans are Zahau, Hlawneh, Chinzah, Zathang, Hmarum, bawitlung, Khenglawt and Hlawnehing.¹⁹ According to Carey and Tuck, they

¹⁶ *Lai Hill Range*, their present location.

¹⁷ Jangkhongam Doungel, *Lai Chieftains and its Impact in Politics*, Delhi, Balaji Publications, 2015, p. 21.

¹⁸ Tribal Research Institute, *Pawi Chanchin*, Mizoram, Tribal Research Institute, 1988, p. 1.

¹⁹ V.L. Siama, *Mizo History, Aizawl, Lengchawn Offset*, 2019, p. 171, 172.

are probably a family which split off and was left behind by one of the numerous tribes which migrated north.²⁰ The clans which claim the title of Lais are the Hakas, Klangklangs²¹, Yokwas, Thettas and Kapis as well as certain other independent southern villages. The first two are universally acknowledged as Lais and refuse to admit that the others belong to their race, asserting that they are from different origin.²²

The Lais have many dances and are performed on various occasions which eventually became the most celebrated and main dances of Mizoram in the contemporary period. This include dances like *Cheraw (Ruakkhatlak)*, *Sarlamkai* and *Chawnglaizawn (Cawnglaizawh)* to name a few. They also have other dances which they used to perform during feast, festivals, religious and cultural ceremonies, etc. depending on the occasion and event. The origins of many of their dances are associated with numerous myths and legends. Though most of the dances that are performed today in Mizoram may be traced or linked to the Lai communities, however, it may be pointed out that much of their original names are now changed for instance, *Cawnglaizawh* now came to be commonly known as *Chawnglaizawn*. These changes and modifications are due to various reasons which of course are explained in subsequent chapters. The fact that many dances are associated to the Lai tribes, it can be concluded that Lai people loved dancing and that dance played a huge role in their socio-cultural life.

MARA: The Lakhers or Maras are best described by N.E. Parry in his book, “The Lakhers”.²³ The Maras or the Lakhers, being merely the name by which they are known to the Lusheis²⁴, inhabit the south-eastern corner of the Lushai Hills district, south of the Haka sub-division of the Chin Hills and the extreme north of the Arakan Hill Tracts. Shakespear believed that they are called as Zo by the Chins and Klongshai by Arracan

²⁰ Vumson, *Zo History*, Mizoram, Vumson, p. 53.

²¹ Thantlang.

²² Bertram S. Carey, HN Tuck, *The Chin Hills Vol. 1*, Mizoram, Tribal research Institute, 1932, p. 152.

²³ Vumson, *Zo History*, p. 54.

²⁴ Literal translation of the name *Lusei* by the British and thus, the two words will used interexchangeably through the chapters.⁷

and are closely allied to the Southern Chins.²⁵ They are the same people as the Shendus to whom Colonel Lewin makes constant references in his various works, and are still called Shendus by the Arakanese.

Traditions has it that they all came to their present settlement from different places in the Haka sub-division of the Chin Hills, presumably being pushed forward by pressure from the east, in the same way as the Lusheis under their *Thangur* chiefs were pushed forward into the country they now occupy.²⁶ This whole region inhabited by them is known as 'Marara' in their local language, meaning 'the land of the Maras'. In the early British period, this hill region was popularly known to the British as 'Lakherland' as the Maras were then designated as 'Lakher'.²⁷ The Mara language speaking tribal group includes Tlosai, Hawthai, Chapi, Zyhno, Vytu, Sabyh, Lialai, Heima, Hlaipao etc.²⁸

Since the pre-colonial times, dance has played an important role even in the Mara society. According to NE Parry, dancing is a common form of amusement, and while songs are being sung a man generally dances as well, and acts as a sort of leader of the chorus. He also mentioned that the 'Lakher' dancing purports to be an imitation of the fly, which he did not mention the name or type of the dance.²⁹ The early Maras were very rich in folkdances and folksongs, which occupied an important place in their socio-religious and cultural life.³⁰

Furthermore, they have around twenty-one (21) recorded traditional dances³¹, which are quite a lot for a single tribe, thus, indicating their love for dance and the huge role dance played in the society. They performed the various dances on important occasions such as feasts, sacrifices, ceremonies, festivals and other important events. Since the early Maras were ardent lovers of dancing and singing, dancing was therefore, considered as a

²⁵ J. Shakespear, *The Lushai Kuki Clans*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, reprint 2008, p. 211.

²⁶ NE Parry, *The Lakhers*, Calcutta, Firma KLM Private Limited, 1932, p. 1,2.

²⁷ K. Zohra, *The Maras Indigenous Tradition and Folkculture*, Guwahati, Scientific Book Centre, 2013, p. 1.

²⁸ Based on information provided by K. Robin at Aizawl on 10.10.2019.

²⁹ Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 186.

³⁰ Zohra, *The Maras*, p. 159.

³¹ Interviewed, Dated 5th August 2019, with Pachhi Hlychho at Siaha.

universal practice or item of their socio-religious activities. Both male and female were practically involved in various dances. It was held that the ritual feasts, sacrifices and ceremonies were considered incomplete without the performances of these dances.³²

Lusei: The Luseis are the principal tribe of Mizoram. They were also referred to as Kuki³³ or Lushai by the colonial rulers but the designation “Kuki” is a designated term for the Lusei people by the people of mainland India. Mackenzie mentioned that they are more or less intimately related to the tribes they encountered on the frontier of Chittagong. According to Lister’s Expedition, 1850, the Lushais are a very powerful tribe under the Government of six sirdars of whom one is acknowledged chief with separate cantonments with a number of dependent villages attached to him.³⁴

Most of the Lusei chiefs belong to the Sailo³⁵ clan which established itself as the ruling house even before the advent of the British rule. The chiefs along with the assistance of their Upas³⁶ would decide all matters of the internal village governance.³⁷ Shakespear also mentioned that the Lusheis are sometimes spoken of as Duhlian and that he had seen the Lusheis claiming to have sprung from the village south-east of Champhai. The Lushais appear to have had a common origin with many other clans of the Tibeto-Burman group.³⁸

Luseis do not have as many dances as the Lais and the Maras had. Khuallam is one of the few dances which originated from the Lusei tribe which they would perform during the *Khuangchawi* ceremony. Apart from this dance, *Chheih Lam* and *Chai Lam* are also believed to have originated from the Luseis. There is also a dance called *Rallu Lam* which is similar to the Lai’s *Sarlamkai* and Mara’s *Sawlakia* which is also believed to

³² Zohra, p. 159.

³³ It is a Bengali word, meaning hill-men or highlanders.

³⁴ Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, reprint 2011, p. 287.

³⁵ The pre dominanting clan of the Luseis.

³⁶ Council of elders appointed by the chief and can also be dismissed by the chief himself.

³⁷ NE Parry, *A Monograph on Lushai Customs & Ceremonies*, Aizawl, Firma KLM Private LTD on behalf of Tribal Research Institute, reprint 2009, p. 1.

³⁸ A.G. McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, reprint 2015, p. 34.

have been appropriated from these tribes. The Luseis have a dance called *Mitthi Rawp Lam* where they would erect the statues of their beloved death relatives while drinking alcohol.³⁹ They also have a dance called *Tlanglam* which is believed to have originated from *Puma Zai* not very long ago.⁴⁰

All the above mentioned tribes, even though they have slight differences in their traditions and practices can be considered very closely related in terms of their origin, migration, traditions, practices and most importantly their dances. Festivals and ceremonies would never be celebrated without performing dances and in other words, no festivals would be complete without performing dances. This is essentially true across all the tribes living in Mizoram.

1.3. Dance and Performance:

Dances were performed in almost every event, whether it was a happy or a sad occasion. This was the same case amongst every tribe in Mizoram. Since dance in the pre-colonial period was closely connected with religious belief system, one of the most important and common event of performing their dances was during their religious and sacrificial rituals and ceremonies. This is also due to the fact that the people were basically animists who believed that their sufferings and illnesses were caused by the evil spirits and in order to appease those evil spirits and to ward off their bad spells and influences, a series of sacrifices were performed.⁴¹ Of the various forms of sacrifices, dance would always be included and was one of the most important means of appeasing those spirits.

It is significant to note that dance was performed and was associated in almost all the ceremonies whether performed at birth, at death, in illness or following unnatural death or in the case of woman at childbirth or even during hunt and when at war. In fact,

³⁹ R. Chaldailova, *Mizo Pi Pute Khawvel*, Aizawl, Vanlalnghaki (Mrs. R. Chaldailova), 2011, p. 164.

⁴⁰ Tribal Research Institute, p. 12.

⁴¹ Verghese, Thanzawna, p. 25, 26.

dances were performed in connection with almost every possible phase of life.⁴² Like the popular Cheraw dance which was originally known as *Ruakkhatlak*, it was performed particularly at a time of *raicheh*⁴³ among the Lai tribe during *Ngandam*⁴⁴ ceremony. This ceremony was made for people who died unnatural death or *sarathi*⁴⁵ as it was believed that even after death, their souls would be haunted and pursued before reaching the *mitthi khua*⁴⁶. In order to reach the *mitthi khua* safely by the souls, this *Ngandam* ceremony was performed where food and drinking water was placed in order to bid farewell and a safe passage to the soul and to enter the *mitthi khua*. It must also be noted that this *Ngandam* ceremony could also be performed for people who died a natural death as well.⁴⁷ Cheraw is performed mainly at home and sometimes at the bank of the river in a hope that the person who died of *raicheh*, without any more struggle and hardship would reach the *mitthi khua* safely.⁴⁸ Since Cheraw was performed at the time of death, the dancers would always perform with sad expression.⁴⁹

Another important occasion of performing a traditional dance was when they defeated their enemies or when they are successful in head-hunting. Each tribe has a similar way of celebrating this huge success, through dance known as *Sarlamkai*, *Sawlakia* and *Rallu Lam* which will be discussed in a more detailed manner in the latter chapters.⁵⁰ Since victory in war and taking their heads was a huge thing for the tribes, celebration with pomp and glory accompanied by dancing was considered a huge moment and a deep-rooted activity in their lives since the pre-colonial period. Apart from these, there are

⁴² McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, p. 118.

⁴³ A woman who died while delivering a baby.

⁴⁴ A special ceremony made for the dead people, of various reasons, held before the passing of three months.

⁴⁵ Unnatural death. It also includes sudden death or death accidents of various kinds.

⁴⁶ Literal meaning is village of the death. According to traditional beliefs, it is a place where the soul of every death person will go.

⁴⁷ T. Chalngingluaia, *Zaalte (Lai Hnam Robawm)*, Lawngtlai, The Art & Culture Department Lai Autonomous District Council, 2017, p. 28.

⁴⁸ Tribal Research Institute, p. 160.

⁴⁹ Chalngingluaia, *Zaalte*, p. 30.

⁵⁰ Tribal Research Institute, p. 100.

other important and significant occasions where dances are performed for various reasons which will be discussed and analyzed in the subsequent chapters.

1.4. Dresses:

Regarding dresses that were worn while performing the various dances by the different tribes, it is to be noted that there was no particular uniform dress worn by the dancers unlike the contemporary period. However, it is believed that when performing the dance, the performers would wear their best attires. However, their garments mostly are made from indigenous cotton locally grown throughout Mizoram.

Dresses that are worn by the people during the pre-colonial period seem to be almost more or less the same, especially among the commoners. It was a very simple dress and mostly consists of a single white cloth or loin-cloth, worn the same way, however, but each tribe has their own names and labels for their dress.

The dress of a common man of a Lusei tribe consists of a single clothe which was about 7 feet long and 5 feet wide and in cold weather, more clothes are worn one over the other along with a thigh-length white coat fastened at the throat, ornamented on with red and white of various patterns on the sleeves.⁵¹ It seems that men do not cover up themselves much as they considered it to be feminine and also it was thought to be manly by wearing as little clothes as possible.⁵² According to Colonel Shakespear, one corner of the clothe is grasped in the left hand which is passed over the left shoulder, then behind the back, under the right arm across the chest and the throw the end over the left shoulder. In hot weather when at work, Lusei men would just wrap their cloth around their waist. Lusei men also used to wear plaited waterproof hats made of strips of bamboo or cane, lined with smoked leaves especially in the rain⁵³ known as *Khumbeu*.

⁵¹ Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clan*, p. 5.

⁵² Siana, *Mizo History*, p.15.

⁵³ Shakespear, p. 8, 9.

All Lusei men had long hair with middle parting and make a bun at the back of their head like the women and almost all of them smoke pipes known as *Vaibel*.⁵⁴ While at war, Lusei men would wear a single clothe wrapped tightly round the waist and a haversack protected by a bear or tiger skin guard over one shoulder and a fighting *dao* or *dah* over the other. There was also a special type of dress worn by those who had performed *Thangchhuah* ceremony which include a clothe of a certain pattern and those who have killed men in war also have special head-dress known as *chhawndawl* and *arkeziak*.⁵⁵

B. Lalthangliana mentioned that *siapsuap*⁵⁶ was the first and foremost garment, commonly worn by women.⁵⁷ Apart from this, when they settled in the Lushai Hills, women began to wear cotton clothe, just long enough to be wrapped around their waist, held up by a girdle of brass wire which serves as a knee-length petticoat . Women all wear the same costumes. Apart from this, a short white jacket and a clothe which is worn in the same manner as the men worn are the only upper garments. Shakespear also talked about girls wearing a picturesque head-dress while dancing on special occasion⁵⁸, which is believed to be what is called *Vakiria*. This seemed to be a special ornament as it was worn only on the gala days. Lai and Mara women on the other hand, used to wear what is called *Kharvar*⁵⁹ around their waist as a belt.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ James Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, Aizawl, R. Lalrawna, 1992, p. 213, 214.

⁵⁵ Shakespear, p. 9, 10, 11.

⁵⁶ A fringe-like upper and lower garment made from strands of fibre or bark of trees commonly worn by women. Men also wear it sometimes as a kilt.

⁵⁷ B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram*, New Delhi, Director, Puplications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcating, Government of India, 2005, p. 112.

