THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN SELECT WORKS BY JAMES DOKHUMA

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In partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English and Culture Studies of Mizoram University, Aizawl.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that "The Politics of Identity in Select Works by James Dokhuma" is a bonafide research by V. Lalmalsawmi written under my supervision.

She has fulfilled all the required norms laid down within the Ph.D UGC Regulations 2016 of Mizoram University. The thesis is the result of her own investigation. Neither the thesis as a whole nor any part of it was ever submitted to any other University for research degree.

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DECLARATION

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

This is being submitted to the Mizoram University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English and Culture Studies.

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Glossary

Note: *Except where noted otherwise, all entries in the glossary are sourced from* Lorrain, James Herbert. *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*. The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1940.

Arhnuaichhiah – the name of a sacrifice of a fowl offered in order to ward off impending evil feared because of some bad omen observed by a hunter. (*DLL* 12) Dokhuma, however, denotes that the ritual is mandatory for the hunter who has killed a wild gayal (Tumpangchal) regardless of any bad omen observed. (Scholar's input)

Bawh hla – n. the warrior's chant or cry; the chant or cry raised by warriors when returning from a successful raid.

Bawlpu – n. an exorcist, a priest.

Chhinlung chhuak - *Chhinlung* n. the name of the mythical rock from beneath which the progenitors of most of the present human race are said to have issued. (*DLL* 80) *Chhinlung chhuak* – those who have emerged from the *Chhinlung.* (Scholar's input)

Dan – n. way, manner, mode, fashion, style, method, law, regulations, rule, code, custom, habit, usage, practice, wont, characteristic.

Duhlian - A name given to the upper classes or clans in the *Lushai* Hills and to the dialect they speak – which is regarded as the purest form of the *Lushai* language.

Hlado - The hunter"s cry or chant which is raised directly [after] a wild animal has been killed in the chase. It is also chanted along the way home, and at the entrance of the village.

Hnam - clan, tribe, nation, nationality, race

Hnamchawm – the common people, all save those belonging to the ruling clan.

Hnamdang - another clan, tribe, nation, or race; a person belonging to another clan, tribe, nation, or race; a foreigner.

Inbuan – v. to wrestle, to wrestle together, to have a wrestle. adj. wrestling.

In hrang chang – used in the same sense as *in dang* – v. to live in one's own house and manage one's own affairs; to live in a separate house (as a married son not living with his father, etc., or as a *bawi* slave not living with his chief, etc.); to be on one's own; to be independent.

Inthawina – n. a sacrifice, a sacrificial offering; that which is offered in sacrifice or has anything to do with such a sacrifice. adj. Sacrificial.

Kalphung – used in the same sense as *kal dan* – n. mode, manner, or way of walking, going, acting, doing, speaking, proceeding, or procedure; mode, manner, way, style, meaning. (also. *Kal hmang* and *kal zia*)

Kawktu – an informer who collaborates with the Indian Army to identify members of the Mizo National Army. (Scholar's input)

Khalhkhawm – v. to drive together, to round up.

Kum thar – n. the new year.

Lal - A chief, chieftain, chieftainess, a sovereign, a monarch, a king or queen. The word means "lord."

Lengkhawm – it denotes both the indigenous form of communal singing event as well as the type of songs sung at such events. The *lengkhawm* (the event) and the *lengkhawm zai* (the type of singing/song are hybrids of the indigenous folk and Christian elements. (Scholar's input)

Lusei – n. the name from which the English word 'Lushai' is derived; but, whereas we English-speaking people apply 'Lushai' to the whole tribe, the tribesmen themselves apply Lusei to only the upper classes, and speak of the lower classes as Lutawi ('Longheads' and 'Shortheads' respectively.) (*DLL* 304). While Lorrain has used the term 'upper classes,' it may be more appropriate to call them the 'ruling tribe' or the 'dominant tribe' of a majority of the

region when the British arrived, since there were also areas in which other tribes ruled (Scholar's input).

Mautam - the name given to the periodic dying down of the [mau] bamboos and to the subsequent famine.

Mi – a person, a man, a thing, one, people, kind, sort, which; the person, the man, the thing, the one, etc.; anyone, someone, others, another.

Mikhual tlangval – *Mikhual* –n. a stranger, one belonging to another village, a guest or visitor from another village. *Tlangval* – n. a youth, a young man.

Pasalṭha – v. to be brave, manly, heroic, valiant, stout-hearted, courageous, daring fearless, intrepid. n. a person who is brave and manly; a brave, a hero; a famous or notable warrior or hunter.

Pathian – n. God, the Giver and Preserver of Life. adj. godly, pious, religious, devout. v. to be godly, pious, religious.

Pathian zawnchhuah ram – a land discovered/sought out by God. (Scholar's input)

Pathlawi – n. a youg married man or widower or divorced man; a man of marriageable age.

Pem - To migrate (as family from one village to another); to emigrate, to immigrate.

Phuba la – to avenge, to revenge, to take revenge, to take vengeance.

Pialral - Lushai Paradise, literally means the further side of Pial river.

Puithiam - n. an exorcist; a priest.

Ram - Forest, jungle; country, kingdom, territory, realm, domain, land, estate, place, homeland.

Rambuai - literally, 'troubled land', *Rambuai* is most commonly used to denote the peak period of conflict in Mizoram from 1966 to 1969 (Scholar's input).

Ramhuai – n. an evil spirit, a demon, a devil, a nat.

Ruai - n. a feast

Sa – n. an object of worship; a god; ancient ancestors who are worshipped by the Lushais; the spirit who precides over the house or household; religion, religious rites and ceremonies. (this is an abbreviated form of *sakhua,*... also used in conjunction with *biak* and *phun.* See *sakbiak* and *saphun.*)

Sabiak – n. object of worship.

Sadawt – n. a private exorcist or priest, especially such as are employed by ruling chiefs.

Sakhaw- an abbreviated form of *sakhua* (especially when used as an adjective and before an adjective). adj. religious, pious, devout. v. to be religious, pious, devout (*DLL* 400). *Hmang (hman)* v. to use, to treat (as), to be used to, to be in the habit of, to be addicted to, to spend or keep (as Sunday or Christmas at a certain place); to offer (a sacrifice. – Can only be used with this last meaning when the name of the special sacrifice referred to is mentioned).

Sakhaw biak – n. 1. The worship or worshipping of one's god, or ancient ancestors, or the spirit who precides over one's house or household. 2. The god, ancient ancestors, or spirit whom one worships.

Sakhaw mi – n. religious person, a religiously minded person, a devout or pious person. adj. religious, pious, devout. v. to be religious, pious, or devout.

Sakhua – 1. an object of worship, a god. 2. ancient ancestors who are worshipped by the Lushais. 3. the spirit who presides over the house or house-hold. 4. religion, religious rites and ceremonies.

Sakung – literally, 'the tree of *sa.*' It is a symbolic act of setting up the household 'religion'. According to Dokhuma, the 'planting' of the *sakung* is done not only in the case of *saphun*, the 'conversion' of *hnam,* but is also a prerequisite in setting up one's own household. It involves a series of rituals and sacrifices (Scholar's input).

Sap - a sahib, a white man, a government or other official.

Saphun – v. to adopt the object of worship, god, religion or religious rites and customs (of another). n. one who has adopted the god, religion, or religious rites and customs (of another); a proselyte, a convert.

Thangchhuah - The title given to the man who had distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase or by giving a certain number of public feasts. The wife of such a man also shares his title, and they and their children are allowed to wear the *thangchhuah puan* (the name of a cloth worn as a mark of distinction by one who has acquired the coveted title of *Thangchhuah*). The possession of this title is regarded by the *Lushai* as a passport to *Pialral* or Paradise.

Tlahpawi- n. an exorcist or priest whose duty it is to divine with a *tlah* and a *tlahpawina*. (*tlah* - n. a piece of bamboo with some of its outside covering partially stripped off, used along with the *tlahpawina* for divining.) (*tlahpawina* - n. a piece of wood used along with the *tlah* for divining.)

Tlawmngaihna - 1. to be self-sacrificing, unselfish, self-denying, persevering, stoical, stouthearted, plucky, brave, firm, independent(refusing help); to be loth to lose one's good reputation, prestige, etc; to be too proud or self-respecting to give in, etc. 2. to persevere, to endure patiently, to make light of personal injuries, to dislike making a fuss about anything. 3. to put one's own inclinations on one side and do a thing which one would rather not do, with the object either of keeping up one's prestige, etc, or of helping or pleasing another, or of not disappointing another, etc. 4. to do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient it may be to oneself or to one's own inclinations. 5. to refuse to give in, give way, or be conquered. 6. to not like to refuse a request, to do a thing because one does not like to refuse, or because one wishes to please others. 7. to act pluckily or show a brave front.

Vailen - modified form of *vailian.*

Vailian - literally, "the upsurge of the *Vai"*. It refers to both the large-scale expeditions of the British (1872 and 1889-1890), and the period of British occupation (1890-1947) (Scholar's input).

Vai - natives from the plains of India. (Scholar's input)

Val-upa – n. a oldish young man, a middle aged man.

Vawkhniahzawn thla – n. the moon or lunar month corresponding nearly to July.

Zawlbuk – the large house in a Lushai village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night. (*DLL*, 562) Dokhuma points out in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* that even married men continue to lodge in the *Zawlbuk* until they move out of their parents' home to set up their own house. (206)

Zohnahthlak – An ethnonym used to denote all the *Zo* tribes, and is considered to be more inclusive than the term *Mizo.* (Scholar's input)

Zosap - the white missionaries were referred to as *Zosap,* while all white Europeans are included in *Sap.* (Scholar's input)

Zu - Beer or any fermented liquor.

Zufang – n. fermented rice and its liquor made in a smaller pot than ordinary beer or *zupui*, and used on less important occasions. This fermented rice is generally made of *kawnglawng* or *fazu.* It is eaten as a refreshment, and its liquor is also drunk as a beverage.

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CHAPTER ONE

AN AUTHOR: JAMES DOKHUMA

This thesis examines the politics of Mizo identity formation in the works of James Dokhuma with specific focus on *Rinawmin* [*Faithfully*] (1970)*, Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* [*The Wild Gayal or Saithangpuii*] (1981), *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* [*The Mores of the Mizo in Olden Times*] (1991), [1] and *Silaimu Ngaihawm* [*The Beloved Bullet*] (1995). [2] Anchored on the standpoint that identities are constructed within discourse, the discourses which pertain to Mizo identity formation are located within three historical moments – the pre-colonial 'beginnings' in the oral past, the colonial period of negotiation and the post-colonial period of 'Mizo nationalism'. The socio-cultural forces at play in the construction of Mizo identity are examined within their historical specificities and juxtaposed with Dokhuma's concept of Mizo identity and the cultural resources through and within which it is conceptualised in his works. The term 'politics of identity' in this study refers to both the more formal and organised "discourse and action within the public arenas of political and civil society," as well as a broader understanding of "the practices and values that are based on subscription and ascription to various and often overlapping social and political identities" (Hill and Wilson 2-3).

This chapter looks into the life and works of James Dokhuma, highlighting the chief aspects of his works and also gives a brief literature review of works done on the author and his works. To understand his works better, a brief biography of the author is given in this chapter. This is followed by an estimation of some of his most notable works and an exploration of the key concerns of the author. Attempt has been made to contextualise Dokhuma's works within contemporary theoretical frameworks.

Born in Sialsuk village on 15th June 1932 to be the second youngest among thirteen siblings, James Dokhuma hailed from a family of poets/song composers – two of his elder siblings, Romani and Laltanpuia have made their names as folk song composers. He received formal education only till the fifth standard after which he

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[1] All translations of quoted texts and titles of works in this chapter are done by me, unless noted otherwise, for the sole purpose of this study.

[2] *The Beloved Bullet* is a translation of *Silaimu Ngaihawm* by Margaret Ch. Zama.

joined the Indian Army at the tender age of fifteen. He spent four years in the army as Education Instructor during which he acquired proficiency in Hindi and Nepali languages, and also picked up functional English. His army experiences went on to influence and inform several of his literary works. After he left the army in 1952, he went on to work as a Hindi and vernacular teacher in St. Paul's High School in Aizawl in 1954, and then as a Sanitary Inspector under Aijal Community Development Block. In 1960 he once again became a teacher, this time at Hualtu Middle School. He joined the Mizo National Front (MNF) movement in 1961 and was one of the 64 signatories in the declaration of independence in 1966. The movement began as a protest of the Assam government's inaction on the 'mautam famine' crisis in the erstwhile Lushai District, and which escalated into an armed secessionist movement in 1966. After two years of guerrilla life in the underground serving as a Member of Parliament in the underground government, he was critically wounded in an Indian Army ambush and was captured in 1968. He spent the next three years in jail, first at Nowgong Special Jail (1968-69), then in Guwahati District Jail (1969-70), and another year in Aizawl. It was during his incarceration that he started writing his novels. Writing, he believed, was the only way he could continue to serve his political dream of Mizo nationhood. While most biographical records of Dokhuma attribute these three works *Thlahleinga Zan* [*Night of the Full Moon*] (1970), *Rinawmin* [*Faithfully*] (1970) and *Khawhar In* [*House in Mourning*] (1970) as the works written during his incarceration, in his "Introduction" to *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* published in 1980, he writes that this work is the first book that he had completed since he could not continue to write *Thla Hleinga Zan* (as it had been seized by the prison authorities). It would therefore be safe to assume that he had actually written four novels during his time in prison. Apart from these, his *Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna* [*Dictionary of Archaic and Idiomatic Terms*], published in 1981, also had its beginnings during his incarceration.

After his release in 21 June 1971, while he did not go back to join the underground movement, he still held on to his political purpose. He eventually joined the newly formed People's Convention Party (P.C.) in 1975, holding the post of a Joint Secretary in the party. In 1978 he became the Secretary in P.C. 'B', a

breakaway faction of People's Convention Party. For many years after this, he did not actively participate in any political activity, but in 1998, he served as the Vice President of the Zoram Nationalist Party after which he retired from his political career. During this period he continued to write and publish his works, and also contributed numerous essays and articles to periodicals, magazines, and souvenirs. In 1973, while working as a teacher in Lungdar 'E' High School, he started writing *Zoram Kohhran Tualto Chanchin* [*Indigenous Churches of Mizoram*] (1975), a historical account of the indigenous Christian movements in Mizoram. During this same period, *Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna,* his dictionary of archaic and idiomatic terms which he had finished compiling after many years of hardwork unfortunately perished in a fire. He had to start all over again, but was finally able to publish it in 1981. It has remained a great contribution to Mizo language studies, and it has earned him the title of 'Father of Mizo Lexicography'. The numerous awards he had received includes the Padma Shri Award for his contribution to literature in 1985 by the Government of India, the Bhasa Samman in 1995 by Sahitya Akademi, Lelte Weekly's Best Writer Award in 1986, 1988, and 1991, an Academy Award by Mizo Academy of Letters in 1983, and an honorary Doctorate from The International University, California in 1997. Apart from these, he had also received several commendations for his contribution to wildlife preservation.

He was one of the founders of Mizo Writers' Association, and for many years held the post of Vice President in the association, was a Senior Advisor to ZOPPEN (Zo Poets, Playwrights, Essayists and Novelists) Club for ten years, and a member of Mizo Academy of Letters for many years. He had presented numerous seminar papers and delivered lectures in educational institutions, and had also given talks in All India Radio and Doordarshan. Several of his works had been and are still being included in courses in school, college and university levels. Most of Dokhuma's biographies found in electronic and print media have credited him as having published 42 books, but there is no exact record of the number of his essays and articles that he had contributed to magazines, souvenirs and collections/anthologies. Moreover, most of his poems had not been compiled and published, and the exact number of poems written by him cannot be ascertained. According to

mizoarchive.wordpress.com, Dokhuma had written some 450-500 essays, and had composed 42 poems out of which 36 had been published. Out of the 42 books published by him, thirteen are novels, four dramas, three biographies, a few historical accounts, a dictionary, a study on Mizo language usage, religious treatises, a collection of essays, educational books, and miscellaneous others. His literary output is numerous as well as diverse, and such work like *Chawngkhum Dan Tlang Huat Loh* cannot be put into categorisation in terms of genre since this work, though taking the form of a drama with characters and dialogues, is in actuality a collection of anecdotes shared by each characters. The title, "Chawngkhum Dan Tlang Huat Loh" is derived from an idiomatic phrase which roughly translates to "done in the manner of Chawngkhuma's antics against which no one takes offence," and is used to denote no offence intended. Chawngkhuma was a humorous man of yore.

As mentioned earlier, Dokhuma began writing while being held a political prisoner for his role in the armed Mizo National Front movement. His literary production is deeply rooted in his political beliefs and ideals. In his autobiographical essay, "Ka Zalenna*,"* ["My Freedom"] he recounts how he took four bullets – one on his leg, two in his mid-torso and one that shattered his arm, he describes how he called on God with all his heart. He had lain critically wounded in the jungle for two more days before he was finally captured by the Indian Army. In the initial days, he was interrogated and was kept in solitary confinement in a small dark room with his wounds festering. He had not eaten for days before his capture, and he was left to continue to starve for several more days. All the while, however, he refused to succumb although he was fully aware of the perils he was steeped in. Having lost all hope, he had made peace with the idea of death, and this bolstered his resolve to remain loyal to his beliefs. Empowered by the knowledge that the power over life and death solely rests with the supreme God, he writes:

> Lungngaihna puk thim chu ka hring lam taksa tan riahbuk mah ni se, ka ngaihtuahna erawh chu tu ma dipdal loh leh tu khaw tihduhdah phak mai lohvin a duh duh a kawm lawr a. A duh leh Pulpit tlangah Gospel Sermon a sawi a, a chang leh *Political Platform* atangin a duh zawng a sep rawtui thul nen. Chhun khaw eng lah chuan zah pahna min siamsak chuang lo va, zan

> khaw thim lahin eng mah min hliah chuang azeng a ni bawk hek lo. Ka taksa chu retheihna puk chhiaah dahin a awm ngei tak e. Thihna kawngka pawh an hawng huai mai, mahse chuta luh zawng ka zalenna piah lama thuneitu thupek chauh lo chuan luh thian a ni lo.
>
> Although my corporeal existence lies confined within the dark pit of gloom, my mind roams free and unfettered, beyond any oppressive hand. At times it preaches the Gospel from pulpits, and at other times orating at length on political platforms, neither the light of day nor the darkness of night impinges the flight of my thoughts and imaginations. While my body lies rotting in captivity, and though the gate of death gapes wide before me, the final authority over my life rests only with the one who transcends the limits of my freedom. (*Rilru Far Chhuak* [*Trickles of Thoughts*] 72)

This indomitable spirit is epitomised in his oft quoted lines from Byron, and with which he opens the essay *"*Ka Zalenna*"*:

> Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind!
>
> Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art.
>
> \- Lord Byron

Like the 'prisoner of Chillon,' his mind refused to succumb although his body was in fetters. Dokhuma was inspired to take up the pen when he saw the above quoted lines scribbled on the walls of 'Cell No. 1' at Gauhati District Jail in which he eventually began his writing career, according to R. Zamawia (619). The ideals of freedom that sustained Dokhuma's spirit are intrinsic to his ideal of what he termed '*Hnam*[3] *Politics'* which, he explains, is 'Nationalism' which is above and beyond partisan politics - "Party chung lama hnam Politics (Nationalism) –ah zawk chuan kan rilru chu a awm reng a" ("My mind was preoccupied with nationalism"; *Tawng Un*

[3] *Hnam* - clan, tribe, nation, nationality, race. *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* (henceforth *DLL)* 169.

Hrilhfiahna iv). He believes that '*Hnam Politics'* must necessarily ensure four things:

> 1. A ramri sahhual chhung a chiangin tichhe theitu lakah a veng him tur a ni.
>
> 2. Ram mipui hmasawnna a ngaihtuah tur a ni.
>
> 3. A ram mipui sakhua a veng him tur a ni.
>
> 4. Hnam nunphung leh zia (identity) a vawng nung (survive) reng tur a ni si a.
>
> 1. The one who holds such political power] should have thorough knowledge on the territorial boundaries and demarcations, and should safeguard the same from external aggressions.
>
> 2 He/she should ensure the progress and welfare of the people.
>
> 3. He/she should safeguard the religion of the people.
>
> 4. He/she should ensure the survival of the cultural identity. (*Mizo Tawng Kalphung* [*Usage of Mizo Language*] 1)

Thus Dokhuma's '*Hnam Politics'* is Mizo *hnam* nationalism which centres on four main aspects – territory, progress and welfare, religion and cultural identity. In the same essay, he goes on to declare his purpose in writing as a political project. Of the four main concerns of '*Hnam Politics',* he believes that he can make the most contribution towards the preservation and protection of Mizo identity, the other three being out of bounds for someone without political power, through his writings:

> Heng Politics atanga ram leh hnam humhalhna chawi kan tur pali zingah hian thuneitu ka nih loh pawha ka tangkai ve ber theihna tur ka ngaihtuahin 'hnam nunphung lehzia' humhim turin tha tlem ka thawh thei tih ka hria a. Chuvangin, keima chhanah (sanah) ni lovin, ka tu leh fate ka hnutchhiah ang a, eng 'ro' khawm tur nge ka neih ang tih ka ngaihtuah a.

> Chu avang chauh zawk chuan Pathianin 'talent' te tak te min pek lehkha ziak lam hi kan hnam tan ka tih theih sang ber niin ka hria a.
>
> From the four fundamental tenets of the preservation/protection of the land and the tribes/the nation entrenched in the idea of politics, I believe that in my capacity, I can best contribute to the preservation of cultural identity. And so it led me to the consideration of what legacy I could leave behind, not for myself but for my future generations.
>
> Thus I came to the conclusion that my greatest contribution towards the preservation of our cultural identity would be to put to use my God-given literary talent, however meagre it may be. (1)

The quoted lines appear in one of his last published works *Mizo Tawng Kalphung* in 2005. Significantly, it reiterates the reason behind his decision to start writing as expressed in the first works ever written by him, and also throughout his career. Thus, for Dokhuma, writing is first and foremost, political activism towards the cause of 'Mizo Nationalism'. Yet in order to understand the ways in which this nationalism is 'imagined' and how it is inextricably entrenched within the construction of Mizo identity in his works, one needs to look into the socio-political and historical context. In most of his works is found this explicit authorial intention, and although the genres, subject-matters, and treatments of his works are diverse, they all cater to at least one of what he terms "*hnam nunna lungphum"* ("foundations for the survival of the nation") – territory, religion, language, and culture and tradition (*Rilru Far Chhuak* 207).

All of his works are written in Mizo language which has come to be the dominant language of the *Zohnahthlak*[4] in the twentieth century. His mastery of the Mizo language has always distinguished Dokhuma's works from other Mizo writers' even without considering his linguistic works, but when these are taken into consideration, he reigns supreme in the field of Mizo lexicography and semantics.

[4] *Zohnahthlak* – An ethnonym used to denote all the *Zo* tribes, and is considered to be more inclusive than the term *Mizo* (Scholar's input).

His *Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna*, the fruit of years of labour as stated before, and his *Notes on Mizo Idioms and Phrases* (1983) have been meticulously compiled to cover the extensive idioms and phrases of the Mizo language. *Mizo Tawng Kalphung* (2006) is a book dealing with the nuances of the Mizo language, its peculiarities, some of its grammatical aspects, the etymology of words, the changes of meaning and the growth of vocabulary. *Mak leh Mak* [*Wonder and Wonder*] (1995) also falls under this category on account of it being the author's reflection on the wonderful nature of Mizo language which he compares to one of the 'Wonders of the world' – the Great Pyramid. The title 'Mak leh Mak' therefore means 'a comparison between one Wonder with another Wonder'. Language, according to Benedict Anderson, has played a major role in the formation of nations, and although he contends that it is not a requisite for nationalism he has also shown the unifying power of a common language:

> What the eye is to the lover - that particular eye he or she is born with – language – whatever language history has made his or her mother tongue – is to the patriot. Through that language, encountered at mother's knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed. (*Imagined Communities* 154)

Language has played, and continues to play, a pivotal role in the construction of Mizo identity and nationalism in fundamental ways. Several of the different tribes that have now come to collectively call themselves 'Mizo' had their own dialects in the past. While some of them still do speak their own dialects, *Mizo ţawng* (Mizo language) from the Lusei[5] dialect *Duhlian*[6] has become the *lingua franca* of all such

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[5] *Lusei* – n. the name from which the English word 'Lushai' is derived; but, whereas we English-speaking people apply 'Lushai' to the whole tribe, the tribesmen themselves apply Lusei to only the upper classes, and speak of the lower classes as Lutawi ('Longheads' and 'Shortheads' respectively.) (*DLL* 304). While Lorrain has used the term 'upper classes,' it may be more appropriate to call them the 'ruling tribe' or the 'dominant tribe' of a majority of the region when the British arrived, since there were also areas in which other tribes ruled (Scholar's input).

[6] *Duhlian* - A name given to the upper classes or clans in the *Lushai* Hills and to the dialect they speak – which is regarded as the purest form of the *Lushai* language (*DLL* 118).

tribes, ensuring a sense of community. Moreover, Mizo national consciousness has its origins in print and the language of print. Furthermore, the fear of linguistic assimilation was one of the expressed grounds for the Declaration of Independence made by the Mizo National Front in 1966. Thus, understandably Dokhuma, drawing links between culture, religion and language, warns against the appropriation of other cultures and religions even though he has nothing against learning other languages in itself (*Rilru Far Chhuak* 208-209). Sharing Stuart Hall's view that "language is central to meaning and culture and has always been regarded as the key repository of cultural values and meanings" (*Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* 1), he equates the survival of Mizo language to Mizo identity and to this end he warns against mass borrowings from other languages as well – "Mahni hnam tawng humhalh lote hnam chanvo chu hnam ral a ni lo thei si lo" ("A culture that fails to preserve its language is bound for extinction"; *Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna* xi).

The titles of a few of his works are in English, and other languages. There had been a trend of using English words and phrases for titles in Mizo literature, especially in Mizo novels since the 1980s, perhaps in part influenced by the popularity of the translations of western novels into Mizo, and partly influenced by the introduction of what Zama and Vanchiau categorise as 'pulp fiction' to the Mizo readers through the works of Joe Ngurdawla with titles like *Dirty Broadway, High Time in Paris, Home in Texas, and Meet Me in Texas Moonlight.* With regards to these 'pulp fictions', Zama and Vanchiau, in their book *After Decades of Silence: Voices from Mizoram,* briefly mention an interesting point:

> The titles themselves are a strong pointer of the changing times such as the growing influence of Western popular culture, and so occupies a significance{sic} place in the evolution and growth of Mizo fiction under different trends and influences. (34)

However this trend may also be regarded as testament of a colonial hangover as seen in the continued infatuation of the Mizo people with the *Sap*[7] – the white people, and their culture and language. It should be remembered that apart from this being the result of globalisation, there are several other local factors at play in the popularity of such narratives. The period saw a relatively peaceful period and literary production resumed at a remarkable rate after the *Rambuai*[8] years had almost brought literary production to a standstill. The growth of literacy and the promotion of reading by the Social Education Wing's publications were factors that paved the way for the emergence of a reading public highly receptive to secular literature. It was during this period – starting from the late seventies that most of Dokhuma's novels made their appearance, including the ones written much earlier.

In the case of Dokhuma, it is evident that he had not chosen English or foreign titles only to follow the trend since only three of his forty-two published books - *Goodbye Lushai Brigade* (1983), *Kimoto Syonora* (1984) and *Lonesome Cowboy* (1990), and only a few of his numerous essays bear titles in foreign languages. The third one in the list – *Lonesome Cowboy*, seems to be where Dokhuma follows the trends in Mizo popular literature, with characters fashioned after the western novels set in the 'wild west.' It is the only work where the author has indulged in such a trend - it appears to be out of character with the author himself, and unsurprisingly, is not one of his better known works.

Goodbye Lushai Brigade is set against the backdrop of World War II, where the "Lushai Brigade" was "a hastily improvised brigade" created by the British "to prevent an enemy advance through the Lushai Hills to Silchar to Chittagong." [9] The majority of the book is written in the form of an autobiography by the fictional character Major Mark Martin who was once part of the Lushai Brigade. The title,

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[7] *Sap* - a sahib, a white man, a government or other official. (*DLL* 404)

[8] *Rambuai* – literally, 'troubled land', *Rambuai* is most commonly used to denote the peak period of conflict in Mizoram from 1966 to 1969 (Scholar's input)

[9] "The Lushai Brigade," *The Soldier's Burden,* http://www.kaiserscross.com/304501/617322.html.

therefore, reflects the protagonist's own story in his own language. Likewise in *Kimoto Syonora,* the story revolves around the protagonist's unconventional love affair with a Japanese girl named Kimoto during WWII. Instead of using the usual spelling of 'sayonara' which is the Japanese term for goodbye, Dokhuma uses 'Syonora' to mean the same. It should also be pointed out that while the works of Ngurdawla who introduced "pulp fiction" in 1977 (Zama and Vanchiau 34), like a few others who joined the bandwagon, feature only white characters in their works, Dokhuma's foreign characters are mostly situated within the Mizo ethos. In fact, it is in such works that the postcoloniality of Dokhuma is most evident. In the former is portrayed the character of Maj. Mark Martin and the story of how he met and fell in love with a Mizo girl while stationed in the Lushai Brigade, and how the relationship was embroiled in the nuances of the complex relationship between the white rulers and the missionaries with the native Mizo people. Thus, it examines several issues regarding the Mizo colonial experience. The latter, though partly set in Singapore, deals mainly with the Mizo prisoners of war during the Second World War, and again, may be seen as an encounter between two cultures – Japanese and Mizo.

The two works mentioned earlier – *Goodbye, Lushai Brigade* and *Kimoto Syonora,* along with the novels *Thlahleinga Zan* (1970) and *Irrawaddy Lui Kamah* [*By the Banks of the River Irrawaddy*] (1982) are classified as "World War Fiction" by Zama and Vanchiau. The two World Wars, spanning continents and in which the British Empire took centrestage, had impacted the Mizo community in many ways. The participation of Mizo people in the service of the British army in both the wars as well as the proximity of World War II to Mizo inhabited regions had profound impact upon the Mizo communities. According to Zama and Vanchiau, the Mizos "participative role and exposure gained by them through active service during both World Wars I & II" made a big contribution "to the change in outlook, mindset and worldview of the Mizo during the 1st half of the 20th century," and "facilitated the Mizo into moving out of his insular existence into a world of other cultures and way of life, which in turn, went a long way into developing a competitive mind and spirit and the urge to be at par with people of other nations" (23-24). The influence was not lost on Dokhuma who, at the young age of fifteen, enlisted in the Indian Army and

served for more than four years, as evidenced in his fondness for such themes. His own experiences in the army and in the guerrilla movement of the MNF in the sixties indeed inform much of these works. *Thlahleinga Zan* was one of the first works written by him during his political incarceration in the late sixties, but succumbing to the constant request for a sequel, he wrote *Thlahleinga Zan* Part-II which was published in 1999. These two books have now been compiled and published as a single work. The first part is set in the World War II era and focuses on the relationship between two young lovers whose dreams of 'a happily ever after' are thwarted by the capture and imprisonment of the protagonist by the Japanese Imperial Army. Written decades later, the sequel fulfils the reading public's wish of a reunion between the original protagonists through the use of twists of fate that appear too contrived at times. This work abounds in archaisms and the use of idiomatic phrases, and while this may be regarded as evidence of Dokhuma's flair for the Mizo language, the style tends to hamper the flow in many instances. *Irrawady Lui Kamah* is set in Burma during World World II where the protagonist, Thanzinga who is part of the Indian Army Medical Corps met a Burmese girl, Ma Thui while stationed there. This is another story of unrequited love due to the circumstances brought about by war. The protagonist, in this story too, is captured and imprisoned in Singapore by the Japanese Army. The 'loyalty' of the Mizo prisoners to the British colonial power is brought out in their deliberations on and eventual rejection of joining Subash Chandra Bose in the fight for India's independence. This work may also thus be viewed as a document of the complex nature of the Mizo colonial experience.

Apart from these four novels based on the World Wars, several of his other works are also related to wars. *Hmangaihna Thuchah* [*A Message of Love*] (1982) is set amidst the Bangladesh war of 1971. *Rinawmin* (1970) and *Silaimu Ngaihawm* (1995) are meanwhile set within the Mizo National Movement. *Rinawmin* tells the story of a young lad, Rozuala who has joined the Mizo nationalist movement as a member of the guerrilla underground, and who is subsequently killed by the '*Vai sipai*' or the Indian Army personnel. It is a tragedy of betrayal, and it depicts the precarious situations faced not only by the warring sides but also by the civilians caught between the crossfire literally and figuratively. *Silaimu Ngaihawm* has as its

protagonist a woman who has fallen in love with a soldier of the Mizo nationalist movement who also gets killed in an encounter with the Indian Army. Written decades after the actual movement in which the author himself had taken a part, *Silaimu Ngaihawm* may be regarded as a hindsight account of the political scenario of the *rambuai* years. It is remarkable in its representation of the various opinions regarding the movement.

Some of his non-fiction works like *Singapore a Mizo Sal Tangte* [*Mizo Prisoners in Singapore*] (2002) and *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose* (1993) may also be included among his World War based works since they also are accounts of events relating to the Second World War. The former is an account of the Mizo people held as prisoners of war in Singapore by the Japanese Imperial Army, their solidarity despite the hardships they faced, and their rejection of the offer of joining the Indian National Army (INA) headed by Subhas Chandra Bose. The latter is a biography of the Indian freedom fighter Subhas Chandra Bose who attempted to overthrow the British empire's rule in India with the help of the Nazi Germany-Japanese alliance.

Hmangaihna Thuchah, as mentioned before, has as its backdrop the Bangladesh War of the early seventies, which is also known as the Bangladesh Liberation War since it is a war of independence from Pakistan. This war is incidentally bound up with the Mizo nationalist movement at certain points since the Mizo National Army, after being declared 'illegal' by the Indian Government following the armed uprising in 1966, were given asylum by the pre-Independent Government of East Pakistan. The main plot centres on a love triangle, with the protagonist, Lalthanpuia ending up having to choose between a Marathi Christian girl, Sarah Bibi and a fellow Mizo girl, Lalrammawii.

It is interesting to note that most of Dokhuma's war based novels, with the exception of those based on the Mizo national movement, feature either inter-racial or inter-ethnic relationships and that these relationships never work out in the end. While most of Dokhuma's novels have love as their main theme, and not all of them have happy endings, it is still noteworthy that whenever he deals with inter-racial or inter-communal relationships they are never allowed any conjugal union. In his

article, "James Dokhuma Novel-a a Changtute Inneih Loh Chhan" ["Why there is no marriage between the main characters in James Dokhuma's novels"], R Lallianzuala quotes Dokhuma's reply to the question as to why none of the relationships between the Mizo and Non-Mizo characters ended in marriage:

> Mizo leh hnam dang hi kan inngaizawng ang, Mizo nula hi sap ngaihzawn tlak kan ni ve; Mizo tlangvalte pawhin Vai nula te, Kawl nula leh Japan nula te pawh kan ngaizawng ve phak ngang mai. Chutih rual erawh chuan Mizo leh Mizo lo chu a neih em hi chu kan innei tur a ni dawn em ni ka ti deuh a ni.
>
> There would be times when Mizos would form relationships with non-Mizos. Mizo girls are worthy of *Sap*'s attention; Mizo men are not beneath the affections of the *Vai*[10] or Burmese or Japanese girls either. However, I feel that it should not be stretched to the extent of marriage. (91)

His attitude reflects his views on the sanctity of marriage, his standpoint on the question of ethnic identity and the idea of belonging-ness, and it also exposes the double-standard that is prevalent, especially among the men folk, regarding relationships. This attitude becomes more apparent in *Hmangaihna Thuchah* where the protagonist, Lalthanpuia ends up choosing Lalrammawii, a Mizo girl whom he had briefly courted as a young man before he left his village to join the navy. He meets Sarah Bibi, a Marathi Christian girl, while working in the Indian navy. While Sarah Bibi has finished her Masters and is currently pursuing a Ph.D in Notre Dame University in the United States, Lalremmawii is a local girl in Chhawrtui village with no such prospects. The protagonist's choice, made after much consideration, is not based on financial prospects in which case Sarah Bibi has a much higher leverage, nor is it on the grounds of differences in religious beliefs since the issue does not arise. It is not even on the question of who he loves more. It all boils down to the question of shared ethnic identity – the fact that Lalremmawii is a fellow Mizo girl is what clinched the deal for Lalthanpuia. Though the protagonist has had exposure to

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[10] *Vai* – natives from the plains of India (Scholar's input).

other cultures, and while the nature of his profession has removed him from his 'home', his rootedness in the idea of Mizo identity comes to the fore, considering shared background, homeland, and a common language as the deciding factors for a permanent union. Marriage, with its implication of permanence, is reserved for those who 'belong' together and not with the 'other'.

This process of other-ing of the *Vai* has been examined in Joy L.K. Pachuau's *Being Mizo* and David Vumlallian Zou's "*Vai* Phobia to Raj Nostalgia: *Sahibs*, Chiefs and Commoners in Colonial Lushai Hills." The British colonial policy was being played out in the initial period of the colonial encounter in which the *Sap* – the British administrators emerged as the benevolent civilising force while the *Vai*, although they themselves were subjects of the British Raj, were positioned as the 'Other'. Since this aspect is dealt with in more detail elsewhere in the chapter, suffice it to say that *Hmangaihna Thuchah*, where the relationship is between a Mizo and a *Vai*, is the only novel dealing with inter-racial/communal relationship where the separation of the lovers is a result of the deliberate choice of the protagonist, and also the only one where the protagonist is put in a position where he has to choose between a Mizo and a *hnam dang*[11].

Maintaining the racial divide, however, is not confined to the Mizo alone though. In *Goodbye, Lushai Brigade*, we have the *Sap* preventing the marriage between the protagonist Mark Martin and his beloved Mizo girl. In Lallianzuala's article mentioned earlier, where he attempts to address the question of the author's disapproval of mixed marriages, he concludes that if Dokhuma had really wanted to let the lovers marry he would have contrived the story in such a way that they would eventually end up together against all odds as he had done in his novel *Thlahleinga Zan*, but had chosen instead to use various eventualities of war as devices to prevent their union in all the World War novels including *Goodbye Lushai Brigade*, and the choice of Mizo-ness in *Hmangaihna Thuchah*. What Lallianzuala has overlooked is the involvement of *Sap* in the events that lead to the separation of the lovers in

[11] *Hnam dang* – another clan, tribe, nation, or race; a person belonging to another clan, tribe, nation, or race; a foreigner.

Goodbye Lushai Brigade, and also Dokhuma's critique of the attitudes of the *Sap* and the *Zosap*[12] in the "Preface."

Here Dokhuma writes:

> A thawnthu-in a tum ber chu- Mizo nulate hi 'Sap" tia kan chhoh en thin te tan pawh iaiawm an nih lohzia leh neih tlak an nih tho bakah 'Sapho indah sanzia, kan Zosapte meuh pawh khan Pathian Thu chu min duhsak hle mah se, hnam nihna lamah min hmuhsit si-zia a tarlang a. Kan tan Missionary te kha Pathian thu lamah fakawm em em mah se, nupui pasala innei meuh tura mi an hnualsuat si dan te pawh ka thailang tel bawk a ni.
>
> What the story tries to show is mainly that the Mizo *nulate* (young girls of marriageable age) are worthy of even the *Sap* whom we regard as superior to us, and at the same time how the *Sap* considered themselves as our superiors. Even the *Zosap* (the white missionaries in Mizoram), in spite of their missionary zeal were inherently racist. Thus I have also highlighted the fact that the missionaries, although highly commendable for their evangelizing mission, displayed their snobbery and racial prejudice when it comes to the matter of inter-racial marriage between them and us. (5)

What is remarkable with this statement and his decision to depict even the *Zosap* in this light is that this work was published in 1983, much before postcolonialism had reached the Mizo masses. He has pointed out the fact that the *Sap* regarded themselves as superior to the local people. This involves not just the political issue of coloniser/colonised subjects, but also the 'Christianity mission' and the 'civilising' agenda for which the 'superior status' of the 'masters' had to be maintained. It also highlights the duality involved in the Mizos' attitude towards the colonial rule – gratefulness for the Gospel and the 'civilising mission' on the one hand, and the realisation that the same had a lasting impact in the way the Mizo people have come to view themselves on the other hand. The relationship between

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[12] *Zosap* – the white missionaries were referred to as *zosap,* while all white Europeans are included in *sap* (Scholar's input).

the coloniser and the colonial subject has garnered various theories and concepts within colonial and postcolonial discourse. From Fanon's "Having judged, condemned, abandoned his cultural forms, his language, his food habits, his sexual behavior, his way of sitting down, of resting, of laughing, of enjoying himself, the oppressed flings himself upon the imposed culture with the desperation of a drowning man" (*Toward the African Revolution* 39), to describe the colonised subject's lack of agency to resist the colonial transformative forces, to Edward Said's critique of the coloniser's rationale in *Orientalism* - "Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilise, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires, as if one shouldn't trust the evidence of one's eyes watching the destruction and the misery and death brought by the latest mission civilizatrice" (xvi), the postcolonial discourse, though useful to some extent in the decolonising project, does not always fit neatly when it comes to the Mizo colonial experience and its aftermath.

The Mizo colonial experience falls under "the cross follows the flag" tradition (Vanlalchhuanawma 97), and compared to other colonial experiences, the occupation of Mizo lands was not inherently part of the British economic expantionist agenda, and the missionaries 'civilising agenda' as well as the British administrative policies were not always viewed as 'dehumanising' to the Mizo colonial subjects altogether. Margaret L Pachuau clearly denotes the inadequacy of a sweeping postcolonial discourse to address Mizo postcoloniality when she says that "[t]he arguments of many post-colonial theorists fail to convince many Mizos, primarily on account of their refusal to address adequately the ideological stance between the histories of the subject and those of the histories of subjection" (191).

The fact that Dokhuma had chosen to deal with this theme and highlighting the duplicity regarding the *Sap*'s attitude towards the Mizos, places him as one of the first Mizo novelists to venture into an engagement with the issues of Mizo postcoloniality. In his depiction of the 'attitudes' of the *Zosap*, he exposes the 'superior race' mentality of the missionaries who had become the facilitators of the

colonial enterprise through their introduction of Christianity and their 'civilising mission'. It should be pointed out that the Mizo people's perception of the 'whites' itself is inherently complex. They did indeed make certain distinctions between the British administrators and the missionaries, evident from the terms they designated to them, as seen in the earlier quoted passages – *Sap* representing not only the British administrators but also all 'whites' including the missionaries, while the missionaries themselves were referred to as *Zosap.* The term *Sap* is derived from the Hindi term 'Sahib' which means 'Sir' or 'Master', and was used in colonial India invariably to address the male Europeans. Thus the term itself connotes the colonial subjects' acceptance of the 'superior' position of the Europeans. Similarly, with the Mizo colonial subjects, the *Sap* represents position of power, and although the term was used to refer to the 'masters' who had come to subjugate them, it came to be applied by way of extension, to all people of Caucasian descent and thus acquired racial colouring. The missionaries were called the *Zosap*, a combination of the terms "Zo" by which the Mizo tribes had ascribed themselves, and *Sap.* Thus *Zosap* does not only denote a distinction based on the perceived difference in terms of role and position between the *Sap* within their land, but more significantly, the level of acceptance by the colonial Mizo people. As the harbingers of the good news, the *Zosap* were regarded as inherently benevolent. Thus, even Dokhuma's critique of the *Zosap's* attitude towards an inter-racial marriage between the *Sap* soldier and a Mizo girl evinces an expectation of lesser discrimination from them. The critique becomes more succinct as we look in the actual story. The interesting point is that the Mizo people are described through the *Sap*'s perspective, as imagined by the author. Yet the author portrays the protagonist as someone who has a deeper understanding of the native Mizo mentality, unlike most of the colonial ethnographic writings. The *Sap* in this novel is a soldier of the British Army, positioned in the Lushai Hills on account of the War. The work may thus be viewed as a project of 'writing back' where the author employs the *Sap* narrator to serve as the mouthpiece of the author's own reconsideration of the *Sap* - Mizo relationship. The narrator explains the colonial subject's colonial mentality in these lines:

> ...hnam thilah mi an chung en em avangin Sap nupui nih chu an tan chuan a ropui a. Chu avang chuan a bum duhtu tan chuan bum pawh an har lo viau mai thei reng ang. Sapho chuan 'sakhua' an pe a, 'sawrkar' an siamsak bawk a. Tisa leh thlaraua a ropui ber ber petu chu 'Sap' an tithe chu kan nih miau avang chuan mi an ngaisang pawh chu a mawh lo ve.

> As they viewed us as racially superior to them, to become a wife to a *Sap* would be regarded as a great fortune. They would have been easy prey for those who wanted to lead them on (into thinking that the *Sap* suitor would have marital intentions). The *Sap* gave them their religion and created for them a form of governance. The two greatest gifts in worldly and spiritual terms were given to them by the *Sap,* and thus their reverence of us is not totally unjustified. (45)

The *Sap* narrator seems to 'own' the *Sap'*s benevolence in his attempt to rationalise the apprehension of the girl and her family, yet there is a certain ironic tone to this statement as he himself vehemently critiques the *Zosap* for their objection to his marriage:

> An thu kalpui dan lah chu Kohhran thil pawh ni tawh lovin 'hnam' thil a nih tlat tawh avangin min daltu ber pawh Sawrkar Sap lam an ni ta bawk si chu a luhaithlaka chu a ni. Amaherawhchu, heng thila a bul tumtu ber chu Zosap-ho an nih avangin Kohhran chu a mawhchhiat loh theih phei zawng a ni lo. Mahse ka nupui neih tum thila chuti taka Sawrkara hotu Mingo-ho leh sipai lam sap an inrawlhna chhan ber chu Zosap-ho thiltih a nih miau avangin an Pathian thu awih dan chu mak ka ti a. Chu'ng Zosapte chu kristianna leh kohhran rawngbawlna lamah phei chuan fakawm ka tiin ropui pawh ka ti a, mahse hnam thilah erawh chu fakawm ka ti thei mawlh lo thung.