⁵⁸ Shakespear, p. 11.

⁵⁹ Made from flat brass.

⁶⁰ C. Lianthanga, *Hmanlai Mizo Nun*, Aizawl, Mizoram Publication Board, 1994, p. 49.

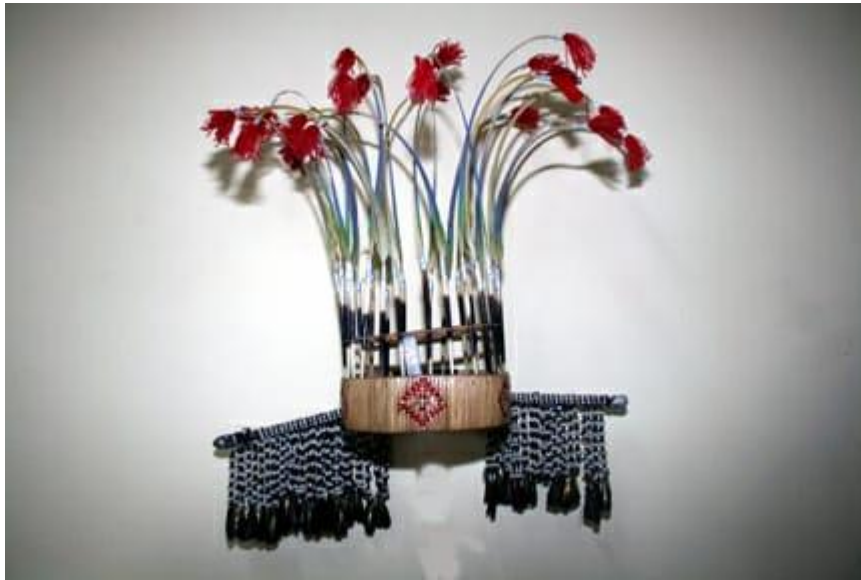


Fig. 1: Vakiria

Source: Dept. of Art & Culture

The common clothing of Lai tribe also seemed to be as simple as that of the Luseis. Carey and Tuck mentioned that they had two distinct fashions in dress where one is only a mantle while the other one is a loin cloth in addition to the mantle. Within the Lai tribe, the sub-groups and clans have their various customs of wearing their dresses where the most universal one was the ordinary mantle which is of white rough cotton among men. The mantle is worn mainly being carried and rolled round the waist or in a coil round the shoulders like the Luseis, for the sole purpose of keeping themselves warm most particularly by the Siyin⁶¹ clan. Other groups such as Tashons, Whenohs and the Hakas also have a distinctive tartan of broad red bands separated by black and green bars crossed with narrow red or red and yellow bars, worn over the white mantle but mostly on special occasions.

Silk was a common material for the people inhabiting the Haka sub-division and independent southerners of present day Mizoram. English shawls and blankets are also worn commonly by the Soktes when they adopted a popular dress of a knee-length

⁶¹ A Chin clan mostly in Burma. They are also known as Sizang or Thaute most commonly by the Luseis.

cotton coat in Kuki Villages which was shaped on the general lines of a frock coat. Apart from this sleeveless coat of the same pattern are also worn. In order to protect themselves from the rain, hats and coat made of bark, grass, bamboo and the leaf of the date-palm are also worn. They do not seem to cover nor protect their feet since footwear was unknown during the pre-colonial period.

The dress of Lai women vary considerably within the tribe. Lai women wear a front open coat but covering their breasts along with an open-clothed short skirts in the northern areas. Just like they all wear their petticoats, they also wear the same class of garments. Southern women on the other hand would wear sleeveless home-made jackets and ankle-length skirts. There were also differences in the clothing of the commoners and the well-to-do women.⁶²

According to Shakespear, there was not much difference in the dress worn by the Maras and that of the Southern Chins.⁶³ Men wear an ordinary white-clothed *dua* or a loin-cloth called *dua-kalapa* (for everyday wear) and *dua-ah* (for occasional wear)⁶⁴ which are twisted around their waist, one end being passed between the legs and slipped under the waist-band. Their garments were made of cotton and silk made by the women. Mara women wear several petticoats, almost ground-length which is merely a strip of cloth wide enough to go one and a half times around the body. Another garment of Mara women is a short sleeve jacket with a pattern similar to the men's clothes. They wear nothing on their heads except on rainy days where they would wear hats like the Luseis do.⁶⁵

These are the most common types of dresses worn by these tribes during the pre-colonial and colonial period and the same are believed to be worn during performing their dances since there are no other types of clothes or garments available during that time.

⁶² Bertram S. Carey, H N Tuck, *The Chin Hills (vol 1)*, Aizawl, Firma KLM Private LTD. On behalf of Tribal Research Institute, reprint, 1932, p. 170, 171, 172.

⁶³ Shakespear, p. 212

⁶⁴ Parry, p. 29, 30.

⁶⁵ Shakespear, p. 213, 214.

Moreover, there are also different types of clothes which could be worn only by chiefs or a person of a high and special status like *Thangchhuah*. But with the passing of time and the various tribes becoming more developed, they began to weave different patterns of cloth with a variety of colours. With this, they began to weave handlooms where the contemporary colourful patterned traditional dresses such as *puanchei*, *kawrchei*, *mangpuan*, *ngotekherh*, *puanrin*, *tawlhlohpuan*, etc., each with different designs were produced which they copied the works of nature to make the designs more interesting and are now accepted as the cultural dress.⁶⁶ It must also be noted that since these cultural dresses are quite expensive and it has not been long that most of the people could afford it, not everyone at the beginning of its production, except the well-to do people could afford to have it.

1.5. Musical Instruments:

Musical instruments have been used from time immemorial for special occasions, amusements and performances like singing, dancing, festivals, etc. Even though it is difficult to trace the date of origin, it is believed to have been used between 10th to 13th centuries as they had already developed their instruments when they were settling at the Kabaw Valley of Myanmar.⁶⁷ In contemporary times, all the different tribes in Mizoram shared almost all of their musical instruments though each of the tribes has their own specific name for a specific and particular instrument. For instance, the same large gong known as *darkhuang* by the Luseis is known as *dawkhang* by the Maras and *khuang* by the Luseis as *khang* by Maras. Just like their dresses in the earlier times, the musical instruments were also very crude and simple⁶⁸ especially when compared to the mainland Indian classical instruments. There are varieties of musical instruments which have their own significance and can be categorized into various groups.

⁶⁶ Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram*, p. 111, 112, 113.

⁶⁷ B. Lalthangliana, *History of Mizo in Burma*, Aizawl, R.L. Rina Zawlbuk Agencies, 1980, p. 71.

⁶⁸ McCall, p. 193.

The most common instrument for dancing is *khuang* or drum. It can be considered as the most popular instrument for not only dancing but also singing and for other amusements purposes. There is even an old saying “*Khuang lova chai ang*” to express the significance of *khuang* in the society, denoting that no occasions or gatherings are complete without *khuang*.⁶⁹ *Khuang* are barrel-shaped instrument made of wood, hollowed out with animal skin stretched tight across the frame which is held firmly by cane twists.⁷⁰ They are usually about 1 foot in diameter.⁷¹ It is used in each and every type of dances where the dancers would dance to the beating sound of the drum.



Fig. 2: Khuang

Source: mizothuziak.blogspot.com/2016/03/khuang-theology.html

⁶⁹ Lalthangliana, p. 160.

⁷⁰ McCall, p. 193.

⁷¹ Parry, p. 183.

Gongs made from brass, are another significant musical instrument for dancing. They are the most expensive instruments⁷² and are mostly imported from Burma.⁷³ There are different types of gongs such as *darkhuang*, *dar* and *darmang*. *Darkhuang* is a big gong made and is a single instrument like *khuang*. *Darbu* on the other hand is a set of three small gongs with different notes each and *darmang* is a medium sized brass used as a counter part with other gongs to complement the sound of each other.⁷⁴

1.6. Conclusion:

Even though the approach and the purpose of performing dance is no longer the same considering and in comparison with the pre-colonial practice, however, it is very clear that dance has always been important for showcasing the tribal culture and ethos through movements and sometimes accompanied by songs. Dance still plays a huge role in the post-colonial society but it no longer has the same significance it had as in the earlier times. More than being a traditional activity, it became more of a cultural activity where it is the responsibility of the people to not let this tradition dies. Due to the colonial intervention and the coming of Christianity, dances have also lost its original significance and purpose, now that the reason and purpose of its performance have changed completely with the changing of time and space.

It is however clear that even though dance has evolved and developed over the years, its significance and importance in the society could never be underestimated and it continues to be a marker of tribal culture, polity and identity especially in Mizoram. Now that it became a good vehicle and mechanism for showcasing traditional customary practices to a wider audience, it also served as an integrating factor within the different tribal groups of Mizoram.

⁷² Lalthangliana, p. 161.

⁷³ Shakespear, p. 26.

⁷⁴ Lalthangliana, pp. 161,162, 163.

1.7. Review of Literature:

The Lushei Kuki Clan is a cultural anthropological book written by Lt. Colonel J. Shakespear about the colonial Mizos where he wrote about his observation of the social, religious and traditions. He also mentioned about the study of the various branches of the Lushei tribes along with the non-Lushei. This book is very informative for studying the Mizo background as it is one of the earliest written history of the Mizos.

The Lakhers (1932), written by NE Parry contains a very wide area of information on the Lakhers or the Maras. He wrote about the general information and traditional customs based on his dealings and observations. He also includes the various anthropological studies on the tribe.

N E Parry's *A Monograph on Lushai Customs & Ceremonies* (1976) is another one of the earliest written record on the history of the Lushai tribe particularly during the pre-colonial and colonial period. As the name of the book suggests, he focuses on the Lushai's traditional customs and various important ceremonies beginning with the chiefs and their villages providing various unknown informations on these topics of the earlier period.

Lushai Chrysalis (1949), authored by Major A.G. McCall is an anthropological book on the Lushai tribe where he wrote detailed informations on the various customs, traditions and other general informations based on his dealings and observations of the people. He also includes his experience on the land. It is a valuable book as it consists lots of informations on the early period of the Lushais.

The Chin Hills (vol. 1) (1987) is another anthropological book authored by both Bretnam S. Carey and HN Tuck which they wrote based on their dealings and findings with the people of the Chin area and the land itself. This book also includes the customs and

social traditions of the people in general and they also wrote about their own experiences of their interactions and dealings with the people.

Dance and the Lived Body: A descriptive Aesthetics (1987) by Sondra Horton Fraleigh attempts to develop an aesthetic perspective of dance through existential phenomenology, particularly through the concept of the lived body. This book also examines and describes dance through the perspective of the author's consciousness of dance as an art mostly through the experience of dancing on the lived body. This book also challenges the reader in seeing dance through their own perspectives of their own self.

Dancing from Past to Present: Nation, Culture, Identities (2006) is a book edited by Therasa Jill Buckland where an international group of writers whose subject range from Europe, Asia and the islands of Java and Tonga in writing about dance. These writers invested history as an increasingly important aspect of their work. Even though this book focuses on a wide area of study, it mostly concentrated only on past references while references of the modern or contemporary are lacking.

Dance History: An Introduction, the Second Edition (1983) is a book edited by Janet Adshead Lansdale and June Layson who brought together a team of international dance historians. This book touches basic points of studying dance history, offering a multitude of starters for this particular study and also presenting examples of dance writing. This book focuses merely on the European and African countries and lacks other parts of the world, resulting in the limitation of the area of study.

An edited book, *The Art and Science of Dance/ Movement Therapy: Life is Dance* (2009) by Sharon Chaiklin and Hilda Wengrower again brought together various international dance historians and offers broad understanding of how and where dance therapy can be used to produce change. Theoretically, this book also offers and provides several ways through which dance can be approached.

Dance in Society (1969) by France Rust is a book which is a small-scale pioneer approach to the sociology of dance. There are also works of other writers who focus on dance sociologically in making a detailed and comprehensive sociological investigation. This book also offers work on the social music and cinema as well and gives samples of the English cultures

In the book, *Art Without Boundaries: The World of Modern Dance* (1997), the author Jack Anderson, by considering modern dance as a self-renewing art, follows its changes over the decades and also discusses the visionary choreographers who devised new modes of movement. Even though this book is very informative, it would have been better if it was more detailed and covers larger topics.

Hmanlai Mizo Nun (1999) is a book written by C. Lianthanga where he wrote about the lives and traditions of the Mizo people as the name of the book suggests. He covered a wide topic of the Mizo history starting from their settlements in Burma. He also wrote all about the cultural, religious, a wide variety of their social activities along with the ethics as a community. He also mentioned about the colonial activities in Mizoram. It is an informative book as it focuses on a wide and variety of different topic about the historical background of the early Mizos.

In his book, *A Brief History and Culture of Mizo*, B. Lalthangliana covers a vast and large part of the history of the Mizos including their origin, migration and settlements, advent and impact of Christianity and the Mizo culture itself. This book also provides informations of the Mizo dances but not in details and only mentioned the seven most common and popular dances of Mizoram.

Mizo Ethos: Changes & Challenges (2005) is written by Rev. V. S. Lalrinawma. It contains insights into the customs, cultures and life of the Mizo society before and after the coming of Christianity in Mizoram as a timeframe along with the changes witnessed after the independence of India. This book has five main chapters and covers a wide portion of the traditional life of the Mizos and their social historical background. But this

book lacks a detailed account on the background of the history of dance even though there are brief mentions of some of the dances.

Mizo Lam Thenkhatte (1985) is a monograph published by Tribal Research Institute of Aizawl, Mizoram under the supervision of H. Lalbiakmawia. This book provides a very detailed account on the various dances of Mizoram and even covers the various traditional songs which are originally sung during the performance of the dances. It also gives account on the instruments and dresses worn and also detailed account on the movements and rhythmic steps of the various dances. Since this whole book is about dance, it contains good and eye-opening information on the topic of the traditional dances of Mizoram.

In *Mizo Culture* by B. Lalthangliana, the author focused on the cultural practices and materials of the Mizos as the title suggests where he included a small portion of the basic history of the seven most common dances of Mizoram. This book has been divided into nine main chapters where the author gives critical analysis about the needs for changes and adjustments in the Mizo culture and society for the betterment of economy with the passage of time in the final chapter. Since this book is not solely for dance, it only contains very basic information of the required information on dance.

Mizos of North East India: An Introduction to Mizo Culture, Folklore, Language & Literature is a book authored by Dr. Laltluangliana Khiangte. As the author himself mentioned, this book is not an exhaustive work but an eye-opener for outsider who are keen to know more about the “Mizos of the North East”. It also gives account on the society and cultural practices and their origins along with the folklore, literature and language with instances within the context of Mizoram..

A History of the Mizos (Volume-1) is a book written by C.G. Verghese and R.L. Thanzawna. It attempts to trace the ancestors of the Mizos, their migrations across Burma towards the place of their present settlement in Mizoram and gives account of the culture, customs and social codes of community, correcting wrong information about the

community passed on to the outside world of Mizoram and provide a balanced account of the people and their problems.

Mizo Chanchin (Kum 1900 Hma Lam) (2000), a book authored by Dr. Lalthanliana provides a detailed account on the ethnography and ethnicity of the Mizos in the early period till the 1900s. The author includes account on the ancestors of the various clans of the Mizos including their origins. This book also provides adequate information of the Mizos but lacks detail references on the traditional dances.

Indian Classical Dances is from the website, Cultural India which talks about the various important and common Indian classical dances in this article. Since this article is merely about the Indian classical dances, there are only mentions of only those kinds of dances in briefs. Even though the information provided is brief and basic, it is still an eye-opening for the readers, especially for beginners to these dances.

Pawi Chanchin (1988) is an organizational book published by the Tribal Research Institute of Art & Culture, Aizawl on the historical background of the tribe Pawi or better known as Lai in the contemporary period. It consists of the socio-ethnic and the laws and customs of the early Pawi tribe dealing with the beginning of the tribe in Mizoram.

Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung (1992), a book authored by James Dokhuma is another book on the various social cultural histories of Mizo. He also covered a wide variety of topics which included the laws and various observations of the early Mizos along with the brief history of wars they used to fight at the time.

H.G. Joshi's book *Mizoram: Past and Present* (2005) is an overview of Mizoram as whole, both historical and contemporary. It includes a few points on the social history as well along with the developments and evolutions of the nation which resulted from the colonial intervention.

R. Chaldailova in his book, *Mizo Pi Pute Khawvel* (2011) wrote random significant topics about of the early Mizos. He mentioned few important figures, traditional rituals and cultural history as well which were major activities of the forefathers of the Mizos quiet briefly but informative.

The Maras: Indigenous Tradition and Folkculture (2013) is a book written by K. Zohra where he wrote about the traditional customs and folk culture along with social background of the early Maras. He wrote it mostly from the perspective of the socio-religious background of the tribes.

In his book, *Zaalte (Lai Hnam Robawm)* (2017), the author T. Chalngingluaia wrote about the brief history of the Lai Autonomous District and the present formation of the Art and Culture Department of Lawngtlai. He also mentioned about the various clans within the Lai tribe in brief and includes the various traditional history of the Lais including their main dances, festivals, major occasions and folksongs. Even though he did not cover a wide topic, the chapters included are very informative.

Chin Hills Chanchin (2018), a book written by B. Lalthangliana focuses deeply on the various clans within the Chin (Lai) tribe where he also includes the cultures, traditions and norms of the particular tribe. Even though he covered a wide topic about the Lai tribe, he only briefly mentioned about their cultures and other social history.

Mizo History (2019) written by VL Siana is an edited version of the older version of the book which was merely for school level history text book. In the edited version of the books, history Mizoram after the Independence of India along with general information on the Pawi-Lakher region was added. It also focuses on the origin of the Mizos and their early settlements and wrote about the various important figures of the earlier period of Mizoram.

Zo History, authored by Vumson is a very informative book which deals with almost all the tribes, clans and sub-clans under the generic term “Zo”. The author traced as far as the beginnings of “zo” people, not only those settled in Mizoram but also in Myanmar

and Bangladesh as well. It is a very detailed book on the study of the root of the “zo” people and their distributions all over India.

1.8. Statement of the Problem:

Like in other parts on the world, even though dance plays a very important role in the culture with its huge impact on the various tribes of Mizoram, its understanding as a subject is very limited and wanting. Though there is various literature dealing on the history of the tribes of Mizoram, however, there are not much books or writing on the history of the dances. Therefore, there is a strong need to have proper and a more extensive research on this.

All dances evolved overtime and this is indeed true in the case of Mizoram as well. In this context, there is a huge necessity to trace and understand the historical evolution of the dances of Mizoram and also situate its significance and bearing in the society. Towards this end, it would be note-worthy to conceptualize dance and also probe how the traditional dances of the various Mizo tribes underwent changes overtime and its relevance and dynamics in the society.

1.9. Objectives:

1. To examine and conceptualize dance.
2. To examine the history and evolution of dances in Mizoram.
3. To study the impact of colonial intervention on dance.
4. To study dance and its place in the society.

1.10. Methodology:

The research work will be based on using both primary and secondary sources. The primary source will consist of archival records while the secondary sources will consist of textual analysis of existing literatures. Moreover, oral sources would be extensively used to corroborate other sources.

1.11. Area of Study:

The area of study will be Mizoram. This research will focus on the historical evolution of traditional dance of Mizoram.

1.13. Tentative Chapterization:

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the introductory chapter, attempt would be made to conceptualize and historize the background of the history of dance in Mizoram and at the same time it would offer the overall framework in which the study will be carried forward.

Chapter 2: Society and Dance in Mizoram

This chapter would analyze the role of dance in the society and how it continued to shape the cultural edifice of the tribes.

Chapter 3: Dance and colonial intervention

This chapter would deal with the colonial intervention and highlights how it impacted dances in Mizoram.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

This chapter will include the summary and the findings of the research.

Chapter II: Society and Dance in Mizoram

2.1. Introduction:

Dance, even though there have not been as much deeper studies and research as compared to other traditional customs, plays a very significant role in the society of Mizoram for the inhabitants of the various tribes since the pre-colonial period and even up till the contemporary period. Tribes of Mizoram have various dances performed in various festivals for centuries. Colonialism and Christianity made lasting impact on the dance themselves and on the events and festivals associated with them.

Dance continued in the post-colonial times.

While tracing dance, we need to look at the dress, accessories, musical instruments and weapons that are intrinsic part of their performance. The most well-known dances in Mizoram can be enumerated as under:

Name of Dance	Tribe
Sawlakia	Mara
Cheraw/ Ruakkhatlak	Lai
Chawnglaizawnh	Lai
Sarlamkai	Lai
Khuallam	Lusei
Chai	Lusei
Chheih Lam	Lusei
Tlanglam	Lusei

The traditional dances have their own various significances in the society which vary from one tribe to the other. The dance which was performed in times of death by one tribe was often performed in times of celebrations or festivals by another tribe. For instance, *Cheraw* now undoubtedly known as a dance performed in times of death by the

Lai tribe is in fact performed by the Lusei tribe in times of celebration such as *buhza-aih* and is often known as *Buhza-aih Cheraw*.⁷⁵ This *buhza-aih* is a form of success in sowing their targeted number of wheat in a year and was celebrated enthusiastically as it is considered to be a blessing from above. *Buhza-aih* was celebrated by the villagers with alcohol, meat and a very solid cooked- rice and it was at this day of celebration that the *Cheraw* dance was performed by the women.⁷⁶

Even after the tremendous changes brought to the traditional dances by the colonial intervention and most importantly Christianity, dance still continue to play an important role in the socio-culture of Mizoram and even remains as a link for the relationship between the various tribes. It is through dance that people from different communities found their similarities and often began to have interest for other people outside their own. The significances of dance in the society of Mizoram may have differed from that of the period mostly during the pre-colonial and post-colonial where dances were still practiced with their own traditional significances to the contemporary period.

Dance also acts as an important tool of attracting other people from outside the state who are especially new to the culture of Mizoram. It is an undeniable fact that, the various traditional dances of Mizoram along with the colorful dresses and ornamentations are very eye-catching and could draw attention towards the interest of the culture and their owner. It will not be too wrong to say that dance is one of the easiest ways of drawing such attentions within the context of culture and is one of the most common ways the people of Mizoram to do so.

Furthermore, like any other tribes in the world, it is one of the most important tools in showcasing the traditional and cultural customs for various tribes of Mizoram both inside and outside the state and even to the bigger audience, i.e., the outside world.

⁷⁵ Interviewed, Dated 20th June 2019, with K. Rosiama at Dept. of Art & Culture, Aizawl.

⁷⁶ Tribal Research Institute, pp. 160, 161.

2.2. Dance and Society:

In Mizoram, dance has always been a major activity, having important roles in the community, religion and tradition of the various tribes since the pre-colonial times. Their dances originally were mostly very basic, using everyday movements since almost everyone in the communities danced in the earlier period. But it must also be noted that some of the dances with particular steps and movements have to be taught and learned from one another. Meanwhile, not everyone in the community can dance each and every type of the dances. The movements and the dances are believed to have been greatly influenced by the birds, beasts, the hills and the valleys.

The inhabitants of Mizoram are ardent lovers of dancing as much as they love singing. One or the other dances are always included in almost every events of the community in order to express and share their emotions and feelings in times of happiness and sorrows as well. Dances in the early society were mostly performed for community involvement and participation.⁷⁷ Being a close-knit society, most of the dances were performed as a group, even though there are also a very few solo dances such as *Chheih Lam*. In the various traditional dances, *khuang*⁷⁸ was the most commonly and popularly used instrument for dancing where the dancers would dance to the rhythmic beat of *khuang*.

Folk songs and folk dances are strongly intertwined. There are particular kinds of songs which are sung during the performance of particular traditional dances. This can be seen in the dance like *Tlang Lam*, which, the dance itself is even believed to have originated from a popular folk song known as *Puma Zai*.⁷⁹ There are many types of traditional dances in Mizoram and most of these dances are believed to have originated from those tribes inhabiting Southern Mizoram such as *Lai* and *Mara* communities. In contemporary times, it must also be noted that other tribes and clans like *Hmar*, *Paite*,

⁷⁷ Lalitluangliana Kiangte, *Mizos of North East India: An Introduction to Mizo Culture, Folklore, Language & Literature*, Mizoram, LTL Publication, 2008, p. 35.

⁷⁸ Traditional drum made of leather which some people believed to have been received from the Chinese civilization through cultural diffusion.

⁷⁹ Tribal Research Institute, *Mizo Lam Thenkhatte*, Aizawl, p. 11.

Ralte, etc. also have their own traditional dances but are not as popular as the Lusei, Lai and Mara dances.

The most popular dances of Mizoram in the contemporary period are *Cheraw*⁸⁰, *Khuallam*, *Chai Lam*, *Chheih Lam*, *Sarlankai*, *Sawlakia*, *Rallu Lam*⁸¹, *Tlanglam* and *Cawnglaizawnh*⁸² among which *Cheraw* may be considered as the most popular dance in the present day. These traditional dances, having their own specific notion of origin, appear to have its own specific time of performance and were usually accompanied by songs being sung by the village folks depending on the circumstances, environment and situation. It is note-worthy that while performing these dances, *darbu*,⁸³ *darkhuang*⁸⁴ and *khuang* are important musical instruments that are used and in particular, no dance could be performed without the beat of *khuang*, which undoubtedly was the most important and popular musical instrument amongst the people of Mizoram.⁸⁵

It must also be noted that these traditional dances are also intricately linked to festivals and ceremonies as invoked by the tribes on specific occasions. In other words, one or the other dances are always performed during the celebration of their festivals. For instance, *Chai Lam*, a dance associated with the Lusei tribe was originally performed during their main festival called *Chapchar Kut* and is even believed to have some special links with one another in terms of its originality. This dance is also believed to be one of the oldest dances of the Luseis. There are also few other dances like *Tangkawnga Vailak Lam* which was originally performed during festivals.⁸⁶ Another instance is the *Cawnglaizawnh*, which was performed during the *Khuangchawi* feast amongst the Lai tribes. Even though this is not an actual festival in the strict sense of the term, however, it may be argued that *Khuangchawi* is the most prominent feast which could only be

⁸⁰ Known as *Ruakkhatlak* originally by the *Lai* tribe from where it originated in Mizoram.

⁸¹ Basically same type of dance but known by the different names by Lai, Mara, Lusei respectively.

⁸² More commonly known as *Chawnglaizawn* in the contemporary period.

⁸³ Traditional three sets of gong made of brass.

⁸⁴ A big single traditional gong also made from brass.

⁸⁵ Verghese, Thanzawna, *A History of the Mizos, New Delhi*, p. 25.

⁸⁶ Tribal Research Institute, *Mizo Lam Thenkhatte*, p.2, 73.

performed by rich people or people from the higher class or a meritorious person who has achieved and attained numerous feats of merits in his lifetime.

It is an undeniable claim that dances in general has always been an important functioning cultural practice not only for the tribes alone but for the nation as a whole which seems to be a common practice all over the world among the diverse ethnics and culture. This may include dance as a form of traditional practice or worshipping or a form of entertainment purpose and a lot more. Basically, dance in general is an unspoken way of connecting and expressing themselves with other people or other tribes as a way of reflecting and exposing their traditions and culture and this practice is thus, very popularly and widely done especially in the outside world of Mizoram.

In other words, dance is also a way of bringing one tribe and the other together. It is through dance that various tribes can connect with each other by observing and even learning one another's dance. This way, it also acts as a medium of tool for the interchange of new culture among various tribes. This further led them to the possibility of building new relationship with other tribes even from outside Mizoram.

At the same time, dance has always served as a tool for building new relationships amongst the dancers and performers, especially the people who were from the same community or village. It is even believed that many people found their partners and new relationship were built through dancing and it was mainly the youths who would perform the dances. Considering the fact that dancing is a way of life, it makes it possible for the village folks, especially the youths who would enjoy and make use of the occasion in a way that would largely serve their social and cultural purposes.