> As the matter had escalated to become an issue of *hnam* – race, ethnicity, nationality, and no longer confined to that of the Church, it resulted in the administrative *Sap*'s objection to my plans much my distress. Yet the blame sat squarely on the Church since the whole problem originated with the *Zosap* themselves. Since the actual instigators behind the opposition to my marriage

> from the white civil administrators and the army were indeed the *Zosap*, I found it hard to comprehend the way they professed to serve God. I, of course greatly commend what they had done in their mission through the Church, but when it came to the question of *hnam*, I could not find anything to commend them on. (66-67)

Dokhuma shows, on the one hand, the confluence of 'the white man's power' - the British administrators and the evangelising mission exerting their power in the Lushai Hills, and at the same time, points out the inadequacy of the new Christian faith to overcome the segregative tendency of nationalism. However, while pointing out the colonial mentality of the Mizo's adoration of the *Sap,* he becomes complicit in that he 'tries to show that the Mizo girls are *worthy* of the *Sap's* affection since the question of 'worthiness' would not arise if the *Sap* were not regarded as superior to the Mizo people. The question of *hnam* had always been a core concern for Dokhuma in the works he had written earlier, and here in *Goodbye Lushai Brigade* is where we see what may be regarded as his 'answer' to the polarising tendencies of nationalism, through Major Mark Martin:

> Vaivuta siam theuh theuh, lei duma siam leh lei vara siam kan inhlut hleina tur ka hre ve phak lo a ni ber mai.
>
> Created equally from dust, I cannot comprehend how the colour of the dust – whether black or white, should determine our worth. (68)

By the time Dokhuma came to write *Goodbye Lushai Brigade* in 1983, he had come to a period where his concern regarding *hnam* has shifted to finding a way for peaceful co-existence without totally obliterating the sameness/difference dichotomy which engenders identity markers for different *hnam*, through the acceptance of the common worth of man on the basis of being equally created by God. In 1982, the same sentiment is reiterated in his radio talk on "Hnam Inpumkhatna" ("National Integration" reproduced in *Rilru Far Chhuak* 114-119) where he advocates mutual respect and regard as the answer to not only the integration of tribes within a nation, but of mankind itself, and he cites Hitler's Nazism as an example of the perils of subscribing to an ideology based on the 'superiority' of certain groups over others.

It is within Dokhuma's conviction in equality and the common worth of man that his notion of Mizo nationalism is situated. Even though he has not yet reached this reconciliatory position, the foundations of his conception of nationalism remains the same, and it finds its explicit articulation in works like *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm*. The concept of 'Nation' in how it has come to be understood today has its roots in the French revolution, according to Anthony D Smith:

> Historians may differ over the exact moment of nationalism's birth, but social scientists are clear: nationalism is a modern movement and ideology, which emerged in the latter half of the eighteenth century in Western Europe and America, and which, after its apogee in two world wars, is now beginning to decline and give way to global forces which transcend the boundaries of nation-states. (*Nationalism and Modernism* 1)

While he accepts that 'nationalism' is a modern movement and ideology, through his ethno-symbolic approach, Smith points out that the pre-modern origins of nations to what he termed 'ethnie' – an ethnic community which is "a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members" (*Ethnic Origins* 32). In order to understand Mizo nationalism, the constructedness as well as its foundation in an *ethnie* needs to be taken into account. Moreover, the complex question of inclusion and exclusion pertaining to Indian nationalism and nation-state needs to be addressed as well. Even as the nationalism of postcolonial states have their beginnings constructed through or in resistance to colonial powers, Mizo nationalism continues to be created through its relation to the independent Indian state and its process of nation-building.

Several of his works fall under the ethnographic writing category, and in them we have Dokhuma in the role of the oral knowledge keeper. The rich oral culture of the Mizo tribes is manifested in much of his writings, and specifically more so in his works dealing directly with the oral past. *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* (1992) is a 'record' of the customs and traditions of the pre-Christianity society of the Mizo people. In it, the author meticulously compiles the traditional belief system

and rituals, the customs and traditions, the values and the administrations of village life. Relying heavily on oral transmission, this work may be seen as an attempt to preserve the vestiges of the oral past. The author admits in the 'Introduction' that he might have included and perhaps blended the pre-Christian practices and beliefs of the different Mizo tribes. The specificities of the tribes and their customs, through the historical processes of Mizo identity formation, have been obscured. Evident here is the erasure of the boundaries that marked the tribe and clan identities. The disjunction brought about by the colonial experience of the tribes, along with the inherently fluid and malleable nature of oral transmissions have, on the one hand erased traditional frames of identity, and on the other hand help expedite the more homogenised Mizo identity.

Zokhaw Nun [*Village Life*] (1998) is a study of several aspects of life in traditional Mizo society. Although we find several topics similar to *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, this work delves deeper into the symbolic and the semantic significance of the topics covered which includes the customs, traditions and material culture of pre-Christian Mizo village communities. *Arsi Thawnthu* [*Stories about Stars*] (1979) is yet another work which records the oral stories and the lores behind the names given by the Mizo people to the stars and the constellations. Such lores have much more to them than the storytelling element. They are deeply entrenched in the culture and worldview of the Mizo tribes, and are the records of how the Mizo ancestors understood themselves and their place in the cosmos. What is even more remarkable is that in the representation of these lores, Dokhuma has not tried to sanitise the stories to suit Mizo Christian sensibilities. Therefore it offers a glimpse into the essentially different modalities of the pre-Christian culture. The lives of some of the legendary Mizo chiefs from the past are covered in *Ni leh Thla Kara Leng* [*Prevailing on the Level of the Sun and the Moon*] (1978), which recounts the lives of the most famous chiefs, not through modern system of historiography, but from the oral accounts handed down from generation to generation, and from region to region. One feature of Mizo orality which recurs regularly in Dokhuma's works is

the insertion of songs in his prose works. The songs vary between the *Hlado*[13] (the traditional war chant), folk songs and religious folk songs.

Among his fictional works, *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* (1970) may also be considered under this category since the intention of the author, as stated by him in the "Introduction", is to 'record' the legacy of the pre-Christian past for the future generations. Here he expresses the purpose behind his choice of expanding what he claims to be an existing story in oral form, albeit without a title, which he has fleshed out and expanded upon while preserving its essence, which contains moral implications and profound meanings. He writes:

> A thawnthuin kan Mizo khawsakzia leh kan mize mu hnu min varchhuah dan chu thu dang ni se, a thawnthu changtu miziaah entawn tur – dawhtheihna leh tumruhna te, rual elna leh dikna te a lang a. Chu chu keini Mizo thangtharte tan hian entawn tur pawimawh ber a nih si avangin, lehkhabu ngeia inthurochhiah tlak ni-a ka hriat avangin ka ziak ta a ni.
>
> Notwithstanding the fact that the story is an important reminder of the traditional Mizo character and way of life, there are, exemplified in the character of the protagonist, traits worth emulating – patience and determination, competitive spirit and integrity. Since it is imperative of us younger generations of Mizo to aspire to such exemplary qualities, I have written this story which I feel deserves to be left as a legacy in book-form. (*Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* 7)

It is evident that Dokhuma is keenly aware of the potential literature has, to open up spaces for the engagement with and interrogation of culture and identity. To him the literary goes hand in hand with the cultural, and he assumes the dual role of story-teller and custodian of Mizo culture. This conception of the social responsibility of the writer is evident not only in his works that deal specifically with culture and social reforms, but also in his fiction and poetry. The following lines

[13] *Hlado* - The hunter's cry or chant which is raised directly after a wild animal has been killed in the chase. It is also chanted along the way home, and at the entrance of the village (*DLL* 148).

from the same preface clearly indicate that he makes no attempt to conceal his intentions of using the story as a vehicle for propagating and preserving what he deems are the core values and the foundation of Mizo identity:

> Kan pi leh pute hmanlai nunphungin a ngaihsan zawng tak leh an hlutsak thilthlengin he thawnthu-ah hian a lang a. Lalkhua leh tuia khawtlang daingul leh pasaltha, mi-kawlh sa-kawlh hmaa zam lo Mizo tlangval tlawmngaite fakawmzia leh ropui si-zia te chu khawvel hmaa pho lan theih nit a se ka va ti em! Amaherawhchu, he Mizo ze chhuanawm tak lungphum hi kan innghahna ber mah ni se, tuma hmuh theih lohin kan phum bo hlen ang tih chu ka hlauh em avangin, a tak inkawhhmuh mai tur hre lo mah ila, thawnthu tala kan insihhmuh theih beiseiin he thawnthu hi ka ziak ta a ni e.
>
> The values of our forefathers and what they esteemed and held in high regard are clearly discernible in this story. How I wish that the world may see the honour and greatness of the stalwarts of the chiefdom – those *pasaltha*[14], the young Mizo men who feared not the fiercest of men nor the most ferocious of beasts, embodying the code of *tlawmngaihna.*[15] It is my hope in writing this story that, as a tangible representation of *tlawmngaihna*, which has been fundamental to the Mizo ethos, it plays a role in the preservation of this admirable code, to prevent it from fading into obscurity. (7)

Set in the pre-colonial past, *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* is a story of a young man who embodies the code of *Tlawmngaihna*, who, through his demonstration of such a trait, proves himself worthy of both the title of *pasaltha* and the hand of the daughter of the village chief. The point of transition from an oral to a written tradition is witnessed here once again in that the author claims that this story, in varied forms, had existed as an oral tale.

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[14] Pasaltha – n. a person who is brave and manly; a brave, a hero; a famous or notable warrior or hunter (*DLL* 352).

[15] *Tlawmngaihna* - n. self-sacrifice, unselfishness, etc; or being self-sacrificing, being unselfish, etc. (as under the verb *tlawmngai*) (*DLL* 514). For *tlawmngai,* see Glossary.

The *pasaltha* is a concept that finds recurrence in many of Dokhuma's works, and the embeddedness of this concept in the Mizo imagination and how it is more than just a title given to the braves but rather a symbolic representation of the entire worldview of the pre-colonial Mizo tribes is seen in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung. Pasaltha* represents the values and ethos of the culture of the Mizo tribes, and thus, is subject to the same transformative forces that had direct bearings on Mizo culture and identity. Not only is the *pasaltha* a construct of Mizo culture, but it is, in its turn, a major force in the construction of Mizo identity itself, and thus the understanding of the concept itself is subject to the shifts in Mizo culture and identity formation. Such revisionism of the concept of *pasaltha* may be traced in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*i, *Khawhar In* and *Rinawmin.* In *Rinawmin*, this concept takes on a 'nationalistic' turn as it is intricately interwoven with the notion of Mizo nationalism and the Mizo national movement.

Dokhuma has also published four plays – *Tumna chu a Hlawhtling Thin* [*Determination Leads to Success*] (1975), *Hmasawnna* [*Progress / Improvement/ Development*] (1978), *Hausak Aiin Hrisel a Hlu Zawk* [*Health is More Valuable than Wealth*] (1979), and *Finna Hmahruai* [*The Harbinger of Wisdom*] (1980). All of his plays were written on the behest of governmental bodies in Mizoram to aid in public education and therefore, are all intentionally instructive. *Tumna chu a Hlawhtling Thin* deals with the importance of literacy and it was written to promote adult education. *Hmasawnna* is also written in the same vein, where he denotes that knowledge and learning is the beginning of progress in society. *Hausak Aiin Hrisel a Hlu Zawk* is an educational play which highlights the importance of nutrition for health and wellbeing. *Finna Hmahruai* is a Christian play which depicts the theme that the gospel is the harbinger of light and wisdom, through the life of the earliest converts to Christianity among the Mizo people, the persecutions they faced and the eventual conversions of the persecutors.

Apart from this play, there are several works of his which may be classified under his religious writings. These include - *Zoram Kohhran Tualto Chanchin* [*Indigenous Churches of Mizoram*], published in 1975, which is a historical account that traces the various indigenous movements under Mizo Christianity down the

years. The work has remained an invaluable source for scholars of Mizo Christianity as it traces the indigenous elements that have rendered Mizo Christianity as a syncretic one. *Gabbatha* (1989) is a Christian fiction, and has been translated into English by Lalthankima. Dokhuma belonged to the Salvation Army and two of his works – *Chhungkua: Sipai Inkhawm Thupui* [*Family: Salvation Army Service Topic*] (1990) and *Thisen leh Mei: Self Denial Thupui* [*Blood and Fire: Topic on Self Denial*] (2001) are liturgical exegesis of the doctrines of the Salvation Army denomination. Apart from these, it must be pointed out that many other works have implicit 'religious' elements, informing the ways in which he approaches the subject, and this is once again, bound up with his notion of Mizo nationalism. This notion is not peculiar to him either. Mizo nationalism, as it came to be conceived, have been inherently both ethnic and religious. The ways in which nationalism is conceived in *Rinawmin* and to a lesser degree, in *Silaimu Ngaihawm* bear ample testimony to this ethno-religious orientation. Mizo nationalism, by this point of time, has come to be 'imagined' in direct opposition to the threat, both perceived and real, of cultural, linguistic and religious assimiliation by the dominant, pre-dominantly Hindi-speaking, Hindu nationalism.

The biographical works of Dokhuma include, along with *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose* and *Ni leh Thla Kara Leng*, *Lamsuaka* (full title *Chhakawm Keipui Lamsuaka* which roughly translates to "Lamsuaka, the Tiger from the East", 2001) which is a biography of one of the most famous Mizo chiefs, Lamsuaka, and a biography of the first Chief Minister of the Lushai Hills District, *Ch.Chhunga Chanchin* [*Biography of Ch. Chhunga*] (1999). This biography of Ch. Chhunga can be read as a counter-narrative to the idealised form of Mizo nationalism as found in *Rinawmin* and other works from his early writing career. It stands as a testament to his committent to a 'nationalism' which is "above and beyond partisan politics" (*Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna,* iv).

Dokhuma has written more than 400 essays, contributing regularly to the periodical *Zoram Eng* [*The Light of Zoram*] which is now known as *Meichher* [*The Torch*], as well as to various magazines, souvenirs, anthologies and other periodicals. A few of his essays have been compiled and published in book form in *Rilru Far*

Chhuak (1995) and his poems in *Ka Thinlung Luangliam* [*Outpourings of my Heart*] (1996). These essays and poems cover diverse subjects like reflections on the truths of life, reminiscences, educational essays, Mizo culture and history, among others. Many of his essays have been included in syllabi of schools, colleges and under Mizoram University.

Secondary works dealing with the writings of Dokhuma are still scant, and the few that are available includes Malsawmliana's "James Dokhuma Thuziakte Thlirna" ["Observations on James Dokhuma's Writings"] (August 11, 2018), an online article which provides a general overview of Dokhuma's prose works where he lists out several general characteristics of these works: that Dokhuma's main concerns are Mizo identity, the preservation of Mizo culture, the growth and preservation of Mizo language, his belief that it is his duty to serve Mizo community and the idea of Mizo nationhood, educational and inspirational works geared towards social, cultural and moral reforms as well as progress, the need for wildlife conservation, and general observations on life.

Rualzakhumi's article "*Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* by James Dokhuma: As an Auto-Ethnographic Novel" (2012) considers the novel as ethnographic writing from a native's point of view, and Lalthasanga Hrangate's "Representation of Mizo Identity in the Works of James Dokhuma" is a short study of the concept of Mizo identity as conceptualised in the works of Dokhuma, where he makes the observation that "'*Identity*' created out of the traditional history of Mizo was Dokhuma's distinct character." HD Lalrinkimi's *Treatment of Women in Selected Fictions of James Dokhuma* (2015) traces the position of Dokhuma's female characters within a constrictive Patriarchal Mizo society. KC Lalthansanga's M.Phil dissertation, *Women's Perspective of Mizo Insurgency in* Rinawmin *and* Silaimu Ngaihawm *by James Dokhuma* (2017), traces the plight of the female characters in these novels.

Since James Dokhuma's legacy in the literary domains stretches across genres, it is best summed up thematically. His notable contribution towards the discourse on Mizo identity and nationalism and his passionate commitment to the writing purpose, the preservation of Mizo oral tradition and culture, and his valuable

legacy in preserving and enriching Mizo language will continue to ensure relevance and currency to his works.

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CHAPTER TWO

MIZO IDENTITY IN THE WORKS OF JAMES DOKHUMA

This chapter seeks to comprehend and consolidate the aspect of Mizo identity in Dokhuma's works. A brief historical overview of the discourses on identity itself has been given to highlight the issues that pertain to the study of identity, and to justify the theoretical underpinnings and approaches of the study. Mizo identity cannot be understood without the consideration of the cultural, socio-political and historical specificities, and therefore, attempt has been made to locate the forces at play within such a context from various approaches.

'Identity' has been a key concept in Western philosophy for centuries, and has continued to be the crux of contemporary discourses. While the modern understanding of the term is a later phenomenon, it may be assumed that man has always mulled over the existential question – "Who am I?" since it is essentially bound up with the notion of the *self*. And it may also be assumed that a sense of social identity has been central to mankind's evolution, right from the time when mankind decided to form social groups. What is evident here is that there are two aspects to subjective identity – the personal and the social. Simple dictionary definitions of 'identity' like "1. who or what somebody/something is 2. the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that make people different from others," (*Oxford Advanced Learners'*) though seemingly clear cut and simple, belie the fundamental issues that have become the centre of contemporary identity debates. The supposition of an essential, fixed, or stable identity, of a 'knowing subject', and the idea of being 'identical'- the traditional position of considering the notion of identity has been questioned, abandoned and replaced by more dynamic approaches moored on the notion of 'fluidity' and 'constructedness'.

Tracing the traditional notion of identity, Francis Fukuyama acknowledges the Greek philosophers for their insight into 'human nature', but ascribes the emergence of our understanding of identity to the period of Reformation – "In the West, the idea of identity was born, in a sense, during the Protestant Reformation, and it was given its initial expression by the Augustinian friar Martin Luther… Luther was one of the first Western thinkers to articulate and valorise the inner self over the external social being. He argued that man has a twofold nature, an inner spiritual one and an outer bodily being; since "no external thing has any influence in

producing Christian righteousness or freedom," only the inner man could be renewed…" He points out his belief that in the shift in our understanding of identity, along with the socio-economic conditions, Luther's ideas that led to the Protestant Reformation also play a role (20 – 31). In *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts* edited by Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, there is a brief account of the history of the identity debate. Summing up the development and highlighting the key moments of Identity discourse from the Orthodox European philosophical tradition down to the Cultural Studies of the present, it denotes that "orthodox account of identity" have always located the "self" as the subject which is "stable and independent of external influences" at least since Descartes in the seventeenth century. The 'knowing subject' which is stable is what Stuart Hall calls 'the Enlightenment subject':

> The Enlightenment subject was based on a conception of the human person as a fully centred, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action, whose 'centre' consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same – continuous or 'identical' with itself – throughout the individual's existence. The essential centre of the self was the person's identity. ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 275)

This notion was subsequently questioned by some philosophers like David Hume, in the eighteenth century, who "observed that the contents of his consciousness included images (or sense impressions) of everything of which he was thinking (either directly perceiving, or recalling in memory). There was, though, no image of the self that was supposedly doing this perceiving and remembering," and he therefore "proffered what was commonly known as the 'bundle theory' of the self, such that the self is nothing more than a bundle of sense impressions, that continually changed as the individual had new experiences or recalled new ones" (Edgar and Sedgwick 167). Thus, up till this point, society was thought to be composed of individuals on their own volition under certain agreements such as the 'social contract'. These notions from 'liberal individualism' eventually met a challenge with Emile Durkheim who argued that "the individual was a product of society" which inverts the idea that society was produced by individuals. Thus, Durkheim made the

point that “a modern understanding of individuality (and thus, the self-understanding of humans in modern society) was a product of that particular culture,” and therefore “individual identity is not primary, but is a product of economic organisation” (Edgar and Sedgwick 167-168), and this brought in a disruption to the course of the identity debate. George Herbert Mead’s analysis of the self which became fundamental to ‘symbolic interactionist’ approach in sociology, distinguishes between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ with regards to the ‘self’, saying “The ‘I’ is a response of the organism to the attitudes of others; the ‘me’ is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes.” He elaborates on their distinctiveness and their relationship to each other, highlighting the role of outside forces in the development of the self (Mead 175-178). Erving Goffman’s furtherance of this point where the self is “a product of particular interactions, in so far as the individual’s capacities, attitudes and ways of behaving (and possibly, of conceiving of him or herself) changes as the people around him or her change” renders the self as having less self-consciousness in isolation – “The self therefore has no stability, being almost as fluid as the self proposed by Hume” (Edgar and Sedgwick 168).

From this point forward, the identity debate has grounded itself on what Stuart Hall calls ‘the Sociological subject,’ which is a reflection of “the growing complexity of the modern world and the awareness that this inner core of the subject was not autonomous and self-sufficient, but was formed in relation to ‘significant others’, who mediated to the subject the values, meanings and symbols – the culture – of the worlds he/she inhabited” (“The Question of Cultural Identity” 275). The gap between the personal and the social notions of identity has been bridged at this point of time, and the ‘instability’ and ‘fluidity’ of the notion of the self have been established:

> Identity, in this sociological conception, bridges the gap between the 'inside' and the 'outside' -between the personal and the public worlds. The fact that we project 'ourselves' into these cultural identities, at the same time internalizing their meanings and values, making them 'part of us', helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective ' places we occupy in the social and cultural world. Identity thus stitches (or, to use a current medical metaphor, 'sutures" the subject into the structure.) It stabilizes both subjects and the

> cultural worlds they inhabit, making both reciprocally more unified and predictable. ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 275)

The psychological turn that the debate on identity has taken is already evident at this stage, but the developments made by Sigmund Freud and those after him take this course further. Freud's conception of the self as a complex structure consisting of the Id, the Ego and the Super-ego, brings to the fore that "man is not the rational agent he thinks he is... that man's intelligence and reason are neither the strongest forces operative in him nor even independent ones," and that "the unconscious is a process which is always active and which all too often manages to force conscious motivations into its service" (de Berg 129). Erik Erikson's psychodynamic theory that positions identity as a product of the processes of the interaction between the individual and the social identities, and Lacan's proposition of the unconscious being structured like language which is receptive and reactive to the others that it encounters (Edgar and Sedgwick 168-169), have further contributed to the multi-dimensional understanding of identity in the contemporary discourse.

Another important development is the contribution of the Marxist-influenced ideas of the Structuralists that posits the role of ideology in the construction of identities. Further, of lasting and profound influence to the identity debate is Michel Foucault's works. His contribution to the discourse on identity is summed up by Edgar and Sedgwick who refer to two of his works, *Madness and Civilization* (1971) and *The History of Sexuality* (1981) thus:

> …in his early work on madness (1971), he analyses how madness is conceived differently in different ages (comparing, for example, the Renaissance view of madness as its own form of reason, with the rationalist seventeenth century's exclusion of the insane from society). Madness is thus socially constructed and specific, and historically variable social practices exist to constrain it. Yet, crucially for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, madness is also the other, in comparison to which the sane and rational define themselves. The identity of the dominant group in society therefore depends upon its construction of its own other. In Foucault's later

> writings, he turns to the problem of the construction of the 'self (especially in relation to sexuality) through its positioning within discourses' (1981). From this, the self may be theorised in terms of the conceptual and other intellectual resources that it calls upon in order to write or talk about itself, and in the way in which it is written about, or written to. The way in which a text is composed will anticipate, and thus situate, a certain self as reader. (Edgar and Sedgwick 169)

What Hall designates as 'the post-modern subject' is thus "conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. Identity becomes a 'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us… It is historically, not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self'." He further adds that there is within us "contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about," reinforcing the notion of the temporality of identity, and claims that "if we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or 'narrative of the self' about ourselves." Thus, instead of "a fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity… we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities any one of which we could identify with – at least temporarily" ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 277).

The basic premise on which the present study on Mizo identity is founded is the cultural studies' approach to identity which has facilitated new ways to re-think about the concept of identity and its multiple implications across the fields of social sciences and human endeavours:

> The recognition that identity is not merely constructed, but depends upon some other, opens up the theoretical space for marginal or oppressed groups to challenge and renegotiate the identities that have been forced upon them in the process of domination. Ethnic identities, gay and lesbian identities and

> female identities are thus brought into a process of political change. (Edgar and Sedgwick 170)

Mizo identity, to James Dokhuma, is as much about 'becoming Mizo' as it is about 'being Mizo'. In the following passage from his essay, "Mizo Ka Ni Ka Zak Dawn Lo" ["I Am Mizo and I Am Not Ashamed"],[16] his self-ascription of 'being' a Mizo is most pronounced:

> Kei pawh 'MIZO' ka ni a, ram leh tawng (hrang) ka nei a. Chu bakah hnam dan leh kalhmang zepui danglam riau mai nei hnam ka ni bawk a. Khawvela 'ber' nih ka kaina awmchhun pawh 'MIZO' ka nihna hi a ni.
>
> I am a Mizo, having my own land and my own language. Additionally, I belong to a *hnam* with its own unique culture. My only claim to distinction from the rest of the world is, indeed, my being a 'Mizo'. (*Rilru Far Chhuak* 74)

Through this declaration, he 'positions' his Mizo identity within the articulation of ethnic identification, territory, language and culture. His essentialist conception of Mizo identity becomes even more apparent when he clarifies that linguistic affinities or even the adoption of Mizo customs and traditions do not qualify anyone to assume a Mizo identity:

> Hnam dangte chuan Mizo nih tumin, pai hauh lovin ṭawng pawh thiam mah se, hnam dang Mizo ṭawng thiam tak a ni ve ringawt ang a. Tin, kan khawsak dan leh kan hnam kalphung ang zawng zawng zawmin khawsa ve mah se, hnam dang Mizo nih châk tak a ni satliah ve ringawt ang.
>
> If someone from another *hnam* with an aspiration to become a Mizo displays even a native-speaker level of Mizo language proficiency, he/she would still be just an outsider who is exceptionally fluent in Mizo language. Even if that

[16] All translations of quoted texts and titles of works in this chapter are done by me, unless noted otherwise, for the sole purpose of this study.

> person adopts our customs and traditions, he/she would never be more than someone wishful to be a Mizo. (74)

Yet in the same essay, he goes on to imply that being Mizo 'by blood' is not enough, that there are certain ways in which Mizo-ness is performed- that it is about 'becoming':

> ...keima ngaih ve danah chuan ka Mizo nihna tak hi ka thisen atanga ka pianpui chu ni mah se, ka che zia leh ka nun hian min ti-Mizo zawk. 'A Mizo lo em mai' kan tihte hi an thisen leh pian leh murna chu Mizo ngei chu an ni asin. Mahse an Mizo lohna chhan chu an chezia atangin a ni fo thin.
>
> In my opinion, although the real essence of being Mizo is by blood and by birth, it is my conduct and how I live which identify me as a Mizo. The ones we regard as 'un-Mizo' are indeed Mizo by birth – however, it is usually their behavior which invalidates their Mizo-ness. (75-76)

In his 1996 essay on "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Stuart Hall postulates two "related but different" views of 'cultural identity.' He notes that "there are at least two ways," suggesting that these may not be the only ways, "of thinking about cultural identity." The first view positions the subject within the essentialist notion – of being. The second, however, "is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (223 – 225). The politics of Mizo identity as found in the works of James Dokhuma may best be summed up within this frame of investigation undertaken by Hall in this essay.

> The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self,' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves' which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common." (223)

While this essentialist notion of identity has been questioned and rejected by much of the social discourses of our times, Hall does not dismiss this view outright, although he does point out the limitations of this view, but rather chooses to highlight that "such a conception of cultural identity played a critical role in all the post-

colonial struggles which have so profoundly reshaped our world.” He points out the centrality of this essentialist position in the concept of ‘Negritude’ and in the earlier Pan-African political project, and how “it continues to be a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalised peoples” (223). Similarly, in order to understand Mizo identity, the historical processes that have played major roles in how the Mizo people have come to identify themselves, the colonial experience of the Mizo tribes and its overarching impact on the Mizo tribes and the post-colonial experiences need to be examined. Identity is one of the chief concepts of postcolonial theories, and drawing heavily from this notion of the post-modern subject, postcolonial studies has initiated new ways for the interrogation of identity politics, establishing an identity discourse that encompasses the postcolonial identities, and enabling the assessment and re-assessment of even the local identities.

Mizo identity in the works of Dokhuma that have been selected for this study locates itself within three main parameters – the pre-colonial beginnings in the oral past, the colonial period of negotiation and the post-colonial period of ‘Mizo nationalism’. “The identity of the Mizo has been in a nutshell, a drawing together of a hybrid existence that is still in many ways inherently enigmatic,” according to Margaret L Pachuau. The origin of the Mizo people is shrouded in the oral past, and historians have relied heavily on the origin myths and oral tales to search through the migratory routes to surmise several theories. As mentioned before, the written script was introduced only in the last decade of the nineteenth century to the Mizo people, and prior to that there are only a couple of records that pertain to the Mizo tribes, and these too are products of the British colonial administration and thus, fail to cover any period prior to the colonial encounter in specific ways. With the absence of any written record, researchers have to resort to other historical markers to retrace the history of the Mizo people. R.K. Lalhluna, a Mizo writer and historian, lists out some of the sources on which they have based their research: archeological sites and artefacts, bones found in caves, folk songs and oral narratives, folk tales and other folk narratives, oral history, physical anthropology, clothing, and historical linguistics, besides historical records found in neighbouring lands and places which

are believed to be part of the migratory route of the Mizo people (1-2). Most of the historians have come to believe that the Mizo people originated in the southern part of modern day China although they do not always agree on the matter of when and how.

Chief among the origin myths that historians have resorted to, is the *Chhinlung chhuak*[17] myth, and this myth has continued to play a significant role in the Mizo's conception of their identity. *Chhinlung* literally translates to a 'covering rock' or a 'lid made of stone'. According to this myth, the ancestors of the Mizos emerged from a hole in the earth. While there are various versions to this myth as is the characteristic of myths and lores, most versions talk about the instance of closing the *chhinlung* due to the Ralte tribes making too much noise. In the historisation of this myth, there have been various interpretations of the *Chhinlung* myth – as pointing to having emerged from a cave, or a fort, and others believe the term '*chhinglung'* represents an actual place with such a name or the name of a ruler. This *Chhinlung* tradition is shared by most of the tribes that come under the umbrella term 'Mizo' – the *Hmar* tribes call it *Sinlung*, while the "Thadous, Paites, Gangtes, Vaipheis and others called it "Khul" or "Khulpi" but the way they locate the place is different from one another" (Malsawmdawngliana 57). The significance of the *Chhinlung* myth to the construction of Mizo identity is seen in how it contributes to the idea of a 'shared past' and 'continuities' in the history of the people. "What makes these myths, values, symbols and memories so attractive and potent is their invocation of presumed kinship and residence ties to underpin the authenticity of the unique cultural values of the community," according to Anthony D Smith (*Nationalism and Modernism* 46), and Mizo nationalism certainly draws heavily from this notion of a shared history from the *Chhinlung* myth.

While there is no consensus on the origin of the Mizo people, most historians more or less agree on the question of the migratory route that the tribes followed

[17] *Chhinlung* - n. the name of the mythical rock from beneath which the progenitors of most of the present human race are said to have issued (*DLL* 80). *Chhinlung chhuak* – those who have emerged from the *Chhinlung* (Scholar's input).

although their timelines differed widely. The migration through the plains of present day Burma to the present day India is believed to have been made in several waves and had taken centuries. There are also legends that point towards a semi-urban settlement in a place called 'Khampat' in Burma before they entered the terrain of present day Mizoram. It is generally believed that the migration from Burma to present day Mizoram happened in three phases, and this resulted in the classification of the Mizo people as 'Old Kuki', 'New Kuki', and 'Lushai' by the earliest ethnographic records. The first batch consisted of the 'Old Kuki'- the Hrangkhawl, Biate, Langrawng, Pangkhua and Mung (Kawk) (Malsawmdawngliana 81). It is believed that the last batch – the Lusei group which consisted of the Lusei, Ralte, Chawngthu, Khiangte, Hauhnar, Chuaungo, Chuauhang, Ngente, Punte and the Parte sub-tribes, had entered present day Mizoram by the second half of the seventeenth century, and that on their arrival had driven off the previous batch northward and southward, and who in turn had already driven out the earliest batches to the neighbouring areas – Cachar, Tripura and Manipur. From this period onward till the colonial conquest, the Lusei clan under Sailo chieftainship became the dominant tribe. The various processes of dispersion along their migration continue to impact the relationships between the tribes up till the present time, and form the basis of some of the issues in the contemporary discourse on Mizo identity.

Mizo historians believe that before they crossed the Tiau, most of the tribes would set up their villages based on clannish lines, and chieftaincy began while they were settled between the Run and Tiau rivers (Liangkhaia 58; Siama 8-16; Lalthangliana 14-34). The Sailo chieftaincy is also believed to originate during this period. The first Lusei chief was believed to be Zahmuaka who was entreated by the Hnamte clan to become their chief owing to the fact that he had many male offspring. It took much persuasion from his wife and the offering of a basket of paddy as tribute for him to accept the chieftaincy. His sons – Zadenga, Paliana, Thangluaha, Thangura, Rivunga and Rokhuma went on to establish their own villages, and a descendant of Thangura named Sailo came to establish the Sailo chieftaincy (Lalchhuanawma 47). Accounts vary with regards to whether Sailoa was one of the sons of Zahmuaka or that of his son Thangura. Since Zahmuaka, by all

accounts, was believed to belong to the Paihte clan, Dokhuma points out that the origin of the Sailo chiefs was not from the Lusei but from the Paihte clans. “Sailo lal, ni leh thla kara leng inti ngatte pawh, he Lusei sal thlah Zahmuaka kapkar atanga piang, Paihte tuchhuan invawrh sang chhote hi an ni.” (“The Sailo chiefs, who claimed to be sovereigns under the sun and the moon, were descendants of none other than the slave of the Lusei clan, Zahmuaka, and were thus, in reality, the descendants of Paihte but who managed to eventually rise to fame and glory,” *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 125).

By the nineteenth century, the Sailo chiefs had established themselves as the ‘chief clan’, commanding a wide network of chieftainship based on familial ties. However, the other clans like the Mara, Lai and Fanai also held their own and Joy L.K. Pachuau quotes Capt. J Shakespeare who felt that had the colonial intervention not happened, the Fanai chiefs of the south “would have attempted to eject the southern Lushai chiefs” (17). Thus to say that the Sailos ruled the land uncontested before the colonial encounter would not be accurate although they were indeed the dominant clan.

It should not be supposed that the *Lal,* [18] the chiefs, had absolute power over their subjects. The traditional Mizo administrative set-up involved a council of *Upa*[19] (“elder/s”) who advice the chief, and the *Zawlbuk*[20] (the male dormitory) exerted a considerable level of influence on the administration as well. Moreover, “he could not assume absolute power in his administration because the greatness of the chief was measured by the number of his subjects, and the people were perfectly free to choose their leaders. Individuals had the freedom to leave the chief and migrate to

[18] *Lal* – a chief, a chieftain or a chieftainess, a sovereign, a monarch, a king or queen, an emperor or empress, a rajah or ranee (*DLL* 283).

[19] *Upa* -- an elder, an elderly person, a chief man, a mantri (*DLL* 537).

[20] *Zawlbuk* – the large house in a Lushai village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night (*DLL* 562). Dokhuma points out in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* that even married men continue to lodge in the *Zawlbuk* until they move out of their parents’ home to set up their own house (206).

the neighbouring village. Thus the chief had to exercise his power carefully" (Rokhum 33). The democratic nature of the chieftaincy led TH Lewin to describe it as "democracy tempered by disposition" (Vanlalchhuanawma 49). The tempering power of the *Zawlbuk* is evident from the following description – "No orders or legislation of the *Lal's* court could be implemented nor codified without the express consent and approval of the *zawlbuk,"* according to Vanlalchhuanawma, but he also points out that "the latter, as a rule, would not withhold its approval of the former's decisions without some concrete or unavoidable reasons" (55). There were customs and conventions that bounded not only the chief but the entire community, and these customs, conventions and traditions would almost amount to laws in their set-up. In *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, this *Zawlbuk-Lal* dynamics is exhibited when the *Lal* of Darzo village summoned the young men of the *Zawlbuk* on a rainy night. The fact that only Fehtea responded to the summon, and the chief's exhibition of his appreciation of Fehtea's *tlawmngaihna* (which is voluntary in essence), show the element of voluntarism in the chief-subject relationship. This aspect is further shown in the discussion between the *Lal* and the *Upa* regarding the incident – here they voiced their displeasure at the lack of responsiveness from the other young men of the village which boasted of three hundred households, and yet there is no discussion of punishment (17-22).

The tribes that later on came to be called the Lushai tribes by the British administrators were first heard of, in an account by Francis Buchanan in 1777 (Joy L.K. Pachuau 91-92). Here they were referred to as "Kookies, men who live far in the interior parts of the hills" (Vanlalchhuanawma 74). From the beginning of the nineteenth century, raids on the British claimed territories became a regular occurance. "The British responded to these raids by sending retaliatory expeditions (1844, 1850, 1869) to the villages concerned in search of the culprits," and since these measures did not stop the raids, larger punitive expeditions were carried out, according to Joy L.K. Pachuau (92). These encounters are dubbed 'the British-Mizo wars' by Vanlalchhuanawma who cites "irreconcilable claims of geographical boundaries and encroachment of land by tea-plantation" as the main issues

underlying the same. He highlights five factors that could have been the reason behind the "reciprocal accusations" between the British and the Mizo tribes:

i) Mizoram was *terra incognito* at that time,

ii) Mizos carried on inter-sub-tribal wars within their own land as they understood it,

iii) The British claimed the Mizo sub-tribes, so-called Kukis, then scattered in the extremities of Mizoram as their subjects after bidding them serve in tea-gardens since an undefined point of time,

iv) In defence of those tea-garden workers they interfered with what the people understood as the Mizo inter-sub-tribal feuds, and

v) The British acquired certain parts of its territories on assumption without official conduct of land survey or official agreement with the claimants of those acquired areas. (75)

The first of these punitive expeditions in 1844 was a response to the raid carried out by Lalsuthlah, a Palian chief, on a Manipuri village of Sylhet. The second retaliation took place in Sentlang village in 1850 where the expeditionary forces burned down the village, the third one (1866 – 67) led by Captain Tom Lewin (T.H. Lewin) ended up with him forging a friendship with the Lusei chief Rothangpuia through "some sly trick," and the fourth expedition in 1869 involving Suakpuilala and Vanpuilala on the charge of having made fresh raids. These are by no means large scale expeditions, especially considering the scale of the next two. A significant point highlighted by Vanlalchhuanawma is that through the course of these encounters, the relationship between the Lusei and the Kuki tribes soured considerably owing to the tactics of the British to employ the Kukis as pawns (75-77). This strategy, part and parcel of the British 'divide and rule' policy, is aimed at dividing the colonial subjects by preventing them from perceiving each other as fellow subjects but rather as the oppressors, and it gets repeated constantly throughout the colonial processes.

The first large-scale punitive expedition was "popularly but inaccurately known as the First or Earlier British Expedition" according to Vanlalchhuanawma (who insists on calling it the "Fifth Expedition"), was carried out during 1871-72 and was known as *Vailen*[21] *hmasa*[22] by the Mizo people. The raids carried out by an alliance of Vanhnuailiana's sons, Liankhama, Buangtheuva, Pawibawia and Lalburha from the east, and Savunga, Lalpuithanga and Bengkhuaia from the west, "to retaliate against the expanding influence of the British over the Mizos in Mizoram" led to this military expedition. Vanlalchhuanawma quotes from "Orders of the Governor General in council" dated 11th July, 1871:

> The main focus of the expedition was "the most prominent offenders" who "came from the Howlongs and Syloos" whereas the primary objective was both "retaliation" and "to show these savages that they are completely in our power". (78)

Mary Winchester, the six-year old daughter of Dr. Winchester who himself was killed during the raid, had been taken captive along with several workers of the Alexandrapore tea-garden. Her abduction was highly publicised, and her retrieval was, of course, one of the main missions of the expedition. Up till this point, the policy of the British did not include full occupation of the Mizo lands but rather "remained one of leaving the 'tribes' to handle their own affairs and to cultivate friendly relations with them, though the old policy of maintaining outposts on the frontier in order to deter raids in the future continued to be advocated" (Joy LK Pachuau 92). The expedition, carried out from the north and the south by two columns, managed to bring most of the chiefs responsible for the raids to task, and they retrieved Mary Winchester, and compelled most of the chiefs to submit to

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[21] *Vailen* – modified form of *Vailian*. *Vailian* literally translates to 'the upsurge/invasion of the *vai*'. It refers to both the large-scale expeditions of the British (1872 and 1889-1890), and the period of British occupation (1890-1947) (Scholar's input).

[22] *Vailen hmasa* – the first *vailen.* In this context, it refers to the first large-scale expedition of the British in 1971-72 (Scholar's input).

British authority. However, the raids started again within a decade, and this time the British decided to change their policy to a full-scale occupation of 'Lushai Hills'.

A year before the Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1889-90 expedition was undertaken, a punitive force called "The Lushai Expeditionary Force" commanded by Colonel Vincent Treager was sent to the Lushai Hills which managed to destroy the village of Hausata, the accused in the ambush and killing of Lieutenant John Stewart and two other members of his Survey party. They troops left Lunglei in April of 1889 but had established a stockade post garrisoned by 200 men (Zorema, "British Policy" 116). Earlier, Upper Burma was annexed by the British force in 1888 and Fort White was set up as a permanent outpost. The Lushai Hills was thus surrounded by lands that had already come under the British Government, and it was "the only piece of intervening territory between the Chittagong Hill tracts and upper Burma that was not governed by the British" (Joy LK Pachuau 83).

The 'Chin-Lushai Expedition' was thus carried out from three directions – from Chittagong, Cachar and Chin Hills. Though the expedition was finally successful in subjugating the tribes of the Lushai Hills and bringing their land under British jurisdiction, it was met with fierce resistance from many of the *Lal* of the time. Vanlalchhuanawma who calls this "the final phase of the British-Mizo War," records the various resistances met by them and how the Mizo *Lal* were finally overwhelmed by the joint forces of the three columns saying:

> The psychological impression definitely fulfilled an outstanding objective of the British military operations at that time. The devastation caused to the Mizos by them dislocated the whole Mizo society. The Mizos were left in the grip of constant fear. (84)

Here he uses, like most of the contemporary writers do, the term 'Mizo' to denote the tribes that had come under British rule as a result of the expedition, and it is interesting to note that colonial narratives regarding the same refer to the same people as the 'Lushais'. This aspect about the terms will be discussed further in the same chapter. For the current discussion, it should be mentioned that the territory of the Mara and Lakher tribes came informally under the British administration only in

1924, and formally as part of the province of Assam in 1931-32 (Zorema, “Establishment” 147).

This expedition marked the beginning of British occupation of the Lushai Hills, though it took several more years to consolidate their rule. The expedition was generally regarded as ‘successful’ by most accounts yet narratives vary greatly regarding the causes that led to the expedition and the motive of the expedition itself. Liangkhaia, whose work *Mizo Chanchin* [History of the Mizo] which initially was an essay entered in an essay competition in 1926 (but eventually published in book form in 1938) to become “the earliest published monograph on Mizo speculations of their origins and their past” (Joy LK Pachuau 109), wrote that the main cause that led to the British expedition was the Mizo’s meddlesome behaviour. “Hmana Vai lian hmasa ang bawkin tun tuma lo lian pawh hi Mizo ho ninhlei avang bawk a ni leh a ni.” (“Just as it was with the first *Vai lian*, it was the meddlesomeness of the Mizo that caused this one,” Liangkhaia 139) The word *ninhlei*, according to Lorrain’s *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, when used as a verb can also mean “to knock about in the jungle on shooting expeditions, to go shooting in the jungle,” but Liangkhaia’s usage points towards the adjectival meaning given in the same dictionary to mean “fidgety, troublesome, tiresome, full of life, full of spirits, high-spirited, mischievous, meddlesome” (343), which becomes more evident with the indignant yet almost apologetic tone he uses in listing out several incidents which he believed the British had intended to ‘avenge’:

> 1) Kum 1888-ah hian Ramate kiangah khuan Sikin Stewart hovin tlang an sam a; chu chu Hausata Pawi lalho rammuin an hmu fuh ta hlauh va, an suam ta a, Sap 2 leh sipai pakhat an that a, he mi phuba hi Sawrkarin lak an tum ta deuh reng a ni.
>
> 2) Kum 1888 December lamah Lungliana leh Nikhama Tlabung atanga mel 4 lek Sirte tlang ami Thangluah khua an run a mi an that hle a, salah an hruai chiam bawk a. Chu chu sawrkarin an haw bawk; heng phuba hi lak tuma Sawrkar an inpuahchah lai takin.

3) Kum 1889-ah hian Lianphunga'n Satikang rama mi bawk Tuikuk a zuk run a, an that chiam a, sal 100 lai an man bawk a. Heng phuba hi la turin chhim hmarah Vai lian an lo chho ta a ni, 1890-ah hian.

1) In 1888, while a party led by Lieutenant Steward was clearing the jungle near Rangamati, a hunting/raiding party led by the Pawi chief Hausata chanced upon them, and they raided and killed two *Sap* and one soldier. The government therefore made plans to avenge this.

2) In December of 1888, Lungliana and Nikhama[both were *Lal*] raided a Thangluah village situated at Sirte, only 4 miles from Tlabung, inflicting heavy casualties, and carried off many as captives. The government took great offense at this; and all this while the government was making preparations for taking revenge for these acts.