Dance has always been a moment of pleasure, particularly for the people who love dancing. This is especially true for the early inhabitants especially during the pre-colonial period. Traditional dances were mostly performed during their long awaited festive occasions and which was always accompanied by grand feasts for the entire villagers. It was a time for them to take a break from their hardworking and exhausting

jhum labour, which was part of their daily routine and therefore, dance was one way of refreshing themselves from this hard labour and toil. It was also a chance of relaxing from their daily occupation as they used to entertain themselves by various traditional games, sports, singing and in this regard, dance was considered as one of the most indispensable way of relaxation and an energizing exercise.

In fact, dance was regarded as one of the most important way of entertaining themselves especially among the youths and no exception to the elders as well. It is also true that even children enjoyed dancing as much as they excelled and enjoyed the various traditional games and sports. However, it must clearly be noted that during these festive occasions where alcohol was a mandatory beverage, as a rule, children would not be allowed and were kept out from it.

Another important role played by dance in the society is that it provided comfort and solace to people who are facing hard times and difficulties. It really helps in lessening sadness, nostalgia and comfort from longing for their bereaved relatives that passed away. Therefore, dancing was a surest way of consoling the family and also a way of having fun altogether amongst the village folks.

Furthermore, dances like *Topum Lam* by Lai and *Chheih Lam* by the Lusei tribes are some common examples for such dances where *Chheih Lam* is even believed to have originated from this Lai's *Topum Lam*.⁸⁷ These dances are said to be merely for social entertainment purposes and do not have any particular significances in the society. Especially among the elders of the village, they would informally gather together at one of the villagers' houses without any specific reason and sometimes in order to solely lessen their loneliness as they had more free time than anyone else. It was at this time that they would perform and dance different types of dances all throughout the night and would drink *zu* with *sa*⁸⁸ while enjoying the gathering.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Interviewed, Dated, 4th September 2019, with HC Hniangkhara at Lawngtlai.

⁸⁸ Zu and sa literally means alcohol and meat.

Another important role of dance as a means of forming a relationship with other people and outsiders in general can be clearly witnessed from the Lusei dance called *Khuallam*.⁹⁰ As the name itself suggest, it is a dance performed by the guests from their neighboring villages or any visitors from outside. This was a special type of dance which was performed on the occasion of the grand feast called *Khuangchawi*. This dance is believed to have been performed mostly by the visitors at the village gate or *kawtchhuah* and the guests would often be joined by the local villagers in dancing as a sign of welcoming them where they would jointly dance the *Khuallam* altogether.

According to McCall, it was a traditional practice that a man who was to perform the *khuangchawi* would send an invitation to his father-in-law by sending an unspoken message through a messenger a ‘forked piece of bamboo with white cock’s feathers and pieces of ginger’ attached to it and on acceptance by the father-in-law, he has to place the same on his wall and would then kill a pig after as a gesture of acceptance and goodness. With his acceptance through this gesture, the father-in-law would arrange a group to perform this dance called *Khuallam* where they would dance out in the open courtyard and performed *Khuallam* dance.⁹¹ Therefore, it can be concluded that dance was an important tool for building and maintaining their relationship with their neighboring villages. It was an age old tradition of welcoming their visitors and an indication of harmony and solidarity as well a sign of invitation for future visit.

⁸⁹ Hniangkhar.

⁹⁰ Interviewed, Dated, 9th September 2019, with T. Chalngingluaia, at Bungkawn, Aizawl.

⁹¹ McCall, pp. 188, 189.



Fig. 3: Khullam

Source: Dept. of Art & Culture, Aizawl

2.3. Dance and Pre-Colonial Society:

There have been various historical accounts on the pre-colonial traditional dances among the various tribes of Mizoram where most of them are secondary sources. In fact, almost all of these materials are more or less confined to the customs and tradition of dances practiced during the pre-colonial period.

Mizoram has a rich cultural background which includes songs, poems, folklore and dance as well. According to various sources, it would seem that the early habitants of Mizoram were known to be nostalgic and sentimental in a sense that they easily felt lonesome and would often long for accompany. Perhaps, this must have been the reason why they were known to be ardent lovers of singing and dancing. The people since the pre-colonial period have always enjoyed gathering together with others within their own

community where they would even sing and dance the whole night. This clearly indicated that it was since the time of their fore-fathers that the people have always loved singing and dancing as a form of entertaining each other within their own communities.

Dance has always been a part and parcel of their culture from pre-colonial times and this is also evident from the fact that various sources clearly mentioned that dances of different kind have been invoked quite intensely and performed by the people through the ages. Some of the dances especially the common ones like *Cheraw*, *Sarlamkai*, etc are believed to have already been practiced during their earlier settlements in Burma and is said to have been continued and adapted even in their present settlement in Mizoram.



Fig. 4: Cheraw

Source: Dept. of Art & Culture, Aizawl

Dance not only played a huge role in their traditional life but also in their socio-religious life as well. According to K. Zohra, the early Maras practiced their traditional dances in various important occasions such as feasts, sacrifices, ceremonies, festivals and other important events since they were great lovers of dancing. Dance was even considered as a universal practice or item while considering their various socio-religious activities and occasions.⁹² It must also be noted that these dances originated over a different period of time.⁹³

Just like the Maras, other tribes are also known to be ardent lovers of dancing as various tribes, clan and sub-clans also have their own dances which could be labeled as their own originated dance even though the number differs. Apart from Mara tribe, Lai tribe is another tribe which is believed to have quite a large number of. It would seem mostly it is the dances that originated and emanated from of the Lai communities that are continued to be widely and commonly practiced all across the state.

The religious belief system also played a major role in the pre-colonial society. Their socio-religious belief system has a big role and a long term effect in their milieu including their belief in life after death at *mitthi-khua* and *pialral*. Dances which are related to death ceremonies are performed in times of death like *Cheraw*, *Chawnglaizawn*, *Sarlankai*, *Sawlakia*, *Rallu-lam*, etc. All these dances are performed to attain a happy after-life in *mitthi-khua* or *pialral* for the dead people and also for their safe passage to *mitthi-khua* and *pialral*. This shows how dance was also used as a form of wishing good luck to the departed souls for their life after death and also as a form of protecting those souls from demons and evil spirit on their way to the village of the dead.

⁹² Zohra, p. 159.

⁹³ Pachhi Hlychho, interviewed by Lalhminghlui on August 2019 at his office in MADC in Siaha.



Fig. 5: Rallu-lam

Source: Dept. of Art & Culture, Aizawl

Looking at the origins of various dances especially the Mara and Lai's, the background and story of their origins are deeply related to spirits, demons and animals. These types of dances include *Sawlakia*, *Sarlamkai*, *Athih-la*, etc. where they were originally performed to appease the spirits and demons from inflicting and causing harm to them. At the same time, dances were also performed for the hunters or warriors in the *sa-aih* or *lu-aih* or *ia* ceremony in order to have a full control over the spirit of their enemies and animals that they killed. In the various important socio-religious ceremonies, dance was also included as an indicator of completing the ceremonies as a whole or the ending the sacrifices.

2.4. Dance during Colonial Period:



Fig. 6: Sawlakia

Source: Dept. of Art & Culture, Aizawl

It will not be wrong to say that the significances of the traditional dances depend much on the socio-religious customs of the society. But since there began various changes within those traditional customs and practices in the society, dance also began to transform and evolve along with those changes as a result of colonialism, mainly the advent of Christianity. Most of their existing practices were no longer relevant to the new form of socio-religious custom that they adopted through the new beliefs brought by Christianity.

It was during this period of colonial rule that changes also came to be seen in the context of the traditional dances. Since then, significance of dance began to erode as most of them came to be viewed as contradictory to the new faith and practices unleashed by colonialism and Christianity. But interestingly, at times, it was again the Christian missionaries at some point or the other who contributed in spreading the dances from one place to another and also from one tribe to another indirectly.

This can be seen in the incident of the missionary Ms Chapman who went to Cheural village and saw and learned the *Cheraw* dance which she further taught to the school she was teaching in Serkawn where the dance was still new to them.⁹⁴ Then from that, this particular dance was performed by tribes other than the people from the Cheural village and then further spread to other villages. But at the same time, this incident also led to the change of its original and traditional name as well.

Thus, it can be seen that dances even with all the transformations and changes still continued to play a major role in the society of Mizoram. The colonial period was the period whereby dance underwent significant transformation and changes from its traditional form and orientation which in fact was inevitable since there was tremendous political and religious influences exerted by the Imperial Raj and the missionaries making dances becoming flexibility and change oriented. Since the significances of the dances were also based on the social and religious customs, it was impossible for the numerous dance traditions to be performed and carried out in its traditional and pure form.

Since the Christian missionaries attempted on fitting the ethics and norms of Christianity into the traditional customs and beliefs of the inhabitants of Mizoram, it further led to the dilution of the existing traditions which are considered to be in contradiction to the new teachings initiated by the Christian missionaries.⁹⁵ Apart from these, the influence of the political administration may also be seen in terms of new initiatives taken up pertaining to various activities having direct impact on the traditional dances.

⁹⁴ Chalngingluaia, 27.

⁹⁵ Percival R. Kirby, 'The Effect of Western Civilization on Bantu Music', in I. Schapera (ed.), *Western Civilization and the Natives of South Africa*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul LTD., 1967, p. 137.

2.5. Dance in Contemporary Period:

In the post-colonial scenario and even more in the contemporary period, there have been large number of changes and that even the tempo, style and movements of various traditional dances have been modified. Not only the movements, but also the names of various dances came to be renamed or changed contrary to the original names as christened by concerning tribes. In the case of *Chawnglaizawn* dance, it was traditionally called “Cawnglaizawnh” by the Lai tribe.⁹⁶ But since it became more widely and commonly practiced by various tribes, it is now more popularly called “Chawnglaizawn” in Mizoram.

More than anything else, there also began to develop an increasing consciousness on the dresses adorn when performing these dances which clearly explains a departure from the earlier practice. This was also due to the fact that with the onset of colonialism goods of different kinds came to be available and it also became easier to access a wider variety of dresses. The only thing that does not change is that only traditional attires, though with modifications and with a more colourful touch, are worn when performing the dances, be it in groups or individual or as a duo. In due course, there began uniformity in dresses worn by the dancers while performing various dances unlike the pre-colonial practice where a performer could wear any dress in their possession along with beads and ornaments.

Furthermore, as a result of new forces and practices making inroads into the society and along with other material developments that accompanied colonialism, there also began to emerge new and innovative ideas in the dances, particularly in the movements. Changes were also made purposefully in the movements of the dances in order to add more colors to the various dances and make it more beautiful and relevant to the contemporary situation. There also develops a desire to set up centres and institutions for imparting and learning traditional dances showcasing their historical significance as

⁹⁶ Chalngingluaia, p. 14.

well. Even though the practice of the traditional dance may not be completely neglected, but there is an increasing apprehensions on the part of the senior folks that younger generations may gradually lose their interest and with it may soon lead to withering away of traditional dances along with values and ethos

One significant orientation that is witnessed in the contemporary period is the fact that certain and specific dances became more prominent and popular amongst the tribes whereas an increasing trend came to be seen wherein some of the traditional dances are gradually relegated to the background. This is mainly due to those dances which have become more popular as they are considered to be more colorful and unique as compared to the other traditional dances. Even though they may still be performed at some quarters by some communities, it appears that they are no longer performed as frequently or as enthusiastically as in the earlier period.

One remarkable change in the contemporary period is the labeling of *Cheraw* as “bamboo dance.” Regarding this, there could be questions of when and why. It is very difficult to know the exact time when *Cheraw* came to be known as bamboo dance but it is believed to have been in the 2000s when the people of Mizoram set a new Guinness World Record for “Largest Bamboo Dance in the World” on 12th March, 2010 which was performed by more than 10,000 people. In this event, instead of using the name of the dance in its native language, it is believed that the name “bamboo dance” was used for making it more relevant and comprehensible to other people across the globe as it was an international level competition. Following this, there has been controversies and disagreement with the new nomenclature “bamboo dance” in instead of its indigenous name “Cheraw” while registering in the Guinness World Record.

Moreover, strong influence could be felt in so far as musical instruments are concerned with new materials and instruments making headway in the society and this definitely has a lot of impact on dances as well. This is clearly evident in the case of *Cheraw* dance wherein musical track is now used, instead of live music, along with the tune of an old native song called *Liando te unau*. At the same time, *khuang* is still regularly used in all

of the dances, including *Cheraw* (even when a music track is played) along with the brass gongs. In the contemporary period, brass gongs and other instruments are normally used in order to showcase the complete set of musical instruments that are being used when performing the dances but do not contribute much tune to the dances, especially in the case of *Cheraw* as the sound of the gongs are also incorporated in the contemporary musical tracks.

2.5.1. Economic Benefits:

Traditional dances were never used as a form of economic benefits prior to the contemporary period. In the earlier period, dances were solely for traditional customs and entertainments. Not only that, dance were never seen as having economic ends or benefits. It was only in the contemporary period that the various traditional dances began to be used as a tool for tourist attraction or ‘cultural tourism’ which further contributed to the economic development of the state.

The various tourist attractions also included the main traditional festivals and some other celebrations where variety of cultural items and activities are included. This also shows that traditional customs which eventually became more of a cultural practice are now given more importance and recognition with added economic values attached to them and therefore, these events and festivals are still considered to be incomplete without such performances.

2.6. Social Status:

Another important significance of dance is that it also indicates the social status of a person, particularly during the pre-colonial period through dance; one can see existence of different layers of status in the society. This may be corroborated by the fact that a

particular dance would be performed for fulfilling a particular motive or reason. For instance, almost all the dances were performed during the death ceremonies of a chief or his relatives or people from the higher section of the society or from the rich family.

Higher status in the pre-colonial society mainly refer to the chief and his associates called *lal upa* or *lal khawnbawl*⁹⁷, people who are rich and live well enough to perform the grand *khuangchawi* feast and also the people who are capable of killing certain types of wild animals (including tiger) and succeed in completing various steps required to perform *khuangchawi* at the same time. On the other hand, the lower status of the people generally referred to the people who are not from the mentioned class. Performing *khuangchawi* is of important significance in determining ranks and status in the society. It is well-known fact that apart from the chiefs and his village elders, the people who were able to perform *khuangchawi* were given special status in the society during the pre-colonial period.

All these differentiations and distinctions became largely visible when different dances were performed on different occasions. A significant and prominent dance *Chawnglaizawn* is the dance which is said to have been performed only in the time of the death of the village chief. It was performed by his trusted servant to bid farewell to the chief and promise him that he will always look after him, be loyal no matter what happens and that he will always protect him in times of sadness and hardships even in *pialral*,⁹⁸ just like he had done during his lifetime in this world.⁹⁹

Even though this particular dance is said to have been confined only to be performed during the funeral of the chiefs by most of the sources, it is also believed to have been performed during the *khuangchawi* feast as well.¹⁰⁰ During the *khuangchawi* feast, *lalnu* or the wife of the chief would be carried around at the center of the area where the

⁹⁷ Village elders or council of the chief in Lusei language.

⁹⁸ Paradise.

⁹⁹ Chalngingluaia, p. 15.

¹⁰⁰ Interviewed, Dated 3rd September 2019 with Lalruatkima, at Lawngtlai.

dancers performed *Chawnglaizawn* as she would toss up¹⁰¹ goods such as chains, necklaces and several valuable items which would be picked up by women and children attending the grand feast.¹⁰²

Even though the time and occasion of performing *Chawnglaizawnh* could still be a debatable topic, one thing which is clear is that this dance, particularly during the pre-colonial period was a dance which was related to special occasions which were further confined to the people with higher status in the society as it was performed during the funeral of the chiefs and *khuangchawi*, it is clear that this dance is related to the higher class and well to do people. At the same time, there are no known dances for the other section of the people except for *Cheraw* as this dance was performed whenever there was a woman who died of *raicheh* or miscarriage, regardless of her social background.

Other than *Chawnglaizawn*, another dance called *Sawlakia* by the Maras was also said to be performed in times of the death of the chief.¹⁰³ This dance is also commonly categorized as a warrior dance as it was performed during ceremonies in order to celebrate their victory whenever they defeated their enemies and brought the heads of their enemies back home. Even though other tribes such as Lusei and Lai also have their own version of this dance, they seem to have performed only during those celebrations unlike the Maras. But performing this dance for the dead chief is commonly unknown as this dance is most popularly known as the warrior dance or victory dance by all the tribes practicing it. Perhaps it was performed for very few chiefs in order to show their greatest gratitude and honour towards him by his villagers.

But still, it is believed that there is no differentiation regarding the people who could perform the *Chawnglaizawn* dance. It was mostly the youth, both male and female, who use to perform these dances commemorating various events, but there seemed to be no restrictions regardless of their social status and background in the society. At the same

¹⁰¹ Money.

¹⁰² Interviewed, Dated 3rd September 2019, with B. Buanhmunga, at Lawngtlai.

¹⁰³ Interviewed, Dated 9th August 2019, with L. Laina, at Zawngling, Siaha.

time, the *Chawnglaizawn* dance being performed for the higher class of the society could also mean that, since they were the people who made the biggest achievement one could possibly make during their lifetime, and which was not possible for everyone, therefore they were considered to have deserved a special status and treatment in the society.

2.7. Position of Women:

Women were not excluded from performing most of these traditional dances. They participated as much as men did. In fact there seemed to be not much discrimination between the two genders in dancing. Almost all of the traditional dances of Mizoram are performed in groups by the mixture of both men and women. At the same time, there are also few dances which are performed by a specific gender.

One of the most popular dances among these is *Cheraw*. Since it was originally a dance related to women (*raicheh*), it was performed exclusively by women while men were completely excluded during the pre-colonial period. The two roles of the performer of *Cheraw*; the dancers and the ones who strike the bamboo rhythmically according to the beat or sound of *khuang* or any music instrument used, were both taken up by women. The dance was led specifically by a divorcee¹⁰⁴ or any other woman who have experienced a miscarriage.¹⁰⁵

Meanwhile, *Sawlakia* is a dance which is believed to have been performed only by men since it is the dance of the warriors and was performed by the *pasaltha* or the warriors themselves. It was performed by dancing around the head of their slain enemies while chanting *hlado*¹⁰⁶ in order to show-off their victory and strength towards the death of the defeated enemy with war materials and weapons in hand. It is also believed by many

¹⁰⁴ Interviewed, Dated, 4th September 2019, with HC Hniangkhar, at Lawngtlai.

¹⁰⁵ Chalngingluaia, p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ Hunter or warrior's cry or chant.

others that women were also included in performing this dance even during the pre-colonial period without chanting *hlado* and carrying war weapons like men do.

Women were believed to have been included in this dance as a way to show their impartiality towards them.¹⁰⁷ It remains unknown whether *Sawlakia* was also performed by women but it is better to believe that they were included as other tribes such as Lusei and Lai who have similar type of dance, called *Rallu-lam* and *Sarlamkai* respectively, included both men and women when performing the dance.

Apart from such dances all the other dances involved a pair or a whole group of dancers where both men and women participated regardless of their gender even though the role of both the genders differed in various dances. Therefore it is clearly evident that both men and women shared the same privilege in dance during the pre-colonial period and still remains the same even in the contemporary times.



Fig. 7: Chai Lam

Source: Dept. of Art & Culture, Aizawl

¹⁰⁷ Interviewed, Dated 5th August 2019, with Pachhi Hlychho, at Siaha.

2.8. Conclusion:

Over the years, with the passing of time changes could be seen in the style, tempo and orientation of different kind of dances in Mizoram. Dances have become more of a practice in order to preserve the tradition and to keep the culture alive. This can be clearly seen from the fact that cultural programmes are always included in various important social and religious events such as the inauguration of the Union Territory of Mizoram in 1972¹⁰⁸ and the celebration of the Gospel Centenary in 1994¹⁰⁹ which are two of the biggest events held in the beginning of the post-colonial period where the various traditional dances are kept as the main items of this particular cultural session.

In the contemporary period, dance as a cultural tradition have been immensely diluted and further changes were made by the people and the performers alike. This includes the modification and changing of the movements of the dance and even the tune and music of the various dances which were changed according to their relevance and situation. Not only this, changes were also made in the traditional dances in order to make it more attractive, relevant and fit to the contemporary demands.

At the same time, in the contemporary period, dance have become more of a showcase in order to reflect the various traditional customs and practices not only in Mizoram but even to the outside world and performed wherever different tribes settled. It also remains as one of the major traditional tools for expressing and introducing the culture of Mizoram even to the outsiders.

When tracing the traditional dances from the pre-colonial to the contemporary period, it is undeniable that transformation and changes have taken place including its significance, dress style, movements, ornaments, instruments, etc. Even though various organizations and local governments have been trying to keep up the values of these

¹⁰⁸ Minute of the Programmes for Inauguration of Union Territory of Mizoram, 1971, (General Dept. CB-119 G-1432), Mizoram State Archives, Aizawl.

¹⁰⁹ Minute of MGC Lawm Dan (Cultural Programmes at Lunglei Town Area), 1994, Baptist Church of Mizoram Archives, Serkawn, Lunglei.

dances by taking certain measures, some of the traditional aspects and features could not be maintained anymore mainly due to the change of time and demands. In spite of this, the various dances of Mizoram have spread to the various nooks and corners of the world and its art, skill and techniques continued to be disseminated and passed on to younger generations in order to make the tradition alive.

Chapter III: Dance and Colonial Intervention

3.1. Introduction:

The Oxford Dictionary defines colonialism as “The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers and exploiting it economically.” The nature of colonialism may have varied from one colony to the other due to the motives of the dominating empire. In the context of Mizoram, apart from the mentioned policies, one of its major effects was seen in the evolution and changes of the traditional cultural beliefs and practices which can further be witnessed in the various traditional dances.

Even though there were no particular attempts to culturally colonize the various tribes of Mizoram, however, it may be argued that through different forces like; western education, the world wars, the influences of the colonial administration and most importantly, the coming of Christianity had major impact on this field. Therefore, it is indeed consistent to look into the way in which how these traditional norms and customary practices were affected following colonial intervention and in this context, the various dances of Mizoram also underwent significant transformations and with it the performance, presentation and staging of almost all the dances had to adapt and re-orient with the new changing circumstances.

3.2. Colonialism and Dance in Mizoram:

In the words of Edward Said, “Colonialism is the implanting of settlements in distant territory”, and is almost always a consequence of the term imperialism which means “the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory”. It also simply means the process or policy of establishing or

maintaining an empire¹¹⁰ “Colonialism can also be defined as the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods”. At the same time, it must also be noted that colonialism in this sense is not limited to the expansion of the European powers into Asia, Africa or the Americas, but in fact it has been a recurrent and widespread feature of human history.¹¹¹

The British Empire started to occupy Mizoram only by the late nineteenth century even though its surrounding areas like Chittagong and Burma were already conquered in the mid-nineteenth century. The reason seemed to be that very little or no interest was given to the people and the hilly area of what soon came to be called by them as the Lushai Hills and often claimed them as “irreclaimable savages”.¹¹² Chieftainships was at its height and best set of governance while the people lived in small and isolated clusters under the leadership of their chiefs, inter village feuds, warfare against each other was common and among which the Sailo clan was the most dominant one. The preliterate society was simple and cohesive and their religious lives were dominated more or less by paganism and animism led by the clear concept of life after death called *pialral* or paradise and *mitthi-khua*¹¹³. The main concept of *pialral* and *mitthi-khua* was that their life beyond this world, whether it a luxurious life or a difficult one, will solely depend on the life they lead during their lifetime. But this is different from that of the concept of reincarnation or the beliefs of life after death by other religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, etc. as the *pialral* concept was not based on the good deeds they did during their lifetime in the world but on how many particular animals they hunted and killed or if they could perform *khuangchawi*. They also elaborately practiced animal sacrifices mainly to appease the evil spirits in order to avoid natural disasters, diseases, etc. or to be healed from diseases when they suffer from one.¹¹⁴ It must also be noted that the

¹¹⁰ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1993, p. 9.

¹¹¹ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/ Post Colonialism*, London, Routledge, 1998, p. 3.

¹¹² Donna Strom, “Christianity and Culture Change Among the Mizoram”, *Missiology: An International Review*, vol. 8, issue. 3, 1980, p. 308. Available from: Sage Journals, (accessed on 1st November, 2019).

¹¹³ Land of the dead people.

¹¹⁴ Lalsangkim Pachuau, “Mizo Sakhua in Transition”, *Missiology: An International Review*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2016, pp. 41-56. Available from: Research Gate, (accessed 2/11/2019).

inhabitants of Mizoram since the pre-colonial period did not have a separate concept or belief of reincarnation unlike the other religions, except the life after death in the world of the dead people or *mitthi-khua*.

If we focus merely on the traditional dances of Mizoram especially during the colonial period, then some of the interviewees considered that colonialism did not have any direct impact as the colonizers did not attempt to change or influence nor did they take concrete steps to make an impact on the dances directly. Rev. L. Mark from Saikao¹¹⁵, the great grandson in-law of the missionary of the Maraland Reginald A. Lorrain¹¹⁶, mentioned that no particular attention was given to the traditional dances of the then Lushai Hills nor were against the dances. He also said that even though the missionaries did not know how to perform or dance, they were aware of and familiar with most of the traditional dances, especially the popular ones during that time which include *Cheraw*, *Sawlakia*, *Sarlamkai*, *Arpa Lam*, etc.¹¹⁷

At the same time, some interviewees have also mentioned that the missionaries did have a say and were against the tradition and practice surrounding the dances but not directly on the dance itself. This was mainly due to the inclusion of alcohol in festival and ceremonies which the Christian missionaries were strictly against and prohibited among the newly Christian converts. For instance, elders of the villages who were no longer strong enough to go to work in their agricultural fields or for hunting used to gather during their free time where they would sing and dance in order to console each other's loneliness by enjoying their companies. Here, *zu* and *sa* or in other words 'alcohol' and 'meat' was always traditionally included which came to be heavily opposed by the missionaries as Christianity gained more ground in Mizoram.

Along with this, the missionaries were also believed to have been against the traditional practices associated with the various dances performed during "kut-ni vang thla" or the

¹¹⁵ Serkawr.

¹¹⁶ A Christian Missionary of Siaha, former Lakherland during the early twentieth century.

¹¹⁷ Rev. L. Mark, interviewed by Lalhminghlui on August 2019 at his residence in Serkawr, Siaha.

festive seasons. During those festive events where dances were performed in accordance to their general traditional customs, alcohol was one of the major and compulsory food/beverage items which was the main reason for the missionaries to oppose such events, including the dances performed during those occasions.¹¹⁸ In this case, it can clearly be seen that the Christian missionaries did not seem to be against the traditional dances per se, but rather the general traditional customs that came with dances and in this case, *zu* or beer. Dance and alcohol, in fact, had always been interconnected as dancing is always accompanied by drinking of beer and vice versa. But this began to change with the coming of Christianity and the prohibition of consumption of alcohol by the missionaries.

If we look at the way colonialism impacted traditional customs and practices, then, it was Christianity which was a by-product of colonialism and the subsequent subjugation of the indigenous people that directly or indirectly led to changes in the cultural practices of these tribes.

3.3. Christianity and Dance:

In Mizoram, since the pre-colonial period, religious rituals and customs have always played a big part in the lives of the people. Such rituals and customs were almost always connected with activities such as dancing and singing. One common feature of the tribes was that there were no definite worship of gods or goddesses; but at the same time they had a unique kind of relationship with whom they considered as supernatural human beings such as *Pu Vana*, *Khuanu*, and others. For the Lusei tribe, in particular, ceremonial offerings and sacrifices were made to various invisible spirits along with other supernatural beings like *ramhuai* or *phung*,¹¹⁹ *lasi*¹²⁰ whom they considered to have the ability to curse them or cause bad luck¹²¹ in various aspects of their lives.

¹¹⁸ Rosiama.