3) In 1889, Lianphunga [*Lal*] raided the Tuikuk tribe in the same Satikang area, killing many and taking 100 captives. To seek revenge for these, the *vailian* advanced from the south and the north in 1890. (139)

Liangkhaia places the blame squarely on the Mizo for the punitive expeditions, echoing the colonial discourse. The underpinnings of the colonial discourse in terms of the "Lushai tribes" was already to be seen in the descriptions of the "hill tribes" by the administrators of Bengal and their colonial subjects decades before the actual colonial encounter. Thomas Lewin's *A Fly on the Wheel* (1912) records several descriptions of these "hill tribes" from the tribes who were serving them then, from the British officials, and from his own impressions after he managed to make contact with some of the "Lushai tribes" themselves. While he was stationed in Chittagong, Lewin began collecting stories about the tribes who dwelt beyond their jurisdiction – "the wild tribes, the Kukis, Shendus, Mrungs, and others, who dwelt on our borders and traded in our frontier marts, and who occasionally made forays into British territory for the purpose of taking heads and obtaining slaves." Many of the stories he heard were "fables evidently unworthy of credence, stories of men with tails and villages built in trees – a host of improbabilities," yet what little he heard piqued his interest even more, so much so that he decided to go beyond the

frontiers himself (143-145). He met with a series of misadventures in his trip to those he called the 'Shendus' – the Mara tribes. The British-Shendu encounter took place much before the Lushais, yet their lands came under British jurisdiction much later. Thus their initial colonial experience differs much from that of the 'Lushai tribes'.

Lewin eventually made contact with Rothangpuia, a southern chief, referred to as Rutton Poia in his book, and Lewin's account of these first encounters become quite significant for the current study for a few reasons: firstly, Lewin's account of "The Lhoosai or the Kookies" and "The Shendus or the Lakheyr" as recorded by him in his ethnographic attempt, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein: With Comparative Vocabularies of the Hill Dialect* (1869), became the colonial impression of the tribes:

> These tribes are in every respect wilder than the Khyoungtha; they are more purely savages, and unamenable to the lures of civilization... As civilization advances, they will retire, and it will be found, I think, difficult, if not impossible, to wean them from their savage life. (76)

Secondly, his account of how he managed to establish an alliance with Rothangpuia and his ally chiefs through the use of trickery and sleight of hand exposes the colonial attitude towards the 'Lushai people'. (*A Fly on the Wheel* 202-204)

The third point is that Lewin ascribed the name 'Lushai' as having derived from two words "Lu" and "sha" "correctly interpreting "lu" as "head" but mistakably rendering "sha" as "to cut" since the actual rendering of the name is "Lusei" literally translated "long head" (*A Fly on the Wheel* 245-46; Vanlalchhuanawma 23).

To Lewin's defence, he admits that *A Fly on the Wheel* was written with no intention of publication by his young self, and thus whatever "mistakes or misconceptions" there may be cannot be altered by the time of publication "without marring it: they are the vivid impressions of his youth" ('Preface'). Moreover, Lewin went on to become one of the most loved of the British administrators especially in the Southern district, and his works including *Progressive Colloquial Exercises in*

the Lushai Dialect (1874) and *Grammar of the Lushai Language* (1884) proved to be invaluable to the development of the Mizo script.

It is interesting to note that Liangkhaia uses the term *phuba la*[23] as the motive behind these expeditions. McCall in *Lushai Chrysallis* (1949) also expresses the same expedition as undertaken "to avenge this athrocity" (53). In sharp contrast to this narrative of 'savages' who hunted heads for trophy and who revelled in raids and warfare, James Dokhuma's account of the 'raids' positions the Mizo chiefs as the defender and not the perpetrator: "Phai vai an run fona chhan pawh an sai ramchhuahna ngawpui ṭha Saphovin thingpui huana an vah chereu zau zel vang a ni pakhat a" ("One of the reasons behind the raids [carried out by the ancestors] was the fact that the *Sap* had been deforesting and devastating their elephant hunting grounds to expand their tea plantations," *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 255).

Vanlalchhuanawma's analysis of the last of the five points mentioned earlier, that the British's acquisition of lands "on assumption without official conduct of land survey or official agreement with the claimants of those acquired areas" where he also quotes Woodthorpe viz. "[t]he tea-gardens, which were originally confined to the northern part of the district, have of late years been sweeping further and further south, as enterprising individuals have been found to take grants from Government for the cultivation of the tea-plants" (75) supports this claim made by Dokhuma.

The context in which Dokhuma has mentioned the raids as an example needs to be highlighted here. In the chapter titled "Indo Dan" ["Codes of War"] in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* (255-264), he states that while the ancestors of the Mizos seemed to be constantly engaged in wars amongst themselves, they never went to war only for the thrill of it nor without valid reasons. Pointing out that what was regarded as justified and valid in those times may no longer seem to be reason enough to engage in warfare, yet it is important to bear in mind the changes in the ethos that have been brought about by time and circumstances (254).

[23] *Phuba la* – to avenge, to revenge, to take revenge, to take vengeance (*DLL* 362).

He cites two reasons for their disputes and wars. "Hmanlai an indo chhan tam ber pawh an dikna (rights) humhalh an tum vang a ni phawt a. Chutah lal tinin mahni ram humhalh an duh theuh a" ("The majority of those wars were fought in the claim and protection of their rights according to their ethos. The other possible reason arose from the fact that each chief wanted to protect and secure his own territory" 254). He then asserts that the raids carried out by them on the plains were the results of the ancestors asserting their rights and fending their territories.

In order to discuss the colonial construction of identity within the Mizo context, another important aspect needs to be brought to the forefront – the introduction of Christianity to the tribes of the then Lushai Hills. The colonial experience of the tribes was inextricably bound up with the evangelical experience of the colonial subjects. The colonial administration was consolidated through the missions. Contrary to a popular phrase that Mizoram is "Pathian zawn chhuah ram"[24] (*Rinawmin* 146) which roughly refers to "A land that had been sought out by God), it is one of the last places in Northeast India to receive the Gospel. The first Christian missionary to set foot in the Lushai Hills was Rev. William Williams who visited the land in the early months of 1891 when the resistance to the British imperial power was still was still being put up by a number of chiefs. He had met a number of Mizo chiefs who were incarcerated in Sylhet by the British, and his interest grew from seeing them (Vanlalchhuanawma 95). "On seeing the sad condition of the people he felt a strong desire to go there to teach them the Gospel, but he died very unexpectedly before anything could be done in the matter" (*Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales on Mizoram 1894-1957* 1). He went back to the Khasi Hills with the intention of returning in April of the same year but he died unexpectedly before he could fulfil his desire.

It took a couple of years before FW Savidge and JH Lorrain landed in Sairang on January 11, 1894 due to restrictions on entry to the Lushai Hills warranted by what was called "rebellions" in the region. They were sent by the Arthington Aborigines or India Arthington Mission. On their arrival, the British

[24] *Pathian zawnchhuah ram* – a land discovered/sought out by God (Scholar's input).

officials still considered it "unsafe for them to live more than a mile away from Fort Aijal," and so were allotted a site at "Tea Garden Hill" now known as Macdonald Hill in Aizawl. (Rohmingmawii 193) The initial reception of the Mizo people was one of hostility since the Mizo at this point of time greatly resented the forced porterage demanded of them by the colonial administrators. Writing about the struggles of the newly arrived missionaries to get the labour they needed to set themselves up at the site, Rohmingmawii says they took their problems to the Superintendant who in turn "devised a way to solve their problem by controlling the sale of salt in the shops. Salt was a precious commodity for the Mizos, and he allowed the missionaries to give salt as wages. This privilege improved the status of the two friends to the Mizos immediately and they began to be considered as great chiefs" (194). The involvement of the Superintendant in the setting up of their site, and the method he employed to bring their subjects to compliance already signals the policies that would be put in place eventually, regarding the role of the Christian mission.

"Christian missions in Mizoram followed the tradition of "the cross follows the flag" (Vanlalchhuanawma 97). While it may be debatable whether Christianity would make inroads without the enabling hand of the British administration, what is evident is that the introduction of this new belief system greatly 'helped' in the consolidation of the British colonial power, and vice versa the colonial set-up facilitated the spread of Christianity among the tribes. This synergistic force of the colonial administrators and the missionaries created an 'ambivalence' in the ways the Mizo people eventually came to view themselves and their relationship to the *Sap.*

The disruption brought about by colonialism to the ways of the Mizo tribes coupled with the introduction of a new system of belief resulted in a complete overturn of the Mizos' political, social and cultural systems. The enormity of the impact of colonialism on the whole Mizo cultural experience is immediately evident from the periodisation of Mizo history into "vai len hma lam" and "vai len hnu lam" ("before *vailen"* and "after/since *vailen*" Liangkhaia 139). The two works dealing with the pre-colonial period, namely *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* and *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* are both based on the oral tradition of the Mizos, but the latter is not

a work of fiction but rather a record of traditional Mizo culture. Many of the tribes which are now considered under the umbrella term "Mizo" had their own distinct identities based on tribal and linguistic divisions. 'Mizo' is an ethnonym for the ethnic tribes residing in present day Mizoram and its bordering areas. It is a compound word where '*mi*[25]' denotes 'people' and while opinions vary on the etymology of the term 'zo', the most widely accepted meaning denotes hill/mountain, lofty, or of high elevation. Dokhuma, aware of the heterogeneity in the traditional cultural beliefs and practices of the different tribes avoids the pitfalls of projecting the dominant Lusei traditional culture as a homogenous Mizo culture in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* through the inclusion of the traditional culture of the other tribes. While he admits the differences in customs and dialects, Dokhuma turns the issue into a matter of inclusion - to assert the inclusiveness under Mizo identity:

> He lehkha ziakah hian Lusei hnam, dawi sa kil tlang thei kalphung chauh ni lo, Ralte hnam leh awze dang kalphungte nen ka ziak chi chawm viau mai thei a. Mahse a eng hnam zia pawh chu khung tel ta i la, hmanlai Mizo kalphung a nih tho a khel chuan loh avangin, ziaka a awm hi a tha-ah i ngai tlang phawt mai teh ang …
>
> Mahse ka lehkhabu hian Lusei hnam kalphung chauh ni lo, Mizo zia thai lan ka tum zawk avangin, hnam hran tih thu lamah chuan rilru kal pentir lo ang u."
>
> I may have included the customs and traditions of not only the Lusei clans but also the Ralte and other tribes not sharing the same dialects with the Lusei. The inclusion of the ways of these tribes does not make this work any less about Mizo cultural history, so let us be satisfied that it gets to be recorded in writing... My intension is not to record the ways of only the Lusei clans but rather the culture of the Mizo, let us not make an issue out of the clan's differences. (x)

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[25] *Mi* – a person, a man, a thing, one, people, kind, sort, which; the person, the man, the thing, the one, etc.; anyone, someone, others, another (*DLL* 313).

In the same preface, Dokhuma goes on to emphasise what he believes are the defining positive characteristics of the Mizo tribes and the core values that inform the Mizo way of life in the olden days:

> Pi leh pu atangin Mizote hi hnam huaisen, hnam tan leh mi dang tana inchhi ral thak ngam hnam kan nih bakah sakhawmi tak, pi leh pu (hnam) thurochhiah ngai pawimawh hnam, aia upate zah thiam tak leh an thu pawh a kawi a ngila zawm thin, hnam rinawm, rukruk leh tualthah duh ngai lo, Kristian kan nih hma phei chuan Kristian zirtirna laimu nuna hmang thlap hnam kan ni, ti ila kan tisual tampui lo ang. Mahse kan ramah Kristianna a lo luh atangin kan hnam nun a dal tial tial a, kan sakhuana nun pawh a pan telh telh bawk a. Kristian nun kan la chhah telh telh chuang si lo a. Hnam dangin min chim zel a, kan Mizo ze pangngai leh kan Kristian nun a dal hret hret zel a.

> From the time of our ancestors, we the Mizos have been a valiant tribe, willing to sacrifice one's all for individuals and for the tribe, deeply religious, reverential of the traditions and legacies of the ancestors, known for showing respect for elders and obedience to their wishes and whims, an honest and trustworthy tribe who desisted from engaging in theft or murder, and who, it may be claimed, lived by codes of Christian ethics even more thoroughly before we even became Christians. However, the pre-Christianity culture started to gradually fade away with the introduction of Christianity to our land, and our religious nature followed the same fate, and yet we have not let the teachings of Christianity take root in us either. As outsiders are gradually encroaching our bounds, we are gradually losing our Mizo character along with our devotion to the Christian way of life. (xi)

Dokhuma's concern for the threat of cultural assimilation and the loss of Mizo cultural identity as expressed in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* underlines most of his works:

> Tunah phei chuan hnam nihna (*identity)* hre lo lehkhathiam te, hnam nihna hloh khawpa *Party* buaipuina te, dikna ngainep khawpa hmasawn tumna te,

> Mizo nih zak khawpa rual pawh zau inti te, hnam incheina thlauh khawpa hnam dang entawnna te, mahni tawng hmusit khawpa tawng dang thiam chapopuina te, Mizo tlawmngaihna hloh khawpa intih-Kohhranmi-na te, khua leh tui tan ni lova mahni tana lal duhna te, hnam huaisen ber thin hnam dawizep ni khawpa hnam dang *Politics* luhkhungna leh mahni ke-a ding zo lova inhriatna chhiahhlawh rilru pu kan awm palh ang tih a hlauhawm ta zawng a nih hi.
>
> We have come to a point where the threat of having within our midst people who are educated but lacking knowledge of one's cultural identity, those who have lost their cultural integrity because of extreme partisan politics, those willing to disregard morals in the pursuit of their ambitions, people who are embarrassed of being Mizo due to their supposed exposure to other cultures, those who imitate other cultures to the point of rejecting the Mizo traditional dress, those whose fluency of other languages only lead them to a disdain for their own, those whose sense of affiliation to the Church lead them to lose Mizo *tlawmngaihna*, those who want political power only for their personal gains, and the reduction of a brave *hnam* to cowards under the influence of political forces from 'outside' leading to the 'slave mentality' that has internalized the belief that one's own *hnam* is not capable of surviving on its own resources. (xi–xii)

Franz Fanon, in the *Wretched of the Earth*, discusses why and how the 'colonised intellectuals' undertake the task of 'rediscovering the past,' suggesting that "perhaps this passion and this rage are nurtured or at least guided by the secret hope of discovering beyond the present wretchedness, beyond this self-hatred, this abdication and denial, some magnificent and shining era that redeems us in our own eyes and those of others." He decides to delve deeper, saying, "Since perhaps in their unconscious the colonized intellectuals have been unable to come to loving terms with the present history of their oppressed people, since there is little to marvel at in its current state of barbarity, they have decided to go further, to delve deeper, and they must have been overjoyed to discover that the past was not branded with shame, but dignity, glory, and sobriety. Reclaiming the past does not only rehabilitate or

justify the promise of a national culture. It triggers a change of fundamental importance in the colonized's psycho-affective equilibrium" (148). Although Fanon is wary of the danger that such projects can lead to the deployment of such mythologised pasts to bring in a new elite power group, he however, explains that the need is felt since "colonialism is not content merely to impose its law on the colonized country's present and future. Colonialism is not satisfied with snaring the people in its net or of draining the colonized brain of any form or substance. With a kind of perverted logic, it turns its attention to the past of the colonized people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it" (149).

Hall, in his study of the "first position," also cites some of the lines quoted above from Fanon (albeit from a different translation), and, while he questions this essential position of cultural identity to establish a "second position", he also warns against dismissing it altogether, while stressing its role as "a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation" in movements beyond the immediate decolonisation projects:

> We should not, for a moment, underestimate or neglect the importance of the act of imaginative rediscovery which this conception of a rediscovered, essential identity entails. 'Hidden histories' have played a critical role in the emergence of many of the most important social movements of our time – feminist, anti-colonial and anti-racist. ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 224)

Citing as example artistic productions by "black people" in diaspora, he calls such a production "an act of imaginary reunification," and how "such images offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas. They do this by representing or 'figuring' Africa as the mother of these different civilisations. This Triangle is, after all, 'centered' in Africa. Africa is the name of the missing term, the great aporia, which lies at the centre of our cultural identity and gives it a meaning which, until recently, it lacked." He goes on to explain that the "rift of separation, the 'loss of identity,' that is integral to the black diasporic experience finds a healing process in such representations. "Such tasks restore an imaginary fullness or plenitude, to set

against the broken rubric of our past. They are resources of resistance and identity, with which to confront the fragmented and pathological ways in which that experience has been reconstructed withtin the dominant regimes of cinematic and visual representation of the West" (225).

Although Hall's essay is written within the context of the Caribbean diaspora, and specifically the "new Cinema of the Caribbean," and while Fanon's work was deemed anti-colonial liberationist and situated in the Algerian liberation movement, the representation of Mizo identity in Dokhuma's works, and especially in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii, Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, and in a more complex articulation in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, has its beginnings in much the same scenario. This concern with the 'preservation' of the 'essence' of being Mizo is most evident in his representation of the intangible cultural heritage as witnessed in *Tumpangchal nge Saithangpuii*. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Dokhuma expresses his intention to highlight the exemplary qualities of the character of Fehtea as one of his purposes in choosing to re-tell this oral tale, and as such, he portrays Fehtea as the very embodiment of *Tlawmngaihna*, and a *Pasaltha*. *Tlawmngaihna*, as a Mizo code of life characterised by altruism, self-sacrifice, chivalry, valour and humility, is not exclusive to the *Pasaltha*, nor is it confined to the males of the society. Dokhuma himself, in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, wrote about the ways in which the young women's *tlawmngaihna* was practiced in those days. In fact, it was regarded as the code of ethics which governed the whole social functioning of the village. It is the "Mizo philosophy of life," according to Vanlalchhuanawma who explains it as "a précis of the whole Mizo traditional discipline." *Tlawmngaihna* is the noun form of the verb *tlawmngai* (*-ngaih*) which means, according to JH Lorrain's *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* the following:

> 1. to be self-sacrificing, unselfish, self-denying, persevering, stoical, stouthearted, plucky, brave, firm, independent(refusing help); to be loth to lose one's good reputation, prestige, etc; to be too proud or self-respecting to give in, etc. 2. to persevere, to endure patiently, to make light of personal injuries, to dislike making a fuss about anything. 3. to put one's own inclinations on one side and do a thing which one would rather not do, with

> the object either of keeping up one's prestige, etc, or of helping or pleasing another, or of not disappointing another, etc. 4. to do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient it may be to oneself or to one's own inclinations. 5. to refuse to give in, give way, or be conquered. 6. to not like to refuse a request, to do a thing because one does not like to refuse, or because one wishes to please others. 7. to act pluckily or show a brave front. (513)

This dictionary entry has been listed out to show how completely these traits are embodied in the Fehtea's character. When the village chief decides to put the young men of his village to a test to find out their level of *tlawmngaihna* by summoning them in the middle of a rainy night, only Fehtea turns up in the chief's house. Putting him on a further test, the chief, on the pretext of having an urgent matter to be attended to in a neighbouring village, Fehtea readily volunteers, thus passing the test. While he pleases the chief and the *Upa* with his level of *tlawmngaihna,* they are also dismayed by the fact that only one out of more than two-hundred young men of the village *Zawlbuk* shows up. In the traditional village set-up, the chief depends on the young men of the village for security, the execution of orders and administration of the village. The nature of the relationship between the *Lal* and the *Zawlbuk* is such that "No orders or legislation of the *Lal*'s court room could be implemented nor codified without the express consent and approval of the *zawlbuk,* whereas the latter, as a rule, would not withhold its approval of the former's decisions without some concrete and unavoidable reasons" (Vanlalchhuanawma 55). Fehtea's response to the chief's summon should not, therefore, be seen as an act of servitude but rather as done out of *tlawmngaihna,* and thus warrants the favour of the *Lal* and the *Upa.* The disappointment they feel with the rest of the young men is also explained by this rather egalitarian dyanamics.

In Dokhuma's portrayal of Fehtea, however, what stands out even more at times is his physical strength and his hunting prowess. Right from the opening of the narrative, Fehtea's strength and skill in *inbuan*[26] (traditional Mizo recreational form

[26] *Inbuan* – v. to wrestle, to wrestle together, to have a wrestle. adj. wrestling (*DLL* 195).

of wrestling) is highlighted. It is here that we are introduced to the character of the antagonist – Sangtuala, a perfect foil to the character of Fehtea. When Fehtea defeats the *mikhual tlangval*[27] (young man from another village) which Sangtuala had lost to earlier, the latter's ego is bruised, sparking a conniving kind of animosity which leads him to come up with plot after plot to smear the reputation of Fehtea. With every feat achieved by Fehtea, Sangtuala gets further inflamed, and the more vindictive he gets, the more despicable his plots, until he finally succeeds in bring disrepute to the protagonist.

Interestingly, however, it is mainly through his hunting prowess that Fehtea is made to reclaim his reputation and to regain the trust of his father – by proving his worth through the slaying of the *tumpangchal* (the wild gayal) and not by proving his innocence and gradually rebuilding his reputation. Sangtuala, being overwhelmed by the feat of Fehtea and over-powered by the *Zu* that he has consumed at the celebration of Fehtea's slaying of the famed *tumpangchal*, makes a confession by declaring the series of machinations that has crushed the reputation of Fehtea, thereby clearing the latter's name. Fehtea is further rewarded with the ultimate in prize – the hand of the only daughter of the village chief. Although the endurance, perseverance and steadfastness of Fehtea in the face of social rejection and derision are also qualities that exemplify *tlawmngaihna*, these are often overshadowed by the display of masculine prowess in wrestling and hunting. Dokhuma's concept of the *pasaltha* as shown in *Tumpangchal nge Saithangpuii* is, thus, a combination of bravery, perseverance, *tlawmngaihna*, and physical prowess.

> Kan pi leh pute hmanlai nunphungin a ngaihsan zawng tak leh an hlutsak thil thlengin he thawnthu-ah hian a lang a. Lal khua leh tuia khawtlang daingul leh pasaltha, mi-kawlh sa-kawlh hmaa zam lo Mizo tlangval tlawmngaite fakawmzia leh ropui si-zia te chu khawvel hmaa pho lan theih ni ta se ka va ti em! Amaherawhchu, he Mizo ze chhuanawm tak lungphum hi kan innghahna ber mai ni se, tuma hmuh theih lohin kan phum bo hlen ang tih chu ka hlauh

[27] *Mikhual tlangval* – *Mikhual* –n. a stranger, one belonging to another village, a guest or visitor from another village. (*DLL* 314) *Tlangval* – n. a youth, a young man (*DLL* 512).

> em avangin, a tak inkawhhmuh mai tur hre lo mah ila, thawnthu tala kan insihhmuh theih beisei in he thawnthu hi ka ziak ta a ni e.
>
> The values of our forefathers and what they esteemed and held in high regard are clearly discernible in this story. How I wish that the world may see the honour and greatness of the stalwarts of the chiefdom – those *Pasaltha*, the young Mizo men who feared not the fiercest of men nor the most ferocious of beasts, embodying the code of *Tlawmngaihna*! It is my hope in writing this story that, as a tangible representation of *Tlawmngaihna* which has been fundamental to the Mizo ethos, it plays a role in the preservation of this admirable code, to prevent it from fading into obscurity. (7-8.)

The centrality of the concept of *pasaltha* to Mizo identity becomes more indisputable in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* both set within the *Rambuai* era. The Mizo people's political consciousness has been, in part, a product of colonialism, and yet it is also engendered through the relationship with the rest of what would eventually become sovereign India. The aspect of nationalism located in these works had their origins in the notion of a collective Mizo identity that was formed during the colonial times, and the withdrawal of the British brought up questions of 'belonging' within the independent Indian union. The notion of Mizo nation can be understood within the definition given by Anthony D Smith: "A named human population occupying a historic territory and sharing common myths and memories, a public culture, and common laws and customs for all members" (*Chosen Peoples* 24). In this ethno-symbolic approach, the nation is not a modern phenomenon but has been around since the farthest historical records as *ethnie,* and is neither confined to the western civilisation. *Ethnies* are constituted, not by lines of physical descent, but by the sense of continuity, shared memory and collective destiny, i.e. by lines of cultural affinity embodied in myths, memories, symbols and values retained by a given cultural unit of population (*National Identity* 29). Within this understanding of Mizo nationalism, the symbolic significance of the *pasaltha* as central to Mizo identity can be understood. *Rinawmin* opens with a chapter titled "Pasaltha". This chapter is not intrinsically significant to the plot except for the introduction of the major characters, and yet the symbolic meaning cannot be missed.

The shooting of a bear by a secondary character, Hrangluaia, a close friend of the protagonist, and who would eventually become a member of the Mizo National Army along with the protagonist, is described in detail. However, this incident has no bearing to the plot apart from the highlighting of Hrangluaia's hunting skill and the way in which the *Hlado* which accompanies the shooting is regarded by the now-mostly Christian populace, and especially the elders of the Church of their village. Although the depiction of the young men who are variously referred to interchangeably as 'volunteers' and Mizo Army is in the romanticised heroic tradition, they themselves are never referred to as *pasaltha* themselves. It seems to be the author's intention to establish a link between the *pasaltha* of old and the new *pasaltha* of Mizo nationalism. He aligns them with the idea of *pasaltha* as protectors of the people, their land, their customs, their religion and thus, Mizo identity. The slogans "Pathian leh Kan Ram Tan" ("For God and our Land/Country/Nation") and "Hnehna chu Mizote Pathian ta a ni" ("Victory belongs to the God of the Mizo people") bring into sharp focus the changing ideals that the *pasaltha* stands for. It is within this re-formulation of the institution of the *pasaltha* that it is witnessed, more than in the works dealing with the historically older periods, that Mizo identity is as much a matter of 'becoming', if not more, than 'being'. This nuanced conception, of 'being' and 'becoming' Mizo can be understood through Hall's "second position" ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 225-227). This position is not a total rejection of the first, but rather

> … a related but different view of cultural identity. This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather – since history has intervened – 'what we have become'. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side –the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean's uniqueness. (225)

Without acknowledging the impact of the historical processes that came to mould and continue to determine the very form of Mizo identity construction, it will

also not be possible to comprehend the significance of the "first position" (223-225) in how the Mizo people have come to see themselves.

> Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (225)

In *Rinawmin,* Dokhuma codifies the character of Rozuala as a *hnam pasaltha,* with a strong sense of purpose and justice, bound by an astute sense of loyalty to the idea of Mizo nationalism. The changes in the socio-political system and the ethos of the Mizo people are reflected in the values which Rozuala embodies. His loyalty and devotion to the nationalist cause is bound up intricately with his devotion and loyalty in his personal relationship with Ramhluni, and the hopes and aspirations of the lovers are conjoined with the goals of an independent Mizo nation. Yet when faced with the opportunity to kill or capture alive the very brother of his beloved, he volunteers for the job. The said brother, Kapmawia by name, has become a hated *kawktu*[28] – an informer, responsible for the capture of many of his fellow Mizo Army personnel and volunteers including his own brother. For him, the *kawktu* are traitors of Mizo *hnam*, cowards who operate behind veil, and hindrances to the nationalist cause. The reactions of the immediate family of Kapmawia reveal another layer of Mizo sense of honour and betrayal. While his mother in her grief curses the Mizo Army and their leader Laldenga, it is in the manner in which the father and Ramhluni

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[28] *Kawktu* – an informer who collaborates with the Indian Army to identify members of the Mizo National Army (Scholar's input).

are conciliated with the death that the question of ‘loyalty’ is implicated. Ramhluni has always regarded her brother’s collaboration with the *vai* as a transgression and it prompts her to report his action to Rozuala through a letter where she expresses the shame she feels for what her brother has been doing and she reassures him that she would, unlike her brother, stay loyal to God and the country, even if not for the cause itself but out of her love for Rozuala. Hence she has been able to come to terms not only with her brother’s death but even with the possibility of her lover being the killer of her own brother. It is the reaction of her father that the notion of Mizo-ness as a process and as a positioning becomes clearer. The author presents Ramhluni’s father as a staunch supporter of the Mizo Union and one who has been quite vocal in his opposition to the MNF movement, yet when it comes to his son’s involvement as a *kawktu*, he regards it as an embarrassment. So the news of his son’s death does not seem to shock him. He accepts Kapmawia’s death as inevitable, saying that he had, time and again, warned his son not to have any association with the Indian Army, and that his death, though a pity, is an inevitable reckoning for his son’s actions. Although the Mizo Union is posited as collaborators to the *vai* in the nationalist rhetoric of the MNF and while some of the Mizo Union youths are indeed depicted as having joined the Indian Army and bearing arms under their patronage in both *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* when the question positions the Mizo in relation to the *vai,* the ethnic elements of shared past, values and kinship ties are invoked. Thus Kapmawia who has never been part of the MNF movement himself is still regarded as a ‘traitor,’ violating an unspoken code of loyalty to a shared bond, “a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 7), which in this case is the notion of Mizo national identity.

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CHAPTER THREE

INTERPRETING IDENTITY IN JAMES DOKHUMA’S TEXTS

The historical experience of colonialism, the encounter with Christianity and modernity, and the political upheavals ushered in by the end of British imperial domination and the resultant creation of the Indian nation-state, all have unequivocally transformed the fabric of Mizo ethos. The chapter traces the processes of engagement with such transformative forces, specifically focusing on the disruption and continuities within the social structures, belief systems and cultural practices, highlighting that while traditional systems, modes of knowledge, affiliation and signification, are supplanted by new forms of knowledge and belief, yet the traditional indigenous elements persist, finding articulation in the formation of Mizo as an ethno-religious Mizo national identity. Since cultural identities are "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* 225), this chapter explores how the same is played out within the cultural and symbolic elements that pertain to Mizo identity formation within the selected texts. The signifying practices, through which meanings are made, and how the shared codes and meanings continue to mould the way the Mizo understand themselves, and the shifts in the modes of meaning making have been examined in their historical context to highlight the disruptions and continuities in the cultural identity of the Mizo.

The *Vailen* of 1890 brought the Mizo inhabited areas under British administration and though faced with pockets of resistance for several years, by the year 1894 when the missionaries arrived, the British had already set themselves up as the 'rulers'. "Christian missions in Mizoram followed the tradition of "the cross follows the flag" (Vanlalchhuanawma 97). While it may be debatable whether Christianity would make inroads without the enabling hand of the British administration, what is evident is that the introduction of this new belief system greatly 'helped' in the consolidation of the British colonial power, and vice versa the colonial set-up facilitated the spread of Christianity among the tribes. This synergistic force of the colonial administrators and the missionaries created 'ambivalence' in the ways the Mizo people eventually came to view themselves and their relationship to the *Sap* since the missionaries 'gave' the Gospel and the script to the Mizo people. The imposition of new forms of governmentality, introduction of

Christianity and writing, and exposure to forms of modernity have transformed the ways in which the Mizo define themselves. The traditional forms of identification, belief system, social institutions and cultural practices have undergone radical transformations, yet the ethnic elements persist through the negotiation with the forces of change. It is within this understanding of Mizo identity as produced through discursive practices that the chapter locates itself.

The impact of Christianity in the way Mizo people have come to understand themselves is one of the most striking features of the works of James Dokhuma. According to Margaret L Pachuau, "the contrast in terms of identity in the pre- and post-colonial paramenters have been vast because the colonized Mizo domains were previously under a culture that was inherently non-Christian and so subsequently had a different sensibility altogether, whether religious or secular" (182). In the Mizo context, the history of the people before the introduction of new forms of historiography through colonialism exists only in the form of oral narratives. "Most oral narratives are those handed down after much 'censorship', according to L. Pachuau who uses the term 'censorship' "in the context of the notion of a decided suppression and restriction that has been associated with Mizo orality" and traces this 'aspect of control and predominant editing" as having its beginnings with the advent of the missionaries, and the subsequent perception of the traditional Mizo songs, and other oral tradition as posing a 'threat' of luring the Mizo community back to their pre-Christian ethos. That this process of filtering out the elements which are regarded as 'pagan' persists is evident in the remarkable lack of mention it receives in written Mizo literary compositions. What was once such an integral part of their life like the religious practices and their belief systems have been left out even from Dokhuma's own *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii.* The religious practices, beliefs, festivals, sacrificial practices and their worldview are narrated in detail in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung.* Dokhuma highlights the centrality of the traditional religious beliefs and practices to the tribes and how they permeate all aspects of their lives, from their main agricultural preoccupation to diseases and ailments, to hunting and festivals. Each of the Mizo tribes had their own complex sets of rituals and taboos anchored on pre-colonial ethos. Yet in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii,* the story is stripped of

traditional religiosity. For instance, Fehtea's successful hunt of the *tumpangchal* [wild gayal] [29] which is the turning point in the story is celebrated by the whole village including his nemesis, Sangtuala. Yet there is no mention of the '*Arhnuaichhiah*'[30] ceremony/ritual which, according to *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, is mandatory (42), nor is there any religious connotation attached to the kill. The sentiment of censorship persist even in the Rambuai era as shown in how the Church elders admonish Rozuala in *Rinawmin* for performing the *hlado* citing its connection with the 'pagan' religion of the pre-Christian era and the fact that it was one of the first things that the *Zosap* had taught the Mizo Christians to stop practicing as the reasons (23-24). This 'censorship' lends itself in three forms in the selected texts, omission, revision and reinterpretation. Since the characteristic of orality is essentially fluid and dynamic, "the homeostatic tendencies of memory usually consign to oblivion what is no longer wanted" (Goody 25). What has been omitted and 'consigned to oblivion' can only be conjectured at this point, and based on what Dokhuma says regarding the centrality of the religious beliefs and practices to the pre-Christian Mizo tribes in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, it may be inferred that such elements had been filtered out even in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii.*

Revision and re-interpretation of the past through newer forms of discursive frameworks is most evident in the area of Mizo beliefs and worldview. Explaining the concept of '*sakhua*'[31] (religion, belief system) as the belief in the existence of a higher power, not only for the here and now but presiding over even the afterlife, he

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[29] All translations of quoted texts and titles of works in this chapter are done by me, unless noted otherwise, for the sole purpose of this study.

[30] *Arhnuaichhiah* - the name of a sacrifice of a fowl offered in order to ward off impending evil feared because of some bad omen observed by a hunter (*DLL* 12). Dokhuma, however, denotes that the ritual is mandatory for the hunter who has killed a wild gayal (Tumpangchal) regardless of any bad omen observed (Scholar's input).

[31] *Sakhua* - n. 1. an object of worship, a god. 2. ancient ancestors who are worshipped by the Lushais. 3. the spirit who presides over the house or house-hold. 4. religion, religious rites and ceremonies (*DLL* 401).

claims that the ancestors of the Mizo tribes could have been the most *sakhaw*[32] *mi*[33] ("religious") of all the tribes/nations of the world:

> Chumi kawngah chuan Mizo pi leh pute chu khawvel hnamah hian an sakhaw mi ber hial awm e. An ni tin khawsak dan chu sakhuanaa khat a ni ringawt a.
>
> In that regard, the Mizo ancestors could have been the most religious of all the tribes/nations of the world. Their daily life was permeated with such religiosity. (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 27)

On the etymology of *sakhua*, he explains that *'sa'*[34] refers to a 'creator/maker', the maker of all tribes/nations, and *'khua'* means 'guardian, keeper and one who bestow blessings', and that the word, '*bia'* (worship) was not used in reference to the rituals and sacrificial rites, but rather used the term *'sakhaw hmang*' ("observing *sakhua*/performing *sakhua*"), stressing on the performativity of their religion: "Mizote chuan an sakhaw thil serh sang an hlanin 'bia' tih tawngkam an hmang lo va, an sakhua chu an be lo va, a hmana an hman avangin *Sakhaw hmang* an ti a ni" (27). Here Dokhuma's version differs from the more dominant account found in Vanlalchhuanawma's *Christianity and Subaltern Culture* where he writes: "The term for worship was *sakhaw bia*[35] or *sabiak,* [36] of which *bia* literally means *to hold*

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[32] *Sakhaw*- an abbreviated form of *sakhua* (especially when used as an adjective and before an adjective). adj. religious, pious, devout. v. to be religious, pious, devout (*DLL* 400). *Hmang (hman)* v. to use, to treat (as), to be used to, to be in the habit of, to be addicted to, to spend or keep (as Sunday or Christmas at a certain place); to offer (a sacrifice. – Can only be used with this last meaning when the name of the special sacrifice referred to is mentioned) (*DLL* 158).

[33] *Sakhaw mi* – n. religious person, a religiously minded person, a devout or pious person. adj. religious, pious, devout. v. to be religious, pious, or devout (*DLL* 400).

[34] *Sa* – n. an object of worship; a god; ancient ancestors who are worshipped by the Lushais; the spirit who precides over the house or household; religion, religious rites and ceremonies. (this is an abbreviated form of *sakhua,* also used in conjunction with *biak* and *phun.* See *sa biak* and *sa phun.*) (*DLL* 396).

[35] *Sakhaw bia* - verb form of *sakhaw biak* – n. 1. The worship or worshipping of one's god, or ancient ancestors, or the spirit who precides over one's house or household. 2. The god, ancient ancestors, or spirit whom one worships (*DLL* 400).

conversation with, while in religious usage it meant to worship, to venerate, or to adore" (64). '*Sabiak'* and '*sakhaw biak*' are also found in the works of Liangkhaia, Vannghaka and Lalthangliana. Dokhuma's account also varies from the more common account in the titles assigned to the priests of the Lusei clan in that he claims while the *puithiam*[37] (priest) of the Lusei was the *Sadawt,* [38] the *Bawlpu*[39] was the priest of the Ralte clan and not of the Lusei. The *sadawt* did have an assistant/aide, the *Tlahpawi*[40] who could step in for the *sadawt* when the need arose. Liankhaia and Lalthangliana have not mentioned the *bawlpu* altogether while Vanlalchhuanawma has included the *bawlpu* along with the *sadawt* and the *tlahpawi* among the Lusei priests, and in Vannghaka's "The Old Mizo Religion", the *sadawt* and the *bawlpu* were two different classes of priest found in every 'Mizo' village, each having his own distinct function – the *bawlpu* "performed sacrifices to propitiate evil spirits that cause illness to humans. The priest would feel the pulse of the patient and prescribe a domestic animal to be killed for sacrificial offering for recovery," while the *sadawt* who would "offer sacrifices to the good spirit called *Pathian* (God)", and the "village chief's *sadawt* functioned as the official priest and as such was responsible for performing all the religious functions of the whole village community… the *Sadawt* also performed the family religious rituals (*sakhaw biakna)*" (169).

Ironically, Dokhuma himself resorts to using the adjective '*biak'* interchangeably with '*hmang'* throughout the text, which denotes the tendency to re-imagine the pre-Christian ethos oriented in 'performativity' from the Christian

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[36] *Sabiak* – n. object of worship (*DLL* 397).

[37] *Puithiam* – n. an exorcist; a priest (*DLL* 371).

[38] *Sadawt* – n. a private exorcist or priest, especially such as are employed by ruling chiefs (*DLL* 397).

[39] *Bawlpu* – n. an exorcist, a priest (*DLL* 33).

[40] *Tlahpawi*- n. an exorcist or priest whose duty it is to divine with a *tlah* and a *tlahpawina*. (*tlah* - n. a piece of bamboo with some of its outside covering partially stripped off, used along with the *tlahpawina* for divining.) (*tlahpawina* - n. a piece of wood used along with the *tlah* for divining.) (*DLL* 509).

understanding of 'worship'. The variations are not limited to these points, and in fact, no two accounts concur on the exact nature of the belief system nor on the performance of the rituals and sacrifices. Such is the nature of orality, and various factors may account for the diversity. One such factor is clearly the tendency to reframe the oral past based on the concept of a homogenous Mizo identity in the pre-colonial period. Dokhuma, time and again, reiterates two points – on the one hand, the diversity of cultural practices that existed in each village setting, with the various tribes having their own distinct norms, dialects, beliefs and practices, and on the other hand, the difficulty of differentiating these. These points become more pertinent when it comes to the representation of *sakhua* - the belief systems, worldview and practices, which was inextricably linked and inherently fundamental to the *hnam* identity:

> A hnama sakhaw nei hrang mi an nih avangin an biak dan pawh a dang hret hret a. Tin, hnam leh sakhua chu inkungkaih tlat a nih avangin an hnam an thlak dawn pawh in a sakhua an thlak tihna an ni a. Chu avang chuan miin a sakhaw kungpui leh a hnam a phun sawn avangin a hmingah pawh *Saphun* an ti a, *Sakung* an tih an phun thin.
>
> Since each clan or sub-tribe had their own *sakhua,* the ways in which they practiced their *sakhua* also varies from clan to clan. Moreover, *hnam* and *sakhua* are intricately interconnected, and thus when one changed their *hnam* it necessarily meant that they had also changed their *sakhua*. Therefore the process of *saphun* is a shifting of the tribal as well as the religious affiliations, a replanting of the *sakung.*[41] (27)

Hnam, in the literal sense refers to all of the following – "clan, tribe, nation, nationality, race" *(DLL* 169). In the context of Mizo identity formation, the concept of Mizo as a *hnam* gradually evolves into a politically charged identity having ethnic,

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[41] *Sakung* – literally, the 'tree of *sa.*' It is a symbolic act of setting up the household 'religion'. According to Dokhuma, the 'planting' of the *sakung* is done not only in the case of *saphun*, the 'conversion' of *hnam,* but is also a prerequisite of setting up one's own household. It involves a series of rituals and sacrifices (Scholar's input).

linguistic, territorial and religious dimensions. However, in the above quoted text, Dokhuma's usage of *hnam* refers to specific clans or sub-tribes like the Lusei and the Ralte clans or sub-tribes. What is evident is that the conception of *sakhua* itself cannot be explained in terms of the common understanding of the word 'religion' as a system of faith. What is suggested here is that their understanding of *sakhua* is something that cannot be separated from their clan or tribe identity, and also that there is a certain fluidity to their clan/tribe identity. That one may 'convert' to another clan or tribe and through that 'conversion' convert his belief system appears to be a complete reversal of the common conceptions of 'conversions'. Within the same context he also says that most of the *saphun* happened to be from smaller tribes like Ralte to the dominant tribe, Lusei, and goes on to reiterate the inseparableness of *hnam* and *sakhua*:

> Hnam dangin mi sakhua an tawm ve khan an sakhua chauh a tawm a ni lo va, a hnam chena a inleh a ngai a. Lusei hnam kalphung chu sakhaw hnam a nih avangin an sakhaw zawmtu chuan an hnam pawh a zawm nghal lo thei lo.
>
> When a person from one clan adopts the *sakhua* of another clan, he not only changes his *sakhua* but his clan affiliation as well. Since the Lusei clan's system is also Lusei *sakhua*, the one who has adopted their *sakhua* cannot choose not to adopt the Lusei *hnam.* (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 28)

What must be considered here is that the pre-Christian belief systems of the Mizo tribes operated within a completely different paradigm from the western Christian belief system altogether. The religious/secular binary did not seem to exist in the pre-Christian Mizo ethos and nor was there a distinction between religion and ethnicity. In this regard, Lalsangkima Pachuau's argument becomes key to understanding the old belief systems he calls "Mizo primal religion":

> *Sakhua,* in its original use, has **a** much more narrow meaning and limited scope in the traditional Mizo society than what we today understand religion to be. Because the word has been used to translate the English word "religion," all that which conceptually accompanied religion in the English word has been gradually imported as the meaning of *sakhua* even at the risk

> of inundating the original meaning. This resulted in a certain kind of confusion as to the content and meaning of traditional Mizo religion (or primal religion). Whereas the scope of the original meaning of *sakhua* was very limited, the range of what could be considered religious in the traditional Mizo society itself was much broader. (2006, 34:1, 42)

He points out that there are two methodological flaws in the study of the traditional Mizo religion and religiosity that have resulted from this issue pertaining to the translation of the English word 'religion' into '*sakhua'* in the Mizo language. The first one is that "because of the choice of *sakhua* to 'translate' religion, the search for the primal religion of the Mizos has often been done within what *sakhua* refers to in the traditional society" and he contends that this "gravely restricts the meaning of the religion." He clarifies that "there is no doubt that *sakhua* was an essential part of the Mizo primal religion, but it did not constitute the whole religion." The second flaw, he points out, is that "the onslaught of modern western thought with its clear dichotomy between what is sacred and what is secular has deeply influenced existing descriptions of the primal religions of the tribal people. Such a framework is foreign and its imposition fails to do justice to the integrity of the religious concept." He maintains that "any study on primal religion of most tribal groups, such as the Mizos, must avoid the highly western sacred-profane dichotomy and look at the entire socio-cultural life system for the meaning of the people's religion and religiosity. This is because of the absence of a clear-cut sacred-profane dichotomy in tribal (and in many other eastern people's) worldview. The interconnectedness of different aspects of the society and the interlocking meanings of symbols of various domains of life do not permit such clear dichotomy as life is seen and treated as one whole" (41 – 42). In the light of this argument, it becomes clearer why Dokhuma's chapter on "Sakhaw Hman Dan" ("How *Sakhua* is Practiced") in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* is limited to the descriptions of several rituals and practices, and of the 'gods' or 'deities'. He claims that practice of *sakhua* is confined to those that relate to *Pathian*, [42] and that '*inthawina'*[43] (sacrificial rituals,

[42] *Pathian* – n. God, the Giver and Preserver of Life. adj. godly, pious, religious, devout. v. to be godly, pious, religious (*DLL* 352).

propitiatory offerings) were offered solely to the *ramhuai*[44] (demons/spirits) since these malevolent spirits were thought to be the cause of all human ailments and had to be appeased. Yet within the same passage he writes that there were two types of *inthawina'* – one to *Pathian* and the other to *ramhuai*, and later in the passage, "Pathian laka inthawina pawimawh deuh deuh kan sawi hmain, pi leh putena ramhuai chi an thliar dan lo chhui hmasa ila" ("Before we talk about the propitiatory sacrifices to *Pathian*, let us first trace how our ancestors classified the demons/spirits"; 54), as if to suggest that *Pathian* and *ramhuai* cannot be totally differentiated. The concept of *Pathian*, like many other writers and scholars tend to do, is represented as a supreme, benevolent yet indifferent divine entity by Dokhuma in both *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* and *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*. In fact *Pathian* is the only spiritual being mentioned in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, and here the indignant chief of Darzo village, expressing his disappointment on his village *tlangval*, attributes their fortune of not having foes to the benevolence of "*Chunga Pathian*" in the phrase "Chunga Pathianin zahngaiin bawkkhupin min thlir a, ti hian do la lovin kan awm hlauh pawh a" ("*Chunga Pathian* [the God on High/the God above us] has been watching us (in a prone position) with kindness, we are fortunate to not have any foe"; 21). He uses this same phrase to explain how *Pathian* is conceived of as existing in the realm above mankind, and so has to lay down prone in order to observe mankind. Here he claims that *Pathian* is synonymous with the *Khua* in *sakhua*, that *Sa* represents a creator, while *Khua* was the guardian, protector and the source of blessing for mankind, and that *Pathian/Khua* was believed to be the one who designs and decrees everything (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 30). The general trend to interpret the traditional belief system of the Mizo along the Judeo-Christian tradition of monotheism is found not only in the early writings of the *Sap*, but also among the scholars even to this day.

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[43] *Inthawina* – n. a sacrifice, a sacrificial offering; that which is offered in sacrifice or has anything to do with such a sacrifice. adj. Sacrificial (*DLL* 214).

[44] *Ramhuai* – n. an evil spirit, a demon, a devil, a nat (*DLL* 376).

Vanlalchhuanawma credits the earliest interpretations in this tradition to the pioneer missionary, D.E. Jones and two of the British administrative officials, J Shakespeare and A.G. McCall, which were all oriented towards the belief in a supreme or at least a benevolent God, and a distinction between this benevolent being and the numerous 'spirits of evil' and hints at the difficulty faced by the colonial ethnographic writers in trying to grasp the traditional Mizo belief system, yet after he goes on to trace the accounts of the earliest Mizo writers, *Khua was* "almost identified as Fate" and as imminent, and he goes on to say that "in the process of the progressive understanding of God the Mizos developed an idea of different personalities in *Pathian,* known by different names. Here he lists out the "four such divine or rather heavenly personalities with various functions, as written by K. Zawla in *Mizo Pipu te leh an Thlahte Chanchin*: "*Puvana* (God in heaven)," "*Vanchungnula* (heaven's maiden)," "*Vanhrika"* who is "the god of science and magic", and *"Khuanu* (Mother Goddess)" (All translations: Vanlalchhuanawma 64). Dokhuma's version corresponds to this rhetoric in so far as he believes that these 'divine personalities' are variations of the same "*Chung Pathian*" (the only variation being *Puvana,* who he claims is also called *"Khuapa"*) but the point of departure is Dokhuma's admittance that these 'personalities' include those which are not exactly conceived of as *Pathian* (30). To Page DuBois,

> Polytheism is characteristic of many traditional cultures, and a loyalty to many gods can mark resistance to colonization and its demand to convert, to accept the conquerors' one god and abandon the deities, the ancestor-gods, and the ancestors. The prejudice against conquered peoples' religious practices, be they animism or polytheism, has often been linked to forms of racism, the view that phenotypically different human beings are racially inferior, their skin color along with their religions markers of primitivism and backwardness." (129-30)

The dominant narrative regarding Mizo *sakhua* is decidedly inclined towards a notion of a monotheistic concept of God, an attempt to align the spiritual entities with the notion of a supreme God above all other entities without labeling it as polytheism, and perhaps as a counter-narrative to the generalisation that the pre-

Christian Mizo tribes were animists. K.C. Vannghaka's "The Old Mizo Religion" may be cited as an illustration of this point. He declares, "The old Mizo religion is *monotheism,* but they also believed in the existence of minor gods bearing different names. However, some writers of Mizo history describe the traditional religion of Mizo as *Animism*… Such writers ignored any element of theism in the religion, which should be classified as *prima* rather than 'animism'. Though there was a certain element of truth in these characterization [sic] of Mizo religion, they were by and large, illustrations of the ignorance of those who claimed to have 'advanced' religions about the nature of primal religion" (2013: 165). While the latter part of the quotation seems to be aimed towards dispelling certain misconceptions, his declaration itself is paradoxical.

While the plurality of oral tradition itself as well as the heterogeneity of the pre-Colonial Mizo tribes, situated within the premise of the "interconnectedness of different aspects of the society and the interlocking meanings of symbols of various domains of life" that is found in Mizo orality points towards a complex belief system that cannot neatly fit into the scheme of any one of the classifications, yet this rhetoric served the evangelising mission of the first missionaries in Mizoram which sets into motion the processes of formulating and reformulating the very notion of Mizo identity. Some of the ways in which this new religion, although it has been effectively argued by scholars like Lalsangkima Pachuau, Vanlalchhuanawma and Joy L.K. Pachuau that the indigenous elements in Mizo Christianity have produced a religion that cannot be termed as 'foreign', have changed the understanding of religion itself can be illustrated from *Rinawmin.* First of all, in marked contrast to *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii,* the other selected novels, being set in the period after the introduction of Christianity, represent the Mizo as 'essentially' Christian. Mizo identity at this point of time, had acquired an ethno-religious dimension, more notably in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm.* In *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, the Christian festival – Christmas, in Mizo orthography *Krismas,* or *'Mas'* (*Mas* is a contraction *Krismas,* and is often used in the text, especially in the casual dialogues) has now come to be the time marker. In the selected texts, we see how *Krismas* or *Mas* has come to be regarded as the most important time of the year, although the

traditional agro-based cyclical time markers have not been relegated. The period covered in these three works is a period of 'Mizo Christianity'- a period when the Mizo people have come to totally identify themselves as Christians, practicising what can only be called 'Mizo Christianity', a hybridised identity of Christianity with indigenous elements, with a "national consciousness" that seeks to assert Mizo nationalism through the ideologies of an "imagined community." The significance of *Krismas* beyond the religious is seen in the ways the characters regard it – as a festival to be celebrated with their community in the indigenous traditions and reminiscent of the pre-Christian festivals – the feast that has come to be associated with the occasion and the necessary slaughter of a pig. The indigenisation of Christmas is seen in how the *Krismas ruai*[45] (feast) is accompanied by the *lengkhawm,*[46] and how it can stretch beyond the New Year. How the celebration of the New Year has come to be regarded as a Christian festival is not certain, yet we see how it is seen as a continuation or as part of the *Krismas* celebration itself. We also see how the characters understanding of the *Krismas* festival is bound up with their *khua*, their village. In both *Rinawmin* and in *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* we see how the '*vai'* (the Indian Army and all its personnel are collectively referred to as 'vai' in the texts), seeming to understand the religious and cultural significance of the *Krismas* and *Kum Thar ruai,*[47] choose to wait till the evening of the *Kum Thar ruai* to announce the intended 'grouping' of the villages:

> That year Hualtu celebrated Christmas in the presence of the Army. Yet, despite the times, the community singing and celebrations by the different churches went off better than expected. New Year too was celebrated eagerly just like other years. The soldiers in the village remained indifferent all the

[45] *Ruai* - n. a feast (*DLL* 392).

[46] *Lengkhawm* – it denotes both the indigenous form of communal singing event as well as the type of songs sung at such events. The *lengkhawm* (the event) and the *lengkhawm zai* (the type of singing/song are hybrids of the indigenous folk and Christian elements. (Scholar's input)

[47] *Kum thar* – n. the new year (*DLL* 276).

while. Curfew was lifted during Christmas and New Year celebrations so that people moved about freely.

The day after New Year, even before the feasting was over, the Army there suddenly announced that everybody in Hualtu village should move to Baktawng the very next day. ("The Beloved Bullet" 171)

This tactic of 'grouping' required a few villages within the same zone to move to a designated village grouping centre which they term, 'Protected Progressive Village' (PPV), and which the Mizo people, equating it with Hitler's 'Concentration Camp', referred to as "Public Punishment Village" (*Silaimu Ngaihawm* 68). The same plot line is employed by Dokhuma in *Rinawmin* where the separation of Ramhluni and Rozuala is caused mainly by the same grouping tactic. Dokhuma, in *Rinawmin*, consistently uses the term "*Khalhkhawm"*[48] to refer to the grouping, a term which translates to "to drive together, to round up", appropriately suggestive of the corralling of cattle. To the female protagonists in both these works, *Krismas*, since the MNF uprising of 1966, becomes the most difficult times of their lives. The loss or absence of their lovers is felt most acutely during Christmas time. The lore of the lonely grave in *Silaimu Ngaihawm* is directly associated with *Krismas* since Ramliani has come to connect the loss of her lover, his grave and *Krismas.* The Christian festival of Christmas, to the Mizo Christian imagination, is thus intricately bound up with the socio-cultural identity of these works.

Another interesting change in the sensibility of the Mizo Christian is his attitude towards *Zu*[49] [Liquor], and this change may be traced in the selected works. In *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung,* Dokhuma records the various kinds of *zu*, how they are brewed, for what purpose, and for whom it is intended. He explains that since time immemorial, *zu* had played a central role in the life of the Mizo tribes. It is clearly evident from his description that not only drinking but the process of producing the drink themselves are community affairs, having deep cultural and religious

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[48] *Khalhkhawm – v.* to drive together, to round up (*DLL* 248)

[49] *Zu* - Beer or any fermented liquor (*DLL* 570)

significances. No religious rite is complete without *zu,* and there are certain set codes to follow regarding how, when and which *zu* should be prepared depending on the rite or ritual that is being practiced. He also shows that drinking is an inclusive activity, one in which the elders and the children of the community are included. In *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, the religious significance of *zu* is left out altogether, along with any element of the 'old religion', yet depicts the socio-cultural significance in various ways. When the chief of the village wanted to show his appreciation of Fehtea's tlawmngaihna, he asked his daughter, Saithangpuii to serve Fehtea with *zufang*,[50] and although he tried to decline it, he was compelled to take a sip since it is regarded as an honour. The same process is repeated when Fehtea bagged the prized *tumpangsial*.

The extent of the missionary's intervention is hard to trace, yet we may safely say that the attitude towards *zu* changed due to the introduction of Christianity. D.E Jones, one of the first two missionaries reported during the early years of their mission that "One great difficulty to grown-ups in accepting Christianity has been to abstain from alcoholic liquors… And it will remain a stumbling block to many for a long time." (qtd. in Vanlalchhuanawma 141). While one of the reasons for the advocacy of abstinence from liquor could be the Welsh Missions' stance of abstinence, but another, and more strategic motive would be the fact that *zu* and drinking had been part and parcel of the 'old religion', and the 'pagan' culture of the Mizo tribes.

By the time Mizo identity evolved into a nationalist movement in the sixties, as seen in *Rinawmin*, the proscription of *zu* has become part and parcel of Mizo Christian identity. The indigenous form of Christianity that has become central to Mizo religio-ethno-nationalism is clearly discernable when the protagonist Major Rozuala, informs the rules and codes of 'Mizo Army' to his Battalion. Of the seven rules, the first four deals with discipline, loyalty, honesty, integrity and chivalry,

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[50] *Zufang* – n. fermented rice and its liquor made in a smaller pot than ordinary beer or *zupui*, and used on less important occasions. This fermented rice is generally made of *kawnglawng* or *fazu.* It is eaten as a refreshment, and its liquor is also drunk as a beverage (*DLL 572*).

codes which had always been part of the Mizo tribal culture. But the last three points specifically highlight the practices of Mizo Christianity, and these were aspects which were never part of the Mizo traditional systems:

> 5. Zu reng reng in phal a ni lo. 6. A theih chhung chuan Chawlhni serh hram tur. 7. Mizo Army-ah chuan inkhawm hi thupek a ni.
>
> 5. The consumption of any type of liquor is prohibited. 6. The sanctity of the Lord's Day/Sunday should be observed. 7. Worship/Church service is mandatory in the Mizo Army. (105)

How the Church has become the regulator of the socio-cultural life is also evidenced in an episode in chapter -2 of the text where the local Church elders summon Rozuala, to chastise him for perfoming the *hlado. Hlado* is the hunter's cry or chant, raised on the occasion of the successful chase of specific wild animals. Bears, wild gayals, boars, elephants and tigers, all have their own specific *hlado* to be chanted at specific time and location in Mizo traditional system. It had its origin in the distant past, with different tribes having their own chants and indiscriminately applied to the killing of wild animals and enemies alike. However, like all forms of oral tradition, it eventually evolves into two types – the *hlado* for slain animals, and the *bawh hla*[51] for slain enemies. The *hlado* has featured regularly in Dokhuma's works, and among the selected texts, it is found prominently in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* and *Rinawmin.* The elders' objection to the *hlado* in *Rinawmin* is on the grounds that these chants are markers of the traditional values and belief systems, and that it goes against the teachings of the missionaries and also of the Church (23-25). Since the shifts in the power structure and the ways in which the Mizo has come to see themselves, the 'national consciousness' that resulted in a large-scale conflict with the Indian union will be the focus of the next chapter, suffice it here to say that the changes ushered in by the processes of colonialism and the subsequent exposure to globalisation have a far-reaching impact on the formation and re-formulations of Mizo identity.

[51] *Bawh hla* – n. the warrior's chant or cry; the chant or cry raised by warriors when returning from a successful raid (*DLL* 31)

The study of orality is significant in the postcolonial cultures as it pertains to the notion of identity. "Post-colonial cultural studies have led to a general re-evaluation of the importance of orality and oral cultures and a recognition that the dominance of the written in the construction of ideas of civilization is itself a partial view of more complex cultural practices" (Ashcroft et al. 151). The oral past, in the Mizo context, becomes a rich field of resources through which the Mizo continually affirms the sense of 'past', and through the re-interpretation of such a past, re-formulate Mizo national identity. In an article which studies the prominence of oral tradition in contemporary African writing and dealing specifically with the works of notable postcolonial writers like Bessie Head and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, M.J. Cloete and R.N. Madadzhe concludes that:

> …written African literature cannot be properly studied without viewing it as firmly rooted in oral tradition. Moreover, literature alters profoundly and often irrevocably with any change in society, whether political, economic, social, cultural, religious, or educational. No meaningful study can thus be made of any form of change without a sound understanding of the manifestation of the true nature of similar conditions in the past. Such knowledge can best be accumulated by studying relevant oral literature. (16)

The same may be said of written Mizo literature, especially the works of James Dokhuma, in that much of what the author has written is steeped in the oral tradition of the Mizo tribes, and his own writings bear witness to the changes in the social, political, religious and cultural dimensions of Mizo identity. As mentioned earlier in the previous chapters, *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* is based on an oral tale that Dokhuma believes is not particularly well known. The Mizo people, like most oral cultures, have a rich storytelling tradition. Mizo oral tradition abounds with origin myths, folk lores and folktales which display the Mizo imagination of an enchanted world where the lines between the human, the animal and the spiritual realms are usually blurred. Yet there are also human stories which depict the joys and sorrows, the struggles and triumphs of a people living in a world where they have to negotiate with the forces of the elements, the threats of the wild and of their enemies. These tales are often based on real incidents, and most often feature what may be

regarded as love stories. The plot of *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* belongs to this type of oral tale. In the Preface, Dokhuma has made an acknowledgement that his source is an oral story but one that is lesser known:

> He thawnthu hi awm sa behchhana ka ziak a ni a. Mahse chu thawnthu awm sa chuan thawnthu hming (title) a nei chuang lem lo a. Tin, thawnthu lar tak pawh a ni lo a ni ang, mi sawi ve pawh ka hre vak lo. Mahse thawnthu awm zawng a ni meuh mai. Chu thawnthu awm sa chu a sei vak lo a. Mahse thawnthu zir tlak leh awmze nei tak a nih si avangin, chu chu laimua hmangin a tuamtu leh cheimawina ka siam belh ta a. A tingaihnawmtu atan thiam vak lo chungin ka pawt fan (expand) velin ka duang danglam vak a. Mahse chu ka siksawi kual velna chuan a thawnthu lai hlawm chu a khawih che chuang lo.
>
> This story is based on an existing one. However, the original story does not have a title. It is not a widely-known story and I hardly know anyone telling it. Yet it is indeed an existing oral tale. That original tale is not of considerable length. Yet, since it is a tale worthy of contemplation with deeper significance, I have used this as the core of this narrative while fleshing it out and adding embellishments. In an attempt to make it more interesting I have, with humble effort, expanded and considerably restructured the tale. However, these modifications that I have made have not in any way affected the essence of the original tale. (*Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* 7)

Dokhuma's articulation of the processes of committing to writing what had hitherto been one of the many oral stories of the Mizo people has several significances for the present study. Some aspects of the 'original' tale mentioned here like the absence of a proper title and that it is a short tale, denote that the source tale is a typical Mizo oral tale. The difference between oral cultures and chirographic cultures is not only in the absence or presence of writing. While orality and writing cannot be regarded as excusive to one another, the influence of the technology of writing on the human thought processes has led to a restructuring of human consciousness, according to Ong:

> Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form. More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness. (77)

Marshall McLuhan goes even further to claim that "societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication" (8). The shift in how narratives are presented after the introduction of writing is already evident in the quoted lines from Dokhuma's "Preface" in these two aspects – that he has given a title to the tale, and also in lengthening and restructuring the narrative. The addition of a title to a narrative, in this case "Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii", and the breaking up of the tale into chapters, each having a title, may be regarded as evidence of chirographic conditioning. It is not unconventional for oral literature to bear titles, and Mizo oral tales are no different. What is unconventional, though, is the use of a title which does not bear the name of the protagonist nor is descriptive of the main events of the story. Most Mizo oral tales, whether they belong to myths, legends, fables or human stories, are conventionally referred to in several ways:

- by the name of the protagonist alone as in *Chemtatrawta or Mualzavata*;

- by the names of both the protagonist and a secondary character as in *Lalruanga leh Keichala*, or that of a love interest in the case of a love story as in *Zawlpala leh Tualvungi*, *Chawngmawii leh Hrangchhuana*;

- by the names of both the protagonist and the antagonist as in *Rungi nu leh Thialtea*, *Sakuh leh Sakhi*;

- or by a major event in the story as in *Thlanrawkpa Khuangchawi*, *Chungleng leh Hnuaileng Indo*.

As illustrated here, these titles are the names people give to these stories in order to identify them and differentiate them from other stories, and therefore are either self-explanatory or descriptive of the stories they refer to, and are always simple and straightforward. If Dokhuma had followed the oral convention, his work

would most probably be entitled one of the following - 'Fehtea', 'Fehtea leh Saithangpuii', 'Fehtea leh Tumpangchal' or 'Fehtea leh Sangtuala'. The title given by Dokhuma to his work, however, involves a deeper noetic activity, more characteristic of a written culture. "Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii" literally translates to 'Wild Gayal or Saithangpuii' where Saithangpuii is the name of the village chief's daughter. In the story, both the wild gayal and the chief's daughter are presented as the ultimate dream of the men in the village. It has been the main topic of discussion of the menfolk in their *zawlbuk* for quite a while. To bag the head of the biggest wild gayal they have seen represents the utmost level of achievement in the *Pasaltha* realm. In a society where the hunting skill of a man is regarded not only as bringing fame and respect but even a passage to *pialral*,[52] the equivalent of heaven in the traditional Mizo belief system, the *tumpangchal* represents the culmination of their highest aspirations. To win the hand of Saithangpuii in marriage represents another type of achievement for the men of the village for various reasons – First of all, she is represented as an ideal woman, with physical features that most of the men find appealing coupled with qualities of feminine grace, industrious, energetic, kind and humble. Moreover, she is regarded as out of their league since daughters of chiefs usually marry sons of chiefs from other villages and a chief's daughter marrying a commoner would be breaking tradition. In the case of Saithangpuii, it would carry the added benefit of eventually becoming the chief of the village if one happens to be lucky enough to marry her since she is the only child of their village chief. Thus the menfolk have turned these two 'prizes' into the ultimate question of choice between fame and glory on the one hand, and fortune and comfort on the other. The comparison has become such a favourite topic of the men that eventually the two became linked in a rumour that their chief would reward whoever bags the head of the *tumpangchal* with the hand of his only daughter.

However, the author has omitted an interrogation mark after "Saithangpuii" which renders the title to more than a question of choice between the prized wild gayal and the hand of the chief's daughter. The title has a more significant meaning

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[52] *Pialral* - Lushai Paradise, literally means the further side of Pial river (*DLL* 365).

when applied to Fehtea, the protagonist. Having lost the respect of the majority of the villagers and suffering their derision and detestation through the evil machinations of the antagonist, Sangtuala, both the *tumpangchal* and Saithangpuii represent ways for Fehtea to finally disprove the falsehoods that have led to his disgrace and to reclaim his honour and respect. Such seems to be the intention of the author too since he has given the same "Tumpangchal nge Saithangpuii" as the heading of the chapter where Saithangpuii gives hints to Fehtea's aunt about her father's willingness to give her hand to the one who brings home the *tumpangchal*'s head. Thus the title becomes a question of which one of the two would help him regain his lost honour, and also whether he would be able to attain either one of them. This deeper significance attached to the title is clearly a characteristic of a written culture, more inclined towards an analytical and discursive understanding as compared to the titles given to the tales from Mizo oral tradition. This is not to suggest that an oral culture is intellectually inferior to writing culture, or that the pre-literate Mizo people did not have the capacity for analytical thought. Rather it highlights the fact that oral tradition operates within a different paradigm, that the tales from Mizo oral traditions bear titles only incidentally to differentiate them other tales and that the stories themselves have never been meant to be pondered upon and analysed like the written word. The headings given to each chapter of this work is again characteristic of a chirographic culture evident not only in the linear organisation of the narrative but where the visual element comes into play. The lengthening and embellishing of a shorter oral tale into a lengthier printed text itself is yet another aspect that documents the shift from orality to writing. Oral tales generally tend to have shorter plots. "In fact, an oral culture has no experience of a lengthy, epic-size or novel-size climatic linear plot. It cannot organise even shorter narrative in the studious, relentless climatic way that readers of literature for the past 200 years have learned more and more to expect – and, in recent decades, self consciously to depreciate" (Ong, *Orality* 140).

The dynamics of orality characterised by a certain level of fluidity and flexibility, and the multi-authoredness of oral tales are generally believed to be arrested at that moment when such tales are committed to writing. The very act of

writing down what has been told from generation to generation with variances dependent on who tells the story and to whom, may be regarded as a curbing of the processes of oral tradition and an imposition of fixity on an otherwise fluid and flexible art form. By committing to writing the story, Dokhuma has arrested the continual process of creation that takes place with every retelling of the tale process also 'claims' authorship to a tale that has been authored by every teller of the story before him. Yet considered differently, one may regard Dokhuma as having participated for one final time in the long tradition of the telling of this tale. He has not merely transcribed an existing tale but has rather performed, though using a different medium, the act of recreating the narrative. While the plurality inherent in oral narratives has been sacrificed at the moment of its transition into print, what has been gained in this case is the preservation of a "tale worth emulating," a tale which exemplifies the very 'essence' of Mizoness which needs to be 'preserved' and continually 'performed'.

> A thawnthuin kan Mizo khawsakzia leh kan mize mu hnu min varchhuah dan chu thu dang ni se, a thawnthu changtu miziaah entawn tur – dawhtheihna leh tumruhna te, rual elna leh dikna te a lang a. Chu chu keini Mizo thangtharte tan hian entawn tur pawimawh ber a nih si avangin, lehkhabu ngeia inthurochhiah tlak ni-a ka hriat avangin ka ziak ta a ni.
>
> The fact that the story is an important reminder of the traditional Mizo character and way of life is one thing, there is, exemplified in the character of the protagonist, traits worth emulating – patience and determination, competitive spirit and integrity. Since it is imperative of us younger generations of Mizo to aspire to such exemplary qualities, I have written this story which I feel deserves to be left as a legacy in book-form. (*Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* 7)

Believing *tlawmngaihna* to be the defining trait of a Mizo, Dokhuma has set out to portray the character of Fehtea to embody most of the qualities that are associated the ideas of *pasaltha* and *tlawmngaihna*. Since such is the author's intention, the characterisation of Fehtea falls within what Ong terms 'heroic "heavy"

characters'. To Ong, "oral memory works effectively with 'heavy' characters". Such characters are "persons whose deeds are monumental, memorable and commonly public." He explains that such characters are the outcomes of the need for mnemonic economy saying that the noetic economy of the nature of oral memory "generates outsize figures, that is, heroic figures, not for romantic reasons or reflectively didactic reasons but for the much more basic reason: to organize experience in some sort of permanently memorable form." He goes on to explain that "colorless personalities cannot survive oral mnemonics. To assure weight and memorability, heroic figures tend to be type figures" (*Orality* 69). He claims that "as writing and eventually print gradually alter the old oral poetic structures, narrative builds less and less on 'heavy' figures until, some three centuries after print, it can move comfortably in the ordinary lifeworld typical of the novel" (*Orality* 70). In the light of these observations, we may regard Fehtea as a typical oral 'heavy' hero. His defeat of the champions of Thingsai village in the wrestling match, his exemplary *tlawmngaihna* when tested by the village chief, his level of resilience in the face of the whole village's derision, his feat of bagging the head of the prized wild gayal, and his elevation to the level of a future-chief, are all achievements which may be regarded as no less than those of the Greek heroes of old within the pre-colonial Mizo's frame of reference. And no doubt he is a 'type figure' who may be called 'pasaltha huaisen Fehtea' with the epithet added in the mode of "wise Nestor, furious Achilles, clever Odysseus..." (*Orality* 69). Thus, Dokhuma's characterisation of Fehtea may be, in one way, regarded as the 'oral residue' of the Mizo oral tradition. However, it may be argued that Dokhuma does have the choice to make certain changes in the manner in which his protagonist is portrayed. His 'heavy' character does not arise out of the need for mnemonic economy since he his narrative is no longer 'performed' through oral strorytelling. It has come out of the author's unapologetically didactic purposes - of depicting in concrete terms the abstract idea of *tlawmngaihna*, and of preserving an oral tale which is at the brink of sinking into oblivion:

> Kan pi leh pute hmanlai nunphungin a ngaihsan zawng tak leh an hlutsak thil thlengin he thawnthu-ah hian a lang a. Lal khua leh tuia khawtlang daingul

> leh pasaltha, mi-kawlh sa-kawlh hmaa zam lo Mizo tlangval tlawmngaite fakawmzia leh ropui si-zia te chu khawvel hmaa pho lan theih ni ta se ka va ti em! Amaherawhchu, he Mizo ze chhuanawm tak lungphum hi kan innghahna ber mai ni se, tuma hmuh theih lohin kan phum bo hlen ang tih chu ka hlauh em avangin, a tak inkawhhmuh mai tur hre lo mah ila, thawnthu tala kan insihhmuh theih beisei in he thawnthu hi ka ziak ta a ni e.
>
> The values of our forefathers and what they esteemed and held in high regard are clearly discernible in this story. How I wish that the world may see the honour and greatness of the stalwarts of the chiefdom – those *Pasaltha*, the young Mizo men who feared not, the fiercest of men nor the most ferocious of beasts, embodying the code of *Tlawmngaihna*! It is my hope in writing this story that, as a tangible representation of *Tlawmngaihna* which has been fundamental to the Mizo ethos, it plays a role in the preservation of this admirable code, to prevent it from fading into obscurity. (7-8.)

Another oral residue that permeates *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* and *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* is the lack of calendar chronology within the *Tumpangchal* story and in the lack of linear chronological progression in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*. By the time Dokhuma started writing in the sixties, literacy had reached a majority of the Mizo population, and the Gregorian calendar had been in use since the coming of the British in the late nineteenth century. Yet in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, the author has retained the traditional story telling convention where chronological years are not numbered. In *Rinawmin and Silaimu Ngaihawm,* chronological dates are maintained according to the Georgian calendar as these works are set in that point of time when such a calendar system had already been in use by the Mizo people. *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, on the other hand, is set is the pre-literate past, the *Vailen hma* – before the invasion of the British, as pointed out in the previous chapter. The indigenous conception of time, markedly different from the enumerated calendar system of the chirographic cultures, operates within a totally different frame of reference. It is cyclical as compared to the linearity of writing culture, and specific points in time are stored in the memory of the people through their association with

what was happening around them. Thus the cyclical famines like the *Mautam* and the *Thingtam* had served as markers of the cycle of time.

The traditional Mizo understanding of time is intricately linked with the cycle of nature - their conception of a year is governed by their agricultural cycle which in turn is governed by the cyclical seasons. In *The Silent Language,* Edward T. Hall uses the Hopi Indians' understanding of time as an example to illustrate how they (the Americans) find it difficult to imagine a system of time that is not governed by clocks and calendars. He says, "the Hopi are separated from us by a tremendous cultural gulf. Time, for example, is not duration but many different things for them. It is not fixed or measurable as we think of it, nor is it a quantity. It is what happens when the corn matures or a sheep grows up-a characteristic sequence of events. It is the natural process that takes place while living substance acts out its life drama" (169). This reflects how the Mizo conceived of himself - as part of the natural cycle of life and not as a being distinct and separate from it. Within *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, we see how Ralvani, Fehtea's aunt, counts the number of days using sticks. She does this to mark the number of days Fehtea and party, which includes her own husband, have been away in their hunting quest for the *tumpangchal*. The hunting party has set off with ten-day ration, and Ralvani has been keeping count of the days to know when to expect them back. We can see that counting days is significant for them only in so far as it relates to their specific human activity. Specific dates and years mattered little to the Mizo, and the age of a person is not measured by the years but by what that person can or may do. To illustrate this from the text, we never get to know the exact age of Fehtea from the story – he has only been described as "zawlbuk kai rual" which means 'old enough to board the *zawlbuk*'. The time covered by the story is, again, not made clear. There are many instances where Dokhuma explains what stage of the agricultural cycle they are in, to better explain the daily activities of the characters. However, only once does he mention which month it is - in Chapter two, he mentions that it is "Vawkhniahzawn thla" and that the rain has been incessant. In the Mizo month division

Vawkhniahzawn thla[53] corresponds with the month of July which is that time of the year when the monsoon rain hits. The author's description of the month and the rains is crucial to highlight the *tlawmngaihna* of Fehtea. Their village chief has set up a ruse to test the *tlawmngaihna* of the young men of the village and has chosen this particular night in *Vawkhniakzawn thla* when it has been raining non-stop. The chief sends the village *tlangau* (the village crier who also acts as the chief's messenger) to the *zawlbuk* to summon the young men to his house for some urgent matters. The relationship between the chief and the men in the *zawlbuk* is rather democratic and based on mutual respect in any typical village. Thus the young men of the *zawlbuk* can decline the 'summon' in principle but at the same time the code of *tlawmngaihna* binds them to carry out the wishes of the chief. The chief's summon in the middle of that rainy night is thus the perfect test to see who answers the summon. Fehtea turns out to be the only one of the *zawlbuk* to pass the summon test. He immediately leaves the *zawlbuk* for the house of the chief, and once he reaches there, the chief and two of his *upa* have another test in store for him. The chief tells Fehtea that he needs *tlawmngai* men to go to a distant village the very night itself. Through this pretext, the chief and his *upa* plan to find out the level of *tlawmngaihna* in their young men. Fehtea readily volunteers to leave for the said village alone immediately. The level of *tlawmngaihna* shown by Fehtea will be immediately understood by the Mizo readers for whom Dokhuma has intended this work by his mentioning of the rain and the time of the year. Thus the month – *Vawkhniahzawn thla* is used here as a device to conjure up to the imagination of the readers the willingness to brave the monsoon rains which never seem to let up, in the middle of a moonless night when firelight torches will not work due to the rain, to trod barefooted through the muddy roadless distance, all the while with the knowledge of the perils of the jungle filled with wild beasts and the threats of the forces of the elements.

We see the power of the spoken word in Sangtuala's influence on the young men of Darzo village, and in how he uses his clout to rope them in on his plots to bring down Fehtea through campaigns of slander. Sangtuala's schemes to tarnish

[53] *Vawkhniahzawn thla* – n. the moon or lunar month corresponding nearly to July (*DLL* 547).

Fehtea's image work exceptionally well in a community who swears by the maxim - "Pan lo-ah tho a fu lo" (53, 111) which means 'there must be some element of truth to it for people to say it so." Although no one has seen any proof of the veracity of the allegations, their willingness to believe in such slanders brought much pain and misery to Fehtea.

The term 'Mizo' when situated within a historical context, enhances several issues that are persistant and relevant even in contemporary discourses on Mizo identity. Most significantly, the issue of inclusion under the umbrella term, 'Mizo' needs to be addressed. In as early as 1938, Liangkhaia had included the Ralte, Hmar, Paihte and Pawih under the "Mizo Hnam Hrangte" (the clans/sub-tribes of the Mizo), yet had excluded the Mara from the list. With Dokhuma's work, the tendency to homogenise, though present, is admitted and explained by the author himself repeatedly. With the fluidity inherent in oral transmissions, the author admits that it is no longer always possible to differentiate between specific customs and rituals of the various tribes who have come to be collectively identified as Mizo people. All of the sixteen chapters of *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* are arranged under specific *Dan,* [54] which translates to "way, manner, mode, fashion, style, method, law, regulations, rule, code, custom, habit, usage, practice, wont, characteristic." The linguistic felicity of Dokhuma is shown in his choice of the terminology to include the religious practices, the social and individual customs, the habits and mores, and even the folk wisdom. Thus the work is a historical record of the ways of the people. Yet the other meaning of the term *dan* as law brings in another dimension to the work. The regulatory code, unwritten and yet pervasive in the pre-Christian ways of life, continues to remain embedded in the Mizo understanding of themselves. It becomes evident in how the Mizo people feel that there are boundaries which mark the limits as to how a Mizo may behave, as seen in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm.* It underlines an unwritten contract, the violation of which brings up questions of 'loyalty' to their fellow Mizo people. While *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* may seem like

[54] *Dan* – n. way, manner, mode, fashion, style, method, law, regulations, rule, code, custom, habit, usage, practice, wont, characteristic (*DLL* 102).

a straightforward record of the ways of some of the Mizo tribes, the orality of the tribes which has direct bearings on the cultural dynamics within the tribes, accounts for 'the ways' being regarded as 'the laws'. Chapter-1, "Dante Chu" ["The Laws/Codes"] is entirely dedicated to the exposition of the intersection of the orality, the customs and the legal aspects. He opens the chapter by pointing out that *"hmanlai Mizote"* [the Mizo people of the past/of the olden days], with the absence of any script, did not leave any written record. He then goes on to explain that the '*dan',* being handed down from generation to generation orally were subject to individual interpretation, hinting on the dynamism of the oral tradition:

> Tawngkama inzirtir chhawng mai an nih avanging an dante reng reng chu an hriatna atanga hmang leh rel mai a ni.
>
> Since their laws had been transmitted verbally, they were executed based on their own knowledge/memory. (1)

Here one can see the role of knowledge and memory, and how the interpretation of the customs and laws depend on the recipient. Explaining why these *dan* were surprisingly uniform even though the tribes had lived in separate villages with their own chiefs, and often separated by vast distances, Dokhuma says: "An hriat dan inang lo lai deuh awm leh an sawi khawm a, and dan lai ber chu la in an hmang zui mai thin a ni" ("when and if what they knew differred, they would discuss it among themselves and follow the middle path"; 2). We can also clearly see how *dan* is used as tantamount to 'law' in this context. The following lines reinforce this legal conception of *dan* – "Chung an dante chu an naupan lai atanga an lo zir leh hman chhoh nghal reng a nih avangin, Mizote zingah Dan Hremi (Lawyer) awm hranpa pawh a ngai lo va, awm an awm hek lo" ("Since these laws/codes had been learnt and practiced since childhood, there was never a need for a lawyer among the Mizo people, and there never was any"; 1). The chief of the village, under the traditional village system, held sovereignty over both the 'executive' and 'legislative' powers, according to Dokhuma, yet there is what may be regarded as a 'limitation' to the legislative power – the chief, or anyone for that matter, cannot forego or override what the author calls "*Dan Thlungpui"* – the fundamental tenets of the *dan.* This

aspect is reiterated in chapter-9, "Lal Lal Dan" ["The Nature of Chieftainship"] where he highlights both the democratic aspect and the sovereignty of the chieftainship.

> Mizo Lalte chu tunlaia *Democracy* ram lalte anga thlan lal (*elected*) an ni ve lo a. Mahse mipuiin an lal chu an duh loh chuan khaw dangah an pemsan vek thei a. Chuti anga an pemsan lal chu *General,* ho nei lo an sawi ang maiin lal khua leh tui nei lo (*despot without subjects*) an ni thei mai a. Chu an dinhmun chu hre ranin lal fing chu a khua leh tui lakah a inluling lutuk duh ngai lo.
>
> The Mizo chiefs were not elected to their positions unlike the leaders of the democratic nations of the present day. Yet the people had the option to migrate out of his jurisdiction. A chief who has been left by all his subjects is like a *General* without a troop – a despot without subjects. Knowing this, a prudent chief would refrain from ruling with a tyrannical hand. (125 – 126)

It must also be mentioned that Dokhuma also speaks about how the chieftainship gradually grew more autocratic as time goes on. He describes the power of the chief as absolute with no higher authority of appeal, and in the instance where the subjects find grievances in the chief's governance; they are left with no choice but to migrate away. ("Lal chuan khawtlang rorelna zawng zawng a pumhmawm vek a. A thu chu thu-tawp a ni a. Miin a rorel an duh loh pawhin tunlai angin a sang zawka lungawi loh thu thlenna (*Appelation Court of Justice*) a awm tawh chuang lo. Lal rorelna duh lo chuan pemsan mai loh chu kawng dang a awm lo"; 127). From the above discussion, it is evident that their understanding of *dan* is different from our understanding of the law as a system of set rules, operative within the legislative, executive and judicial systems of governments. Dokhuma's further explanation shows how their *dan* were intricately linked with their values and belief systems:

> Mahse chung an dante chu mi tinin an zahin an pawisa em em a, Dan pawisa lo chuan 'van ni an sal' an ti a. Dan bawhchhia chu malsawmah pawh tlaka an rin loh avangin, chung an dante chu a kawi a ngilin an zawm thlip thlep vek tih theih a ni.

> Yet these laws/rules were heeded and respected by everyone. Those who disregard the law/rule/code were believed to be accursed, and those who break the law/rule/code were regarded as unworthy of any form of blessing. Thus all such laws were heeded and followed by everyone. (1)

He further explains the authority of their *dan* and public's role in the jurisprudence thus:

> Sawi tawh angin eng dan mah chu ziaka nei an ni lova. Thiam loh chantirtu Dan bu a awm loh avangin an dan lek kawh dan chu a dik lo a thih theih ngawt lo. Hriatna dan dan hmang an nih avangin mi tin chu 'dan bu' niin dan bawhchhia chu mi tinin an thiam-lovin an dem thin a. Chuvang chuan mipui thiam-loh nih chu khawtlang thiam loh an sa nghal mai a. Chuvangin, Court-in thiam-loh a chantir ai mahin a zahthlak a, dan bawhchhiat pawh a hlauhawm ta zawk mah bawk a ni.
>
> As mentioned before, none of the laws were kept in writing. However, the absence of a Book of Law/written law did not make their jurisprudence any less legitimate. Since they based themselves on their oral knowledge, every person was a repository of legal knowledge, and every offender condemned by all. Conviction in such a public court automatically means condemnation by the whole community, which is a matter of shame and embarrassment, a fate considered worse than an actual 'court' conviction. (3)

In the title of *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, the author uses the term '*kalphung',*[55] which means mode or manner, and also convention, instead of *'dan'*. This usage conforms to the author's closing remarks in the book: "he lehkhabu bung thupui tinah hian 'DAN' ti veka ziak hi, tunlaia 'law' an tih ang dan hi ni lovin, 'tih dan leh chin dan' a ni tih in hrethiamin ka ring a. Hmanlaia kan pi leh pute kal dan leh khawsak dan '*Culture'* an tih leh, chin thin dan *'Tradition'* an tih lam vek a ni tih chu

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[55] *Kalphung* – used in the same sense as *kal dan* – n. mode, manner, or way of walking, going, acting, doing, speaking, proceeding, or procedure; mode, manner, way, style, meaning. (also. *Kal hmang* and *kal zia*) (*DLL* 225).

in chhiar atanga in chian mai ka ring e." ("I suppose you have come to understand that 'DAN', used in all the chapter titles of this book, does not signify 'law' in current usage but rather 'ways and mores'. And I also suppose you must have comprehended through your reading that the focus of the work is on the culture and tradition of our forefathers"; 311). This comment does not seem to be an afterthought made in hindsight but rather part of the author's plan right from the start. At the onset, he establishes the legal aspects of the *dan*, exploring the notion of legitimacy of 'unwritten laws', and closes with what may be regarded as an admission that these *dan* that he has been referring to have been the cultural norms and the traditions all along. This device has effectively driven home the point that in the oral past such demarcations between the political, the social, and the religious, or the legal and the customary, did not exist, and that the norms and the customary laws operated through the dynamics of social obligations, indigenous belief systems, and other shared cultural meanings, which in turn is founded on the notions of identity and belonging. *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* may thus be regarded as a record of the codes of the tribe, and the author, through his writing, performing the role of a knowledge keeper. There is no evidence to suggest the existence of an official record/knowledge keeper in the Mizo oral past like there is in many other oral cultures. While the West African cultures have the *Griot*, other cultures have their *Elders*. The Mizo's knowledge keepers were the older male members of the community, and much of the transmission of knowledge were done in the *zawlbuk.*

> ...chung an dan inzirtirna hmun ber chu zawlbuk a ni a. Zanah zawlbuk meilum ai paho chu an titi a. Chung an titi chu mipa naupang leh tlangvalte chuan an ngaithla a. An titi tam ber chu: Ramchhuah thu leh rammut thu te, an tlangval lai chanchin leh thlawhhma chungchang te leh khawtlang inrelbawl dan te a ni ber a.
>
> The location for imparting knowledge about those laws/rules/codes was mostly the *zawlbuk* . The menfolk (married men) gather around the *zawlbuk* hearth to chat. The younger men and boys listen in on their talks. Their main topics of discussion revolved around hunting, hunting/warring expeditions,

> their bachelor days, their jhum and their customs and administrative processes. (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 1)

This shows that all the male folk of the village were privy to the knowledge of the elders, and also that knowledge itself falls within the male domains. According to the UNESCO, "Local and indigenous knowledge refers to the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. For rural and indigenous peoples, local knowledge informs decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life" (https://en.unesco.org/links). In this work, Dokhuma documents the indigenous knowledge of the tribes pertaining to the geography, agricultural processes, natural phenomenon and in the form of proverbs. He further dedicates a unit under the chapters, "Dan Dang leh Dan Tesep" ["Lesser laws/rules/codes"] to "Mizopa Science" ["Mizo man's science"].

Another important aspect of Mizo identity is seen in representation of the *Zawlbuk* as the seat of Mizo cultural ethos, and how the eventual abolition of the system brought changes in the manner in which the Mizo tribes were able to adopt the larger "Mizo Identity" in place of the micro village identity. The centrality of the *Zawlbuk* in the pre-colonial village set-up, as mentioned before, is reflected in the centrality of the Darzo village *zawlbuk* in *Tumpangchal nge Saithangpuii.* The story opens in a *zawlbuk*, the male dormitory found in every Mizo village till the early years of the colonial rule in the erstwhile Lushai District. While the village chief was the sovereign ruler within his territory, the administration of pre-colonial 'Mizo' village was democratic in spirit, in that the chief had his council of elders, albeit appointed by him, comprising of the more prominent and distinguished of the village males first of all, and also because the young men of the dormitory (under the guidance of a few *val-upa*[56] – the elders among the young men) could, and did, exert influence over the rule of the chief, and any sensible chief would definitely reckon with the opinions prevalent in the *zawlbuk*.

[56] *Val-upa* – n. a oldish young man, a middle aged man (*DLL* 542).

The dormitory system is a common feature in many tribal societies around the world, and is a common feature in the cultures of many of the tribes of the Northeast. By referring to the *zawlbuk* as a 'male dormitory' instead of a 'bachelors' dormitory' as it is sometimes called, it is hoped that a misrepresentation will be avoided. First of all, all the young men of the village were members of the *zawlbuk*, whether they were married or not – the qualifying criteria being age and physical development, and not marital status. Thus, adolescent boys, once they reached puberty and declared as having attained the status of *'tlangval'* ('bachelor') by members of the *zawlbuk*, automatically graduated to members themselves and were required to start sleeping there. The young men were never allocated sleeping areas in their own homes. However, unlike the *Moshup* of the Arunachali tribes and the *Morung* of the Angami Naga tribes, the *zawlbuk* continued to be the lodging of the young men even after they were married, till they finally moved out of their parents' house with their own wives and children to become "*in hrang chang*[57]*"* – having one's own household, to become the heads of their own families. The character Sangtuala, one of the *val upa,* in the *Zawlbuk* of Darzo village had been portrayed as a *pathlawi*[58]- a once-married but divorced young man (in his case, thrice), who continued to not only sleep in the *zawlbuk,* but was one of the most prominent of the *val upas.* Even before such an initiation to *zawlbuk,* the lives of the young boys were practically bound to it as the responsibility of collecting firewood and water for the *zawlbuk* was solely in the hands of the young boys of the village who would roughly be divided into age groups, with each group being taxed on the amount of firewood they had to collect each day according to their capacities. No male child, except the son of the chief and a few who had managed to distinguish themselves according to the codes laid out by the male fraternity, was allowed to shirk this responsibility – doing so would incur penalty.

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[57] *In hrang chang* – used in the same sense as *in dang* – v. to live in one's own house and manage one's own affairs; to live in a separate house (as a married son not living with his father, etc., or as a *bawi* slave not living with his chief, etc.); to be on one's own; to be independent (*DLL* 198).

[58] *Pathlawi* – n. a youg married man or widower or divorced man; a man of marriageable age (*DLL* 352).

The married men who had become heads of their own families and therefore, no longer lodging at the *zawlbuk,* continued to play a vital role in the *zawlbuk* culture. As they no longer had to go courting, they would gather at the *zawlbuk* after supper, sitting around the hearth engaged in conversations on all topics covering all aspects of life in the village – accounts of hunting expeditions, wars, the codes and strategies of warfare, hunting, farming, village administration and relationships with other villages, the legends and lores, their history, beliefs, customs and traditions, and even their exploits regarding women. Such accounts informed by their experiences were the chief source of learning and knowledge for the young men gathered there. Coupled with the moral codes that inform the strict discipline with which all aspects of the *zawlbuk* were governed, the *zawlbuk* was firmly established as the educational and training institute of every village. The *zawlbuk's* significance in the society did not stop there. It also functioned as a place where all matters and plans regarding war, hunting expeditions and community fishing were discussed and decided. Furthermore, the more practical and immediate function of the *zawlbuk* was as a defence strategy of the village. In having all the young men with fighting capacity under one roof, precious time would was not lost in mobilising the warriors – a crucial factor especially where swift action could save the lives of the villagers in the instance of raid, put out fire before more houses caught it, or prevent preying beasts from stealing domestic animals as found in the story.