¹¹⁹ A kind of ghost.

Among the rituals practiced by the people of pre-Christian Mizoram, an animal sacrifice was also a common feature which was mainly associated with superstitious beliefs. This proved that their mentality was greatly dominated and guided by their strong superstitions and belief system. One of the most evident instances within the context of dance can clearly be seen in the case of the *Cheraw* dance, formerly (or originally) known as *Ruakkhatlak* which was performed when a woman dies due to *raicheh* or a woman who died while trying to give birth to a child. The dance was initially performed only by women exclusively, and they would only let a barren or sterile woman to lead the dance as they believed that if a young woman who was not barren led the dance, then she would also die of *raicheh* later on. It was only performed when a woman particularly selected for the event leads the dance and that other women would join the dance.¹²² This was in fact due to their superstitious belief and fear of being cursed if they did not follow such customs that strict rules were followed.

Most of these customs, if not all, started to change after the coming of Christianity in Mizoram as most of the existing traditions were in contradiction to the doctrines and ethics of Christianity. During the pre-colonial period, even though the people did not explicitly worship evil spirits or demons in such a way that they could be considered as demon worshippers, they still considered them as important entities in their rituals and sacrifices. People did not worship those spirits and demons like they would worship God or *Pathian* but they always included them in the various sacrificial rituals in order to appease them so that the spirits will bring them any bad luck. However, with the advent of Christianity, all these customs and beliefs began to lose their importance and significance and became merely old tradition and a practice before their conversion to Christianity.

¹²⁰ A type of angel whom they believed to be very beautiful and have the super power to bless them especially in hunting.

¹²¹ L. B. Thanga, *The Mizos: A Study in Racial Personality*, Guwahati, United Publishers, 1978, pp, 26, 27.

¹²² Chalngingluaia, p. 27.

3.4. Education and Dance:

Education could be considered as one of the major agents of colonialism. The introduction of education, which accompanied Christianity, brought positive impacts on the lives of the people and the society as a whole. As far as dresses were concerned, the newly Christianized and educated groups seemed to be invariably conscious of western style of dressing which they eventually adopted in due course. This in turn would also make way for modifications in the traditional attires that were worn in festivals that always included different dance forms.

3.5. Colonial Intervention and Dances of Mizoram:

As mentioned briefly, the colonial intervention has a lot of important impacts which further changed the significances of dance especially in Mizoram. It is inevitable that the traditional dances still played a major role in the society but very much changed as compared to that of the pre-colonial and colonial period. This is clearly evident in the case of dance becoming more of an entertainment purpose rather than meeting the social and cultural purposes.

3.5.1. Modification of name:

Even though it is evidently unintentional, modification of the name was one of the most common and significant feature associated with dances in Mizoram. It is definitely remarkable as it completely changed the original name of the dance as once traditionally called by the tribe from where it originated. The dance now widely known as *Cheraw* was originally known as *Ruakkhatlak* by the Lais. It was due to the absence of information and mispronunciation by one of the prominent colonial Christian

missionaries under Baptist Missionary Society, Miss Edith M. Chapman,¹²³ who came to Mizoram in 1919 and spent most of her time at Serkawn¹²⁴ that the traditional *Ruakkhatlak* came to be strictly known as *Cheraw*.

The narrative behind this incident goes back to when Ms Chapman, accompanied by some of her colleagues went to a town called *Cheural*¹²⁵ where they were warmly welcomed with the traditional dance which was known as *Ruakkhatlak*. She found the dance to be very beautiful and interesting and also believed to have learned the dance along with her colleagues. When she went back to her working place at *Serkawn* where the missionaries opened and taught in a Baptist Christian school, she and her colleagues started to teach the beautiful *Ruakkhatlak* dance, wanting their students to learn and know the dance. Just like Ms Chapman and her colleagues, the people there who just saw them dancing also found the dance to be unique and beautiful and asked those questions regarding what dance it was.

Here, Ms Chapman, not knowing the original name “Ruakkhatlak” just answered the name of the dance by taking the name of the village they from where they learned the dance. Furthermore, as she was not able to pronounce the local word “Cheural” correctly in the local accent, she just simply answered to their question saying that it was a “Cheraw¹²⁶ dance. Due to this, the dance came to popularly known as “Cheural dance” or “Cheural Kan¹²⁷” by the locals of Serkawn for a long time. Subsequently, the name was further altered and become more widely known as “Cheraw Kan” or simply “Cheraw” till date.¹²⁸

¹²³ More commonly known as Pi Zirtiri among the locals in Mizoram.

¹²⁴ The name of an area in Lunglei which is located in the southern part of Mizoram.

¹²⁵ The name of a town in Lawngtlai district in the southern part of Mizoram.

¹²⁶ Believed to be a mispronunciation of the word “Cheural”.

¹²⁷ The word “kan” is also a word used for saying the way of dancing Cheraw in Lusei language.

¹²⁸ Chalngingluaia, p. 29.



Fig. 8: Miss Edith M. Chapman also known as Pi Zirtiri
Source: www.mizobaptist.org

This is believed to have happened in the 1920s as the missionaries started the Christian school at Serkawn in 1922 and the fact that Ms Chapman was able to teach the dance to her students indicated that it happened after 1922 when the school was established. This incident of the change of the original name, “Ruakkhatlak” to “Cheraw” was also told in various personal interviews as well. However, it is not known why the name “Cheraw” which was started by a ‘foreigner’, especially in the case of a ‘traditional’ dance was accepted in the society. This, in a way, shows the immense influence weigh on by the missionaries upon the local people of Mizoram. Even in the contemporary period, it is without doubt that at the most, not more than half of the people especially in the present generation among the youth are aware of the original name of the popular *Cheraw* dance even though it is now considered to be the main and most practiced dance of Mizoram. There also seemed to be no attempt in renaming the dance or reusing the original name.

Apart from Ms Chapman, no other missionaries were known to have interest in the traditional dances nor taken steps to pass on the dance from one area to another area, and

it was true even in the case of the missionaries¹²⁹ who came during and after her retirement in 1953. Another remarkable feature is the fact that due to the interest and enthusiasm shown by Ms Chapman, the *Cheraw* dance came to be more widely known in the area especially in Serkawn where *Cheraw* seemed to be unknown at that time until she started to teach them and pass the skill to the people.

This way, Ms Chapman can be considered as a pioneer and thus credited for spreading *Cheraw* dance to a wider area and also for the inter-exchange of dance between different tribes which was unusual during the time. Moreover, due to all this, the “Ruakkhatlak” dance is now accepted and known as “Cheraw” both inside and outside Mizoram.

There are also other traditional dances whose names were modified but did not seem to be the result of the colonial intervention. Rather, these modifications could be considered more as a result of mispronunciation of the original name given by the origin tribe.

3.5.2. Social Changes:

One of the changes brought by the British colonizers in Mizoram was seen in the institution of chieftainship of the then Lushai Hills which eventually led to the abolition of the entire institution of chieftainship. The changes in the position of the chief were undeniably one of the major impacts of the British rule. Although there were some chiefs who were retained by the British colonizers as their agents to rule and take charge of some villages during the time, it is still undeniable that the position of the chiefs had

¹²⁹ This implies all the other missionaries of any denomination who worked in the different areas of Mizoram.

to a great extent eroded and lost its significance during the colonial period and the British subjugation and conquest of the region.¹³⁰

The abolition of chieftainship had an impact on dance as there were certain traditional dances which were exclusively performed only in times of the death of the chiefs. For instance, the *Cheraw* dance was performed by the Maras only in times of the death of their chief, if not the rich or people with a high status in the society.¹³¹ The Maras also had another dance particularly called *Athih la*¹³² which was performed during the time of the feast called *Riha* and which was organized by the family of the demised for the mourners.¹³³

Another important dance is *Cawnglaizawnh*¹³⁴, a dance which was performed on the event when the village chief died particularly among the Lai tribe.¹³⁵ It is also said to have been performed when the people from the higher section of the society who are rich enough to have slaves died. This dance was performed in order to show their condolence and loyalty towards their masters even at the time of their death and in the afterlife. It is also a dance performed to indicate their encouragements towards their dead master and wishing them their best regards to reach the *mithi-khua* safely.¹³⁶

Colonialism and the abolition of chieftainship directly affected the traditional significance of these dance as it was no longer possible to perform them without the presence of the chiefs. So, with the absence of chiefs, the traditional or original significance of these particular dances were no more relevant and could not be followed

¹³⁰ Lalthakima, 'Chieftainship in Mizo Society', Mizo Article, (web-blog), <https://mizothuziak.blogspot.com/2017/01/chieftainship-in-mizo-society.html>, (accessed 15th November, 2019).

¹³¹ Interviewed, Dated, 9th August 2019, with L. Laina, at Zawngling, Siaha.

¹³² The literal meaning is funeral dance.

¹³³ Interviewed, Dated, 5th August 2019, with Pachhi Hlychho, at MADC(Mara Autonomous District Council), Siaha.

¹³⁴ Also popularly known as Chawnglaizawn.

¹³⁵ Chalngingluaia, p. 15.

¹³⁶ Interviewed, Dated, 4th September 2019, with H.C. Hniangkhar, at Lawngtlai.

in the strict sense of the term although these dances continued to remain popular and significant even today.



Fig. 9: Chawnglaizawn

Source: Dept. of Art & Culture

3.5.3. Religious Changes:

The religious transformation which was the result of the advent of Christianity rendered it impossible for pre-Christian religious practices and associated traditions to thrive and persist. Since those traditions were deeply associated with the dances, the significances of those traditional dances also became irrelevant eventually.

Festivals:

There are many types of traditional festivals in Mizoram belonging to the various tribes such as *Chapchar kut*, *Mim kut*, *Pawl kut* for the Lusei tribe, *Khutla* or *Lyuva-Khutla*, *Pazita*, *Ladawdai*, *Khohna-Kia*¹³⁷ for the Mara tribe and *Tho*, *Lochiat*, *Hlukhla*, *Hnianghrawm*¹³⁸ for the Lai tribe.

Most of these festivals are linked to their cultural milieu such as agriculture, hunting, war and thanksgiving ceremonies and activities since farming and hunting were the main occupations for the various tribes in the pre-colonial period. There were also other festivals which are observed merely for their death relatives and dear ones and also for celebrating the blessings in their lives. The significances of other types of festivals also contributed to the success they achieved in their agricultural fields and in hunting animals throughout the year.

These various festivals were mostly celebrated and observed enthusiastically and ardently by the whole villagers including the elders, the youths, the parents and the children in the community. There used to be grand feasts in which the expenditures were jointly contributed mainly by the villagers who participated in the occasion. There were also different types of festivals where some of them would last only for a day or a little more than a day while some would last even up to a week or so. Apart from festivals being an important occasion, it was also a time when they relaxed and entertain themselves to get relieve from their hard agricultural toil which was their daily routine from morn to dusk.

In other words, festivals were the time of “public merry-making” where they entertained themselves by playing traditional games, would sit together and sing different songs and dance while enjoying their “zu and sa”¹³⁹ and would often last the whole night. It was their way of escaping from the reality and would wait for it eagerly the whole year since

¹³⁷ K. Zohra, pp, 27-41.

¹³⁸ Chalngingluaia, pp. 36-43.

¹³⁹ The literal meaning is alcohol or local beer in the case of pre-colonial period and meat.

the inhabitants of Mizoram in the pre-colonial times had to continuously work hard in their agricultural field or hunting without much breaks in between. Also, there were not much other entertainment and such unlike the contemporary period and festivals was one of the very few ways to enjoy their life. To sum up, these festivals were celebrated very whole-heartedly and they would prepare for it as much as they could to make the best out of the occasion they had been waiting and looking forward to for a long time.

As mentioned, some dances are exclusively associated with certain festivals where *Chai lam*, a dance associated with the *Lusei* tribe and is a group dance performed by both men and women which was initially performed only during the festival *Chapchar kut*.¹⁴⁰ There are also other dances like *Sikpui lam*, *Tangkawnga Vailak lam* which originated from another tribe called Hmar who lived in mostly Mizoram and some areas of Manipur and were performed only during a specific festival as well.

Other dances include *Khuallam*, a Lusei dance which is said to have been performed only during the time of *khuangchawi* in the earlier period.¹⁴¹ Even though *khuangchawi* was not exactly a festival (but rather a grand feast which was organized by a qualified individual rich enough to meet all the criteria in hunting certain particular animals), it was very close to the type of festivals they used to celebrate, especially in terms of the fondness and enthusiasm shown by the people for the *khuangchawi* feast.

Another dance, *Chawnglaizawnh* is also said to be performed during *khuangchawi* event. But this is debatable as it is said to have been danced only during the death of a chief and people who were rich, while on the other hand it is said to have been performed at the time of the grand feast. Another type of dance related to festivals was the Lusei's *mitthi rawp lam*¹⁴² which was again dedicated to their dead relatives during *khuangchawi*.

¹⁴⁰ Tribal Research Institute, p. 1.

¹⁴¹ Rosiama.

¹⁴² They performed this dance only after completing a certain steps.

The significance of dances in festivals is therefore clearly evident which is proved by the fact that there were particular dances exclusively for the festivals. However, this scenario completely changed following the advent of Christianity as dances were no longer attributed to a particular event and occasions even though festivals are still celebrated and observed with great pomp and enthusiasm. Drinking of alcohol and local beers were also strongly opposed by the missionaries. Festivals which were particularly observed for the dead villagers or citizens like *Mim kut* and others became to be no longer relevant in the contemporary period since the advent of Christianity.

Traditional Beliefs:

Since the various traditional dances were closely interlinked with pre-colonial belief system and customs, dances also began to lose most of their traditional grandeur and significance. One of the major changes that this transformation brought about was the *lu-aih* and *sa lu-aih* tradition. This tradition was done by the various tribes whenever they killed their enemy or when they killed some particular animals like bear and compulsorily a tiger, which was believed to be a *sapui*.¹⁴³ Whenever they killed a person or an animal, they would cut the head¹⁴⁴ and carried home in order to prove their success in hunting animals or killing their enemies. For a warrior and a hunter, to have a proof of valour and bravery was really important and therefore, obtaining these trophies assumed great significance for cementing their standing in the society. Those warriors who came back home from hunting with their trophies such as slain human heads or animals were indeed given high honors.