Another important element of the *zawlbuk* which found ample reference in the text is the centrality of 'wrestling' within the *zawlbuk* culture. Wrestling as a sport provided physical training to the inmates of *zawlbuk* (as well as the young boys of the village) which, in this capacity, could be equated to the present-day 'indoor stadium' and was a popular mode of entertainment inside the *zawlbuk* (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 208). Beyond this, however, through the articulation of wrestling with socio-cultural elements, it served as a 'space' where physical strength and skill provided the agency to contest as well as assert social standing not only within the *zawlbuk* community, but also between villages, as exemplified in the wrestling matches between the two guests from Thingsai and the local champions. Another function of the *zawlbuk,* which is also depicted in the opening scene, was to provide

sleeping accommodation to male guests from other villages. Such guests would have 'official' host houses where they would eat, stay during daytime and even help with their cultivation. More often than not, such guests would be complete strangers to the host's household or with only vague associations, yet the household they had approached would allow the guests to 'stay' with them for such was the protocol of hospitality in those times. However, if such guests were male, and if they are of the age when they themselves would be lodged in the *zawlbuk* of their own villages, they would then retire after supper to sleep in the *zawlbuk* of the host village. The young men of the *zawlbuk* would, sometimes, take the guests along to court the village maidens till it was time to retire, or they would, as depicted in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, engage in wrestling matches as it was customary of the host inmates to challenge guests to such matches. As mentioned earlier, such matches would be loaded with a real sense of competition, though hidden behind the protocol of modesty, for the victories in such matches carried the implication of superiority in strength and valour of their respective villages. This underlying sense of competition gets played out in the match between Tlungirha, the champion from Thingsai village, and Fehtea.

The *zawlbuk* system which had for so long held a central place in the Mizo tribes' sense of identity also suffered a blow from colonialism. It could no longer serve as the centre of the village social life since the introduction of Christianity and the massive upheavals in the socio-political life of the Mizos. However, it is interesting to note that the Christian missionaries initially "found the *Zawlbuk* system "advantageous" for mission work and made use of it for preaching the gospel" (Samuel VL Thlanga, 63), that the pioneer missionaries – "Lorrain and Savidge found their first opportunities to interact with the Mizos in the *zawlbuk,"* and that "the early Mizo evangelists in the same way made use of the *zawlbuk* as a centre of their work which shook the institution to its foundation until it ultimately deteriorated into oblivion" (Vanlalchhuanawma 59-60).

The ways in which the Mizo National Army is structured, and the very code of voluntarism through which it functions bring out the persistence of the sense of 'fraternity' engendered through the performativity of *tlawmngaihna* in the *zawlbuk*

system. In the opening chapters of *Rinawmin* is denoted how the 'volunteers' of Mizo National movement are re-structured into an 'army' as 'Mizo National Army'. In both *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* the Mizo Army personnel are generally referred to either as 'Mizo sipai' or 'volunteers', regardless of the nature of their affiliation. The fact that they are not conscripted in the way a regular state's army would is first and formost, evidence of the nature of voluntarism which is a fundamental basis of *tlawmngaihna*. Secondly, the internal matters of the "Mizo Army" are handled, not in the form of strict orders coming from the top, but rather through discussion, negotiation and voluntarism. Moreover, the nature of how matters pertaining to 'operations' are discussed in *Rinawmin* is reminiscent of the dynamics of the *zawlbuk.* An instance of this set-up is denoted in the monthly meeting of the 'officers' of the 'battalion' to which Rozuala belongs in chapter fifteen. Here, the 'officers' consist of the lowest, "2/Lt" (the second lieutenant) to the highest, the "CO," the Commanding Officer. In the discussion on the matter of the *kawktu*, hierarchies usually associated with army structures are not maintained, with even the lowest in rank having a say in the discussion. Furthermore, in the way the officers volunteered for the operation, we see the *tlawmngaihna* operating within the system (153-157). The dynamics of the *zawlbuk* is re-enacted in the way the Mizo Army itself is structured, and this in turn aligns the Mizo Army with the *pasaltha* of the pre-Christian traditional era.

Owing to the lack of recorded history, early references to the people who now occupy present-day Mizoram called them 'Lushei clans', 'Lushais', and then as one of 'the hill tribes of Assam' in the official documents of the British imperial administration. Joy L.K. Pachuau situates the genesis of 'Mizo identity' to the period when the colonial administrative control took shape after the British had decided to formally occupy the 'Lushai hills'. "True to the British colonial methods elsewhere, British contact with the 'tribes' was followed by the entire paraphernalia of information gathering" (93). Through surveys, the British were mapping the topography and at the same time, the people. Initially, ethnographic materials on the inhabitants were collected to "identify the 'tribes' that had perpetrated the raids", but it graduated to a concern over the threat of the customs and traditions of the past

disappearing through the changes brought about by the policies of the imperial rule: "…seen as a way of connecting the people with their own histories and was often scripted as a service to a people who lacked the technology to do so." Thus the collection and publication of ethnographic materials "became an imperial tool of governmentality" (95). Here we have the first attempt to record the 'oral narratives' of the tribes, one of the many changes made on the indigenous ways of life to facilitate imperial administration. Another significant change being the classification of the tribes on linguistic lines which "meant that the fluidity and movement of and between 'tribes' that had always been a feature of the Mizo past was forced to come to an end" (97). As for the topographical mapping and boundaries and demarcations created there from, which eventually 'fixed' the tribes to specific territories, brought about notions of and identification with territoriality, and the end of the migratory culture of the tribes. The British policy of indirect rule by not doing away with the chieftainship but making the chiefs along with their villages their subjects also disrupted the existing notion of hierarchy while establishing new hierarchies based on colonial ties, and the 'divide and rule' policy was evident in the groupings of chiefs spatially and on kinship lines. The tribes, in the face of all these changes, naturally had to re-negotiate their concepts of self due to the dissolution of their social, political and cultural structures they had identified themselves with. Thus, the crystallisation of identity and social practice within the parameters that the British had set out for was in fact the genesis of the formation of 'Mizo identity', and Pachuau asserts that "this crystallization took the form of a binary, in the creation of a 'self' vis-à-vis an 'other'". The creation of Mizo and *Vai,* binary as evidenced from the title of the first 'chanchin bu' – *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu* [*Newspaper/Newsletter of the Mizo and the Vai*] launched in 1902, was, she maintained, through the conscious creation of the *Vai* as the 'other' of the Mizos by the colonialists. She also observed that such a binary was possible only because the tribes had, by this time, begun to accept the macro identity of 'Mizo' due to the disruption of the chief/village micro-identity.

The construction of the Mizo identity by this point in time was, thus, a direct outcome of the British imperial policies to consolidate the colonial hold. Since all the

existing modes of self-identification had been replaced by colonial systems, the situation "created the scope for Mizos to be reflexive about their own situation and past" (Joy L.K. Pachuau 108). A significant characteristic that the process of Mizo identity formation came to take on was "the need the Mizos felt to record their past," which, again, was enabled by the colonial situation – while the introduction of the script and the dissemination of literacy through the missionaries was certainly a factor, another interesting factor was that the Mizos, very early on in the assumption of their 'new' identity sought a validation for the same.

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CHAPTER FOUR

CONFLICT AND IDENTITY FORMATION

This chapter will seek to understand the role of conflict in the formation of Mizo identity while focusing on key moments in the history of the Mizo people. The centrality of the notions of the 'self' and 'the/an other' to identity will inform this chapter's attempt to trace the significance of conflict in the formation and evolution of Mizo identity. Through such reconfigurations, Mizo identity, by the 'Rambuai' period, had taken on the form of ethno-religious nationalism. Thus, the notion of Mizo 'nationalism' as represented in Dokhuma's works will be examined in detail. Although varied and vague in its application, the notion of cultural identity itself is always based on the understanding of the 'self' in relation to an 'other' – the self-other distinction, the 'us' and 'them' constructed on the perception, of whatever degree of validity, of sameness and difference. The 'sameness' principle underpins the question of inclusion - who is a Mizo. Inversely, the 'difference' principle frames the contours of Mizo identity by exclusion. The issue becomes quite complex when it comes to Mizo nationalism and national identity since the idea of nationalism itself has been the site of much debates across contemporary discourses.

A "Memorandum" submitted to the then Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri on October 30th, 1965, by the Mizo National Front (MNF) opens with the following passages:

> This memorandum seeks to represent the case of the Mizo people for freedom and Independence, for the right of territorial unity and solidarity; and for the realization of which a fervent appeal is submitted to the Government of India.
>
> The Mizos, from time immemorial lived in complete Independence without foreign interference. Chiefs of different clans ruled over separate hills and valleys with supreme authority and their administration was very much like that of the Greek city state in the past. Their territory or any part thereof have never been conquered or subjugated by their neighbouring states. However, there had been border disputes and frontier clashes with their neighbouring people which ultimately brought the British Government to the scene in 1844. The Mizo country was subsequently brought under the British political control in December 1895 when a little more than half the country was

> arbitrarily carved out and named Lushai Hills (now Mizo district) and the rest of their land was parcelled out of their hands to the adjoining people for the sole purpose of administrative convenience without obtaining their will or consent. Scattered as they are divided, the Mizo people are inseparably knitted together by their strong bond of tradition, custom, culture, language, social life and religion wherever they are. The Mizos stood as a separate nation even before the advent of the British Government having a nationality distinct and separate from that of India. In a nutshell, they are a distinct nation, created, moulded and nurtured by God and Nature.[59] (Zamawia 972)

In the first passage, the Mizo National Front demanded for the recognition of the Mizo people as a nation, with the autonomy and sovereignty due to such, and the second paragraph contains, in a nutshell, the ways in which this 'Mizo Nation' is imagined. In his oft quoted definition of the 'nation', Benedict Anderson proposes that the nation "is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." Justifying the term 'imagined', he goes on to say that "it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (*Imagined Communities* 6). As a proponent of the constructivist approach, he even points out the 'drawback' of his fellow constructivist – Ernest Gellner's famous quotation – "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist" (qtd. in *Imagined Communities* 6), in that there is an implication of the existence of 'true' communities. To Anderson, "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined." Thus, "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (6).

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[59] Extracted from "Memorandum Submitted to The Prime Minister of India by The Mizo National Front General Headquarters, Aizawl, Mizoram on October 30, 1965" published as 'Appendix-VII' in R. Zamawia's *Zofate Zinkawngah,* 2nd ed., 2012.

The 'style' in which the 'Mizo nation' is imagined in the memorandum, significantly, reiterates an amplified form of Mizo nationalism as expressed in "Mizo Union Memorandum" submitted to "His Majesty's Government and the Government of India and its Constituent Assembly" through the Advisory Committee in 1947.[60] The arguments in both memorandums, submitted eighteen years apart, espouse a Mizo national identity structured on ethnic, historical, cultural and religious principles. The assertion of Mizo traditional sovereignty and 'independence' before the advent of British colonial power, the insistence on the ethnic kinship of the Mizo tribes in areas that covered the Lushai Hills District and the adjoining areas, and how these tribes have become scattered through territorial divisions "carved out arbitrarily for administrative purpose" by the imperial government. If a nation is imagined as "both inherently limited and sovergeign", the Mizo nation is imagined as finite in its ethnic and territorial boundaries, and sovereign and unconquered since "time immemorial," yet disrupted by "the advent of the British." The nation being imagined as "limited" denotes that it "has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations" (Anderson 7). The "Mizo Union Memorandum" is even more emphatic in its insistence on the ethnic contours, drawing sharp boundaries with "the other nations" or ethnic groups inhabiting the surrounding areas, claiming that "[t]he Mizos have nothing in common with the plains nor with the Nagas or Manipur, etc. They are distinct block" (Lal Thangliana 429), and at the same time stressing on primordial Mizo identity:

> Wherever they go and wherever they are, they carry with them their primitive customs, culture and mode of living in its purest origin, always calling and identifying themselves as Mizos. (429-430)

[60] Referred to as "Mizo Union Memorandum" or "Mizo Memorandum Submitted to His Majesty's Government, Government of India and Its Constituent Assembly through The Advisory Sub-Committee by The Mizo Union." Published as "Appendix II" in Lal Thangliana's "Mizo National Front Movement: A Sociological Study," 427-437; K. Remruatfela, *Indian Union Chhunga Zofate Rin Luh Kan Nih Dan*, 49-55.

The Mizo Union memorandum goes on to reject the terms Kuki and Lushai, listing out specific names of the tribes and sub-tribes to frame the contour of ethnic inclusion:

> Only the word Mizo stands for the whole group of them all : Lusei, Hmar, Ralte, Paite, Zo, Darlawng, Kawm, Pawi, rhado, Chiru, Aimoul, Khawl, Tarau, Anal, Purm, Tikhup, Vaiphei, Lakher, Langrawng, Chawrai, Bawng, Biate, Mualthuam, Kaihpen, Pangkhua, Tlanglau, Hrangkhawl, Bawmzo, Miria, Dawn, Khumi, Khianu, Khiangte, Pangte, Khawlhring, Chawngthu, Vanchiau, chawhte, Ngente, Renthlei, Hnamte, Tlau, Pautu, Pawite, Vangchhia, Zawngte, Fanai, etc. closely related to one another cultural!v, socially, economically and physically thus forming a distinct ethnical unit. (430)

What is clearly evident is that by the time the Mizo people came to raise their political voice, they had already imagined themselves as a nation. Moreover, a side-by-side comparison of the MNF memorandum and the Mizo Union memorandum reveals that the MNF memorandum is closely modelled after the latter, not only in thought and content, but down to the very phrases chosen to articulate Mizo identity, nationhood and primordial sovereignity. Joy L.K. Pachuau's comment on the MNF memorandum, thus, equally applies to both:

> The leaders of the MNF were clearly resorting to history to claim their right to independence. In historicising their past, the 'Mizo' identity was considered a given and therefore 'primordial'; although past histories of feuding chiefs belonging to different clans were not denied, there was an insistence that they all had recognized themselves as 'Mizos'. In claiming that colonial intervention had bifurcated their territory, they were also claiming for themselves an ancient territorial identity that did not recognize the boundaries that had been created by state intervention, whether colonial or post-colonial. In maintaining that there were connections between the various fragments thus created, they chose to stress the 'primordiality' of their 'united' identity. (83)

While much of the ways in how Mizo nation and Mizo national identity are imagined in these two memorandums are similar, the significant difference lies in the fact that while the MNF memorandum was submitted to declare 'independence' from India, the Mizo Union memorandum sought for "full self-determination within the province of Assam" (Lal Thangliana 436). The main point of divergence, then, is in the way the 'sovereignty' of the Mizo nation is imagined, and this difference in political ideology is what plays out in the pages of *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm.* D. Smith states that "as there are many kinds of nationalisms, so concepts of the nation assume different forms and national identities are subject to considerable change over time" (*Chosen People* 25), and based on this admission of plurality, he frames a 'working definition' of nationalism as "an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential 'nation' (24). Seen from the light of Smith's conceptions, we may assume that there are at least two strands of Mizo nationalism in the selected texts, overlapping at several points but distinct in the way "the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity" is envisioned in their ideologies.

If Mizo identity had its beginnings in the colonial times, its 'national consciousness' had become a major factor in the political arena by the time the British cessation became an eventuality. It should be mentioned that although 'Mizo identity' has been used consistently in this study to denote the social collective identity taken on by the tribes right from the time of colonial times, under the political administration of the British until 1946, the official term given to them by the British administrators was 'Lushai' and the area they inhabited was christened 'the Lushai Hills' and placed as a district of Assam. The term 'Lushai' was a mispronunciation of *Lusei,* the name of the clan/tribe that was 'ruling' a majority of the region at the moment of the British arrival. It was only in 1954, years after India's independence, that the name Lushai Hills District was changed to Mizo District.

'Political consciousness' among the Mizo people began to take shape with the emergence of a new class of educated 'commoners' and those who have had wider

exposure to the outside world, either through their participation in the I World War as a labour force under the British and those who had been given the opportunity to study outside of the Mizo inhabited areas. According to Malsawmliana, “The Mizos had never been exposed to modern political system until they came under the British rule. Thus, any political consciousness hardly existed in Mizoram (then Lushai Hills) before 1920s” (242). Then the Lushai Students Association which came on to take the name Mizo Zirlai Pawl, was formed in 1924 in Shillong, and branches of the Association began to crop up in various cities and towns including Guwahati and Aizawl. During this decade, the demand for representation to Assam Legislative Assam was made but came to nought, but it stands as testimony to how the Mizo people during the early decades had already formed a distinct collective identity apart from the chief-village affiliations, and we can see the growing annoyance towards the chieftainship system that was continued and ‘adopted’ by the British administration to serve their own cause of ruling the people. It was during the same decade that the Mizos witnessed the breakdown of the *Zawlbuk* system. Thus, what is evident is that the changes brought about by the colonial encounter and their institution of new systems of administration, education and religion had already moulded the ‘Mizo’ into a new identity within a few decades. Mizo nationalism, like other nationalisms in colonised countries, had its beginnings with the newly created ‘educated class’. Actual political activism in the Mizo context, however, was only revived in the wake of the British withdrawal from India about two decades later and it led to the formation of the first ever political party within the Lushai Hills called ‘Mizo Commoners Union”, soon renamed “Mizo Union” in 1946. Sangkima attributes “the hectic political activities in the neighbouring areas of Assam and Bengal, ill-feelings between the Mizo chiefs and the commoners, development activities adopted by the administration and others” (qtd. in Malsawmliana 243-244) as the main factors that led to this political consciousness awakening.

To Joy L.K. Pachuau, it was “the political climate and events surrounding British proposals to withdraw from the region and Indian independence that made it possible for the Mizos to formalize the articulation of their identity.” She further adds that use of the term ‘Mizo’ in Mizo Commoners Union “was definitely a shift to

new ways of perceiving themselves" (125). To highlight the significance, she pointed out that the Young Mizo Association (YMA) was still known as 'Young Lushai Association'. Tracing the significance further, she writes:

> According to R. Vanlawma, under whose leadership the Mizo Union was formed and who was instrumental in naming the party, this represented a conscious decision to use 'Mizo' as it was self-referential. It was the term the colonialists had used. Moreover it helped in providing broader parameters for Mizo identity, beyond the now traditional colonial frames of encapsulation. Mizo was the only ethnonym that could also incorporate those 'tribes' outside the borders of the then Lushai Hills districts who did not speak the Lushai/Mizo language, but who were still seen as being kin to the larger 'Mizo' family… In other words, the formalization of their identity had an incumbent problem, that of membership, and in the Mizo case it led to the de-recognition of boundaries created in colonial times; alternatively, it can also be seen as the beginning of the aggrandizement of identity claims. (125)

The conscious decision behind the use of the term Mizo, then, was political, and the aim of such a move to not only reclaim the right to name themselves but to provide "broader parameters for Mizo identity" beyond what the colonialists had demarcated had a far reaching influence on the idea of a 'Greater-Mizoram' that became one of the main rallying cries of the Mizo National Movement in the sixties. The narrative that the tribes had always belonged to a 'family' before the colonial methods of administration brought about their separation by imposing hitherto unknown forms of fixed boundary had a great appeal to the imagination of the Mizo community.

The anxiety regarding the possibility of the withdrawal of the British was indeed, one that could not be taken lightly. Their future was uncertain, and opinions greatly vary as to what would be best for the Mizo people when the British finally left, or on the issue of whether they would have the option to choose to which country they would like to be attached to. In *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* the Mizo Union is often seen as collaborator to the *Vai* and thus, enemies of Mizo

nationalism. By the time of the MNF uprising, the Mizo Union had been holding political power for more than a decade. Yet in the inception of the Mizo Union we have seen the first articulations of the much of the ideology behind what came to be played out as Mizo nationalism under the MNF movement. The aims and objectives of the Mizo Union according to Laldinpuii were: a) The Mizo Union is formed for the integration of the Mizo both inside and outside the Lushai Hills, b) To bring about better relations between the general public and administrators, c) To show the Mizo masses the ways by which they occupy their rightful places and positions, d) To bring about all round progress in all aspects of Mizo life and to raise the position of women, e) To be the organ for expression of the views and wishes of the Mizo people in every way and at any time, f) To mend whatever is defective and to preserve whatever is good in our customary laws (qtd. in Malsawmliana 246). Lalchungnunga gives a slightly differently version with an indication that the original 'Constitution of the Mizo Union' has been obtained from Vanlawma, who was the initiator of the formation of the political party: "The principal objectives of the party were to achieve a rightful status for the Mizos; to develop better understanding between chiefs and commoners; to unify the common people; general uplift of the Mizo people; to become the democratic representative and spokesman for the whole of Mizo people; and to popularise Mizo language" (146). In both versions, it is clear that the main concerns were the 'rights and status' of the Mizos, the tension in the relationship between the chiefs and the common mass, and the desire to have a platform for self-representation. Yet the most pressing concern, though not explicitly mentioned in the 'aims and objectives', was that of the desire for 'independence' once British cessation became inevitable, and Vanlawma expresses this point in his autobiography, *Ka Ram leh Kei (My Country and I)*: [61]

> A thil tum te chu thukhuh takin, "Mizo mipui te chu an nih ang tak leh an dinhmun dik tak a awmtir turin," tiin kan dah a.
>
> Hetih lai hian indona an hneh chuan British chuan min chhuahsan an tum tih kan lo hre thawi tawh a, min chhuahsan hunah chuan tuma hnuaia awm lova

[61] The translation of the title is as given in the original work.

keimahni hnam ngei ro inrel ve kan chak em em a, mahsela Sap hnuaiah khan thlamuang takin ralthuam lam pawh ngaihsak hauh lovin kan lo khawsa rei tawh a, kan lal te pawh lal ni tak tak lo mah sela khua leh tui te tan chuan hnawksak mai lo nihna lai a lo awm bawk si a, keimahni chakna ringa independent thei tur chuan kan impumkhat hlawm tha tawk lo hle tih kan hria a, chuti chung chuan Hindu milem be ho hnuaia awm lah kan hreh em em bawk si a, chuvang chuan huam zau tawk tak tur in kan dinhmun tur dik taka awm thei tur ti zawnga dah hian a huam tha berin kan ring a ni.

The aims and objectives (of the Mizo Union), deliberately left vague and reserved was framed thus - "The Mizo people should be accorded their rightful status and dues."

We already had an inkling of the British's intention of cessation if they were to win the war (if the Allied force won WWII), and we had been having hopes of self-governance once they did withdraw. However, we had been living a peaceful and 'unarmed' life under the British for quite a period of time. The chiefs, though without real authority/sovereignty, had only become a burden and nuisance to their subjects at this point. So we were well aware of how unprepared we were for total independence. Still the idea of being governed by the idol-worshipping Hindu people was not acceptable to us. Therefore, to in order to be non-committal and to keep the options open, we felt it was in our best interest to frame it in terms of rights and status. (136-137)[62]

The sudden surge in the passion for the Mizo Union among the masses was, by all accounts including that of Vanlawma, the appeal of the idea of the abolition of chieftainship. The nature of their dilemma, the uncertainty of their future and the need to consolidate the Mizo *hnam* identity to 'claim' their 'nationhood' became a serious concern. Vanlalchhuanawma sums up the political scenario as it pertains to

[62] All translations of quoted texts and titles of works in this chapter are done by me, unless noted otherwise, for the sole purpose of this study.

the relationship between the chiefs and the commoners of the time as recorded by several writers thus:

> The basic motive of the MU became blurred when the party began to grow rapidly and dissension began to appear among the leaders. Ray[63] says with some truth, that the formation of the Mizo Union was a move against the *Lal*s and it was therefore looked upon by the British as opposition to British rule. He contends that the growing resentment of the people against the chieftainship ultimately led to the formation of the first political party in Mizoram. According to Liangkhaia, even after the Mizo Union was declared open for all Mizos, the Lals remained reserved about it. Vanlawma complains that the people understood little about the Union's larger interest in seeking the best possible future for Mizoram, because of their obsession with the single objective of the Union movement, the *Lal*s immediately resorted to forming a Council of *Lal*s. (381)

Ch. Saprawnga, another leader of the Mizo Union, agreed that "though it was anti-British sentiment which was the primary motive of those who established the Union movement, it was anti-chieftainship that most influenced the commoners' support for it. He himself encouraged the people along these lines (Vanlalchhuanawma 381). What is evident here is that the political consciousness of the mass, the commoners – the *Hnamchawm*[64] was at this point, focused on the changing ways in which they identified themselves. The need for the chief had been greatly reduced since there was the presence of the British for governance, yet the British government at the same time 'subjected' the chiefs to their own administrative convenience, to act as collectors of fees and taxes and to provide *kuli*,[65] impressed labour. Thus the role of the chief was no longer what it used to be, and it had in fact become clear to the *hnamchawm* that their chiefs had become tools in the British colonial enterprise. Moreover, as we have already mentioned, the

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[63] Vanlalchhuanawma is referring to Animesh C. Ray's *Mizoram: Dynamics of Change* (2012).

[64] *Hnamchawm* – the common people, all save those belonging to the ruling clan (*DLL* 169).

[65] *Kuli* – n. an impressed labourer. v. to work as an impressed labourer (*DLL* 275).

transition from identity bounded to a chieftaincy with its fluidity, to a larger identity not based on allegiance to a chief but rather to a larger one in which old hierarchies have crumbled had a great appeal to the Mizo tribes. "Rather than seeing themselves as the inhabitants of different territories or as the subjects of different and contesting chiefs, Mizo now began seeing themselves as the inhabitants of a common territory that belonged to everyone" (Joy L.K. Pachuau 123-124). Chieftainship was eventually abolished, with the passing of the Acquisition of Chiefs Rights Act in 1954, two years after the Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council came into being in 1952 and nearly seven years since the withdrawal of the British. It became the legacy of the Mizo Union that they had been the emancipators of the commoners, and Ramhluni's father in *Rinawmin* proudly announces his allegiance to the party:

> MNF-te chu eng ang pawhin pungin tam mah se kei chu ka ni ve chuang lo ang. Mizo Union, lal bantu leh Zoram phurrit su kiangtu hi ka thlah dawn kumkhua lo.
>
> Even if the MNF has grown multifold in number, I will not become one of them. I will never, ever part with Mizo Union – who had abolished chieftainship and had eleviated Zoram's burden. (15)

And Zaikima's father, Thangchuanga, in *Silaimu Ngaihawm* reiterates the same sentiment. When he hears of his son's intention to join the MNF movement, he informs his son that a Mizo Union "Councillor" [Sic] will be visiting that evening and he advises his son to pay heed to what the "Councilor" has to say. Zaikima, however, replies with what he thinks of the Mizo Union:

> Ho mai mai, Mizo Union-ho, hnam ngaihtuah phak lo, lal chauh duh hotu thusawi ka ngaithla peih lo."
>
> I don't care, I can't be bothered to listen to any leader of the Mizo Union - who cannot even comprehend the issue of *hnam*/nationalism, and who are only after power. (39)

To this his enraged father replies:

> I va han a tak em! Mizo Union tluka hnam hmangaihtu tu nge awm? Hnam an hmangaih avangin Sailo lal an ban tawh a, kum kha leh chen hnamchawm rap beta lal hrawt-khumtu ber an ban tawh aliamah Mizo hnam tan thil dang eng nge tul awm tawh? District Council ni se kan hnam nena in mawi tawk tak kan dil lohin mi pe lehnghal. Kan hotute tluka fing leh hnam hmangaihtu tu dang mah an awm lo…"
>
> How foolish you are! Is there anyone who is more dedicated to Mizo *hnam* than the Mizo Union? They had abolished Sailo chieftainship out of their concern/love for *hnam*. Apart from doing away with the age-old tyranny over the *hnamchawm*, what more is there to achieve? They have even given us a District Council which is quite sufficient for our *hnam*. There is no one more prudent and patriotic than our leaders… (39)

While this part of the deal was indeed delivered by the Mizo Union, the more complex and serious issue, as expressed by Vanlawma, on the future of the Mizo *hnam* after the British rule, introduced party politics to the newly formed political awareness of the Mizo people. This outcome of the issue would also have a more lasting impact on the idea of Mizo nationalism which persists even today. The decision to withdraw from India was a fulfillment of the British empire's promise, but the sudden and unprepared nature of the withdrawal left the country in turmoil. While the infamous Partition was played out along Hindu/Muslim lines costing millions of lives, the issue of affiliation as played out among the Mizo tribes, thankfully evaded bloodshed but came very near to it, according to Vanlawma. In the days leading up to 15th August, 1947, tensions between the two factions in Mizo Union had reached a breaking point. Vanlawma's faction tried to prevent the District Superintendent from hoisting the Indian flag on the 15th, and according to Vanlawma, there were men who were ready to take up arms to prevent the hoisting. There was also the threat of an all-out shooting if the other fraction made good with their intention of organising a celebratory rally:

> August 14, 1947 a lo thleng a, a tuk chu British chhuah ni tur a ni a. Bawrhsap Macdonald-a kha Pu Penn an a thlak a, rei lo te chauh a awm a,

> Peter-an a rawn thlak leh tawh a, a ni chu chumi tuka India puanzar reng reng Aizawla zar lo tur in kan hrilh lawk a a awih chiah phei chu kan beisei lova, mahsela zar tir hauh loh kan tum avangin hrilh lawk; tha in kan hria a, kan hrilh lawk a ni a.
>
> Chung lai chuan indo ban hlim chhawn a ni a, silai chi hrang hrang te, grenade te Aizawl leh a chheh velah a la tam em em mai a, sipai bang te leh tang lai mek te chuan min puih an chak em em mai bawk a, chumi August 14 zan chuan an inpuahchah a, tlangval thenkhat te chu an tlaivar zak a ni.
>
> When August 14, 1947 arrived, the British withdrawal was to happen the next day. Superintendent Macdonald's place had been briefly filled by Pu Penn, and he in turn had left and Peter was the Superintendent at the time. We informed him not to hoist the Indian flag anywhere in Aizawl the next day, although we did not expect him to heed us, we decided that we had to inform him since we were adamant on not letting any flag hoisting take place.
>
> Since the war had only ended recently, there were many guns and grenades accessible in and around Aizawl, and several war veterans as well as those who were still enlisted were enthusiastic to help us, and so several young men stayed up the whole night on the14th August, 1947 in preparation (for a fight). (193)

Bloodshed was averted, after all, through the prudence of the Superintendent. The political developments leading up to this situation are significant for the present study in that the seed of discontent for the MNF uprising had already been sown during what transpired within the political domains during this period and more specifically in how there was a split in the political aspirations of the newly politically conscious Mizo people.

According to Romila Thapar, "A comment frequently made is that since historical facts do not change, how can history change? This reflects a lack of awareness of the sources and methods currently being used in historical interpretation. The facts may not change, although sometimes they do as a result of

fresh information or new ways of analyzing old information, but the interpretation of these facts can change. History is not just a directory of information; it also involves analyzing and interpreting this information" (22). While this expression applies to most of what has been discussed and will be discussed, it becomes pertinent especially to what transpired within the political arena during the period when the Mizo Union came into being in 1946 and the Independence Day of 1947. In 2013, a symposium was organised by the Mizo Students Union where the question of "India Union Hnuaia Mizoram Kan Luh Dan" ["How Mizoram Came Under the Indian Union"]. Here, prominent scholars and well known politicians and statesmen deliberate on the question of how and when Mizoram became part of the Indian Union. It is apparent that even today, not only opinions but what had been believed to be facts have not been settled and agreed upon ("Symposium on India Union hnuaia Mizoram kan luh dan," youtube).

Several questions persist regarding how and when the Mizo people and their land came under the Indian Union. The pressing issue for the Mizo people's future after the transition of power centres on a few key questions – whether they would become part of the Indian Union, and if so, would they still be able to retain some form of autonomy, whether it would be better to be part of Burma since the Mizo people were ethnically related to the people, especially the Chins, whether they wanted to be part of the then newly formed Bengal region of Pakistan, or whether they actually had the option to become a crown colony along with the other tribal-inhabited areas. The idea of becoming part of Pakistan was rejected categorically by all factions of the Mizo tribes right from the start. However, the uncertainty of the British Empire's intention for the predominantly Christian tribal areas as well the clash of interest between the Mizo Union and the Chief's council magnified the dilemma further. While the Mizo Union, regardless of faction, championed the abolition of chieftaincy, the Chiefs held the hope of resuming their former sovereignty once the British government withdrew. It should be pointed out that at this point in time, all sides within the Mizo political domain concurred in their belief that the Mizo people had become part of British India only with the 'conquest' by the

British, and therefore did not consider themselves as part of India or subscribe to the idea of Indian nationalism.

The British occupation of the area that was then known as the Lushai Hills lasted for less than six dacades. "The Northern Lushai Hills was put under Assam from 3rd June 1890. Captain Herbert Browne, Personal Assistant to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, designated the Political Officer was to exercise general control over all departments with headquarters at Aizawl" while "[t]he South Lushai Hills was attached to Bengal and placed under the Lieutenant Governor. From 1st April 1891 Charles Stewart Murray of the Bengal Police was appointed Superintendent with the Headquarters at Lunglei," and "[b]esides Fort Lungleh, Fort Lalthuama and Fort Tregear were established with a base at Demagari... it was declared that for administrative purposes Demagiri should be considered to be part and parcel of the South Lushai Hills" (Zorema 144 – 145). Although there continued to be resistances from many of the chiefs, the "British India Governor General Foreign Department" issued a declaration that the Lushai Hills have become part of British India on Sept 6, 1895 (Hluna, "India Union Hnuaia Mizote Kan Luh Dan"). On how the Lushai Hills District was created and how and when it was placed under British Assam administration, Zorema says:

> ... on 27th January, 1898, the British Government of India accorded its approval of the transfer of South Lushai Hills to Assam. With that, the whole Lushai country came under the charge of the administration of Assam with effect from 1st April of that year. A Proclamation by the Government of Assam placed the Lushai Hills (Amalgamated) under the charge of an officer who will be styled 'Superintendent of the Lushai Hills' and appointed Major John Shakespear to be the first Superintendent. The administration of the district was vested in the Governor/Chief Commissioner of Assam acting under His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor General of India, the District executive administration being vested in the Superintendent, his Assistants and the chiefs and headmen of villages. (146)

What is denoted here is, first of all, how much of the Lushai Hills area came under British administration and how it had come to be associated with Assam. Secondly, it clarifies how the present area came to be constituted into Lushai Hills District with the boundaries that later on would be contested not only for the 'Greater Mizoram' cause but also in the present-day boundary issues with the state of Assam. Thirdly, we see how the chiefs fit into the British administration to become 'agents' of the colonial power, a fact which came to play a central role in the political imagination of the Mizo people, and which became the major factor in the decision to opt for joining the Indian Union.

Furthermore, with the formation of the Lushai Hills District, "notifications were issued to remove all British Government of India and Provincial enactments applicable elsewhere within British India from operation within the Lushai Hills, with the exception of certain Acts which were specifically introduced. The district was, moreover, brought under the provisions of the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation 1880 and the Scheduled District Act, 1874," according to Zorema (147). JV Hluna suggests that such a policy, already in use in other hill areas, was opted by the British as the least expensive method to prevent the Mizo people from further disruption of the interest of British India. He further mentions that two regulations – Chin Hills Regulation 1896 (Regulation V of 1894) and Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation 1873 (Regulation V of 1873) were put in place to restrict entry of the *vai* into the Mizo inhabited Lushai Hills District. Assam was given Provincial Legislature by the Government of India Act 1919, but Mizoram and other hill-tribe areas were declared 'backward tract' and thus had no representation in the Assam Legislature. The Government of India Act 1935 which gave more autonomy to the provinces declared the Lushai Hills as 'Excluded Area' (Hluna, "India Union Hnuaia Mizote Kan Luh Dan"). "The term excluded here implies that Lushai is outside the the control of the Provincial Legislatures, responsibility to Parliament for its administration vesting in His Excellency the Viceroy as Crown Representative, who has empowered, on his behalf, His Excellency the Governor of Assam, as Agent to the Crown Representative, to administer the Lushai Hills" (McCall 241). Earlier in 1926 (1924 according to Hluna), a few young men from Kulikawn, Aizawl were

arrested on account of their activities in seeking representation in the Assam Legislative Assembly (Malsawmliana 243). This ‘Excluded Area’ status, according to Malsawmliana, “alienated the Mizo people from mainstream India”, and also adds that “Mizo has different distinct culture and traditions which was far different from Indian culture. So there was a need to formulate the future of the Mizo hills in respect of administration” (241).

Two important points that pertain to the future of the Mizo people that are evident here are: first, the exclusion of the Mizo people from ‘mainstream’ Indian politics in the pre-Independence period and in the Indian Independence movement. Secondly, the recognition that there was no historical, cultural, linguistic or ethnic relatedness between the Mizo tribes and mainstream Indians, or to use Lalsangkima Pachuau’s term, ‘Indic-Indians’. These points had far reaching implications on Mizo identity and the future of the Mizo people. Paul B Chonzik’s interpretation of the inclusion of Lushai Hills in the ‘Excluded Area’ falls in line with what Malsawmliana has said about the alienation of Mizo people from mainstream India, but goes further to directly assert that such an ‘isolation’, of not only the Mizo tribes but “other areas inhabited by the so-called ‘backward tribes’,” had been the motive of the British administration all along, and had a far reaching impact on the politics of Mizo identity:

> This isolation had been the aim of the British administration since their occupation of these areas. Thus, acts and regulations were passed disallowing free intercourse of plainspeople with the hill tribes. Reforms introduced in other parts of British India were not made applicable to these hill areas. This isolation had bred a feeling of ‘otherness’ from the rest of the country, which gave way to the search for identity, resulting in the assertion of ethnic groups within the wider Mizo group. However, there continued a strong current of one-ness among the various Mizo tribes. Thus since independence was granted to India and Pakistan, there ensued a parallel movement of self-assertion on narrow ethnic lines among the Mizo tribes and a movement for re-unification of the Mizo group. (148)

Condemning the British's policy towards the Mizo people, Lalchungnunga claims that it is such a legacy that was inherited by 'Free India' after the British had withdrawn and which had irrevocable consequences on the future of the Mizo people:

> Certain sections of Mizos tend to believe that the British policy of 'non-interference' in the day-to-day life of the Lushais and in the chief's administration of the village, and the subsequent system of administration adopted by them in the various forms of regulations and Acts, were governed by the British "respect" for local customs and traditions. Some would even go to the extent of holding the view that it was out of "love' that the colonial ruler saw to it that special treatment was given to the Lushais. While these attitudes towards the British are not totally baseless, the more objective analysis... would reveal the fact that basically it was governed by the principle and objective of keeping the Lushais, who were then known by them as the "wild hill tribes", tamed and unable to attempt any uprising at the least possible cost. The consequences of this are now inherited by the free India. The fact that the Lushais were not permitted to have any political activity till the 1940's and that they were divided and given to the charge and control of different regional authorities just for the sake of "administrative convenience" and further that they were left in that state during the British transfer of power to the ex-colonies, would go to suggest that basically the British had none or little concern about the political future of the Mizos. (67-68)

While the "the colonial frames of encapsulation" had drawn borders that separated the Mizo-inhabited areas by the creation of the Lushai Hills District for the convenience of colonial administration, the intension of the British administration in declaring the tribal inhabited hill areas as 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded' did seem to be, to some extent, concern for the hill tribes since they felt, according to McCall, that "an emancipated people, like the plainsmen are better equipped to develop their own political future. A backward people, like the Lushais, cannot easily

start" (235). Thus Sangkima summarises the intent of the act and the reaction it received from the "Indian leaders":

> ... In other words, Mizoram was outside the control of the Provincial Legislature... The object of section 91 was not to impose on the tribal people Parliamentary institutions and the ordinary civil and criminal law for more civilized communities. The politically conscious Indian leaders resented strongly about the status of the tribal people under the Act. Subsequently, it led to a hot debate among the members of the Constituent Assembly. (56)

The germination of the 'crown colony option' for the hill areas that was proposed later seems to have come from the notes made by the British administrators during this stage when proposals were made for the exclusion of these areas from the constitutional amendment of 1935/36. According to R. Syiemlieh, "All officials thought that the hill areas in north-east India should be excluded from the proposed constitutional changes," and he points out that one such administrator, John H. Hutton, who was the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills, "in a note to the Assam Government, which was subsequently placed for the Simon Commission's consideration... pointed out that on grounds of race, history, culture, language, politics, finance and education the hill districts of Assam should received consideration for their exclusion. He showed that the interests of the hill districts would not be served by having them included in the reforms but that they would suffer very serious detriment by being tied up to the politically more advanced plains districts, while the latter were likely to suffer in the future if joined with people of an irreconciliable culture in an unnatural union which would ultimately only entail discomfort for both parties." Syiemlieh goes on to quote Hutton's words of caution: "History is full of instances of lamentable results of attempting to combine alien populations into political units. The danger can be avoided here at the outset" (181).

However, the lack of specific provisions – financial and political, made for the Lushai Hills, and the fact that the Lushais had no vote nor "any direct share in the responsibility for the good Government of this land" resulted, much of the time, in negligence of the development of the Lushai people until Sir Robert Reid came to be

the Governor of Assam, according to McCall (238-240). In what became known as the Reid-Coupland plan which was proposed along the lines of the ideas already flouted by Hutton to the Simon Commission earlier in 1928-1929, "the Crown colony would include the Chittagong Hill Tracts (now in Bangladesh), the Chin and Kachin areas (now in Burma/Myanmar) and the following areas in India: Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya and mountainous areas in Assam," and while "the plan lost out at the time of Partition, it did not disappear overnight. The Reid-Coupland plan continues to be part of political discussions in Northeast India, as a model for an independent mountain state," according to van Schendel who cites several historians in his chapter titled "Afterword: Contested, vertical, fragmenting: de-partitioning 'Northeast India' studies" (276). The 'mountain state' referred to here is yet another conception that came to nought, involving a large part of the same geographical areas but under independent India, and one in which the Mizo Union also, at least for a short period, participated until they moved on to favour a demand for a 'Mizo state' (Malsawmliana 255-257).

Opinions on the impact of the Acts and the labels that went with them like 'backward tracts' which ensured the separation of the hill tribes from the politics of 'Mainland India' vary but are all valid. The 'alienation' and 'otherness' of the Mizo tribes from the rest of India, as contended by Malsawmliana and Chonzik may be true to a certain extent. Lalchungnunga's argument regarding the intent of simply 'taming' the 'wild tribes' for the protection of the British had no concern for the future of the Mizo people except for their own convenience also seem valid in that even though the colonial narratives mentioned above were put to action only up till the point of their departure, and the plans and proposals for the future of the hill tribes never came under serious consideration. The colonial narrative, as already evident from what has been discussed, claimed genuine concern for the welfare of the inhabitants of the hill areas, and this narrative is anchored on the sameness-difference binary. Syiemlieh quotes Sir Robert Reid's comment on the tribes he administered as Governor of Assam thus:

> They are not Indians in any sense of the word, neither in origin, or in language, nor in appearance, nor in habits, nor in outlook and it is by

> historical accident that they have been tacked on to an Indian Province. On both sides of the so called watershed and frontier were to be found Kukis, Lakhers, Chins, Nagas, Khamtis and Kachins, having common customs, common languages and living under similar social conditions. These tribes common to both frontiers were divided between two administrations when the logical answer was to unite them into one administration. (188-189)

Yet no reparation was made before or during the transition of power to undo the separations through colonial processes of mapping and fixing boundaries.

Thus, the recognition that the inhabitants of these 'Excluded Areas' were historically, ethnically, linguistically, culturally and even in religious beliefs different from the mainstream Hindu Aryan Indians and the measures they had taken in the form of these acts did prevent assimilation, and to the Mizo national movements, it became a strategic tool to assert their distinctness and to claim the legitimacy of their cause.

> The protection of the tribes from the demographic engulfment and from the cultural assimilation by dominant groups is acceptable as a sound policy. But it also noted that the resultant non-involvement and non-participation of the Lushais in the wider socio-political process sustained the independent orientation of the tribes, the further consequence being that their regional sentiment was reinforced to the extent of letting them feel they were never part of India. The Mizo National Front movement which gained prominence during the sixties bears this fact out. (Lalchungnunga 78)

It facilitated the imagination of a pristine Mizo culture that had to be 'preserved.' It also legitimises their will to reclaim their pre-colonial sovereignty. Lalchungnunga further makes a hindsight observation that "had the British administration opened an opportunity for the Lushais to participate in the political process outside their Hills along with the policy of protecting them from outside exploitation, the regional feeling of the Mizos may not have gone to the extreme" (78). The political 'othering' created through the process of 'exclusion' by the British is here attributed as the main cause of the Mizo national movement that eventually

culminated in a protracted armed conflict. As discussed in the last chapter, the crystallisation of Mizo identity, after its genesis through colonial constructions, took the form of the Mizo/*Vai* as the self/other binary, through the conscious construction of the *Vai* as the 'other' (Joy L.K. Pachuau 104-105).

Yet in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* the conflict undercuts a simple Mizo/*Vai* encounter. Other elements come in the form of differences in political ideologies between the MNF and the Mizo Union. Among the Mizo Union, furthermore, while there are those who do not support the movement but do not act in blatant opposition to the MNF, there are others who in many instances, act as 'collaborators' of the *Vai* – the Mizo Union activists who either act as *kawktu* ("finger-pointer", informant) or those who have taken up arms against the MNF army, as found in both novels. While many of the *kawktu* belong to the Mizo Union, again, there are others who act as *kawktu* for other reasons as well, and these 'enemies' of Mizo *hnam* are none other than their fellow Mizo people. The political developments have been discussed at length here since this study attempts to understand how the Mizo Union, whose initial ideology was no different from that of the Mizo National Front, came to be perceived as 'traitor' to the 'nationalistic cause' in the MNF movement as seen in both *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm.* The Mizo people, at that junction of British withdrawal, were not unified when it came to the question of what type of self-governance they wanted to form. This question involves the formation of new power structures. More importantly, it becomes a question of reformulation of identity and belonging. Thus a flurry of political activity ensued. The two strands of Mizo nationalism found in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm* are conceived through several common contours of identification, yet the main point of divergence is seen in the way the notion of 'independence' is understood. While the Mizo Union conceived of independence in terms of modernist political ideology, the MNF's interpretation of the same is situated within ethnic and religious paradigms. 'Independence' has been the moot point of Mizo political arena right from the period of the first political party, and it underpins the factionalism that ensued from the early stage until it culminated in the formation of the MNF, although the issue of

abolition of chieftainship is imbricated in the ways in which the notion of 'independence' is imagined.

As mentioned earlier, there already was factionalism within the Mizo Union party very early on from its inception based on its political aims – one faction favouring entry into the Indian Union, while the other faction which came to be known as the "Right Wing" held on to the ideology of 'independence' (Hluna, *Political Development in Mizoram* 19). A year after the Mizo Union came into being, the second political party – the United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO) was officially formed. Locally referred to as *Zalen Pawl* (Free Party/Freedom Party), who advocated that the "Mizo people would have better and bright future if they opt out of India and join Burma instead of India Union." (Lalthlengliana, qtd. in Malsawmliana 247). The first expressed objective of UMFO – "In looking for a country with which to identify ourselves we should seek one we admire and which can give us some benefits" (Lalchungnunga 159), we see that Mizo independence was not the agenda, but that they believed that the Mizos should be able to choose the country with which they identify themselves based on what they they thought would best benefit the Mizo people, and thus, the reasons they gave for their advocacy of joining Burma are: "a) Burma being smaller than India, the Mizos might have a larger voice in affairs generally; b) Mizo participation in public affairs may have greater scope in Burma; c) Mizos are very close to the Burmese ethnically; d) Mizos would have greater autonomy in Burma; e) It was said that the Draft Constitution of Burma had a provision for the possibility of opting out of Burma by any of the hills-people after ten years" (Lalchungnunga 160-161). The *Lal* wanted to revert back to the micro-sovereignty of their chieftaincy, to reclaim the traditional autonomy within their own "hills and valleys." It finally boils down to two main campaigns:

> Thus, the campaign for a separate state within the Indian Union and a sovereign state without the Indian Union dominated the district both appealing – though to a different degree – to the ethnonational feelings of the people. The MNF campaign led to an armed revolution which opened a

> chapter in the history of the district. (Lalsangkima Pachuau, *Ethnic Identity* 85)

As denoted in the previous chapters, Mizo as a 'macro identity' of tribes came into being and was solidified through the colonial encounter and the imperial administration following the annexation of the land of the tribes. The disruption of their former systems of affiliations, on the one hand facilitated the adoption of the larger social identity, but at the same time necessitated a validation of the new identity through the construction of imagined 'continuities'. The pre-colonial Mizo tribes identified themselves with the names of their chiefs and not so much with fixed territories. The semi-nomadic nature of the tribes, necessitated by their method of cultivation, meant that every chieftainship shifts its settlement every few years. Moreover, such affiliation with the chief also had certain fluidity in that the individual could, at any time, shift his alliance by migrating to a different village at will. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the notion of *hnam* as 'tribe' or 'clan'- the ethnic marker of the tribes was not rigid or fixed either. The individual could 'change' his tribe through the provision of *saphun*, by which process he simultaneously 'changed' his *sakhua* – his religious alliance. In addition to these fluidities, the fact that the Mizo tribes were an oral culture, characteristically dynamic and heterogeneous, lends another aspect to the fluidity of identity in the pre-colonial times.

Thus, Joy L.K. Pachuau states that "[f]or the 'Lushai' tribes, indeed, identities were created in movement," and she contends that "the struggle between the colonialists and the indigenous can be seen as a contestation between an identity founded on territory and territoriality and an identity founded on movement, which made the forcible 'rooting' of a people to a fixed space even more significant" (100; 101). However, we may argue that territory and territoriality did not only have a significance with the tribe, but that their idea of territory and territoriality was bound up with their sense of justice and honour, and was the cause of much of the conflicts and violence in the pre-colonial times. In fact, it is the notion of territory and territoriality that differs, and more specifically it is the notion of a territory fixed and bounded that is alien to the Mizo tribes. If one looks at Dokhuma's accounts from

Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung, the shift in the conception of territory in the pre- and post-British era becomes apparent:

> Hmanlaia an indo chhan tam ber pawh an dikna (rights) humhalh an tum vang a ni phawt a. Chutah lal tinin mahni ram humhalh an duh theuh a. Phai vai an run fona chhan pawh an sai ramchhuahna ngawpui tha Saphovin thingpui huana an vah chereu zau zel vang a ni pakhat a. Chung chu an indo chhan a nih si chuan, tunlai khawvel Sawrkar indo chhan aia a nep chuanna a awm chuang lo... He kan Mizoram hi humhalh tumin kan pi leh pute chuan lu tam an lo hloh tawh a Thisenin an lo lei a, tun hi min thlen ta chauh a ni zawk.
>
> The cause of most of their wars was fore mostly, the safeguarding of their rights. Moreover, each chief wanted to defend and protect his territory. One of the reasons behind the raids (carried out by the ancestors) was the fact that the *Sap* had been deforesting and devastating their elephant hunting grounds to expand their tea plantations. If such were the causes of their wars, the causes were not any less justifiable than the causes of modern governments... In their fight to retain/protect this very Mizoram, our ancestors had lost many lives. They have bought the land with their blood to secure us our territory of today. (255-256)

Here Dokhuma explains their notion of territoriality, of what they believed was rightfully theirs, and how the ancestors had sacrificed their lives to assert and lay claim to their territory. In the same work, however, Dokhuma also states:

> Mizorama Bawrhsap a lo lal chinah chuan lal reng rengin lalna lehkha ‘Ramri lehkha’ an tih mai chu Bawrhsap hnen atangin an la a, chu chu an lalna lehkha ve ber chu a ni. Khaw tin lal chuan ramri an nei vek a. Chu an lalna ramri chhungah chuan thuneihna vawrtawp neiin an awm a; lal zawng zawng chu an ‘independent’ vek mai a ni. Vailen hma phei chuan ramri pawh fel taka thliah a awm meuh lo. A huai huai leh khua leh tui nghah apiangin an thut zau mai a ni.

> After the Superintendent became the head of Mizoram area, all the chiefs collected from him the 'Ramri Lehkha' – 'Boundary Papers', and that paper is the token of recognition of their chieftainship. Each village chief had a territorial boundary, in which he reigned supreme and all the chiefs were independent sovereigns. Before the advent of the British, there were hardly any clearly delineated boundaries. The chiefs who had the most power and villagers simply staked the widest territories. (126)

These lines have Dokhuma describing the notion of territory from the colonial understanding of territory as fixed and bounded spatially. The latter conception of boundary and territory as valid only if it exists in 'paper' demonstrates the shift from the former notion of territory and territoriality, and how this colonial legacy of 'mapping' the territory had a direct bearing on how the Mizo came to understand themselves. In an article titled "Maps, Mission, Memory and Mizo Identity" which deals with an examination of "the role of imperial maps, Christian mission, shared memories and collective consciousness in the formation of Mizo identity," Lal Dingluaia, a faculty member of Aizawl Theological College, throws light on the intersection of this mapped territoriality and the element of divine ordination which Mizo identity has come to assume in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm.* He explains the basis of the concept of a 'greater Mizoram' that stretches across the areas adjacent to the present day Mizoram, and which came to be one of the demands of the Mizo national uprising, the Mizo's indignation with how the imperial power imposes its political map on the Mizo tribes, and traces several key elements that came to have direct bearing on Mizo identity of the 'Rambuai' period and beyond. A point in connection with the 'raids' carried out on the Cachar plains needs to be mentioned here as it pertains to the discussion of territoriality which is interlinked with the traditional belief system of the pre-colonial Mizo tribes:

> In traditional Mizo belief, to attain the status of thangchhuah which entitled a person's soul to reached pialral, or heaven, one needed to kill an elephant and other wild animals on the chase. To have a successful elephant hunt, a solemn kawngpui siam sacrifice was performed and a holiday had to be observed if the hunting party succeeded. The meat was shared by whole villages, and the

> elephant tusks were traded and also used as earrings which were the most precious ornament of Mizo women. One of the blessings they bestowed upon a new born baby boy was to say, 'He will become a brave man/warrior and shoot an elephant'. Losing this territory greatly undermined every aspects of their lives. (242-243)

By drawing this connection, Lal Dingluaia establishes that for the pre-colonial Mizo tribes the land, the act of hunting, their values and their belief systems are all interconnected in a complex worldview that is clearly distinct from the colonial. Significantly, one of the first ways in which the colonial rulers exerted their power in the transformation of Mizo culture was through impositions of new and alien form of justice and prohibitions of various practices integral to the Mizo way of life. Lawmsanga, another ordained minister, commenting on the prohibitions of raids, headhunting and elephant hunting, by the British administrators to curb what was regarded by the western imperialists as "savage and barbaric practices," expresses that:

> ...the prohibition of elephant hunting and killing of enemies (not murder in the village) severely affected the Mizo religion since these were requirements in 'ram lama thangchhuah' to earn salvation and a place in pialral (heaven). Therefore, the Mizo religion was paralyzed when the British administrators strictly prohibited raiding villages and killing elephants and one of the means of gaining salvation collapsed. (76)

Although the latter has reiterated the same point that Lal Dingluaia has made, the frame of reference here is Christian, and we see a reframing of the pre-Christian cultural ethos within Mizo Christianity. The ideology behind the MNF movement, as reflected in both their memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India in 1965, their 'Declaration of Independence' the following year in which Dokhuma himself was a signatory, and in Dokhuma's *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, strikingly echo this pre-colonial worldview, albeit anchored on a different religious system. D. Smith, in his critique of the 'internal colonialism' thesis of ethno-

regionalism, brings out the complex nature of "ethnic separatists' relationship with territory:

> Land is indeed vital to ethnic separatists, but not simply for its economic and political uses. They are equally interested in its cultural and historical dimensions; what they need is a 'usable past' and a 'rooted culture'. Ethnic nationalists are not interested in any land; they only desire the land of their putative ancestors and the sacred places where their heroes and sages walked, fought and taught. It is a historic or ancestral 'homeland' that they desire, one which they believe to be exclusively 'theirs' by virtue of links with events and personages of earlier generations of 'their' people. (*Nationalism and Modernism* 63)

The significance of territory linked with cultural associations to Mizo nationalism further converges with the very idea of 'freedom' in the instance of village grouping – the 'counter-insurgency' measure which was resorted to by the India government. As denoted in the previous chapter, village grouping is basically the rounding up of the inhabitants of three or four villages into a single one designated "grouping centre" known as 'Protected Progressive Village' (PPV), which Dokhuma informs us in *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, is referred to as "Public Punishment Village", and likened to the 'Concentration Camps' devised under Adolf Hitler's holocaust programme (68). In the same work the author gives a description of the trauma faced by the Hualtu villagers on receiving orders for their relocation to Baktawng as part of this village grouping:

> Hualtu tui liaka seilian, mahni khawtlang bak tlang dang lunglen ngai lo pitar leh putarte chuan mahni duh reng vanga Baktawng tlanga pem tur ni lova, vailian khalhkhawm avanga Baktawng tlang pan tura nawr liam an an ni mai tur chu an ngaithiam thei thlawt lo va; mualpho e, zahthlak e, bal e, an dawn thei tawh lo va, an tap rawih rawih hlawm a.

> The elders of Hualtu village who had been nurtured by the spring waters of their village, who had never longed for any place but their own, could not reconcile themselves with the idea of being herded off by the *vailian*, not out

of their own volition but by force, to Baktawng village. Such was the trauma that they wept and wailed aloud. (66)

The trauma has more to do with having to leave their ancestral village instead of just their individual homestead, and thus, it is not so much the idea of material loss but rather the uprooting from the emotional and symbolic ties with the geographical space, the sense of belonging that cuts across the historical, the symbolical and the communal, and what underpins the trauma, as seen from the author's description, is the violence of having lost a sense of agency - the sense of power to choose to which, where and how they belong. The practice of relocation is not alien to the Mizo's relationship with geographical space. As denoted in the earlier chapters, the Mizo tribes, owing to their system of farming, would continually shift the location of their villages, and therefore would identify more with the name of the chief than with the name of the territory itself before the advent of the British whose policies greatly curtailed the freedom of movement the villages used to enjoy. Yet the idea of *pem*[66] (relocation) on the personal level was not alien to them either. This notion of fluidity has been discussed in the previous chapter in connection with the complex democratic relationship of the chief and the villagers. The villagers were not bound by any dicta to any village, and the people had a choice to leave at will. In *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii,* we find Fehtea contemplating on moving away during the peak of his sufferings, yet he eventually makes the choice to stay on in Darzo village for two reasons – his father's will to live out his days in Darzo village, and his own desire to prove his worth instead of escaping from his burden the cowardly way (58). Such is the level of agency involved in their affiliation with their villages, and this in turn implicates a sense of belonging that is voluntary and determined by other cultural and social forms of attachment.

The grouping of villages thus robs the Mizo people of their sense of having choices, of agency, the power to 'imagine' their community. Furthermore, the complete disruption of the way of life for the Mizo people brought about by the

[66] *Pem* - To migrate (as family from one village to another); to emigrate, to immigrate (*DLL* 356).

installation of new power structures within the 'grouping centres' greatly impacts the ways in which the Mizo people view themselves through their relationship with the 'other' - the *Vai,* the Indian Army. In both *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, we find the slogan of the MNF, "Pathian leh kan ram tan" (For God and our country) predominantly. These two works are based on the Mizo National Front uprising, the former, *Rinawmin*, written during the peak years of the armed movement while the author himself was incarcerated for his participation in the said movement, and the latter composed decades later. This slogan, especially in *Rinawmin*, is a recurring motif, and the title 'Rinawmin' itself is inextricably linked to the notion of loyalty to 'God' and to the 'country'. On the genesis of this slogan, R. Zamawia, in his work, *Zofate Zinkawngah* [*In the Course of Zofa/Mizo People's Journey*], has stated that he and J. Sawmvela, both holding high ranking positions in the MNF movement, came up with the idea of "PATHIAN LEH KAN RAM TAN" and how they decided to fashion it after the Boy Scout slogan which he learned during his 'Boy Scout days', "For King and my Country". Significantly, they decided, at the same meeting, to replace the English formulaic letter ending, "yours faithfully" with the Mizo term "*Rinawmin"* which may be translated to 'faithfully, being trustworthy, in good faith, or loyally.' He goes on to say that they issued a circular to inform all 'volunteers' of the movement that "*Rinawmin"* should be used for all correspondence between themselves, explaining how the usage began and how it was continued to be used consistently by the "Mizoram (Ramhnuai) Sawrkhar" ("The Underground Government of Mizoram") (250).

In *Rinawmin,* the protagonist Rozuala who has just returned from the 'MNF Special Assembly' in Aizawl, informs the volunteer unit from his village that the Vice-President Pu Lalnumawia had announced the order to replace "*I rin tlak*" (the conventional formal letter ending in Mizo language which translates to 'one you can trust") with "Rinawmin" and he goes on to explain that "Rinawmin" should not be limited to correspondences within the movement but that it applied to all correspondences (26). The author lays great store by the term, as evident in how every time 'Rinawmin*'* or 'rinawmin' is found in the text, it is highlighted in bold and placed within single inverted commas, or in all upper case, and sometimes, both

in bold and upper case, except once where the term is used as an actual ending to a letter. The theme of loyalty in *Rinawmin* is inextricably bound up with the notion of loyalty in the personal relationships as well. In the author's description of Rozuala and his battalion, this notion of loyalty is highlighted:

> An Battalion pawh sakhaw lama kaihruaitu ber a niin, nulat tlangval lah khaw tina ngaihzawng nei zel zul chi a ni si lo. Ramhluni bâk nula hmangaih dang a nei lovin Mizoram tan a inpumpek a. A ram leh Ramhluni bâk chu engmah dang chungah rilru a nghat lo. Ram tana a thawh theih ve tawk hlawhtlinna chu Pathian kutah chauh a awm tih a hriat avangin Pathian kutah a innghat hmiah a. Pathian chhâla ram tana thawktu an nih angin an zingah ho ve fe fe tawk chu awm mahse, an vaiin Pathian biak an ngai pawimawh ṭheuh a. Nula pawh thlahlel ve tho hlawmin nawmsip bawl pawh duh ve tho mah se, Pathian hnenah ṭawngṭai an ngai pawimawh ṭheuh a. An ram luah thuthlungah pawh 'HNEHNA CHU MIZOTE PATHIAN TA A NI SI A' tih a ni rêng a.
>
> He has been taking the leading role in upholding religious worship in his battalion and he is not the type to womanise. Giving his heart only to Ramhluni, he has devoted himself to his land/nation. His heart is set only on his land/nation and Ramhluni. With the conviction that the materialization of the cause he has fought for rests in God's will, he has commended himself fully in God's hand. While there are some of them who live less astutely, having taken their oaths in the name of God, the worship of God remains a matter of great importance to all of them. And though they are not immune to the desire to fool around with women sometimes, they remain committed to the worship of God for they know that their national cause hinges on the belief that 'victory belongs to the God of the Mizo people.' (171-172)

This notion of "Mizote Pathian" ("the God of the Mizo people") in the phrase "HNEHNA CHU MIZOTE PATHIAN TA A NI SI A*"* ("Victory belongs to the God of the Mizo people") is found twice within *Rinawmin.* The phrase seems to have been derived from several biblical verses: Proverbs 21:31 – "The horse is made ready

for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD;" the last sentence of 2 Chronicles 20:15 – "This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's," and Psalm 3:8 – "Salvation belongs to the LORD. Your blessing is upon Your people." (in some versions, victory/deliverance comes from the Lord) among others (New International Version).

To understand such an interpretation of the Mizo national movement in religious terms, especially along the 'Covenant" tradition of the Old Testament, one needs to look into the context within which the movement itself is positioned. One of the main professed catalysts for the movement is the perceived threat of assimiliation – religious and cultural, into the Hindu nationalism of the post-Independent period, as seen in the "Declaration of Independence". (*Zofate Zinkawngah* 976-977) Lalsangkima Pachuau argues that:

> One should remember that for many Northeasterners, until recently, the Indic India was a culturally foreign and a historically distant phenomenon. Various movements for autonomy and independence among the tribals have to be seen then as largely a response to the national majority's aggressive efforts of assimilation and domination. The fear of assimilation, domination, and oppression has been intensified by the mainstream's antipathy toward conversion to Christianity as well as by the rise of Hindu fundamentalist influence in the years following the Indian independence. (*Ethnic Identity* 26)

The armed movement, through the perspective of the Mizo National Army (MNA)[67] in *Rinawmin*, is one of rightful defense of their 'God-given' territory, and that they are "hnam chhantu" ("defender of the Mizo *hnam*"; 152). The author also describes the Mizo Army in such terms:

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[67] Mizo National Army (MNA), also referred to as 'Mizo Army' in the selected texts, is the army division of the MNF.

> …chung hun laia an ramhnuai rilru-ah chuan Pathian chauh lo chu hmachhuan dang an nei lovin Mizoram chu Pathian hminga chhanchhuah an tum tlat a ni.
>
> The underground army in those days had nothing but their trust in God to rely on, but they were committed to bring deliverance to Mizoram in the name of God. (172)

Drawing parallels from the Bible, the Mizo Army likened their condition to the oppressive rule of the Biblical Jewish king Herod, who initiated the murder of all infants within Bethlehem region in a bit to kill off the baby who, according to the Magi, would become a great king. The notion of freedom is intricately interwoven with the narrative of their movement, and thus the land, their faith, and the shared feeling of persecution permeate the nationalism of *Rinawmin. Rinawmin* may be read as MNF narrative in that on can see the protagonist and the movement representing the ideals of Mizo nationalism in all their idealisations. *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, on the other hand, gives voice to the Mizo Union point of view, and it depicts a more objective view of the political scenario of the time. What can be discerned is the change in the author's own beliefs regarding the MNF movement, his faith and dedication to the movement finding their expression in *Rinawmin*, written while he was incarcerated for his involvement in the movement, while *Silaimu Ngaihawm* casts the author as more mature, objective and even disillusioned with the movement, it being written almost three decades later.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the politics of Mizo identity formation in the works of James Dokhuma with specific focus on *Rinawmin* (1970), [68] *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* (1981), *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* (1991), and *Silaimu Ngaihawm* (1995). Anchored on the standpoint that identities are constructed within discourse, the discourses within which Mizo identity are represented are located within three historical moments – the pre-colonial 'beginnings' in the oral past, the colonial period of negotiation and the post-colonial period of 'Mizo nationalism'. The socio-cultural forces at play in the construction of Mizo identity are examined within their historical specificities and juxtaposed with Dokhuma's concept of Mizo identity and the cultural resources through and within which they are conceptualised.

In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Hall states that "cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture," and that it "is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute return." Although the politics of Mizo identity construction draws heavily on the notion of such an essential Mizo primordial existence at various points, the study is grounded on the premise that Mizo identity is constructed through discourse, and treats the notion of an essential Mizo primordial existence as a discursive element within the history of Mizo identity politics. Thus, the following lines sum up the theoretical position that the study maintains throughout, that cultural identity

> ... is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental "law of origin." (226)

James Dokhuma, who is keenly aware of the 'instability' of Mizo culture and identity denotes what he believes to be the responsibility of the Mizo people:

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[68] All translations of quoted texts and titles of works in this chapter are done by me, unless noted otherwise, for the sole purpose of this study.

> ...kan hnam dan neih theuh chu hman fing leh changkang apiangin vawn him an tum a. An vawn him chu an hnam damna (survival) a nih pawh an hre chiang em em bawk a ni.
>
> The more advanced and foresighted communities have always tried to preserve and sustain their cultural specificities, knowing fully well that the survival of their communities depends on such preservation. (*Rilru Far Chhuak* 73)

Yet at the same time, the 'mourning' of the 'loss' of some 'essence' is discernable in all the works under the consideration of this study, underpinning an essentialist notion of a recoverable 'authentic' past. His expressed reason in 'taking up the pen' and his very conception of the role of the writer as the 'custodian of culture' place him within the essentialist discourse. Yet implicit in how he expresses his concern for the 'preservation' of Mizo culture is his belief that the essence of being Mizo can and should continue to be performed in the constant negotiation with the forces of "history, culture and power." It was during his three-year incarceration as a political prisoner for his involvement in the Mizo national movement that he decided to start writing with the purpose of continuing to serve the idea of Mizo nationalism. The three years served in various prisons saw him writing fervently, at least as much as prison life allowed him, and he declared his reason behind the decision to start writing, in a preface to another book of his, *Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna* [*Dictionary of Archaic and IdiomaticTerms*]:

> Chutia ka tan lai chuan kan ram tana ka tihtheih tawk ni-a ka hriat chu lehkhabu ziak a ni a. Chu chauh chu kan ram tana ka tihtheih awm chhun, mahse ka la tih ngai reng reng si loh chu tan turin ka han tintuah ta a.
>
> As I was thus incarcerated, I realized that the only thing I could do for our *ram* – country/nation was to write. It was the only viable choice for me to serve our 'nation', and so I decided to venture into unfamiliar territory. (vi)

For Dokhuma, Mizo identity is a *hnam* identity which, in his conception, is both ethnic and nationalist, the Mizo is a nation, and writing is 'performing' Mizo national identity. Thus Mizo identity in his works can be read in two contexts – in a

broader context, the author himself is considered as engaged in the 'imagining' of Mizo national identity, and in the narrower context of textual reading where Mizo identity is 'performed', 'imagined' and 'constructed' within the stories of the selected texts. The 'modernist' notion of nationalism, as theorised by Ernest Gellner, Karl Deutsch, Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, posits that nationalism is a modern phenomenon, arising out of modernisation and modernity, and facilitated by the breakdown of traditional systems of kingship, beliefs and sacred languages (Smith, *The Nation in History* 60-61). Most theories of nationalism that have dominated the discourse since the late twentieth century agree that the 'nation' is socially constructed. As Anderson puts it, the nation is "an imagined political community," and that it is "imagined as inherently limited and sovereign." The boundaries drawn in the imagination of the nation renders it as "limited" and the members within this imagined boundary imagine themselves as sharing a "communion", a sense of community which "is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." It is this "fraternity", the sense of unity and communion which "makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (5-7). This sense of communion is "generated and sustained by symbolic forms, such as, songs, films, cultural practices like stories, traditions, history writing" (Nayar 176). In order to understand how Mizo nationalism fits into this 'modular' understanding of the nation and nationalism, the historical specificities must also be taken into account. The colonial experience, as well as the manner in which the Mizo tribes negotiated with the changes brought about by modernity, have profound impact on the ways the Mizo people understand their collective identity and in how they conceive the Mizo nation. Timothy Brennan who, in "The National Longing for Form," observes that although nationalism as an ideology originates in the imperialist countries:

> … these countries were not able to formulate their own national aspirations until the age of exploration. The markets made possible by European imperial penetration motivated the construction of the nation-state at home." Thus he

> asserts that "European nationalism itself was motivated by what Europe was doing in its farflung dominions. (Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* 59)

It is through the oppositional relation with its 'other' that European nationalism formulates their home nation as the centre of a larger formation. Thus the Indian postcolonial theorist Partha Chatterjee opines that the very conception of nation is 'western', and based on this understanding of nationalism as a western construct he traces how the same is reproduced in the anti-colonial nationalist movements. Nayar sums up Chatterjee's argument in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* as follows:

> Anti-colonial/nationalist movements adopt the idea of progress or modernity from the West and launch the idea of a nation. Chatterjee argues that natives transform the Western idea of a nation in three stages. In the first stage, the natives accept modern Western ideas of progress and modernity. In the second, the elite in the colony turn to folk and popular cultural forms in order to generate both mass support as well as a new form of identity based on local cultures. Finally, in the third stage, the Western and folk cultural forms are projected as a native nationalism by the elite. The anti-colonial movement is based on the projection of the Western model mixed with the folk elements as a truly 'national' idea. Chatterjee terms nationalism a 'derivative discourse' for this reason: that anti-colonial nationalism is built on the conceptual framework and ideas of progress and history given by the West. (177)

While the Indian anti-colonial nationalism was constructed through such processes, Mizo political consciousness also developed along the same lines in the 1920s. It was the colonial enterprise which engendered the notion of Mizo nationalism very early on through the education provided by the missionaries and the colonial administrators, the exposure to the 'world outside' through the Mizo participation in the two World Wars, and through the exposure to other parts of British India. The newly emerged educated 'elites' began to imagine the Mizo as a nation during the colonial period, and the 'folk elements' relied heavily on Mizo orality. Real political activism was seen, however, only when faced with the

precarity of the Mizo national future in the wake of the British cessation in the 1940s (Malsawmliana 243-244). The nationalism that emerged was in many ways, imagined through the ideals of modernity and modern democratic systems, and the invocation of the indigenous elements – shared history, ethnicity, customs, culture and homeland, all align with the modernist conception of the nation. What best illustrates the politics of Mizo national identity is the claim of pre-colonial 'sovereignty' which runs parallel with the rejection of the traditional Mizo chieftaincy. The two strands of Mizo nationalism in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, both imagined through the modern paradigms, invoking, at varying degrees, an essentialised notion of the Mizo, are seen to imagine the sovereignty of the Mizo differently.

Anderson is not alone in insisting on the element of 'sovereignty,' and it is in the imagination of the nation as sovereign that it lines up squarely with the modern notion of the nation state. According to Ermest Gellner, "nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (*Nations and Nationalism* 1), and that it is "it is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round" (56). In the light of Gellner's statement, the nation is only realised through nationalism, and so the Mizo nation did not, and could not have existed during the colonial period, or after until the creation of limited sovereignty in the form of statehood in 1987. Moreover, the nationalist cause found in the selected texts would be characterised as 'regionalism' and 'seperatism' within the larger process of Indian nation building. Therefore the study turns to the ethnosymbolic approach, focusing on Anthony D Smith's understanding of the "ways in which the nation is imagined." For Smith, "the drama of the nation has three climatic moments, each of them glorious: its golden age, its ultimate national destiny, and the sacrifice of its members" (*Chosen Peoples* 218).

The origins of the Mizo tribes are shrouded in the oral past, and much of what the Mizo tribes know about their history is through the oral tradition. This factor, it appears, greatly facilitates the 're-imagining' project when it comes to Mizo identity and nationalist identity formation. As Said puts it, "reading and writing texts are never neutral activities: there are interests, powers, pleasures entailed no matter how

aesthetic or entertaining the work" (*Culture and Imperialism* 385), for Dokhuma, writing becomes a nationalist project. It is thus significant that the first book he undertook to write had him choose to *re-tell* an oral tale which he claims contains the kernel of Mizo identity – the values and beliefs of 'the ancestors' captured in a tale handed down from generation to generation, and embodied in the character of Fehtea. The romanticised portrait of Fehtea, the *pasaltha*, being held up for future generations "as a tangible representation of *tlawmngaihna"* is Dokhuma's way of continuing the nationalist cause even while being confined within prison walls, aligning himself with what Pramod K Nayar calls the two components of nationalism in literature and the arts:

> (i) It helped writers seek a pre-colonial past that would help them define the nation and
>
> (ii) It projected a destiny, a future shared by and common to all people within the space of that nation. (176)

Thus, to him, the most definitive trait, the essence of Mizo identity and what he wanted to hold up as specimen for the preservation of Mizo cultural identity is the code of *tlawmngaihna*. He does contend that the ethos of the ancestors has become latent, and he expresses his wish that such a code, as exemplified by the character of Fehtea be held up as a concrete manifestation of the ethos behind the practice of *tlawmngaihna*. In his representation of Fehtea's *tlawmngaihna,* Dokhuma portrays Fehtea as a *pasaltha*. *Tlawmngaihna*, as a Mizo code of life characterised by altruism, self-sacrifice, chivalry, valour and humility, is not exclusive to the *pasaltha*, nor is it confined to the males of the society, but also practiced by the young women of the village, according to Dokhuma (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 221-222). It was the code of ethics upon which the village administration was anchored before the whole socio-political structure was disrupted through colonial intervention. In *Tumpangchal nge Saithangpuii*, *pasaltha* is a combination of bravery, perseverance, *tlawmngaihna*, and physical prowess. The endurance, perseverance and steadfastness of Fehtea in the face of social rejection and derision are also qualities that exemplify *tlawmngaihna*.

Pasaltha, in Dokhuma's conception is, however, not 'a relic of the past' and he demonstrates how it has lived on in the Mizo ethos through his portrayal of the protagonists in *Khawhar In* and *Rinawmin.* In *Rinawmin,* and to a lesser degree in *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, the romanticised notion of *pasaltha* resurfaces, and this time not limited to the protagonists but to the hnam *sipai*, the Mizo army of the MNF movement.

> Since the ultimate national destiny can never be known, though many may hope to divine it, all we can be sure of is that it will come about only through the commitment and self-sacrifice of its members, and that is what the nation must continually uphold, remember, and celebrate. What we might term 'destiny through sacrifice', therefore, forms the final sacred foundation of national identity, at once seen and unseen, actively cultivated, and a silent presence. (Smith, *Chosen Peoples* 218)

Thus, the *tlawmngaihna* and the distinction of *pasaltha* are shown, not as immutable, but re-articulated within the changing socio-historical processes. While the impetus for the MNF uprising does deploy the romanticised and mythologised form of an essential Mizo identity, in Dokhuma's articulation, the characters set in the 1960s yet exemplify these 'essences', though in a much different setting. The ultimate self-sacrifice of Rozuala and Sanglura, along with numerous other unnamed *pasaltha* of Mizo nationalism, aligns them with this 'final sacred foundation of national identity", and their deaths link the glories of the *pasaltha* of old, the new *pasaltha*, and the concept of the 'glorious death.'

The study has also focused on the construction of Mizo identity through the dynamics of Mizo orality and highlights how the evolution of the Mizo worldview has shaped the very historiography of the oral past. *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* and *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* have both been considered, and the study identifies the persistence of orality in the post-literate understanding and representation of the past, and also discusses the revisionist tendencies denoted in how Mizos have attempted to record and reclaim the oral past. In committing to writing what had been an oral tale in the case of *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, and the oral tradition of the cultural

history of the Mizo people, the author may be regarded as establishing a continuity from the oral to the written culture. The factors that came to the forefront in this aspect is not only the shift in human thought processes that Walter J. Ong has maintained as the direct outcome of the transition from oral to writing/print culture, but also the centrality of Mizo Christianity in the Mizo consciousness. This is not surprising since the Mizo script and Christianity both originated with the pioneer Welsh missionaries in 1894. The origin of the Mizo tribes is shrouded in the oral past. There were hardly any written record about the Mizo people before the colonial encounter, and in such an absence historians rely heavily on origin myths and oral tradition to trace the origin and the migratory routes of the Mizo tribes. Though there is no consensus, it is generally believed that they probably started their migration from the southern part of modern day China, and had followed a route through the plains of present day Myanmar in several waves and within a timeline spanning centuries before they finally entered the present day Mizoram. The various processes of dispersal along their migration continue to impact the relationships between the tribes even today, and it has formed the basis of some of the issues that inform Mizo identity discourse. There were various tribes and clans of the pre-colonial times, each having their own dialect and cultural practices, dispersed across present day Cachar, Mizoram and Chin hills. In the Mizo imagination, and especially in the articulation of Mizo national identity in both the narratives of the Mizo Union and the MNF in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* this ethnic kinship intersects with the claim of pre-colonial traditional form of territorial sovereignty. The orality of the Mizo is constantly invoked in the re-definition of the Mizo within a modernist, westernised concept of nationalism.

Thus, we may conclude that for Dokhuma, the very process of negotiation between the elements of culture and the political reality becomes Mizo identity – the negotiation with the 'essentialised Mizo' and the 'instability' which rests on the temporality and constructedness of Mizo identity. The seemingly paradoxical nature of these positions sustains the tension which the 'search' for identity is founded on. Since Mizo nationalism, like all nationalisms, is anchored on an imagined community, imagined through Mizo identity which is a "becoming' – a continual

process, Mizo nationalism is also a process – of becoming, and of being through the points of stops and in the trace, in the differential of an ever deferred meaning in Derridean term. One cannot think of the process of becoming as following a linear path towards some essential or permanent Mizo identity, a foreclosure, either by the same logic that one cannot conceive of Mizo identity as having an essence that can be recovered. Thus, the very process of becoming is what being Mizo is all about. Dokhuma's own conception of nationalism confirms this position – he insists on 'nationalism beyond party politics', he at first believed and participated in the MNF movement only to gradually distance himself from the cause as the cause gradually became too "this-worldly" (Smith), he goes on to advocate a nationalism beyond party politics, which is not at odds with the idea of integration within the Indian nation-state. It no longer is grounded on notions of sovereignty, territoriality but rather a fervent ideal based on the ideals of liberal democracy. The independence of the mind rather than political self-determination, not the 'liberation' of a 'this-worldly nation,' but of the spirit, the eternal spirit of the chainless mind. Thus the *search* for an essential past, the *negotiation* of Mizoness through historical, political and cultural moments, and the discourses which aim towards *'finding'* Mizo identity – all these are ways of "becoming" Mizo, of performing Mizoness since there is neither an essential metaphysical substance nor a 'finished product'- a complete, fully realised Mizo identity.

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CHAPTER ONE

AN AUTHOR: JAMES DOKHUMA

This thesis examines the politics of Mizo identity formation in the works of James Dokhuma with specific focus on *Rinawmin* [*Faithfully*] (1970), *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* [*The Wild Gayal or Saithangpuii*] (1981), *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* [*The Mores of the Mizo in Olden Times*] (1991), [1] and *Silaimu Ngaihawm* [*The Beloved Bullet*] (1995). [2] Anchored on the standpoint that identities are constructed within discourse, the discourses which pertain to Mizo identity formation are located within three historical moments – the pre-colonial 'beginnings' in the oral past, the colonial period of negotiation and the post-colonial period of 'Mizo nationalism'. The socio-cultural forces at play in the construction of Mizo identity are examined within their historical specificities and juxtaposed with Dokhuma's concept of Mizo identity and the cultural resources through and within which it is conceptualised in his works. The term 'politics of identity' in this study refers to both the more formal and organised "discourse and action within the public arenas of political and civil society," as well as a broader understanding of "the practices and values that are based on subscription and ascription to various and often overlapping social and political identities" (Hill and Wilson 2-3).

This chapter looks into the life and works of James Dokhuma, highlighting the chief aspects of his works and also gives a brief literature review of works done on the author and his works. To understand his works better, a brief biography of the author is given in this chapter. This is followed by an estimation of some of his most notable works and an exploration of the key concerns of the author. Attempt has been made to contextualise Dokhuma's works within contemporary theoretical frameworks.

Born in Sialsuk village on 15th June 1932 to be the second youngest among thirteen siblings, James Dokhuma hailed from a family of poets/song composers – two of his elder siblings, Romani and Laltanpuia have made their names as folk song composers. He received formal education only till the fifth standard after which he

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[1] All translations of quoted texts and titles of works in this chapter are done by me, unless noted otherwise, for the sole purpose of this study.

[2] *The Beloved Bullet* is a translation of *Silaimu Ngaihawm* by Margaret Ch. Zama.

joined the Indian Army at the tender age of fifteen. He spent four years in the army as Education Instructor during which he acquired proficiency in Hindi and Nepali languages, and also picked up functional English. His army experiences went on to influence and inform several of his literary works. After he left the army in 1952, he went on to work as a Hindi and vernacular teacher in St. Paul's High School in Aizawl in 1954, and then as a Sanitary Inspector under Aijal Community Development Block. In 1960 he once again became a teacher, this time at Hualtu Middle School. He joined the Mizo National Front (MNF) movement in 1961 and was one of the 64 signatories in the declaration of independence in 1966. The movement began as a protest of the Assam government's inaction on the 'mautam famine' crisis in the erstwhile Lushai District, and which escalated into an armed secessionist movement in 1966. After two years of guerrilla life in the underground serving as a Member of Parliament in the underground government, he was critically wounded in an Indian Army ambush and was captured in 1968. He spent the next three years in jail, first at Nowgong Special Jail (1968-69), then in Guwahati District Jail (1969-70), and another year in Aizawl. It was during his incarceration that he started writing his novels. Writing, he believed, was the only way he could continue to serve his political dream of Mizo nationhood. While most biographical records of Dokhuma attribute these three works *Thlahleinga Zan* [*Night of the Full Moon*] (1970), *Rinawmin* [*Faithfully*] (1970) and *Khawhar In* [*House in Mourning*] (1970) as the works written during his incarceration, in his "Introduction" to *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* published in 1980, he writes that this work is the first book that he had completed since he could not continue to write *Thla Hleinga Zan* (as it had been seized by the prison authorities). It would therefore be safe to assume that he had actually written four novels during his time in prison. Apart from these, his *Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna* [*Dictionary of Archaic and Idiomatic Terms*], published in 1981, also had its beginnings during his incarceration.

After his release in 21 June 1971, while he did not go back to join the underground movement, he still held on to his political purpose. He eventually joined the newly formed People's Convention Party (P.C.) in 1975, holding the post of a Joint Secretary in the party. In 1978 he became the Secretary in P.C. 'B', a

breakaway faction of People's Convention Party. For many years after this, he did not actively participate in any political activity, but in 1998, he served as the Vice President of the Zoram Nationalist Party after which he retired from his political career. During this period he continued to write and publish his works, and also contributed numerous essays and articles to periodicals, magazines, and souvenirs. In 1973, while working as a teacher in Lungdar 'E' High School, he started writing *Zoram Kohhran Tualto Chanchin* [*Indigenous Churches of Mizoram*] (1975), a historical account of the indigenous Christian movements in Mizoram. During this same period, *Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna,* his dictionary of archaic and idiomatic terms which he had finished compiling after many years of hardwork unfortunately perished in a fire. He had to start all over again, but was finally able to publish it in 1981. It has remained a great contribution to Mizo language studies, and it has earned him the title of 'Father of Mizo Lexicography'. The numerous awards he had received includes the Padma Shri Award for his contribution to literature in 1985 by the Government of India, the Bhasa Samman in 1995 by Sahitya Akademi, Lelte Weekly's Best Writer Award in 1986, 1988, and 1991, an Academy Award by Mizo Academy of Letters in 1983, and an honorary Doctorate from The International University, California in 1997. Apart from these, he had also received several commendations for his contribution to wildlife preservation.

He was one of the founders of Mizo Writers' Association, and for many years held the post of Vice President in the association, was a Senior Advisor to ZOPPEN (Zo Poets, Playwrights, Essayists and Novelists) Club for ten years, and a member of Mizo Academy of Letters for many years. He had presented numerous seminar papers and delivered lectures in educational institutions, and had also given talks in All India Radio and Doordarshan. Several of his works had been and are still being included in courses in school, college and university levels. Most of Dokhuma's biographies found in electronic and print media have credited him as having published 42 books, but there is no exact record of the number of his essays and articles that he had contributed to magazines, souvenirs and collections/anthologies. Moreover, most of his poems had not been compiled and published, and the exact number of poems written by him cannot be ascertained. According to

mizoarchive.wordpress.com, Dokhuma had written some 450-500 essays, and had composed 42 poems out of which 36 had been published. Out of the 42 books published by him, thirteen are novels, four dramas, three biographies, a few historical accounts, a dictionary, a study on Mizo language usage, religious treatises, a collection of essays, educational books, and miscellaneous others. His literary output is numerous as well as diverse, and such work like *Chawngkhum Dan Tlang Huat Loh* cannot be put into categorisation in terms of genre since this work, though taking the form of a drama with characters and dialogues, is in actuality a collection of anecdotes shared by each characters. The title, "Chawngkhum Dan Tlang Huat Loh" is derived from an idiomatic phrase which roughly translates to "done in the manner of Chawngkhuma's antics against which no one takes offence," and is used to denote no offence intended. Chawngkhuma was a humorous man of yore.

As mentioned earlier, Dokhuma began writing while being held a political prisoner for his role in the armed Mizo National Front movement. His literary production is deeply rooted in his political beliefs and ideals. In his autobiographical essay, "Ka Zalenna*,"* ["My Freedom"] he recounts how he took four bullets – one on his leg, two in his mid-torso and one that shattered his arm, he describes how he called on God with all his heart. He had lain critically wounded in the jungle for two more days before he was finally captured by the Indian Army. In the initial days, he was interrogated and was kept in solitary confinement in a small dark room with his wounds festering. He had not eaten for days before his capture, and he was left to continue to starve for several more days. All the while, however, he refused to succumb although he was fully aware of the perils he was steeped in. Having lost all hope, he had made peace with the idea of death, and this bolstered his resolve to remain loyal to his beliefs. Empowered by the knowledge that the power over life and death solely rests with the supreme God, he writes:

> Lungngaihna puk thim chu ka hring lam taksa tan riahbuk mah ni se, ka ngaihtuahna erawh chu tu ma dipdal loh leh tu khaw tihduhdah phak mai lohvin a duh duh a kawm lawr a. A duh leh Pulpit tlangah Gospel Sermon a sawi a, a chang leh *Political Platform* atangin a duh zawng a sep rawtui thul nen. Chhun khaw eng lah chuan zah pahna min siamsak chuang lo va, zan

> khaw thim lahin eng mah min hliah chuang azeng a ni bawk hek lo. Ka taksa chu retheihna puk chhiaah dahin a awm ngei tak e. Thihna kawngka pawh an hawng huai mai, mahse chuta luh zawng ka zalenna piah lama thuneitu thupek chauh lo chuan luh thian a ni lo.
>
> Although my corporeal existence lies confined within the dark pit of gloom, my mind roams free and unfettered, beyond any oppressive hand. At times it preaches the Gospel from pulpits, and at other times orating at length on political platforms, neither the light of day nor the darkness of night impinges the flight of my thoughts and imaginations. While my body lies rotting in captivity, and though the gate of death gapes wide before me, the final authority over my life rests only with the one who transcends the limits of my freedom. (*Rilru Far Chhuak* [*Trickles of Thoughts*] 72)

This indomitable spirit is epitomised in his oft quoted lines from Byron, and with which he opens the essay *"*Ka Zalenna*"*:

> Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind!
>
> Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art.
>
> \- Lord Byron

Like the 'prisoner of Chillon,' his mind refused to succumb although his body was in fetters. Dokhuma was inspired to take up the pen when he saw the above quoted lines scribbled on the walls of 'Cell No. 1' at Gauhati District Jail in which he eventually began his writing career, according to R. Zamawia (619). The ideals of freedom that sustained Dokhuma's spirit are intrinsic to his ideal of what he termed '*Hnam*[3] *Politics'* which, he explains, is 'Nationalism' which is above and beyond partisan politics - "Party chung lama hnam Politics (Nationalism) –ah zawk chuan kan rilru chu a awm reng a" ("My mind was preoccupied with nationalism"; *Tawng Un*

[3] *Hnam* - clan, tribe, nation, nationality, race. *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* (henceforth *DLL)* 169.

Hrilhfiahna iv). He believes that '*Hnam Politics'* must necessarily ensure four things:

> 1. A ramri sahhual chhung a chiangin tichhe theitu lakah a veng him tur a ni.
>
> 2. Ram mipui hmasawnna a ngaihtuah tur a ni.
>
> 3. A ram mipui sakhua a veng him tur a ni.
>
> 4. Hnam nunphung leh zia (identity) a vawng nung (survive) reng tur a ni si a.
>
> 1. The one who holds such political power] should have thorough knowledge on the territorial boundaries and demarcations, and should safeguard the same from external aggressions.
>
> 2 He/she should ensure the progress and welfare of the people.
>
> 3. He/she should safeguard the religion of the people.
>
> 4. He/she should ensure the survival of the cultural identity. (*Mizo Tawng Kalphung* [*Usage of Mizo Language*] 1)

Thus Dokhuma's '*Hnam Politics'* is Mizo *hnam* nationalism which centres on four main aspects – territory, progress and welfare, religion and cultural identity. In the same essay, he goes on to declare his purpose in writing as a political project. Of the four main concerns of '*Hnam Politics',* he believes that he can make the most contribution towards the preservation and protection of Mizo identity, the other three being out of bounds for someone without political power, through his writings:

> Heng Politics atanga ram leh hnam humhalhna chawi kan tur pali zingah hian thuneitu ka nih loh pawha ka tangkai ve ber theihna tur ka ngaihtuahin 'hnam nunphung lehzia' humhim turin tha tlem ka thawh thei tih ka hria a. Chuvangin, keima chhanah (sanah) ni lovin, ka tu leh fate ka hnutchhiah ang a, eng 'ro' khawm tur nge ka neih ang tih ka ngaihtuah a.