¹⁴³ The animal which is believed to be the major and most significant in their traditional beliefs.

¹⁴⁴ It is commonly said that the heads of the slain are taken but in reality, it seemed to be the scalp of the top of the head which are cut out in order to take it back home to prove their success in killing their enemies in most of the time. This is mainly because there was not much space in their traditional bag known as "ipte pui" which is not big enough in case they had to bring home several heads or due to the fact that it could become troublesome to travel back a long way on foot if the whole head was taken.

So when the head of the slain person or animal, especially tiger were brought to the village by the warrior himself, there used to be a special ceremony held in the village *kawtchhuah*¹⁴⁵. This practice is done by all the tribes where the Maras called it the *Ia* ceremony while the Lai and Lusei tribes called it *sa lu-aih*. In this ceremony, the warrior as mentioned was given honor for his bravery and success in defeating his enemy or in hunting wild animals. Another significance of this ceremony was that once they carried out the ceremony, the spirit of the dead person or animal would not disturb them or in a way haunt them but instead would let them live peacefully. This is due to the fact that during the pre-Christian era, there were beliefs that even animals, not only human beings have spirit.¹⁴⁶ They also believed that by carrying out this special ceremony, the spirit of the person or animal they killed would also become their slaves and that the slayer would have a full control over them even in the afterlife at *mitthi-khua*.

It was in this ceremony that the dance often known as the warrior dance called *Sawlakia* by the Maras, *Sarlamkai* by the Lais and *Rallu-lam* by the Luseis was compulsorily performed. This dance was also a victory dance in such a way that it was only performed when there was a success in hunting or killing animals or their enemies respectively. Also, the fact that the various tribes mentioned have the name of the dance in their own languages also partly proved that they had similar beliefs and traditions which they all followed ritually. This dance was also performed in order to show their complete victory over the dead person or the animal by making fun of it and teasing it despicably. It was performed by a group of men where the warrior took the lead and dancing around the head which is placed in the middle of where they performed the ceremony. At the same time, it is also said that women also performed this dance ever since the pre-colonial period which still remains debatable. Nevertheless, this dance is now performed by both men and women in the contemporary period.

¹⁴⁵ Front yard. It is a remarkable area in the village as other important traditional activities were also used to be carried out here.

¹⁴⁶ Chaldailova, *Pi Pute Khawvel*, p. 96.

The practice of “head-hunting” for which the tribes of Mizoram and even some other tribes in the North-East Indian region are popularly known and for which they are even given the ‘controversial label’ in the post-colonial period, the tribes of “head-hunters” have completely disappeared.

The firm belief in the existence of *mithi-khua* or the abode of the dead including the continuance of the spirits in the world of the dead was also no longer relevant as they now believed in the Christian concepts of heaven or hell. The significance of these dances soon became detached from the traditional cultural bearing and now those dances increasingly become geared up solely for an entertainment purpose. Also important festival and ceremony like *khuangchawi*, which was performed with the hope for an assurance of safe passage to *pialral*¹⁴⁷ or the abode of the dead,¹⁴⁸ was no longer considered important since the people now professed Christianity. Thus, following colonial intervention, many tribal dances became insignificant and irrelevant in terms of their traditional touch and orientations as the driving force of these dances became more entertainment oriented and to serve the purpose of contemporary demands.

3.6. Dress and Ornamentation:

The traditional dress or clothing was mostly in the form of draped, wrapped, folded rather than cut, and stitched according to the fittings of the body shape. At the same time there were also some people who adorn almost naked or simply covered themselves with animal skins or other non-woven materials and others who covered their bodies with just cosmetics, tattoos, scars or different types of ornaments whom the colonists often encountered.¹⁴⁹ It can be seen that very little attention was given to dress but the reason could also be that there were not enough materials available for them to focus on having

¹⁴⁷ Paradise.

¹⁴⁸ Mc Call, p. 189.

¹⁴⁹ Rosaline Varsangzuali, ‘Evolution of Mizo Dress: A Historical Study’, PhD Thesis, Mizoram University, 2018, p. 200.

a better dressing sense apart from the fact that there were no inspirations to look up to before the colonial intervention.

Even when they were performing the various dances, it was strongly believed that there was no uniformity in their dress. They were also believed to have worn whatever clothes they owned and would have sometime chosen from their best possession. The colonial ethnographer Lt. Colonel J. Shakespear also mentioned in his work that the only time they dressed a bit differently was during the days when special occasions were held where women were often seen wearing a special head-dress¹⁵⁰ while dancing.¹⁵¹ This statement also shows that dancing was a time where they would be at the spotlight, gaining attention of the audience and the time to wear and show the best kinds of clothes they possibly had.

But all these began to somehow change following colonial advent as the various tribes became deeply influenced by their colonizers even in their dressing sense and also their ornaments. Moreover according to the various statement made by interviewees, it will not be wrong to argue that more than men, women gave more stress in their looks and style of dressing since they loved to be seen in style and elegance mainly a result of western influence.

Since there was a steady growth of consciousness in their clothing pattern with the growing influence from the British colonizers, the local people also started to copy the dressing styles and sense of westerners. Also, with the colonial intervention it became easier to have more clothing material available especially for the rich people. Eventually, what used to be worn only by the upper class people also began to be more affordable by lesser class people as it could now be easily accessed.

In the post-colonial period, the people began to have more of uniformity in their dress while performing different dances. There began to be a growing consciousness and

¹⁵⁰ Believed to be what is called *Vakiria*.

¹⁵¹ Shakespear, p. 11.

understanding of the importance of uniformity in the dress and not only the movements while performing a dance in front of the audience. Ornaments like earrings made of ivory which was then considered precious and popular among them now also began to be neglected as they began to demand more of brass or other types of hairpins, amber and cornelian necklace and combs and also a string of coin necklaces became a lot in demand since the colonial period.¹⁵²

Regardless of the growing evolution and additions in their dressing styles in general and uniformity while dancing, the traditional dresses and way of wearing or draping their clothes especially in the case of *puan* in the pre-colonial period was still kept alive with a positive attitude¹⁵³ even in the contemporary period among both men and women. Even though the style of wearing the wrap-around, *puan* is not the same between the two genders, the practice of wearing when performing the traditional dances are still strictly followed. None of the participants of the traditional dances, including men is ever seen participating in any of the dances wearing pants.

Furthermore, with the colonial intervention came easier accessibility of ornaments and weapons. Especially in the warrior dances including *Sawlakia*, *Sarlamkai* and *Rallu-lam*, weapons play a very important part as the male dancers would always dance around with weapons or other ornament related to war in their hands such as guns, swords, shields and other available war weapon as a sign to show their strength, power and valour while chanting songs and words to vent their anger and indicate their victory. And with the onset of colonialism there was easy availability of new weapons which many of them are brought by the British to Mizoram or are accessed through them.

¹⁵² Mc Call, p. 190.

¹⁵³ Varsangzuali, "Evolution of Mizo Dress: A Historical Study", p. 224.



Fig. 10: Sarlamkai

Source: Dept. of Art & Culture, Aizawl

3.7. Inclusion of Men and Women:

Among the tradition dances, there were dances originally performed exclusively by only one gender, men or women, while there were others that were performed by both men and women together. For instance, the inclusion of women in various dances before the advent of colonialism is very much debatable since many believed that women also participated and performed alongside men in various warrior dances such *Sawlakia*, *Sarlamkai* and *Rallu lam* while many were of the opinion that these dances were strictly and solely male oriented and women therefore had no place in these dances. However, it is difficult to ascertain the definite answer on this since there is no evidence or proof for the same.

Regardless of these debates, what is now evident is the fact that, the colonial period both men and women performed these dances together. At the same time, since men used to carry weapons in their hands while dancing and women did not, weapons are considered to have been exclusively for men who would go to war in order to protect their village or land and women and not the other way round.

Meanwhile, another dance like *Cheraw* was performed exclusively by women only¹⁵⁴ prior to the colonial period. In this particular *Cheraw* dance, if any man is seen performing the dancing part, then he would be considered to be “tuai”¹⁵⁵ which was an embarrassing remark during the pre-colonial times.¹⁵⁶ This in fact has completely changed in the contemporary world as men and women are always grouped and teamed together in *Cheraw* dance except in case where no men are available which is of course very rare especially when performed in Mizoram. But still men never performed this dance alone without women and whenever the two are teamed together for a performance, it will always be women who performed the dancing part while men always took the charge of striking the bamboos and playing the musical instruments such as drums or brass gongs when required.

3.8. Zu and Dance:

Zu, also commonly known as beer or local rice beer have always played a big and major role in the society among the different tribes during the pre-colonial period. There were no special occasions and ceremony that were celebrated without the consumption of *zu*. According to Major McCall, *zu* was never a daily item of intake among the ordinary people who would only consumed when they had free time to enjoy by themselves or

¹⁵⁴ Chalngingluaia, p. 27.

¹⁵⁵ A feminine man.

¹⁵⁶ Tribal Research Institute, p. 161.

with their friends while the chiefs and the well-to-do people would casually drink it every other day.¹⁵⁷

Prior to the advent of the British rule in Mizoram, both the Lusei and Mara tribes had three different types of traditional *zu* which they brewed and made by themselves. The three types of the Lusei's local beer are *zufang*, *rakzu* and *zupui*¹⁵⁸ while the Mara's are *sahmapi*, *sahmahei* and *zuri*¹⁵⁹. These various local beers had their own significance and roles. For instance, referring to the Lusei's *zu*, *zufang* was some type of *zu* which was taken in equivalent to how tea is taken in the house today while *rakzu* was mostly drunk by only the chiefs and the elders of the village and both types of *zu* were never drunk in the public. *Zupui* on the other hand was drunk only during a special ceremony called *Chawng* ceremony and is also brewed in a more special way. However, all these types of *zu* were made from boiled rice.¹⁶⁰

The fact that the different tribes had their own types and names of a variety of *zu* clearly indicated how much they were accustomed to drinking. Apart from consuming it for entertainment purposes, *zu* had a deep rooted importance in the society, which could be considered more like a traditional custom. Drinking of *zu* was compulsory on days where they celebrated special occasions especially during festivals, sacrificial ceremonies and feasts.

Zu was also commonly consumed during the day of *inthen-ni*,¹⁶¹ the day of death of their relatives. People used to be very drunk during these festive occasions but no damage or harm was done according to Parry. But the same time, the Luseis were believed to be more of gentlemanly drinkers than the Maras who were again more gentle than the Lais since he also mentioned that serious brawls which often resulted in people

¹⁵⁷ Mc Call, p. 187.

¹⁵⁸ Tribal Research Institute, *Zu in Mizo Society*, p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ Parry, *The Lakhers*, p. 87.

¹⁶⁰ Tribal Research Institute, p. 3.

¹⁶¹ The day of purification in the case of death.

getting injured or even killed which seldom happened among the Maras was common in the Chin village areas.¹⁶²

Zu being an important part of the traditional custom was again linked with dancing. The consumption of *zu* was always included while dancing, the reason why the missionaries were against the customs around the traditional dances as mentioned before. And by dancing, it included those dances which were for mere entertainment purpose like the *Chheih Lam*, *Topum Lam*, *Awkhypa La* and so on. Each tribe has their own type of dances which had no religious or ritual significances but were merely for enjoying and entertaining themselves and even had simple steps and movements unlike the ones with having traditional significance which every villager was able to perform.

In the Lusei festival of Chapchar Kut where *Chai Lam* was only performed, it was a custom that each and every one except children were supposed to drink, dance and sing throughout the day and night until and unless they run out of supply of *zu* in the day called *zupuini*. In this *zupuini* occasion, the *Chai* dance was not allowed to be performed by anyone who did not drink *zu*.

The Lusei victory dance or warrior dance *Rallu Lam* was also said to be performed while drinking *zu*. In the *lu-aih* ceremony where they performed this dance, large number of *zu* were consumed by the villagers when celebrating the victory while dancing and shouting while the warriors began chanting and crying. This ceremony was celebrated enthusiastically with *zu* and feast until the advent of Christianity.¹⁶³

Drinking of *zu* was made compulsory for the villagers in most of their festivals and feasts where they would entertain themselves by singing, dancing and playing games amongst themselves throughout the night. But this also began to change after the coming of Christianity as the intake of *zu* was demoralized greatly by the teachings of the missionaries as a part of their mission programme and also for their health.

¹⁶² Parry, p. 90.

¹⁶³ Tribal Research Institute, p. 19.

Furthermore, under the government of the British rule, various rules were made especially for the government servants. Eventually after the independence of India and when Mizoram became a state, not merely the consumption but the selling and buying of any types of *zu* were started to be strictly prohibited. With this, it was no longer possible to revive the traditional custom of drinking *zu* and entertainment with *zu* throughout the night by singing and dancing was now completely out of the picture.

In fact, it may even be surprising for the younger generation in the contemporary period that *zu* and dance have a strong linkage in terms of traditional customs and practices. The influences exerted by the British administration in Mizoram have completely changed what was once a normal and legal drink which was even considered to be the equivalent of tea came to be prohibited and considered a sinful act.

3.9. Conclusion:

It is clearly evident that the colonial intervention has made tremendous changes and has undeniably strong impact on the society and which have completely changed the traditional customs, beliefs and practices of different tribal groups in Mizoram. It took them to a whole new world which they never thought even existed. Since most of the existing religious traditional practices were in contradictory to that of the new practices unleashed by colonialism and Christianity, traditional practices and customs became almost irrelevant and eventually went into oblivion.

Therefore, it can be said that colonialism has led to the evolution and developments of the various customs and traditional practices. It was also due to these changes that, what used be a strong and vibrant tradition prior to the British rule has now become more of a showbiz and routine matter and a practice in order to entertain and passed on the traditions from one generation to the younger generation in the contemporary period.

This includes the continuous practice and showcasing of the various traditional dances both inside and outside Mizoram.