> Chu avang chauh zawk chuan Pathianin 'talent' te tak te min pek lehkha ziak lam hi kan hnam tan ka tih theih sang ber niin ka hria a.
>
> From the four fundamental tenets of the preservation/protection of the land and the tribes/the nation entrenched in the idea of politics, I believe that in my capacity, I can best contribute to the preservation of cultural identity. And so it led me to the consideration of what legacy I could leave behind, not for myself but for my future generations.
>
> Thus I came to the conclusion that my greatest contribution towards the preservation of our cultural identity would be to put to use my God-given literary talent, however meagre it may be. (1)

The quoted lines appear in one of his last published works *Mizo Tawng Kalphung* in 2005. Significantly, it reiterates the reason behind his decision to start writing as expressed in the first works ever written by him, and also throughout his career. Thus, for Dokhuma, writing is first and foremost, political activism towards the cause of 'Mizo Nationalism'. Yet in order to understand the ways in which this nationalism is 'imagined' and how it is inextricably entrenched within the construction of Mizo identity in his works, one needs to look into the socio-political and historical context. In most of his works is found this explicit authorial intention, and although the genres, subject-matters, and treatments of his works are diverse, they all cater to at least one of what he terms "*hnam nunna lungphum*" ("foundations for the survival of the nation") – territory, religion, language, and culture and tradition (*Rilru Far Chhuak* 207).

All of his works are written in Mizo language which has come to be the dominant language of the *Zohnahthlak*[4] in the twentieth century. His mastery of the Mizo language has always distinguished Dokhuma's works from other Mizo writers' even without considering his linguistic works, but when these are taken into consideration, he reigns supreme in the field of Mizo lexicography and semantics.

[4] *Zohnahthlak* – An ethnonym used to denote all the *Zo* tribes, and is considered to be more inclusive than the term *Mizo* (Scholar's input).

His *Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna*, the fruit of years of labour as stated before, and his *Notes on Mizo Idioms and Phrases* (1983) have been meticulously compiled to cover the extensive idioms and phrases of the Mizo language. *Mizo Tawng Kalphung* (2006) is a book dealing with the nuances of the Mizo language, its peculiarities, some of its grammatical aspects, the etymology of words, the changes of meaning and the growth of vocabulary. *Mak leh Mak* [*Wonder and Wonder*] (1995) also falls under this category on account of it being the author's reflection on the wonderful nature of Mizo language which he compares to one of the 'Wonders of the world' – the Great Pyramid. The title 'Mak leh Mak' therefore means 'a comparison between one Wonder with another Wonder'. Language, according to Benedict Anderson, has played a major role in the formation of nations, and although he contends that it is not a requisite for nationalism he has also shown the unifying power of a common language:

> What the eye is to the lover - that particular eye he or she is born with – language – whatever language history has made his or her mother tongue – is to the patriot. Through that language, encountered at mother's knee and parted with only at the grave, pasts are restored, fellowships are imagined, and futures dreamed. (*Imagined Communities* 154)

Language has played, and continues to play, a pivotal role in the construction of Mizo identity and nationalism in fundamental ways. Several of the different tribes that have now come to collectively call themselves 'Mizo' had their own dialects in the past. While some of them still do speak their own dialects, *Mizo ṭawng* (Mizo language) from the Lusei[5] dialect *Duhlian*[6] has become the *lingua franca* of all such

[5] *Lusei* – n. the name from which the English word 'Lushai' is derived; but, whereas we English-speaking people apply 'Lushai' to the whole tribe, the tribesmen themselves apply Lusei to only the upper classes, and speak of the lower classes as Lutawi ('Longheads' and 'Shortheads' respectively.) (*DLL* 304). While Lorrain has used the term 'upper classes,' it may be more appropriate to call them the 'ruling tribe' or the 'dominant tribe' of a majority of the region when the British arrived, since there were also areas in which other tribes ruled (Scholar's input).

[6] *Duhlian* - A name given to the upper classes or clans in the *Lushai* Hills and to the dialect they speak – which is regarded as the purest form of the *Lushai* language (*DLL* 118).

tribes, ensuring a sense of community. Moreover, Mizo national consciousness has its origins in print and the language of print. Furthermore, the fear of linguistic assimilation was one of the expressed grounds for the Declaration of Independence made by the Mizo National Front in 1966. Thus, understandably Dokhuma, drawing links between culture, religion and language, warns against the appropriation of other cultures and religions even though he has nothing against learning other languages in itself (*Rilru Far Chhuak* 208-209). Sharing Stuart Hall's view that "language is central to meaning and culture and has always been regarded as the key repository of cultural values and meanings" (*Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* 1), he equates the survival of Mizo language to Mizo identity and to this end he warns against mass borrowings from other languages as well – "Mahni hnam tawng humhalh lote hnam chanvo chu hnam ral a ni lo thei si lo" ("A culture that fails to preserve its language is bound for extinction"; *Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna* xi).

The titles of a few of his works are in English, and other languages. There had been a trend of using English words and phrases for titles in Mizo literature, especially in Mizo novels since the 1980s, perhaps in part influenced by the popularity of the translations of western novels into Mizo, and partly influenced by the introduction of what Zama and Vanchiau categorise as 'pulp fiction' to the Mizo readers through the works of Joe Ngurdawla with titles like *Dirty Broadway, High Time in Paris, Home in Texas, and Meet Me in Texas Moonlight.* With regards to these 'pulp fictions', Zama and Vanchiau, in their book *After Decades of Silence: Voices from Mizoram,* briefly mention an interesting point:

> The titles themselves are a strong pointer of the changing times such as the growing influence of Western popular culture, and so occupies a significance{sic} place in the evolution and growth of Mizo fiction under different trends and influences. (34)

However this trend may also be regarded as testament of a colonial hangover as seen in the continued infatuation of the Mizo people with the *Sap*[7] – the white people, and their culture and language. It should be remembered that apart from this being the result of globalisation, there are several other local factors at play in the popularity of such narratives. The period saw a relatively peaceful period and literary production resumed at a remarkable rate after the *Rambuai*[8] years had almost brought literary production to a standstill. The growth of literacy and the promotion of reading by the Social Education Wing's publications were factors that paved the way for the emergence of a reading public highly receptive to secular literature. It was during this period – starting from the late seventies that most of Dokhuma's novels made their appearance, including the ones written much earlier.

In the case of Dokhuma, it is evident that he had not chosen English or foreign titles only to follow the trend since only three of his forty-two published books - *Goodbye Lushai Brigade* (1983), *Kimoto Syonora* (1984) and *Lonesome Cowboy* (1990), and only a few of his numerous essays bear titles in foreign languages. The third one in the list – *Lonesome Cowboy*, seems to be where Dokhuma follows the trends in Mizo popular literature, with characters fashioned after the western novels set in the 'wild west.' It is the only work where the author has indulged in such a trend - it appears to be out of character with the author himself, and unsurprisingly, is not one of his better known works.

Goodbye Lushai Brigade is set against the backdrop of World War II, where the "Lushai Brigade" was "a hastily improvised brigade" created by the British "to prevent an enemy advance through the Lushai Hills to Silchar to Chittagong." [9] The majority of the book is written in the form of an autobiography by the fictional character Major Mark Martin who was once part of the Lushai Brigade. The title,

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[7] *Sap* - a sahib, a white man, a government or other official. (*DLL* 404)

[8] *Rambuai* – literally, 'troubled land', *Rambuai* is most commonly used to denote the peak period of conflict in Mizoram from 1966 to 1969 (Scholar's input)

[9] "The Lushai Brigade," *The Soldier's Burden,* http://www.kaiserscross.com/304501/617322.html.

therefore, reflects the protagonist's own story in his own language. Likewise in *Kimoto Syonora,* the story revolves around the protagonist's unconventional love affair with a Japanese girl named Kimoto during WWII. Instead of using the usual spelling of 'sayonara' which is the Japanese term for goodbye, Dokhuma uses 'Syonora' to mean the same. It should also be pointed out that while the works of Ngurdawla who introduced "pulp fiction" in 1977 (Zama and Vanchiau 34), like a few others who joined the bandwagon, feature only white characters in their works, Dokhuma's foreign characters are mostly situated within the Mizo ethos. In fact, it is in such works that the postcoloniality of Dokhuma is most evident. In the former is portrayed the character of Maj. Mark Martin and the story of how he met and fell in love with a Mizo girl while stationed in the Lushai Brigade, and how the relationship was embroiled in the nuances of the complex relationship between the white rulers and the missionaries with the native Mizo people. Thus, it examines several issues regarding the Mizo colonial experience. The latter, though partly set in Singapore, deals mainly with the Mizo prisoners of war during the Second World War, and again, may be seen as an encounter between two cultures – Japanese and Mizo.

The two works mentioned earlier – *Goodbye, Lushai Brigade* and *Kimoto Syonora,* along with the novels *Thlahleinga Zan* (1970) and *Irrawaddy Lui Kamah* [*By the Banks of the River Irrawaddy*] (1982) are classified as "World War Fiction" by Zama and Vanchiau. The two World Wars, spanning continents and in which the British Empire took centrestage, had impacted the Mizo community in many ways. The participation of Mizo people in the service of the British army in both the wars as well as the proximity of World War II to Mizo inhabited regions had profound impact upon the Mizo communities. According to Zama and Vanchiau, the Mizos "participative role and exposure gained by them through active service during both World Wars I & II" made a big contribution "to the change in outlook, mindset and worldview of the Mizo during the 1st half of the 20th century," and "facilitated the Mizo into moving out of his insular existence into a world of other cultures and way of life, which in turn, went a long way into developing a competitive mind and spirit and the urge to be at par with people of other nations" (23-24). The influence was not lost on Dokhuma who, at the young age of fifteen, enlisted in the Indian Army and

served for more than four years, as evidenced in his fondness for such themes. His own experiences in the army and in the guerrilla movement of the MNF in the sixties indeed inform much of these works. *Thlahleinga Zan* was one of the first works written by him during his political incarceration in the late sixties, but succumbing to the constant request for a sequel, he wrote *Thlahleinga Zan* Part-II which was published in 1999. These two books have now been compiled and published as a single work. The first part is set in the World War II era and focuses on the relationship between two young lovers whose dreams of 'a happily ever after' are thwarted by the capture and imprisonment of the protagonist by the Japanese Imperial Army. Written decades later, the sequel fulfils the reading public's wish of a reunion between the original protagonists through the use of twists of fate that appear too contrived at times. This work abounds in archaisms and the use of idiomatic phrases, and while this may be regarded as evidence of Dokhuma's flair for the Mizo language, the style tends to hamper the flow in many instances. *Irrawady Lui Kamah* is set in Burma during World World II where the protagonist, Thanzinga who is part of the Indian Army Medical Corps met a Burmese girl, Ma Thui while stationed there. This is another story of unrequited love due to the circumstances brought about by war. The protagonist, in this story too, is captured and imprisoned in Singapore by the Japanese Army. The 'loyalty' of the Mizo prisoners to the British colonial power is brought out in their deliberations on and eventual rejection of joining Subash Chandra Bose in the fight for India's independence. This work may also thus be viewed as a document of the complex nature of the Mizo colonial experience.

Apart from these four novels based on the World Wars, several of his other works are also related to wars. *Hmangaihna Thuchah* [*A Message of Love*] (1982) is set amidst the Bangladesh war of 1971. *Rinawmin* (1970) and *Silaimu Ngaihawm* (1995) are meanwhile set within the Mizo National Movement. *Rinawmin* tells the story of a young lad, Rozuala who has joined the Mizo nationalist movement as a member of the guerrilla underground, and who is subsequently killed by the '*Vai sipai*' or the Indian Army personnel. It is a tragedy of betrayal, and it depicts the precarious situations faced not only by the warring sides but also by the civilians caught between the crossfire literally and figuratively. *Silaimu Ngaihawm* has as its

protagonist a woman who has fallen in love with a soldier of the Mizo nationalist movement who also gets killed in an encounter with the Indian Army. Written decades after the actual movement in which the author himself had taken a part, *Silaimu Ngaihawm* may be regarded as a hindsight account of the political scenario of the *rambuai* years. It is remarkable in its representation of the various opinions regarding the movement.

Some of his non-fiction works like *Singapore a Mizo Sal Tangte* [*Mizo Prisoners in Singapore*] (2002) and *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose* (1993) may also be included among his World War based works since they also are accounts of events relating to the Second World War. The former is an account of the Mizo people held as prisoners of war in Singapore by the Japanese Imperial Army, their solidarity despite the hardships they faced, and their rejection of the offer of joining the Indian National Army (INA) headed by Subhas Chandra Bose. The latter is a biography of the Indian freedom fighter Subhas Chandra Bose who attempted to overthrow the British empire's rule in India with the help of the Nazi Germany-Japanese alliance.

Hmangaihna Thuchah, as mentioned before, has as its backdrop the Bangladesh War of the early seventies, which is also known as the Bangladesh Liberation War since it is a war of independence from Pakistan. This war is incidentally bound up with the Mizo nationalist movement at certain points since the Mizo National Army, after being declared 'illegal' by the Indian Government following the armed uprising in 1966, were given asylum by the pre-Independent Government of East Pakistan. The main plot centres on a love triangle, with the protagonist, Lalthanpuia ending up having to choose between a Marathi Christian girl, Sarah Bibi and a fellow Mizo girl, Lalrammawii.

It is interesting to note that most of Dokhuma's war based novels, with the exception of those based on the Mizo national movement, feature either inter-racial or inter-ethnic relationships and that these relationships never work out in the end. While most of Dokhuma's novels have love as their main theme, and not all of them have happy endings, it is still noteworthy that whenever he deals with inter-racial or inter-communal relationships they are never allowed any conjugal union. In his

article, "James Dokhuma Novel-a a Changtute Inneih Loh Chhan" ["Why there is no marriage between the main characters in James Dokhuma's novels"], R Lallianzuala quotes Dokhuma's reply to the question as to why none of the relationships between the Mizo and Non-Mizo characters ended in marriage:

> Mizo leh hnam dang hi kan inngaizawng ang, Mizo nula hi sap ngaihzawn tlak kan ni ve; Mizo tlangvalte pawhin Vai nula te, Kawl nula leh Japan nula te pawh kan ngaizawng ve phak ngang mai. Chutih rual erawh chuan Mizo leh Mizo lo chu a neih em hi chu kan innei tur a ni dawn em ni ka ti deuh a ni.
>
> There would be times when Mizos would form relationships with non-Mizos. Mizo girls are worthy of *Sap*'s attention; Mizo men are not beneath the affections of the *Vai*[10] or Burmese or Japanese girls either. However, I feel that it should not be stretched to the extent of marriage. (91)

His attitude reflects his views on the sanctity of marriage, his standpoint on the question of ethnic identity and the idea of belonging-ness, and it also exposes the double-standard that is prevalent, especially among the men folk, regarding relationships. This attitude becomes more apparent in *Hmangaihna Thuchah* where the protagonist, Lalthanpuia ends up choosing Lalrammawii, a Mizo girl whom he had briefly courted as a young man before he left his village to join the navy. He meets Sarah Bibi, a Marathi Christian girl, while working in the Indian navy. While Sarah Bibi has finished her Masters and is currently pursuing a Ph.D in Notre Dame University in the United States, Lalremmawii is a local girl in Chhawrtui village with no such prospects. The protagonist's choice, made after much consideration, is not based on financial prospects in which case Sarah Bibi has a much higher leverage, nor is it on the grounds of differences in religious beliefs since the issue does not arise. It is not even on the question of who he loves more. It all boils down to the question of shared ethnic identity – the fact that Lalremmawii is a fellow Mizo girl is what clinched the deal for Lalthanpuia. Though the protagonist has had exposure to

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[10] *Vai* – natives from the plains of India (Scholar's input).

other cultures, and while the nature of his profession has removed him from his 'home', his rootedness in the idea of Mizo identity comes to the fore, considering shared background, homeland, and a common language as the deciding factors for a permanent union. Marriage, with its implication of permanence, is reserved for those who 'belong' together and not with the 'other'.

This process of other-ing of the *Vai* has been examined in Joy L.K. Pachuau's *Being Mizo* and David Vumlallian Zou's "*Vai* Phobia to Raj Nostalgia: *Sahibs*, Chiefs and Commoners in Colonial Lushai Hills." The British colonial policy was being played out in the initial period of the colonial encounter in which the *Sap* – the British administrators emerged as the benevolent civilising force while the *Vai*, although they themselves were subjects of the British Raj, were positioned as the 'Other'. Since this aspect is dealt with in more detail elsewhere in the chapter, suffice it to say that *Hmangaihna Thuchah*, where the relationship is between a Mizo and a *Vai*, is the only novel dealing with inter-racial/communal relationship where the separation of the lovers is a result of the deliberate choice of the protagonist, and also the only one where the protagonist is put in a position where he has to choose between a Mizo and a *hnam dang*[11].

Maintaining the racial divide, however, is not confined to the Mizo alone though. In *Goodbye, Lushai Brigade*, we have the *Sap* preventing the marriage between the protagonist Mark Martin and his beloved Mizo girl. In Lallianzuala's article mentioned earlier, where he attempts to address the question of the author's disapproval of mixed marriages, he concludes that if Dokhuma had really wanted to let the lovers marry he would have contrived the story in such a way that they would eventually end up together against all odds as he had done in his novel *Thlahleinga Zan*, but had chosen instead to use various eventualities of war as devices to prevent their union in all the World War novels including *Goodbye Lushai Brigade*, and the choice of Mizo-ness in *Hmangaihna Thuchah*. What Lallianzuala has overlooked is the involvement of *Sap* in the events that lead to the separation of the lovers in

[11] *Hnam dang* – another clan, tribe, nation, or race; a person belonging to another clan, tribe, nation, or race; a foreigner.

Goodbye Lushai Brigade, and also Dokhuma's critique of the attitudes of the *Sap* and the *Zosap*[12] in the "Preface."

Here Dokhuma writes:

> A thawnthu-in a tum ber chu- Mizo nulate hi 'Sap" tia kan chhoh en thin te tan pawh iaiawm an nih lohzia leh neih tlak an nih tho bakah 'Sapho indah sanzia, kan Zosapte meuh pawh khan Pathian Thu chu min duhsak hle mah se, hnam nihna lamah min hmuhsit si-zia a tarlang a. Kan tan Missionary te kha Pathian thu lamah fakawm em em mah se, nupui pasala innei meuh tura mi an hnualsuat si dan te pawh ka thailang tel bawk a ni.
>
> What the story tries to show is mainly that the Mizo *nulate* (young girls of marriageable age) are worthy of even the *Sap* whom we regard as superior to us, and at the same time how the *Sap* considered themselves as our superiors. Even the *Zosap* (the white missionaries in Mizoram), in spite of their missionary zeal were inherently racist. Thus I have also highlighted the fact that the missionaries, although highly commendable for their evangelizing mission, displayed their snobbery and racial prejudice when it comes to the matter of inter-racial marriage between them and us. (5)

What is remarkable with this statement and his decision to depict even the *Zosap* in this light is that this work was published in 1983, much before postcolonialism had reached the Mizo masses. He has pointed out the fact that the *Sap* regarded themselves as superior to the local people. This involves not just the political issue of coloniser/colonised subjects, but also the 'Christianity mission' and the 'civilising' agenda for which the 'superior status' of the 'masters' had to be maintained. It also highlights the duality involved in the Mizos' attitude towards the colonial rule – gratefulness for the Gospel and the 'civilising mission' on the one hand, and the realisation that the same had a lasting impact in the way the Mizo people have come to view themselves on the other hand. The relationship between

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[12] *Zosap* – the white missionaries were referred to as *zosap,* while all white Europeans are included in *sap* (Scholar's input).

the coloniser and the colonial subject has garnered various theories and concepts within colonial and postcolonial discourse. From Fanon's "Having judged, condemned, abandoned his cultural forms, his language, his food habits, his sexual behavior, his way of sitting down, of resting, of laughing, of enjoying himself, the oppressed flings himself upon the imposed culture with the desperation of a drowning man" (*Toward the African Revolution* 39), to describe the colonised subject's lack of agency to resist the colonial transformative forces, to Edward Said's critique of the coloniser's rationale in *Orientalism* - "Every single empire in its official discourse has said that it is not like all the others, that its circumstances are special, that it has a mission to enlighten, civilise, bring order and democracy, and that it uses force only as a last resort. And, sadder still, there always is a chorus of willing intellectuals to say calming words about benign or altruistic empires, as if one shouldn't trust the evidence of one's eyes watching the destruction and the misery and death brought by the latest mission civilizatrice" (xvi), the postcolonial discourse, though useful to some extent in the decolonising project, does not always fit neatly when it comes to the Mizo colonial experience and its aftermath.

The Mizo colonial experience falls under "the cross follows the flag" tradition (Vanlalchhuanawma 97), and compared to other colonial experiences, the occupation of Mizo lands was not inherently part of the British economic expantionist agenda, and the missionaries 'civilising agenda' as well as the British administrative policies were not always viewed as 'dehumanising' to the Mizo colonial subjects altogether. Margaret L Pachuau clearly denotes the inadequacy of a sweeping postcolonial discourse to address Mizo postcoloniality when she says that "[t]he arguments of many post-colonial theorists fail to convince many Mizos, primarily on account of their refusal to address adequately the ideological stance between the histories of the subject and those of the histories of subjection" (191).

The fact that Dokhuma had chosen to deal with this theme and highlighting the duplicity regarding the *Sap*'s attitude towards the Mizos, places him as one of the first Mizo novelists to venture into an engagement with the issues of Mizo postcoloniality. In his depiction of the 'attitudes' of the *Zosap*, he exposes the 'superior race' mentality of the missionaries who had become the facilitators of the

colonial enterprise through their introduction of Christianity and their ‘civilising mission’. It should be pointed out that the Mizo people’s perception of the ‘whites’ itself is inherently complex. They did indeed make certain distinctions between the British administrators and the missionaries, evident from the terms they designated to them, as seen in the earlier quoted passages – *Sap* representing not only the British administrators but also all ‘whites’ including the missionaries, while the missionaries themselves were referred to as *Zosap.* The term *Sap* is derived from the Hindi term ‘Sahib’ which means ‘Sir’ or ‘Master’, and was used in colonial India invariably to address the male Europeans. Thus the term itself connotes the colonial subjects’ acceptance of the ‘superior’ position of the Europeans. Similarly, with the Mizo colonial subjects, the *Sap* represents position of power, and although the term was used to refer to the ‘masters’ who had come to subjugate them, it came to be applied by way of extension, to all people of Caucasian descent and thus acquired racial colouring. The missionaries were called the *Zosap*, a combination of the terms “Zo” by which the Mizo tribes had ascribed themselves, and *Sap.* Thus *Zosap* does not only denote a distinction based on the perceived difference in terms of role and position between the *Sap* within their land, but more significantly, the level of acceptance by the colonial Mizo people. As the harbingers of the good news, the *Zosap* were regarded as inherently benevolent. Thus, even Dokhuma’s critique of the *Zosap’*s attitude towards an inter-racial marriage between the *Sap* soldier and a Mizo girl evinces an expectation of lesser discrimination from them. The critique becomes more succinct as we look in the actual story. The interesting point is that the Mizo people are described through the *Sap*’s perspective, as imagined by the author. Yet the author portrays the protagonist as someone who has a deeper understanding of the native Mizo mentality, unlike most of the colonial ethnographic writings. The *Sap* in this novel is a soldier of the British Army, positioned in the Lushai Hills on account of the War. The work may thus be viewed as a project of ‘writing back’ where the author employs the *Sap* narrator to serve as the mouthpiece of the author’s own reconsideration of the *Sap* - Mizo relationship. The narrator explains the colonial subject’s colonial mentality in these lines:

...hnam thilah mi an chung en em avangin Sap nupui nih chu an tan chuan a ropui a. Chu avang chuan a bum duhtu tan chuan bum pawh an har lo viau mai thei reng ang. Sapho chuan 'sakhua' an pe a, 'sawrkar' an siamsak bawk a. Tisa leh thlaraua a ropui ber ber petu chu 'Sap' an tithe chu kan nih miau avang chuan mi an ngaisang pawh chu a mawh lo ve.

As they viewed us as racially superior to them, to become a wife to a *Sap* would be regarded as a great fortune. They would have been easy prey for those who wanted to lead them on (into thinking that the *Sap* suitor would have marital intentions). The *Sap* gave them their religion and created for them a form of governance. The two greatest gifts in worldly and spiritual terms were given to them by the *Sap,* and thus their reverence of us is not totally unjustified. (45)

The *Sap* narrator seems to 'own' the *Sap'*s benevolence in his attempt to rationalise the apprehension of the girl and her family, yet there is a certain ironic tone to this statement as he himself vehemently critiques the *Zosap* for their objection to his marriage:

An thu kalpui dan lah chu Kohhran thil pawh ni tawh lovin 'hnam' thil a nih tlat tawh avangin min daltu ber pawh Sawrkar Sap lam an ni ta bawk si chu a luhaithlaka chu a ni. Amaherawhchu, heng thila a bul tumtu ber chu Zosap-ho an nih avangin Kohhran chu a mawhchhiat loh theih phei zawng a ni lo. Mahse ka nupui neih tum thila chuti taka Sawrkara hotu Mingo-ho leh sipai lam sap an inrawlhna chhan ber chu Zosap-ho thiltih a nih miau avangin an Pathian thu awih dan chu mak ka ti a. Chu'ng Zosapte chu kristianna leh kohhran rawngbawlna lamah phei chuan fakawm ka tiin ropui pawh ka ti a, mahse hnam thilah erawh chu fakawm ka ti thei mawlh lo thung.

As the matter had escalated to become an issue of *hnam* – race, ethnicity, nationality, and no longer confined to that of the Church, it resulted in the administrative *Sap*'s objection to my plans much my distress. Yet the blame sat squarely on the Church since the whole problem originated with the *Zosap* themselves. Since the actual instigators behind the opposition to my marriage

from the white civil administrators and the army were indeed the *Zosap*, I found it hard to comprehend the way they professed to serve God. I, of course greatly commend what they had done in their mission through the Church, but when it came to the question of *hnam*, I could not find anything to commend them on. (66-67)

Dokhuma shows, on the one hand, the confluence of 'the white man's power' - the British administrators and the evangelising mission exerting their power in the Lushai Hills, and at the same time, points out the inadequacy of the new Christian faith to overcome the segregative tendency of nationalism. However, while pointing out the colonial mentality of the Mizo's adoration of the *Sap,* he becomes complicit in that he 'tries to show that the Mizo girls are *worthy* of the *Sap's* affection since the question of 'worthiness' would not arise if the *Sap* were not regarded as superior to the Mizo people. The question of *hnam* had always been a core concern for Dokhuma in the works he had written earlier, and here in *Goodbye Lushai Brigade* is where we see what may be regarded as his 'answer' to the polarising tendencies of nationalism, through Major Mark Martin:

> Vaivuta siam theuh theuh, lei duma siam leh lei vara siam kan inhlut hleina tur ka hre ve phak lo a ni ber mai.
>
> Created equally from dust, I cannot comprehend how the colour of the dust – whether black or white, should determine our worth. (68)

By the time Dokhuma came to write *Goodbye Lushai Brigade* in 1983, he had come to a period where his concern regarding *hnam* has shifted to finding a way for peaceful co-existence without totally obliterating the sameness/difference dichotomy which engenders identity markers for different *hnam*, through the acceptance of the common worth of man on the basis of being equally created by God. In 1982, the same sentiment is reiterated in his radio talk on "Hnam Inpumkhatna" ("National Integration" reproduced in *Rilru Far Chhuak* 114-119) where he advocates mutual respect and regard as the answer to not only the integration of tribes within a nation, but of mankind itself, and he cites Hitler's Nazism as an example of the perils of subscribing to an ideology based on the 'superiority' of certain groups over others.

It is within Dokhuma's conviction in equality and the common worth of man that his notion of Mizo nationalism is situated. Even though he has not yet reached this reconciliatory position, the foundations of his conception of nationalism remains the same, and it finds its explicit articulation in works like *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm*. The concept of 'Nation' in how it has come to be understood today has its roots in the French revolution, according to Anthony D Smith:

> Historians may differ over the exact moment of nationalism's birth, but social scientists are clear: nationalism is a modern movement and ideology, which emerged in the latter half of the eighteenth century in Western Europe and America, and which, after its apogee in two world wars, is now beginning to decline and give way to global forces which transcend the boundaries of nation-states. (*Nationalism and Modernism* 1)

While he accepts that 'nationalism' is a modern movement and ideology, through his ethno-symbolic approach, Smith points out that the pre-modern origins of nations to what he termed 'ethnie' – an ethnic community which is "a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members" (*Ethnic Origins* 32). In order to understand Mizo nationalism, the constructedness as well as its foundation in an *ethnie* needs to be taken into account. Moreover, the complex question of inclusion and exclusion pertaining to Indian nationalism and nation-state needs to be addressed as well. Even as the nationalism of postcolonial states have their beginnings constructed through or in resistance to colonial powers, Mizo nationalism continues to be created through its relation to the independent Indian state and its process of nation-building.

Several of his works fall under the ethnographic writing category, and in them we have Dokhuma in the role of the oral knowledge keeper. The rich oral culture of the Mizo tribes is manifested in much of his writings, and specifically more so in his works dealing directly with the oral past. *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* (1992) is a 'record' of the customs and traditions of the pre-Christianity society of the Mizo people. In it, the author meticulously compiles the traditional belief system

and rituals, the customs and traditions, the values and the administrations of village life. Relying heavily on oral transmission, this work may be seen as an attempt to preserve the vestiges of the oral past. The author admits in the 'Introduction' that he might have included and perhaps blended the pre-Christian practices and beliefs of the different Mizo tribes. The specificities of the tribes and their customs, through the historical processes of Mizo identity formation, have been obscured. Evident here is the erasure of the boundaries that marked the tribe and clan identities. The disjunction brought about by the colonial experience of the tribes, along with the inherently fluid and malleable nature of oral transmissions have, on the one hand erased traditional frames of identity, and on the other hand help expedite the more homogenised Mizo identity.

Zokhaw Nun [*Village Life*] (1998) is a study of several aspects of life in traditional Mizo society. Although we find several topics similar to *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, this work delves deeper into the symbolic and the semantic significance of the topics covered which includes the customs, traditions and material culture of pre-Christian Mizo village communities. *Arsi Thawnthu* [*Stories about Stars*] (1979) is yet another work which records the oral stories and the lores behind the names given by the Mizo people to the stars and the constellations. Such lores have much more to them than the storytelling element. They are deeply entrenched in the culture and worldview of the Mizo tribes, and are the records of how the Mizo ancestors understood themselves and their place in the cosmos. What is even more remarkable is that in the representation of these lores, Dokhuma has not tried to sanitise the stories to suit Mizo Christian sensibilities. Therefore it offers a glimpse into the essentially different modalities of the pre-Christian culture. The lives of some of the legendary Mizo chiefs from the past are covered in *Ni leh Thla Kara Leng* [*Prevailing on the Level of the Sun and the Moon*] (1978), which recounts the lives of the most famous chiefs, not through modern system of historiography, but from the oral accounts handed down from generation to generation, and from region to region. One feature of Mizo orality which recurs regularly in Dokhuma's works is

the insertion of songs in his prose works. The songs vary between the *Hlado*[13] (the traditional war chant), folk songs and religious folk songs.

Among his fictional works, *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* (1970) may also be considered under this category since the intention of the author, as stated by him in the "Introduction", is to 'record' the legacy of the pre-Christian past for the future generations. Here he expresses the purpose behind his choice of expanding what he claims to be an existing story in oral form, albeit without a title, which he has fleshed out and expanded upon while preserving its essence, which contains moral implications and profound meanings. He writes:

> A thawnthuin kan Mizo khawsakzia leh kan mize mu hnu min varchhuah dan chu thu dang ni se, a thawnthu changtu miziaah entawn tur – dawhtheihna leh tumruhna te, rual elna leh dikna te a lang a. Chu chu keini Mizo thangtharte tan hian entawn tur pawimawh ber a nih si avangin, lehkhabu ngeia inthurochhiah tlak ni-a ka hriat avangin ka ziak ta a ni.
>
> Notwithstanding the fact that the story is an important reminder of the traditional Mizo character and way of life, there are, exemplified in the character of the protagonist, traits worth emulating – patience and determination, competitive spirit and integrity. Since it is imperative of us younger generations of Mizo to aspire to such exemplary qualities, I have written this story which I feel deserves to be left as a legacy in book-form. (*Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* 7)

It is evident that Dokhuma is keenly aware of the potential literature has, to open up spaces for the engagement with and interrogation of culture and identity. To him the literary goes hand in hand with the cultural, and he assumes the dual role of story-teller and custodian of Mizo culture. This conception of the social responsibility of the writer is evident not only in his works that deal specifically with culture and social reforms, but also in his fiction and poetry. The following lines

[13] *Hlado* - The hunter's cry or chant which is raised directly after a wild animal has been killed in the chase. It is also chanted along the way home, and at the entrance of the village (*DLL* 148).

from the same preface clearly indicate that he makes no attempt to conceal his intentions of using the story as a vehicle for propagating and preserving what he deems are the core values and the foundation of Mizo identity:

> Kan pi leh pute hmanlai nunphungin a ngaihsan zawng tak leh an hlutsak thilthlengin he thawnthu-ah hian a lang a. Lalkhua leh tuia khawtlang daingul leh pasaltha, mi-kawlh sa-kawlh hmaa zam lo Mizo tlangval tlawmngaite fakawmzia leh ropui si-zia te chu khawvel hmaa pho lan theih nit a se ka va ti em! Amaherawhchu, he Mizo ze chhuanawm tak lungphum hi kan innghahna ber mah ni se, tuma hmuh theih lohin kan phum bo hlen ang tih chu ka hlauh em avangin, a tak inkawhhmuh mai tur hre lo mah ila, thawnthu tala kan insihhmuh theih beiseiin he thawnthu hi ka ziak ta a ni e.
>
> The values of our forefathers and what they esteemed and held in high regard are clearly discernible in this story. How I wish that the world may see the honour and greatness of the stalwarts of the chiefdom – those *pasaltha*[14], the young Mizo men who feared not the fiercest of men nor the most ferocious of beasts, embodying the code of *tlawmngaihna.*[15] It is my hope in writing this story that, as a tangible representation of *tlawmngaihna*, which has been fundamental to the Mizo ethos, it plays a role in the preservation of this admirable code, to prevent it from fading into obscurity. (7)

Set in the pre-colonial past, *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* is a story of a young man who embodies the code of *Tlawmngaihna*, who, through his demonstration of such a trait, proves himself worthy of both the title of *pasaltha* and the hand of the daughter of the village chief. The point of transition from an oral to a written tradition is witnessed here once again in that the author claims that this story, in varied forms, had existed as an oral tale.

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[14] Pasaltha – n. a person who is brave and manly; a brave, a hero; a famous or notable warrior or hunter (*DLL* 352).

[15] *Tlawmngaihna* - n. self-sacrifice, unselfishness, etc; or being self-sacrificing, being unselfish, etc. (as under the verb *tlawmngai*) (*DLL* 514). For *tlawmngai,* see Glossary.

The *pasaltha* is a concept that finds recurrence in many of Dokhuma's works, and the embeddedness of this concept in the Mizo imagination and how it is more than just a title given to the braves but rather a symbolic representation of the entire worldview of the pre-colonial Mizo tribes is seen in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung. Pasaltha* represents the values and ethos of the culture of the Mizo tribes, and thus, is subject to the same transformative forces that had direct bearings on Mizo culture and identity. Not only is the *pasaltha* a construct of Mizo culture, but it is, in its turn, a major force in the construction of Mizo identity itself, and thus the understanding of the concept itself is subject to the shifts in Mizo culture and identity formation. Such revisionism of the concept of *pasaltha* may be traced in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*i, *Khawhar In* and *Rinawmin.* In *Rinawmin*, this concept takes on a 'nationalistic' turn as it is intricately interwoven with the notion of Mizo nationalism and the Mizo national movement.

Dokhuma has also published four plays – *Tumna chu a Hlawhtling Thin* [*Determination Leads to Success*] (1975), *Hmasawnna* [*Progress / Improvement/ Development*] (1978), *Hausak Aiin Hrisel a Hlu Zawk* [*Health is More Valuable than Wealth*] (1979), and *Finna Hmahruai* [*The Harbinger of Wisdom*] (1980). All of his plays were written on the behest of governmental bodies in Mizoram to aid in public education and therefore, are all intentionally instructive. *Tumna chu a Hlawhtling Thin* deals with the importance of literacy and it was written to promote adult education. *Hmasawnna* is also written in the same vein, where he denotes that knowledge and learning is the beginning of progress in society. *Hausak Aiin Hrisel a Hlu Zawk* is an educational play which highlights the importance of nutrition for health and wellbeing. *Finna Hmahruai* is a Christian play which depicts the theme that the gospel is the harbinger of light and wisdom, through the life of the earliest converts to Christianity among the Mizo people, the persecutions they faced and the eventual conversions of the persecutors.

Apart from this play, there are several works of his which may be classified under his religious writings. These include - *Zoram Kohhran Tualto Chanchin* [*Indigenous Churches of Mizoram*], published in 1975, which is a historical account that traces the various indigenous movements under Mizo Christianity down the

years. The work has remained an invaluable source for scholars of Mizo Christianity as it traces the indigenous elements that have rendered Mizo Christianity as a syncretic one. *Gabbatha* (1989) is a Christian fiction, and has been translated into English by Lalthankima. Dokhuma belonged to the Salvation Army and two of his works – *Chhungkua: Sipai Inkhawm Thupui* [*Family: Salvation Army Service Topic*] (1990) and *Thisen leh Mei: Self Denial Thupui* [*Blood and Fire: Topic on Self Denial*] (2001) are liturgical exegesis of the doctrines of the Salvation Army denomination. Apart from these, it must be pointed out that many other works have implicit 'religious' elements, informing the ways in which he approaches the subject, and this is once again, bound up with his notion of Mizo nationalism. This notion is not peculiar to him either. Mizo nationalism, as it came to be conceived, have been inherently both ethnic and religious. The ways in which nationalism is conceived in *Rinawmin* and to a lesser degree, in *Silaimu Ngaihawm* bear ample testimony to this ethno-religious orientation. Mizo nationalism, by this point of time, has come to be 'imagined' in direct opposition to the threat, both perceived and real, of cultural, linguistic and religious assimiliation by the dominant, pre-dominantly Hindi-speaking, Hindu nationalism.

The biographical works of Dokhuma include, along with *Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose* and *Ni leh Thla Kara Leng*, *Lamsuaka* (full title *Chhakawm Keipui Lamsuaka* which roughly translates to "Lamsuaka, the Tiger from the East", 2001) which is a biography of one of the most famous Mizo chiefs, Lamsuaka, and a biography of the first Chief Minister of the Lushai Hills District, *Ch.Chhunga Chanchin* [*Biography of Ch. Chhunga*] (1999). This biography of Ch. Chhunga can be read as a counter-narrative to the idealised form of Mizo nationalism as found in *Rinawmin* and other works from his early writing career. It stands as a testament to his committent to a 'nationalism' which is "above and beyond partisan politics" (*Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna,* iv).

Dokhuma has written more than 400 essays, contributing regularly to the periodical *Zoram Eng* [*The Light of Zoram*] which is now known as *Meichher* [*The Torch*], as well as to various magazines, souvenirs, anthologies and other periodicals. A few of his essays have been compiled and published in book form in *Rilru Far*

Chhuak (1995) and his poems in *Ka Thinlung Luangliam* [*Outpourings of my Heart*] (1996). These essays and poems cover diverse subjects like reflections on the truths of life, reminiscences, educational essays, Mizo culture and history, among others. Many of his essays have been included in syllabi of schools, colleges and under Mizoram University.

Secondary works dealing with the writings of Dokhuma are still scant, and the few that are available includes Malsawmliana's "James Dokhuma Thuziakte Thlirna" ["Observations on James Dokhuma's Writings"] (August 11, 2018), an online article which provides a general overview of Dokhuma's prose works where he lists out several general characteristics of these works: that Dokhuma's main concerns are Mizo identity, the preservation of Mizo culture, the growth and preservation of Mizo language, his belief that it is his duty to serve Mizo community and the idea of Mizo nationhood, educational and inspirational works geared towards social, cultural and moral reforms as well as progress, the need for wildlife conservation, and general observations on life.

Rualzakhumi's article "*Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* by James Dokhuma: As an Auto-Ethnographic Novel" (2012) considers the novel as ethnographic writing from a native's point of view, and Lalthasanga Hrangate's "Representation of Mizo Identity in the Works of James Dokhuma" is a short study of the concept of Mizo identity as conceptualised in the works of Dokhuma, where he makes the observation that "'*Identity*' created out of the traditional history of Mizo was Dokhuma's distinct character." HD Lalrinkimi's *Treatment of Women in Selected Fictions of James Dokhuma* (2015) traces the position of Dokhuma's female characters within a constrictive Patriarchal Mizo society. KC Lalthansanga's M.Phil dissertation, *Women's Perspective of Mizo Insurgency in* Rinawmin *and* Silaimu Ngaihawm *by James Dokhuma* (2017), traces the plight of the female characters in these novels.

Since James Dokhuma's legacy in the literary domains stretches across genres, it is best summed up thematically. His notable contribution towards the discourse on Mizo identity and nationalism and his passionate commitment to the writing purpose, the preservation of Mizo oral tradition and culture, and his valuable

legacy in preserving and enriching Mizo language will continue to ensure relevance and currency to his works.

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CHAPTER TWO

MIZO IDENTITY IN THE WORKS OF JAMES DOKHUMA

This chapter seeks to comprehend and consolidate the aspect of Mizo identity in Dokhuma's works. A brief historical overview of the discourses on identity itself has been given to highlight the issues that pertain to the study of identity, and to justify the theoretical underpinnings and approaches of the study. Mizo identity cannot be understood without the consideration of the cultural, socio-political and historical specificities, and therefore, attempt has been made to locate the forces at play within such a context from various approaches.

'Identity' has been a key concept in Western philosophy for centuries, and has continued to be the crux of contemporary discourses. While the modern understanding of the term is a later phenomenon, it may be assumed that man has always mulled over the existential question – "Who am I?" since it is essentially bound up with the notion of the *self*. And it may also be assumed that a sense of social identity has been central to mankind's evolution, right from the time when mankind decided to form social groups. What is evident here is that there are two aspects to subjective identity – the personal and the social. Simple dictionary definitions of 'identity' like "1. who or what somebody/something is 2. the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that make people different from others," (*Oxford Advanced Learners'*) though seemingly clear cut and simple, belie the fundamental issues that have become the centre of contemporary identity debates. The supposition of an essential, fixed, or stable identity, of a 'knowing subject', and the idea of being 'identical'- the traditional position of considering the notion of identity has been questioned, abandoned and replaced by more dynamic approaches moored on the notion of 'fluidity' and 'constructedness'.

Tracing the traditional notion of identity, Francis Fukuyama acknowledges the Greek philosophers for their insight into 'human nature', but ascribes the emergence of our understanding of identity to the period of Reformation – "In the West, the idea of identity was born, in a sense, during the Protestant Reformation, and it was given its initial expression by the Augustinian friar Martin Luther… Luther was one of the first Western thinkers to articulate and valorise the inner self over the external social being. He argued that man has a twofold nature, an inner spiritual one and an outer bodily being; since "no external thing has any influence in

producing Christian righteousness or freedom," only the inner man could be renewed…" He points out his belief that in the shift in our understanding of identity, along with the socio-economic conditions, Luther's ideas that led to the Protestant Reformation also play a role (20 – 31). In *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts* edited by Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, there is a brief account of the history of the identity debate. Summing up the development and highlighting the key moments of Identity discourse from the Orthodox European philosophical tradition down to the Cultural Studies of the present, it denotes that "orthodox account of identity" have always located the "self" as the subject which is "stable and independent of external influences" at least since Descartes in the seventeenth century. The 'knowing subject' which is stable is what Stuart Hall calls 'the Enlightenment subject':

> The Enlightenment subject was based on a conception of the human person as a fully centred, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness and action, whose 'centre' consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same – continuous or 'identical' with itself – throughout the individual's existence. The essential centre of the self was the person's identity. ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 275)

This notion was subsequently questioned by some philosophers like David Hume, in the eighteenth century, who "observed that the contents of his consciousness included images (or sense impressions) of everything of which he was thinking (either directly perceiving, or recalling in memory). There was, though, no image of the self that was supposedly doing this perceiving and remembering," and he therefore "proffered what was commonly known as the 'bundle theory' of the self, such that the self is nothing more than a bundle of sense impressions, that continually changed as the individual had new experiences or recalled new ones" (Edgar and Sedgwick 167). Thus, up till this point, society was thought to be composed of individuals on their own volition under certain agreements such as the 'social contract'. These notions from 'liberal individualism' eventually met a challenge with Emile Durkheim who argued that "the individual was a product of society" which inverts the idea that society was produced by individuals. Thus, Durkheim made the

point that “a modern understanding of individuality (and thus, the self-understanding of humans in modern society) was a product of that particular culture,” and therefore “individual identity is not primary, but is a product of economic organisation” (Edgar and Sedgwick 167-168), and this brought in a disruption to the course of the identity debate. George Herbert Mead’s analysis of the self which became fundamental to ‘symbolic interactionist’ approach in sociology, distinguishes between the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ with regards to the ‘self’, saying “The ‘I’ is a response of the organism to the attitudes of others; the ‘me’ is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes.” He elaborates on their distinctiveness and their relationship to each other, highlighting the role of outside forces in the development of the self (Mead 175-178). Erving Goffman’s furtherance of this point where the self is “a product of particular interactions, in so far as the individual’s capacities, attitudes and ways of behaving (and possibly, of conceiving of him or herself) changes as the people around him or her change” renders the self as having less self-consciousness in isolation – “The self therefore has no stability, being almost as fluid as the self proposed by Hume” (Edgar and Sedgwick 168).