At the same time it is also evident that the colonial intervention has also contributed a lot to a closer relationship between different tribes and that it was only after the British rule and the coming of the Christian missionaries that knowledge and skill of the various dances came to be exchanged and performed mutually among the various tribes.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

Dance is one of the most important cultural practices that had endured the test of time cutting across different cultures and civilizations all over the globe. Dance with its different forms and practices has evolved and undergone tremendous changes over the ages and it is quite true in the case of all cultures across the world. In the context of Mizoram also, dance occupies a central place in the culture, tradition and customary practices of all the tribes. This fact remains the same from the pre-colonial times to the contemporary period though the roles and significance of dances have changed over the years due to different reasons.

Throughout history, different dances have always been an important mechanism for showcasing the rich tribal unity, traditions, culture and heritage to their own kindred but also to the larger audience and beyond their geographical space. Dances have always been one way or the other accompanied by music and songs. Through dance, one can communicate and express the tribal culture and identity beyond its cultural space. In other words, dance is a unique way of unspoken communication about one's culture, tradition and heritage to others.

It is in this background that this research attempted to investigate and analyze the importance of dance as it has always been playing a major role in enriching and shaping the social and cultural edifice of the various tribes of Mizoram. It is a fact that regardless of its importance in the society, little focus is given on the study of the background and history of the various traditional dances of Mizoram. Therefore, in this context this work is assumed much significance as it tries to document the available sources and also bring into the limelight that dance is much more than merely a cultural practice but rather a way of life strongly embedded in the history and worldview.

Right from the pre-colonial to the colonial period, dance has always been included in different occasions, be it ritual ceremonies or festivals, dance is always mainstay of their life. Without dance, those important events are even considered to be incomplete. Such

was the impact that dance had various tribal groups of Mizoram. This also shows that pre-colonial tribes were ardent lovers of dancing. However, it must be noted these various dances could not be performed as and when desired. In fact, dances are performed according to their cultural space, situation and time and this being the essence of their existence.

From this study, it is clear that dance played a big role in determining their worldview, happiness and sorrow, victory and even death. In other words, dance has close connection with their religious belief system, agricultural and economic opulence, victory in war, sickness, death and the afterlife. It was also a form of gesture which would ensure safe passage on their way to *mitthi-khua* or the afterlife. Performing various types of dances was also considered as a way of showing their gratitude, sharing happiness and thanksgiving and a congratulatory message to others for their success and achievements in various aspects of their lives. Thus, their feelings and emotions were often shown and conveyed through dances.

Dance is also a form of social entertainment. There are various dances which were practiced during the pre-colonial period which do not have any specific role or significance but are performed merely for the purpose of social and public entertainment. This alone indicated that they were ardent lovers of dancing as they would often dance in informal social gatherings or when they feel lonesome while they sing together at the same time. Dance was one way of entertaining themselves out of boredom or just for the sake of having fun while drinking *zu* even during the festive occasions.

Dance is also a form of an exposure of cultural materials. This includes materials such as their dress and dressing styles and also their weapons and implements which are often carried while dancing like they do in *Sawlakia*. Unlike the contemporary period, there was no uniformity in their dresses when performing the dances but in fact it was often considered as an opportunity to wear and show-off the best dresses from their own possession along with ornaments like earrings, necklaces, belts and headgears. Since

weapons were also carried while performing some of the dances, it shows that dance was also a part of their platform for showcasing not only their prowess but also material possessions especially their dresses and ornaments etc.

Dance is also one of the few traditional practices where men and women shared the same privilege. Both the genders have their own individual and different roles in almost all of the dances which were both equally important. Especially in the contemporary period, dance provided a good space for gender equality as there is no gender exclusion while performing dances and it indeed served a leveling ground for both the genders.

The onset of colonialism brought about revolutionary changes in nature, pattern and orientation of dances in Mizoram. Colonialism with its concomitant forces Christianity completely restructured and gave a new orientation to tribal culture and practices in Mizoram. In this regard, tribal dances was also hard hit as the new religion does not permit drinking alcohol which was always part and parcel of festivals and ceremonies. It is to be noted that much of the existing traditional beliefs, customs and practices which had for many ages withstood the test of time now became irrelevant with the onslaught of colonialism. Therefore, performing traditional dance was not longer possible in its original and traditional forms as the occasions and festivals where they were performed now had to meet and conform to the new orientation and adhere to the Christian precepts. after the coming of Christianity. One significant development that came about was the fact that with improved means of transport and communication, different tribal groups could share and exchange different cultural practices and also disseminate their knowledge and understanding especially on dances and songs.

Having pointed out these facts it should however be noted that regardless of all the changes and transformations that is witnessed following colonial intervention, dance still continued to play a prominent role in the society. In the contemporary period, dance has become not merely a cultural practice but a way of life and also served as an important platform for showcasing the traditional and customary practices to the younger generations and to wider audience outside their cultural milieu as well. It is interesting to

note that dance is still included in every major event, both cultural and in social gatherings and during the celebrations of festivals as well. In other words, dances are widely performed on various occasions inside and outside Mizoram and the knowledge, skill and techniques of the various dances continued to be passed on from one generation to another.

Findings:

Amongst the different language speaking groups in Mizoram, the Mara tribes has the most number of traditional dances with as many as 21 recorded dances performed on different occasions.

During the pre-colonial period, dances were performed on specific time and occasion and almost all of them have elaborate connection with religious belief system, birth, death, afterlife and worldview, For instance, the *Cheraw* dance was performed only when a person died of raicheh.¹⁶⁴

Likewise, *Chawnglaizawn* dance was performed on the death of the village chiefs or when elders of the village die and it was also performed on the demise of the people from the upper class of the society.

Khuallam dance was performed during the *khuangchawi* feast as a welcome gesture to the visitor of the village and to show that they accepted them wholeheartedly. *Sawlakia*, *Sarlamkai* and *Rallu-lam* were performed to celebrate their victory during war or in times of their success in hunting wild animals.

There was no uniformity in adorning attires while performing dances by the people. However, since the colonial period, with availability and easier access to clothing dancers began to adorn uniform dresses while performing different dances

¹⁶⁴ *Raicheh* is a term referring to a women who died while trying to deliver the baby.

One of the most popular dances in the contemporary period, which is often considered as the major cultural dance of Mizoram “Cheraw” was originally known as “Ruakkhatlak” by the Lai tribes but later on came to be known as *Cheraw* in the colonial period due to the mispronunciation of the original name by one of the Christian missionaries, Ms E Chapman, more popularly known as Pi Ziritiri.

From this research finding, it may be argued that the Lusei tribe has the least number of traditional dances and some of the popular dances include *Khuallam*, *Chheih Lam* and *Chai lam*.

The style, tempo, movement and orientation of dances changes over the years just like its significances and roles in the society also underwent changes where new innovative ideas were incorporated making the various dances more colourful and attractive to the contemporary audience.

Zu (alcohol) which was included in almost all of their festive occasion, celebrations and events where dances are performed was opposed by the missionaries as the customs of drinking *zu* was in contradict to the teaching of Christianity.

Dance apart from its socio-religious significance was also a tool for entertaining themselves and showing their love and care for one another.

Dance is also strongly linked to their religious belief system, customary practices and worldview.

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Interviewed, Dated, 7th August, with Rev. L. Mark, at Serkawr, Siaha.

Interviewed, Dated, 9th August 2019, with F. C. Chhuasa, at Zawngling, Siaha.

Interviewed, Dated, 9th August 2019, with K. Laitha, at Zawngling, Siaha.

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Interviewed, Dated, 3rd September 2019, with B. Buanhnunga, at Lawngtlai.

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GLOSSARY

<i>Arkeziak:</i>	A special type of head-dress for men who have killed their animal.
<i>Athih la (Mara):</i>	Funeral dance.
<i>Chakma:</i>	A distinct tribe who were originally inhabitants of the Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh who sought refuge in Mizoram where a large section of them settled.
<i>Chawnglaizawnh (Lai):</i>	The original name of <i>chawnglaizawn</i> .
<i>Chapchar Kut:</i>	The main traditional festival of the <i>Lusei</i> tribe.
<i>Chawng:</i>	A special ceremony.
<i>Chhawndawl:</i>	Same significance as <i>arkeziak</i> .
<i>Cheural:</i>	A village in the southern part of Mizoram.
<i>Darbu:</i>	A traditional instrument which consists of three set of brass gongs with different sizes.
<i>Darkhuang:</i>	Another traditional big single brass gong.
<i>Darmang:</i>	A medium size brass gong.

<i>Dawkhang</i> (Mara):	Same as <i>darkhuang</i> .
<i>Dua-ah</i> (Mara):	An occasional cloth worn by men.
<i>Dua-kalapa</i> (Mara):	An everyday loin-cloth worn by men.
<i>Hlado</i> :	Hunter's chant.
<i>Ia</i> (Mara):	A ceremony performed over the killing of animals or their enemies in order to have complete control over their souls even in the life after death. It is the same as <i>lu-aih</i> known by the <i>Lusei</i> and <i>Lai</i> .
<i>Kawtchhuah</i> :	Village gate.
<i>Kharvar</i> :	A type of belt made from flat brass worn by both <i>Lai</i> and <i>Mara</i> women.
<i>Khang</i> (Mara):	Same as <i>khuang</i> .
<i>Khuang</i> :	A traditional drum made from a hollow tree and animal skin.
<i>Khuangchawi</i> :	A grand feast organized by a person who is rich enough to feed the whole village as a part of gaining the <i>Thangchhuah</i> title.
<i>Khuang lova chai ang</i> :	An old saying about the significance of <i>khuang</i> and the incompleteness of social gatherings without it.
<i>Khuanu</i> :	Goddess.

<i>Khumbeu:</i>	A traditional local waterproof hat for men made from bamboo.
<i>Lai:</i>	One of the oldest tribes of Mizoram who settled at the Southern part of Mizoram.
<i>Lai Tlang:</i>	The hill range or area of the present settlement of Lai.
<i>Lal upa/ Lal khawnbawl:</i>	Village elders of the chief.
<i>Lam:</i>	Dance, dancing.
<i>Lasi:</i>	A beautiful type of angel whom they believed to have a super power to bless them especially in hunting.
<i>Liando te Unau:</i>	A popular <i>Mizo</i> folk story.
<i>Lusei:</i>	One of the major tribes of Mizoram.
<i>Lushei/ Lushai:</i>	Mispronunciation of the term <i>Lusei</i> by the colonizers.
<i>Mara:</i>	One of the major tribes of Mizoram who settles at the Southern part of Mizoram.
<i>Mudra (Hindi):</i>	A symbolic gesture or mark made with hands and fingers used

in the iconography and spiritual practice in Hinduism.

Mitthi Khua: Village of the dead people where every soul after death will go to.

Ngandam: A special ceremony held for the dead people in their village who died due to various reasons before the passing of three months since their death.

Pawi: It is a term which is often used inter-exchangeably with the term *Lai*.

Pawisa: Money.

Pasaltha: A hero, a brave warrior or hunter.

Pialral: Paradise.

Phung: A type of ghost.

Puan: Cloth.

Puk: Cave.

Pu Vana: A type of god.

Raicheh: A woman who died while delivering a baby.

<i>Ramhuai:</i>	Ghost.
<i>Riha:</i>	A feast organized by the family of demised for the mourners by the Maras.
<i>Ruakkhatlak:</i>	The original and traditional name of the dance <i>Cheraw</i> .
<i>Sa:</i>	Meat (when used as “ <i>zu leh sa</i> ”).
<i>Sa lu-aih:</i>	A special ceremony performed over the killing of animals, especially tigers.
<i>Saikao:</i>	Serkawr village at Siaha.
<i>Sar thi:</i>	Unnatural sudden death including various kinds of accidents.
<i>Sapui:</i>	The animal which is considered to be the most significant, i.e., tiger.
<i>Serkawn:</i>	One of the villages in Lunglei, southern part of Mizoram where the Baptist missionaries made their settlements.
<i>Siapsuap:</i>	A fringe-like upper and lower garment made from the strands of fiber or bark of trees commonly worn by women and also sometimes worn by men as a kilt.
<i>Thangchhuah:</i>	A special title given to a qualified man by killing enough certain number of different animals or gave a certain number of public feasts as required.

<i>Tuai:</i>	Feminine men.
<i>Vaibel:</i>	Smoke pipes.
<i>Vakiria:</i>	A special head-dress worn by women during special occasions.
<i>Zo hanhthlak:</i>	The collective ethnic group of tribes under the term “Zo”.
<i>Zu:</i>	Alcohol, local rice beer.
<i>Zupui ni:</i>	One of the days of the <i>Chapchar kut</i> when they drink <i>zu</i> throughout the day and night until and unless they run out of it.

APPENDICES

PARTICULARS OF THE CANDIDATE

NAME OF THE CANDIDATE : Lalhminghlui

DEGREE : Master of Philosophy

DEPARTMENT : History & Ethnography

TITLE OF DISSERTATION : Dances in Mizoram: A Historical Study

DATE OF PAYMENT OF ADMISSION : 23/7/2018

(Commencement of First Sem)

COMMENCEMENT OF SECOND SEM/
DISSERTATION : January 2019

(From conclusion of end semester exams)

APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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Prof. K. Robin

Head of Department

History & Ethnography

BIODATA

NAME : Lalhminghlui
FATHER'S NAME : Dr. Lalhmuchhuaka
SEX : Female
DATE OF BIRTH : 11th August 1994
AGE : 25
NATIONALITY : Indian
CATEGORY : Scheduled Tribe
CONTACT NO. : 9971608958
EMAIL ID : hminghmingiralte@gmail.com
ADDRESS : D-143, Basic Mual, Ramhlun North, Aizawl,
Mizoram

Details of Education Qualification:

Sl. No.	Class	Subject	Board/ University	Percentage	Division/ Grade
1.	HSLC	-	MBSE	67.8	First
2.	HSSLC	Arts	CBSE	76.6	Distinction
3.	BA	History	DU	60.8	First
4.	MA	History	MZU	76.02	Distinction
5.	NET	History	UGC	-	-