From this point forward, the identity debate has grounded itself on what Stuart Hall calls ‘the Sociological subject,’ which is a reflection of “the growing complexity of the modern world and the awareness that this inner core of the subject was not autonomous and self-sufficient, but was formed in relation to ‘significant others’, who mediated to the subject the values, meanings and symbols – the culture – of the worlds he/she inhabited” (“The Question of Cultural Identity” 275). The gap between the personal and the social notions of identity has been bridged at this point of time, and the ‘instability’ and ‘fluidity’ of the notion of the self have been established:

> Identity, in this sociological conception, bridges the gap between the 'inside' and the 'outside' -between the personal and the public worlds. The fact that we project 'ourselves' into these cultural identities, at the same time internalizing their meanings and values, making them 'part of us', helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective ' places we occupy in the social and cultural world. Identity thus stitches (or, to use a current medical metaphor, 'sutures" the subject into the structure.) It stabilizes both subjects and the

> cultural worlds they inhabit, making both reciprocally more unified and predictable. ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 275)

The psychological turn that the debate on identity has taken is already evident at this stage, but the developments made by Sigmund Freud and those after him take this course further. Freud's conception of the self as a complex structure consisting of the Id, the Ego and the Super-ego, brings to the fore that "man is not the rational agent he thinks he is... that man's intelligence and reason are neither the strongest forces operative in him nor even independent ones," and that "the unconscious is a process which is always active and which all too often manages to force conscious motivations into its service" (de Berg 129). Erik Erikson's psychodynamic theory that positions identity as a product of the processes of the interaction between the individual and the social identities, and Lacan's proposition of the unconscious being structured like language which is receptive and reactive to the others that it encounters (Edgar and Sedgwick 168-169), have further contributed to the multi-dimensional understanding of identity in the contemporary discourse.

Another important development is the contribution of the Marxist-influenced ideas of the Structuralists that posits the role of ideology in the construction of identities. Further, of lasting and profound influence to the identity debate is Michel Foucault's works. His contribution to the discourse on identity is summed up by Edgar and Sedgwick who refer to two of his works, *Madness and Civilization* (1971) and *The History of Sexuality* (1981) thus:

> …in his early work on madness (1971), he analyses how madness is conceived differently in different ages (comparing, for example, the Renaissance view of madness as its own form of reason, with the rationalist seventeenth century's exclusion of the insane from society). Madness is thus socially constructed and specific, and historically variable social practices exist to constrain it. Yet, crucially for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, madness is also the other, in comparison to which the sane and rational define themselves. The identity of the dominant group in society therefore depends upon its construction of its own other. In Foucault's later

> writings, he turns to the problem of the construction of the 'self (especially in relation to sexuality) through its positioning within discourses' (1981). From this, the self may be theorised in terms of the conceptual and other intellectual resources that it calls upon in order to write or talk about itself, and in the way in which it is written about, or written to. The way in which a text is composed will anticipate, and thus situate, a certain self as reader. (Edgar and Sedgwick 169)

What Hall designates as 'the post-modern subject' is thus "conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. Identity becomes a 'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us… It is historically, not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self'." He further adds that there is within us "contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about," reinforcing the notion of the temporality of identity, and claims that "if we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or 'narrative of the self' about ourselves." Thus, instead of "a fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity… we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities any one of which we could identify with – at least temporarily" ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 277).

The basic premise on which the present study on Mizo identity is founded is the cultural studies' approach to identity which has facilitated new ways to re-think about the concept of identity and its multiple implications across the fields of social sciences and human endeavours:

> The recognition that identity is not merely constructed, but depends upon some other, opens up the theoretical space for marginal or oppressed groups to challenge and renegotiate the identities that have been forced upon them in the process of domination. Ethnic identities, gay and lesbian identities and

female identities are thus brought into a process of political change. (Edgar and Sedgwick 170)

Mizo identity, to James Dokhuma, is as much about 'becoming Mizo' as it is about 'being Mizo'. In the following passage from his essay, "Mizo Ka Ni Ka Zak Dawn Lo" ["I Am Mizo and I Am Not Ashamed"],[16] his self-ascription of 'being' a Mizo is most pronounced:

> Kei pawh 'MIZO' ka ni a, ram leh tawng (hrang) ka nei a. Chu bakah hnam dan leh kalhmang zepui danglam riau mai nei hnam ka ni bawk a. Khawvela 'ber' nih ka kaina awmchhun pawh 'MIZO' ka nihna hi a ni.
>
> I am a Mizo, having my own land and my own language. Additionally, I belong to a *hnam* with its own unique culture. My only claim to distinction from the rest of the world is, indeed, my being a 'Mizo'. (*Rilru Far Chhuak* 74)

Through this declaration, he 'positions' his Mizo identity within the articulation of ethnic identification, territory, language and culture. His essentialist conception of Mizo identity becomes even more apparent when he clarifies that linguistic affinities or even the adoption of Mizo customs and traditions do not qualify anyone to assume a Mizo identity:

> Hnam dangte chuan Mizo nih tumin, pai hauh lovin ṭawng pawh thiam mah se, hnam dang Mizo ṭawng thiam tak a ni ve ringawt ang a. Tin, kan khawsak dan leh kan hnam kalphung ang zawng zawng zawmin khawsa ve mah se, hnam dang Mizo nih châk tak a ni satliah ve ringawt ang.
>
> If someone from another *hnam* with an aspiration to become a Mizo displays even a native-speaker level of Mizo language proficiency, he/she would still be just an outsider who is exceptionally fluent in Mizo language. Even if that

[16] All translations of quoted texts and titles of works in this chapter are done by me, unless noted otherwise, for the sole purpose of this study.

> person adopts our customs and traditions, he/she would never be more than someone wishful to be a Mizo. (74)

Yet in the same essay, he goes on to imply that being Mizo 'by blood' is not enough, that there are certain ways in which Mizo-ness is performed- that it is about 'becoming':

> ...keima ngaih ve danah chuan ka Mizo nihna tak hi ka thisen atanga ka pianpui chu ni mah se, ka che zia leh ka nun hian min ti-Mizo zawk. 'A Mizo lo em mai' kan tihte hi an thisen leh pian leh murna chu Mizo ngei chu an ni asin. Mahse an Mizo lohna chhan chu an chezia atangin a ni fo thin.
>
> In my opinion, although the real essence of being Mizo is by blood and by birth, it is my conduct and how I live which identify me as a Mizo. The ones we regard as 'un-Mizo' are indeed Mizo by birth – however, it is usually their behavior which invalidates their Mizo-ness. (75-76)

In his 1996 essay on "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Stuart Hall postulates two "related but different" views of 'cultural identity.' He notes that "there are at least two ways," suggesting that these may not be the only ways, "of thinking about cultural identity." The first view positions the subject within the essentialist notion – of being. The second, however, "is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (223 – 225). The politics of Mizo identity as found in the works of James Dokhuma may best be summed up within this frame of investigation undertaken by Hall in this essay.

> The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self,' hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves' which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common." (223)

While this essentialist notion of identity has been questioned and rejected by much of the social discourses of our times, Hall does not dismiss this view outright, although he does point out the limitations of this view, but rather chooses to highlight that "such a conception of cultural identity played a critical role in all the post-

colonial struggles which have so profoundly reshaped our world." He points out the centrality of this essentialist position in the concept of 'Negritude' and in the earlier Pan-African political project, and how "it continues to be a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalised peoples" (223). Similarly, in order to understand Mizo identity, the historical processes that have played major roles in how the Mizo people have come to identify themselves, the colonial experience of the Mizo tribes and its overarching impact on the Mizo tribes and the post-colonial experiences need to be examined. Identity is one of the chief concepts of postcolonial theories, and drawing heavily from this notion of the post-modern subject, postcolonial studies has initiated new ways for the interrogation of identity politics, establishing an identity discourse that encompasses the postcolonial identities, and enabling the assessment and re-assessment of even the local identities.

Mizo identity in the works of Dokhuma that have been selected for this study locates itself within three main parameters – the pre-colonial beginnings in the oral past, the colonial period of negotiation and the post-colonial period of 'Mizo nationalism'. "The identity of the Mizo has been in a nutshell, a drawing together of a hybrid existence that is still in many ways inherently enigmatic," according to Margaret L Pachuau. The origin of the Mizo people is shrouded in the oral past, and historians have relied heavily on the origin myths and oral tales to search through the migratory routes to surmise several theories. As mentioned before, the written script was introduced only in the last decade of the nineteenth century to the Mizo people, and prior to that there are only a couple of records that pertain to the Mizo tribes, and these too are products of the British colonial administration and thus, fail to cover any period prior to the colonial encounter in specific ways. With the absence of any written record, researchers have to resort to other historical markers to retrace the history of the Mizo people. R.K. Lalhluna, a Mizo writer and historian, lists out some of the sources on which they have based their research: archeological sites and artefacts, bones found in caves, folk songs and oral narratives, folk tales and other folk narratives, oral history, physical anthropology, clothing, and historical linguistics, besides historical records found in neighbouring lands and places which

are believed to be part of the migratory route of the Mizo people (1-2). Most of the historians have come to believe that the Mizo people originated in the southern part of modern day China although they do not always agree on the matter of when and how.

Chief among the origin myths that historians have resorted to, is the *Chhinlung chhuak*[17] myth, and this myth has continued to play a significant role in the Mizo's conception of their identity. *Chhinlung* literally translates to a 'covering rock' or a 'lid made of stone'. According to this myth, the ancestors of the Mizos emerged from a hole in the earth. While there are various versions to this myth as is the characteristic of myths and lores, most versions talk about the instance of closing the *chhinlung* due to the Ralte tribes making too much noise. In the historisation of this myth, there have been various interpretations of the *Chhinlung* myth – as pointing to having emerged from a cave, or a fort, and others believe the term '*chhinglung'* represents an actual place with such a name or the name of a ruler. This *Chhinlung* tradition is shared by most of the tribes that come under the umbrella term 'Mizo' – the *Hmar* tribes call it *Sinlung*, while the "Thadous, Paites, Gangtes, Vaipheis and others called it "Khul" or "Khulpi" but the way they locate the place is different from one another" (Malsawmdawngliana 57). The significance of the *Chhinlung* myth to the construction of Mizo identity is seen in how it contributes to the idea of a 'shared past' and 'continuities' in the history of the people. "What makes these myths, values, symbols and memories so attractive and potent is their invocation of presumed kinship and residence ties to underpin the authenticity of the unique cultural values of the community," according to Anthony D Smith (*Nationalism and Modernism* 46), and Mizo nationalism certainly draws heavily from this notion of a shared history from the *Chhinlung* myth.

While there is no consensus on the origin of the Mizo people, most historians more or less agree on the question of the migratory route that the tribes followed

[17] *Chhinlung* - n. the name of the mythical rock from beneath which the progenitors of most of the present human race are said to have issued (*DLL* 80). *Chhinlung chhuak* – those who have emerged from the *Chhinlung* (Scholar's input).

although their timelines differed widely. The migration through the plains of present day Burma to the present day India is believed to have been made in several waves and had taken centuries. There are also legends that point towards a semi-urban settlement in a place called 'Khampat' in Burma before they entered the terrain of present day Mizoram. It is generally believed that the migration from Burma to present day Mizoram happened in three phases, and this resulted in the classification of the Mizo people as 'Old Kuki', 'New Kuki', and 'Lushai' by the earliest ethnographic records. The first batch consisted of the 'Old Kuki'- the Hrangkhawl, Biate, Langrawng, Pangkhua and Mung (Kawk) (Malsawmdawngliana 81). It is believed that the last batch – the Lusei group which consisted of the Lusei, Ralte, Chawngthu, Khiangte, Hauhnar, Chuaungo, Chuauhang, Ngente, Punte and the Parte sub-tribes, had entered present day Mizoram by the second half of the seventeenth century, and that on their arrival had driven off the previous batch northward and southward, and who in turn had already driven out the earliest batches to the neighbouring areas – Cachar, Tripura and Manipur. From this period onward till the colonial conquest, the Lusei clan under Sailo chieftainship became the dominant tribe. The various processes of dispersion along their migration continue to impact the relationships between the tribes up till the present time, and form the basis of some of the issues in the contemporary discourse on Mizo identity.

Mizo historians believe that before they crossed the Tiau, most of the tribes would set up their villages based on clannish lines, and chieftaincy began while they were settled between the Run and Tiau rivers (Liangkhaia 58; Siama 8-16; Lalthangliana 14-34). The Sailo chieftaincy is also believed to originate during this period. The first Lusei chief was believed to be Zahmuaka who was entreated by the Hnamte clan to become their chief owing to the fact that he had many male offspring. It took much persuasion from his wife and the offering of a basket of paddy as tribute for him to accept the chieftaincy. His sons – Zadenga, Paliana, Thangluaha, Thangura, Rivunga and Rokhuma went on to establish their own villages, and a descendant of Thangura named Sailo came to establish the Sailo chieftaincy (Lalchhuanawma 47). Accounts vary with regards to whether Sailoa was one of the sons of Zahmuaka or that of his son Thangura. Since Zahmuaka, by all

accounts, was believed to belong to the Paihte clan, Dokhuma points out that the origin of the Sailo chiefs was not from the Lusei but from the Paihte clans. "Sailo lal, ni leh thla kara leng inti ngatte pawh, he Lusei sal thlah Zahmuaka kapkar atanga piang, Paihte tuchhuan invawrh sang chhote hi an ni." ("The Sailo chiefs, who claimed to be sovereigns under the sun and the moon, were descendants of none other than the slave of the Lusei clan, Zahmuaka, and were thus, in reality, the descendants of Paihte but who managed to eventually rise to fame and glory," *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 125).

By the nineteenth century, the Sailo chiefs had established themselves as the 'chief clan', commanding a wide network of chieftainship based on familial ties. However, the other clans like the Mara, Lai and Fanai also held their own and Joy L.K. Pachuau quotes Capt. J Shakespeare who felt that had the colonial intervention not happened, the Fanai chiefs of the south "would have attempted to eject the southern Lushai chiefs" (17). Thus to say that the Sailos ruled the land uncontested before the colonial encounter would not be accurate although they were indeed the dominant clan.

It should not be supposed that the *Lal,* [18] the chiefs, had absolute power over their subjects. The traditional Mizo administrative set-up involved a council of *Upa*[19] ("elder/s") who advice the chief, and the *Zawlbuk*[20] (the male dormitory) exerted a considerable level of influence on the administration as well. Moreover, "he could not assume absolute power in his administration because the greatness of the chief was measured by the number of his subjects, and the people were perfectly free to choose their leaders. Individuals had the freedom to leave the chief and migrate to

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[18] *Lal* – a chief, a chieftain or a chieftainess, a sovereign, a monarch, a king or queen, an emperor or empress, a rajah or ranee (*DLL* 283).

[19] *Upa* -- an elder, an elderly person, a chief man, a mantri (*DLL* 537).

[20] *Zawlbuk* – the large house in a Lushai village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night (*DLL* 562). Dokhuma points out in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* that even married men continue to lodge in the *Zawlbuk* until they move out of their parents' home to set up their own house (206).

the neighbouring village. Thus the chief had to exercise his power carefully" (Rokhum 33). The democratic nature of the chieftaincy led TH Lewin to describe it as "democracy tempered by disposition" (Vanlalchhuanawma 49). The tempering power of the *Zawlbuk* is evident from the following description – "No orders or legislation of the *Lal's* court could be implemented nor codified without the express consent and approval of the *zawlbuk,"* according to Vanlalchhuanawma, but he also points out that "the latter, as a rule, would not withhold its approval of the former's decisions without some concrete or unavoidable reasons" (55). There were customs and conventions that bounded not only the chief but the entire community, and these customs, conventions and traditions would almost amount to laws in their set-up. In *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, this *Zawlbuk-Lal* dynamics is exhibited when the *Lal* of Darzo village summoned the young men of the *Zawlbuk* on a rainy night. The fact that only Fehtea responded to the summon, and the chief's exhibition of his appreciation of Fehtea's *tlawmngaihna* (which is voluntary in essence), show the element of voluntarism in the chief-subject relationship. This aspect is further shown in the discussion between the *Lal* and the *Upa* regarding the incident – here they voiced their displeasure at the lack of responsiveness from the other young men of the village which boasted of three hundred households, and yet there is no discussion of punishment (17-22).

The tribes that later on came to be called the Lushai tribes by the British administrators were first heard of, in an account by Francis Buchanan in 1777 (Joy L.K. Pachuau 91-92). Here they were referred to as "Kookies, men who live far in the interior parts of the hills" (Vanlalchhuanawma 74). From the beginning of the nineteenth century, raids on the British claimed territories became a regular occurance. "The British responded to these raids by sending retaliatory expeditions (1844, 1850, 1869) to the villages concerned in search of the culprits," and since these measures did not stop the raids, larger punitive expeditions were carried out, according to Joy L.K. Pachuau (92). These encounters are dubbed 'the British-Mizo wars' by Vanlalchhuanawma who cites "irreconcilable claims of geographical boundaries and encroachment of land by tea-plantation" as the main issues

underlying the same. He highlights five factors that could have been the reason behind the "reciprocal accusations" between the British and the Mizo tribes:

> i) Mizoram was *terra incognito* at that time,
>
> ii) Mizos carried on inter-sub-tribal wars within their own land as they understood it,
>
> iii) The British claimed the Mizo sub-tribes, so-called Kukis, then scattered in the extremities of Mizoram as their subjects after bidding them serve in tea-gardens since an undefined point of time,
>
> iv) In defence of those tea-garden workers they interfered with what the people understood as the Mizo inter-sub-tribal feuds, and
>
> v) The British acquired certain parts of its territories on assumption without official conduct of land survey or official agreement with the claimants of those acquired areas. (75)

The first of these punitive expeditions in 1844 was a response to the raid carried out by Lalsuthlah, a Palian chief, on a Manipuri village of Sylhet. The second retaliation took place in Sentlang village in 1850 where the expeditionary forces burned down the village, the third one (1866 – 67) led by Captain Tom Lewin (T.H. Lewin) ended up with him forging a friendship with the Lusei chief Rothangpuia through "some sly trick," and the fourth expedition in 1869 involving Suakpuilala and Vanpuilala on the charge of having made fresh raids. These are by no means large scale expeditions, especially considering the scale of the next two. A significant point highlighted by Vanlalchhuanawma is that through the course of these encounters, the relationship between the Lusei and the Kuki tribes soured considerably owing to the tactics of the British to employ the Kukis as pawns (75-77). This strategy, part and parcel of the British 'divide and rule' policy, is aimed at dividing the colonial subjects by preventing them from perceiving each other as fellow subjects but rather as the oppressors, and it gets repeated constantly throughout the colonial processes.

The first large-scale punitive expedition was "popularly but inaccurately known as the First or Earlier British Expedition" according to Vanlalchhuanawma (who insists on calling it the "Fifth Expedition"), was carried out during 1871-72 and was known as *Vailen*[21] *hmasa*[22] by the Mizo people. The raids carried out by an alliance of Vanhnuailiana's sons, Liankhama, Buangtheuva, Pawibawia and Lalburha from the east, and Savunga, Lalpuithanga and Bengkhuaia from the west, "to retaliate against the expanding influence of the British over the Mizos in Mizoram" led to this military expedition. Vanlalchhuanawma quotes from "Orders of the Governor General in council" dated 11th July, 1871:

> The main focus of the expedition was "the most prominent offenders" who "came from the Howlongs and Syloos" whereas the primary objective was both "retaliation" and "to show these savages that they are completely in our power". (78)

Mary Winchester, the six-year old daughter of Dr. Winchester who himself was killed during the raid, had been taken captive along with several workers of the Alexandrapore tea-garden. Her abduction was highly publicised, and her retrieval was, of course, one of the main missions of the expedition. Up till this point, the policy of the British did not include full occupation of the Mizo lands but rather "remained one of leaving the 'tribes' to handle their own affairs and to cultivate friendly relations with them, though the old policy of maintaining outposts on the frontier in order to deter raids in the future continued to be advocated" (Joy LK Pachuau 92). The expedition, carried out from the north and the south by two columns, managed to bring most of the chiefs responsible for the raids to task, and they retrieved Mary Winchester, and compelled most of the chiefs to submit to

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[21] *Vailen* – modified form of *Vailian*. *Vailian* literally translates to 'the upsurge/invasion of the *vai*'. It refers to both the large-scale expeditions of the British (1872 and 1889-1890), and the period of British occupation (1890-1947) (Scholar's input).

[22] *Vailen hmasa* – the first *vailen.* In this context, it refers to the first large-scale expedition of the British in 1971-72 (Scholar's input).

British authority. However, the raids started again within a decade, and this time the British decided to change their policy to a full-scale occupation of 'Lushai Hills'.

A year before the Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1889-90 expedition was undertaken, a punitive force called "The Lushai Expeditionary Force" commanded by Colonel Vincent Treager was sent to the Lushai Hills which managed to destroy the village of Hausata, the accused in the ambush and killing of Lieutenant John Stewart and two other members of his Survey party. They troops left Lunglei in April of 1889 but had established a stockade post garrisoned by 200 men (Zorema, "British Policy" 116). Earlier, Upper Burma was annexed by the British force in 1888 and Fort White was set up as a permanent outpost. The Lushai Hills was thus surrounded by lands that had already come under the British Government, and it was "the only piece of intervening territory between the Chittagong Hill tracts and upper Burma that was not governed by the British" (Joy LK Pachuau 83).

The 'Chin-Lushai Expedition' was thus carried out from three directions – from Chittagong, Cachar and Chin Hills. Though the expedition was finally successful in subjugating the tribes of the Lushai Hills and bringing their land under British jurisdiction, it was met with fierce resistance from many of the *Lal* of the time. Vanlalchhuanawma who calls this "the final phase of the British-Mizo War," records the various resistances met by them and how the Mizo *Lal* were finally overwhelmed by the joint forces of the three columns saying:

> The psychological impression definitely fulfilled an outstanding objective of the British military operations at that time. The devastation caused to the Mizos by them dislocated the whole Mizo society. The Mizos were left in the grip of constant fear. (84)

Here he uses, like most of the contemporary writers do, the term 'Mizo' to denote the tribes that had come under British rule as a result of the expedition, and it is interesting to note that colonial narratives regarding the same refer to the same people as the 'Lushais'. This aspect about the terms will be discussed further in the same chapter. For the current discussion, it should be mentioned that the territory of the Mara and Lakher tribes came informally under the British administration only in

1924, and formally as part of the province of Assam in 1931-32 (Zorema, “Establishment” 147).

This expedition marked the beginning of British occupation of the Lushai Hills, though it took several more years to consolidate their rule. The expedition was generally regarded as ‘successful’ by most accounts yet narratives vary greatly regarding the causes that led to the expedition and the motive of the expedition itself. Liangkhaia, whose work *Mizo Chanchin* [History of the Mizo] which initially was an essay entered in an essay competition in 1926 (but eventually published in book form in 1938) to become “the earliest published monograph on Mizo speculations of their origins and their past” (Joy LK Pachuau 109), wrote that the main cause that led to the British expedition was the Mizo’s meddlesome behaviour. “Hmana Vai lian hmasa ang bawkin tun tuma lo lian pawh hi Mizo ho ninhlei avang bawk a ni leh a ni.” (“Just as it was with the first *Vai lian*, it was the meddlesomeness of the Mizo that caused this one,” Liangkhaia 139) The word *ninhlei*, according to Lorrain’s *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, when used as a verb can also mean “to knock about in the jungle on shooting expeditions, to go shooting in the jungle,” but Liangkhaia’s usage points towards the adjectival meaning given in the same dictionary to mean “fidgety, troublesome, tiresome, full of life, full of spirits, high-spirited, mischievous, meddlesome” (343), which becomes more evident with the indignant yet almost apologetic tone he uses in listing out several incidents which he believed the British had intended to ‘avenge’:

> 1) Kum 1888-ah hian Ramate kiangah khuan Sikin Stewart hovin tlang an sam a; chu chu Hausata Pawi lalho rammuin an hmu fuh ta hlauh va, an suam ta a, Sap 2 leh sipai pakhat an that a, he mi phuba hi Sawrkarin lak an tum ta deuh reng a ni.
>
> 2) Kum 1888 December lamah Lungliana leh Nikhama Tlabung atanga mel 4 lek Sirte tlang ami Thangluah khua an run a mi an that hle a, salah an hruai chiam bawk a. Chu chu sawrkarin an haw bawk; heng phuba hi lak tuma Sawrkar an inpuahchah lai takin.

> 3) Kum 1889-ah hian Lianphunga'n Satikang rama mi bawk Tuikuk a zuk run a, an that chiam a, sal 100 lai an man bawk a. Heng phuba hi la turin chhim hmarah Vai lian an lo chho ta a ni, 1890-ah hian.
>
> 1) In 1888, while a party led by Lieutenant Steward was clearing the jungle near Rangamati, a hunting/raiding party led by the Pawi chief Hausata chanced upon them, and they raided and killed two *Sap* and one soldier. The government therefore made plans to avenge this.
>
> 2) In December of 1888, Lungliana and Nikhama[both were *Lal*] raided a Thangluah village situated at Sirte, only 4 miles from Tlabung, inflicting heavy casualties, and carried off many as captives. The government took great offense at this; and all this while the government was making preparations for taking revenge for these acts.
>
> 3) In 1889, Lianphunga [*Lal*] raided the Tuikuk tribe in the same Satikang area, killing many and taking 100 captives. To seek revenge for these, the *vailian* advanced from the south and the north in 1890. (139)

Liangkhaia places the blame squarely on the Mizo for the punitive expeditions, echoing the colonial discourse. The underpinnings of the colonial discourse in terms of the "Lushai tribes" was already to be seen in the descriptions of the "hill tribes" by the administrators of Bengal and their colonial subjects decades before the actual colonial encounter. Thomas Lewin's *A Fly on the Wheel* (1912) records several descriptions of these "hill tribes" from the tribes who were serving them then, from the British officials, and from his own impressions after he managed to make contact with some of the "Lushai tribes" themselves. While he was stationed in Chittagong, Lewin began collecting stories about the tribes who dwelt beyond their jurisdiction – "the wild tribes, the Kukis, Shendus, Mrungs, and others, who dwelt on our borders and traded in our frontier marts, and who occasionally made forays into British territory for the purpose of taking heads and obtaining slaves." Many of the stories he heard were "fables evidently unworthy of credence, stories of men with tails and villages built in trees – a host of improbabilities," yet what little he heard piqued his interest even more, so much so that he decided to go beyond the

frontiers himself (143-145). He met with a series of misadventures in his trip to those he called the 'Shendus' – the Mara tribes. The British-Shendu encounter took place much before the Lushais, yet their lands came under British jurisdiction much later. Thus their initial colonial experience differs much from that of the 'Lushai tribes'.

Lewin eventually made contact with Rothangpuia, a southern chief, referred to as Rutton Poia in his book, and Lewin's account of these first encounters become quite significant for the current study for a few reasons: firstly, Lewin's account of "The Lhoosai or the Kookies" and "The Shendus or the Lakheyr" as recorded by him in his ethnographic attempt, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein: With Comparative Vocabularies of the Hill Dialect* (1869), became the colonial impression of the tribes:

> These tribes are in every respect wilder than the Khyoungtha; they are more purely savages, and unamenable to the lures of civilization... As civilization advances, they will retire, and it will be found, I think, difficult, if not impossible, to wean them from their savage life. (76)

Secondly, his account of how he managed to establish an alliance with Rothangpuia and his ally chiefs through the use of trickery and sleight of hand exposes the colonial attitude towards the 'Lushai people'. (*A Fly on the Wheel* 202-204)

The third point is that Lewin ascribed the name 'Lushai' as having derived from two words "Lu" and "sha" "correctly interpreting "lu" as "head" but mistakably rendering "sha" as "to cut" since the actual rendering of the name is "Lusei" literally translated "long head" (*A Fly on the Wheel* 245-46; Vanlalchhuanawma 23).

To Lewin's defence, he admits that *A Fly on the Wheel* was written with no intention of publication by his young self, and thus whatever "mistakes or misconceptions" there may be cannot be altered by the time of publication "without marring it: they are the vivid impressions of his youth" ('Preface'). Moreover, Lewin went on to become one of the most loved of the British administrators especially in the Southern district, and his works including *Progressive Colloquial Exercises in*

the Lushai Dialect (1874) and *Grammar of the Lushai Language* (1884) proved to be invaluable to the development of the Mizo script.

It is interesting to note that Liangkhaia uses the term *phuba la*[23] as the motive behind these expeditions. McCall in *Lushai Chrysallis* (1949) also expresses the same expedition as undertaken "to avenge this athrocity" (53). In sharp contrast to this narrative of 'savages' who hunted heads for trophy and who revelled in raids and warfare, James Dokhuma's account of the 'raids' positions the Mizo chiefs as the defender and not the perpetrator: "Phai vai an run fona chhan pawh an sai ramchhuahna ngawpui ṭha Saphovin thingpui huana an vah chereu zau zel vang a ni pakhat a" ("One of the reasons behind the raids [carried out by the ancestors] was the fact that the *Sap* had been deforesting and devastating their elephant hunting grounds to expand their tea plantations," *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 255).

Vanlalchhuanawma's analysis of the last of the five points mentioned earlier, that the British's acquisition of lands "on assumption without official conduct of land survey or official agreement with the claimants of those acquired areas" where he also quotes Woodthorpe viz. "[t]he tea-gardens, which were originally confined to the northern part of the district, have of late years been sweeping further and further south, as enterprising individuals have been found to take grants from Government for the cultivation of the tea-plants" (75) supports this claim made by Dokhuma.

The context in which Dokhuma has mentioned the raids as an example needs to be highlighted here. In the chapter titled "Indo Dan" ["Codes of War"] in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* (255-264), he states that while the ancestors of the Mizos seemed to be constantly engaged in wars amongst themselves, they never went to war only for the thrill of it nor without valid reasons. Pointing out that what was regarded as justified and valid in those times may no longer seem to be reason enough to engage in warfare, yet it is important to bear in mind the changes in the ethos that have been brought about by time and circumstances (254).

[23] *Phuba la* – to avenge, to revenge, to take revenge, to take vengeance (*DLL* 362).

He cites two reasons for their disputes and wars. "Hmanlai an indo chhan tam ber pawh an dikna (rights) humhalh an tum vang a ni phawt a. Chutah lal tinin mahni ram humhalh an duh theuh a" ("The majority of those wars were fought in the claim and protection of their rights according to their ethos. The other possible reason arose from the fact that each chief wanted to protect and secure his own territory" 254). He then asserts that the raids carried out by them on the plains were the results of the ancestors asserting their rights and fending their territories.

In order to discuss the colonial construction of identity within the Mizo context, another important aspect needs to be brought to the forefront – the introduction of Christianity to the tribes of the then Lushai Hills. The colonial experience of the tribes was inextricably bound up with the evangelical experience of the colonial subjects. The colonial administration was consolidated through the missions. Contrary to a popular phrase that Mizoram is "Pathian zawn chhuah ram"[24] (*Rinawmin* 146) which roughly refers to "A land that had been sought out by God), it is one of the last places in Northeast India to receive the Gospel. The first Christian missionary to set foot in the Lushai Hills was Rev. William Williams who visited the land in the early months of 1891 when the resistance to the British imperial power was still was still being put up by a number of chiefs. He had met a number of Mizo chiefs who were incarcerated in Sylhet by the British, and his interest grew from seeing them (Vanlalchhuanawma 95). "On seeing the sad condition of the people he felt a strong desire to go there to teach them the Gospel, but he died very unexpectedly before anything could be done in the matter" (*Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales on Mizoram 1894-1957* 1). He went back to the Khasi Hills with the intention of returning in April of the same year but he died unexpectedly before he could fulfil his desire.

It took a couple of years before FW Savidge and JH Lorrain landed in Sairang on January 11, 1894 due to restrictions on entry to the Lushai Hills warranted by what was called "rebellions" in the region. They were sent by the Arthington Aborigines or India Arthington Mission. On their arrival, the British

[24] *Pathian zawnchhuah ram* – a land discovered/sought out by God (Scholar's input).

officials still considered it "unsafe for them to live more than a mile away from Fort Aijal," and so were allotted a site at "Tea Garden Hill" now known as Macdonald Hill in Aizawl. (Rohmingmawii 193) The initial reception of the Mizo people was one of hostility since the Mizo at this point of time greatly resented the forced porterage demanded of them by the colonial administrators. Writing about the struggles of the newly arrived missionaries to get the labour they needed to set themselves up at the site, Rohmingmawii says they took their problems to the Superintendant who in turn "devised a way to solve their problem by controlling the sale of salt in the shops. Salt was a precious commodity for the Mizos, and he allowed the missionaries to give salt as wages. This privilege improved the status of the two friends to the Mizos immediately and they began to be considered as great chiefs" (194). The involvement of the Superintendant in the setting up of their site, and the method he employed to bring their subjects to compliance already signals the policies that would be put in place eventually, regarding the role of the Christian mission.

"Christian missions in Mizoram followed the tradition of "the cross follows the flag" (Vanlalchhuanawma 97). While it may be debatable whether Christianity would make inroads without the enabling hand of the British administration, what is evident is that the introduction of this new belief system greatly 'helped' in the consolidation of the British colonial power, and vice versa the colonial set-up facilitated the spread of Christianity among the tribes. This synergistic force of the colonial administrators and the missionaries created an 'ambivalence' in the ways the Mizo people eventually came to view themselves and their relationship to the *Sap.*

The disruption brought about by colonialism to the ways of the Mizo tribes coupled with the introduction of a new system of belief resulted in a complete overturn of the Mizos' political, social and cultural systems. The enormity of the impact of colonialism on the whole Mizo cultural experience is immediately evident from the periodisation of Mizo history into "vai len hma lam" and "vai len hnu lam" ("before *vailen"* and "after/since *vailen*" Liangkhaia 139). The two works dealing with the pre-colonial period, namely *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* and *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* are both based on the oral tradition of the Mizos, but the latter is not

a work of fiction but rather a record of traditional Mizo culture. Many of the tribes which are now considered under the umbrella term "Mizo" had their own distinct identities based on tribal and linguistic divisions. 'Mizo' is an ethnonym for the ethnic tribes residing in present day Mizoram and its bordering areas. It is a compound word where '*mi*[25]' denotes 'people' and while opinions vary on the etymology of the term 'zo', the most widely accepted meaning denotes hill/mountain, lofty, or of high elevation. Dokhuma, aware of the heterogeneity in the traditional cultural beliefs and practices of the different tribes avoids the pitfalls of projecting the dominant Lusei traditional culture as a homogenous Mizo culture in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* through the inclusion of the traditional culture of the other tribes. While he admits the differences in customs and dialects, Dokhuma turns the issue into a matter of inclusion - to assert the inclusiveness under Mizo identity:

> He lehkha ziakah hian Lusei hnam, dawi sa kil tlang thei kalphung chauh ni lo, Ralte hnam leh awze dang kalphungte nen ka ziak chi chawm viau mai thei a. Mahse a eng hnam zia pawh chu khung tel ta i la, hmanlai Mizo kalphung a nih tho a khel chuan loh avangin, ziaka a awm hi a tha-ah i ngai tlang phawt mai teh ang …
>
> Mahse ka lehkhabu hian Lusei hnam kalphung chauh ni lo, Mizo zia thai lan ka tum zawk avangin, hnam hran tih thu lamah chuan rilru kal pentir lo ang u."
>
> I may have included the customs and traditions of not only the Lusei clans but also the Ralte and other tribes not sharing the same dialects with the Lusei. The inclusion of the ways of these tribes does not make this work any less about Mizo cultural history, so let us be satisfied that it gets to be recorded in writing... My intension is not to record the ways of only the Lusei clans but rather the culture of the Mizo, let us not make an issue out of the clan's differences. (x)

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[25] *Mi* – a person, a man, a thing, one, people, kind, sort, which; the person, the man, the thing, the one, etc.; anyone, someone, others, another (*DLL* 313).

In the same preface, Dokhuma goes on to emphasise what he believes are the defining positive characteristics of the Mizo tribes and the core values that inform the Mizo way of life in the olden days:

> Pi leh pu atangin Mizote hi hnam huaisen, hnam tan leh mi dang tana inchhi ral thak ngam hnam kan nih bakah sakhawmi tak, pi leh pu (hnam) thurochhiah ngai pawimawh hnam, aia upate zah thiam tak leh an thu pawh a kawi a ngila zawm thin, hnam rinawm, rukruk leh tualthah duh ngai lo, Kristian kan nih hma phei chuan Kristian zirtirna laimu nuna hmang thlap hnam kan ni, ti ila kan tisual tampui lo ang. Mahse kan ramah Kristianna a lo luh atangin kan hnam nun a dal tial tial a, kan sakhuana nun pawh a pan telh telh bawk a. Kristian nun kan la chhah telh telh chuang si lo a. Hnam dangin min chim zel a, kan Mizo ze pangngai leh kan Kristian nun a dal hret hret zel a.

> From the time of our ancestors, we the Mizos have been a valiant tribe, willing to sacrifice one's all for individuals and for the tribe, deeply religious, reverential of the traditions and legacies of the ancestors, known for showing respect for elders and obedience to their wishes and whims, an honest and trustworthy tribe who desisted from engaging in theft or murder, and who, it may be claimed, lived by codes of Christian ethics even more thoroughly before we even became Christians. However, the pre-Christianity culture started to gradually fade away with the introduction of Christianity to our land, and our religious nature followed the same fate, and yet we have not let the teachings of Christianity take root in us either. As outsiders are gradually encroaching our bounds, we are gradually losing our Mizo character along with our devotion to the Christian way of life. (xi)

Dokhuma's concern for the threat of cultural assimilation and the loss of Mizo cultural identity as expressed in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* underlines most of his works:

> Tunah phei chuan hnam nihna (*identity)* hre lo lehkhathiam te, hnam nihna hloh khawpa *Party* buaipuina te, dikna ngainep khawpa hmasawn tumna te,

> Mizo nih zak khawpa rual pawh zau inti te, hnam incheina thlauh khawpa hnam dang entawnna te, mahni tawng hmusit khawpa tawng dang thiam chapopuina te, Mizo tlawmngaihna hloh khawpa intih-Kohhranmi-na te, khua leh tui tan ni lova mahni tana lal duhna te, hnam huaisen ber thin hnam dawizep ni khawpa hnam dang *Politics* luhkhungna leh mahni ke-a ding zo lova inhriatna chhiahhlawh rilru pu kan awm palh ang tih a hlauhawm ta zawng a nih hi.
>
> We have come to a point where the threat of having within our midst people who are educated but lacking knowledge of one's cultural identity, those who have lost their cultural integrity because of extreme partisan politics, those willing to disregard morals in the pursuit of their ambitions, people who are embarrassed of being Mizo due to their supposed exposure to other cultures, those who imitate other cultures to the point of rejecting the Mizo traditional dress, those whose fluency of other languages only lead them to a disdain for their own, those whose sense of affiliation to the Church lead them to lose Mizo *tlawmngaihna*, those who want political power only for their personal gains, and the reduction of a brave *hnam* to cowards under the influence of political forces from 'outside' leading to the 'slave mentality' that has internalized the belief that one's own *hnam* is not capable of surviving on its own resources. (xi–xii)

Franz Fanon, in the *Wretched of the Earth*, discusses why and how the 'colonised intellectuals' undertake the task of 'rediscovering the past,' suggesting that "perhaps this passion and this rage are nurtured or at least guided by the secret hope of discovering beyond the present wretchedness, beyond this self-hatred, this abdication and denial, some magnificent and shining era that redeems us in our own eyes and those of others." He decides to delve deeper, saying, "Since perhaps in their unconscious the colonized intellectuals have been unable to come to loving terms with the present history of their oppressed people, since there is little to marvel at in its current state of barbarity, they have decided to go further, to delve deeper, and they must have been overjoyed to discover that the past was not branded with shame, but dignity, glory, and sobriety. Reclaiming the past does not only rehabilitate or

justify the promise of a national culture. It triggers a change of fundamental importance in the colonized's psycho-affective equilibrium" (148). Although Fanon is wary of the danger that such projects can lead to the deployment of such mythologised pasts to bring in a new elite power group, he however, explains that the need is felt since "colonialism is not content merely to impose its law on the colonized country's present and future. Colonialism is not satisfied with snaring the people in its net or of draining the colonized brain of any form or substance. With a kind of perverted logic, it turns its attention to the past of the colonized people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it" (149).

Hall, in his study of the "first position," also cites some of the lines quoted above from Fanon (albeit from a different translation), and, while he questions this essential position of cultural identity to establish a "second position", he also warns against dismissing it altogether, while stressing its role as "a very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation" in movements beyond the immediate decolonisation projects:

> We should not, for a moment, underestimate or neglect the importance of the act of imaginative rediscovery which this conception of a rediscovered, essential identity entails. 'Hidden histories' have played a critical role in the emergence of many of the most important social movements of our time – feminist, anti-colonial and anti-racist. ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 224)

Citing as example artistic productions by "black people" in diaspora, he calls such a production "an act of imaginary reunification," and how "such images offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation, which is the history of all enforced diasporas. They do this by representing or 'figuring' Africa as the mother of these different civilisations. This Triangle is, after all, 'centered' in Africa. Africa is the name of the missing term, the great aporia, which lies at the centre of our cultural identity and gives it a meaning which, until recently, it lacked." He goes on to explain that the "rift of separation, the 'loss of identity,' that is integral to the black diasporic experience finds a healing process in such representations. "Such tasks restore an imaginary fullness or plenitude, to set

against the broken rubric of our past. They are resources of resistance and identity, with which to confront the fragmented and pathological ways in which that experience has been reconstructed withtin the dominant regimes of cinematic and visual representation of the West" (225).

Although Hall's essay is written within the context of the Caribbean diaspora, and specifically the "new Cinema of the Caribbean," and while Fanon's work was deemed anti-colonial liberationist and situated in the Algerian liberation movement, the representation of Mizo identity in Dokhuma's works, and especially in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii, Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, and in a more complex articulation in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, has its beginnings in much the same scenario. This concern with the 'preservation' of the 'essence' of being Mizo is most evident in his representation of the intangible cultural heritage as witnessed in *Tumpangchal nge Saithangpuii*. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Dokhuma expresses his intention to highlight the exemplary qualities of the character of Fehtea as one of his purposes in choosing to re-tell this oral tale, and as such, he portrays Fehtea as the very embodiment of *Tlawmngaihna*, and a *Pasaltha*. *Tlawmngaihna*, as a Mizo code of life characterised by altruism, self-sacrifice, chivalry, valour and humility, is not exclusive to the *Pasaltha*, nor is it confined to the males of the society. Dokhuma himself, in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, wrote about the ways in which the young women's *tlawmngaihna* was practiced in those days. In fact, it was regarded as the code of ethics which governed the whole social functioning of the village. It is the "Mizo philosophy of life," according to Vanlalchhuanawma who explains it as "a précis of the whole Mizo traditional discipline." *Tlawmngaihna* is the noun form of the verb *tlawmngai* (*-ngaih*) which means, according to JH Lorrain's *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* the following:

> 1. to be self-sacrificing, unselfish, self-denying, persevering, stoical, stouthearted, plucky, brave, firm, independent(refusing help); to be loth to lose one's good reputation, prestige, etc; to be too proud or self-respecting to give in, etc. 2. to persevere, to endure patiently, to make light of personal injuries, to dislike making a fuss about anything. 3. to put one's own inclinations on one side and do a thing which one would rather not do, with

> the object either of keeping up one's prestige, etc, or of helping or pleasing another, or of not disappointing another, etc. 4. to do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient it may be to oneself or to one's own inclinations. 5. to refuse to give in, give way, or be conquered. 6. to not like to refuse a request, to do a thing because one does not like to refuse, or because one wishes to please others. 7. to act pluckily or show a brave front. (513)

This dictionary entry has been listed out to show how completely these traits are embodied in the Fehtea's character. When the village chief decides to put the young men of his village to a test to find out their level of *tlawmngaihna* by summoning them in the middle of a rainy night, only Fehtea turns up in the chief's house. Putting him on a further test, the chief, on the pretext of having an urgent matter to be attended to in a neighbouring village, Fehtea readily volunteers, thus passing the test. While he pleases the chief and the *Upa* with his level of *tlawmngaihna,* they are also dismayed by the fact that only one out of more than two-hundred young men of the village *Zawlbuk* shows up. In the traditional village set-up, the chief depends on the young men of the village for security, the execution of orders and administration of the village. The nature of the relationship between the *Lal* and the *Zawlbuk* is such that "No orders or legislation of the *Lal*'s court room could be implemented nor codified without the express consent and approval of the *zawlbuk,* whereas the latter, as a rule, would not withhold its approval of the former's decisions without some concrete and unavoidable reasons" (Vanlalchhuanawma 55). Fehtea's response to the chief's summon should not, therefore, be seen as an act of servitude but rather as done out of *tlawmngaihna,* and thus warrants the favour of the *Lal* and the *Upa.* The disappointment they feel with the rest of the young men is also explained by this rather egalitarian dyanamics.

In Dokhuma's portrayal of Fehtea, however, what stands out even more at times is his physical strength and his hunting prowess. Right from the opening of the narrative, Fehtea's strength and skill in *inbuan*[26] (traditional Mizo recreational form

[26] *Inbuan* – v. to wrestle, to wrestle together, to have a wrestle. adj. wrestling (*DLL* 195).

of wrestling) is highlighted. It is here that we are introduced to the character of the antagonist – Sangtuala, a perfect foil to the character of Fehtea. When Fehtea defeats the *mikhual tlangval*[27] (young man from another village) which Sangtuala had lost to earlier, the latter's ego is bruised, sparking a conniving kind of animosity which leads him to come up with plot after plot to smear the reputation of Fehtea. With every feat achieved by Fehtea, Sangtuala gets further inflamed, and the more vindictive he gets, the more despicable his plots, until he finally succeeds in bring disrepute to the protagonist.

Interestingly, however, it is mainly through his hunting prowess that Fehtea is made to reclaim his reputation and to regain the trust of his father – by proving his worth through the slaying of the *tumpangchal* (the wild gayal) and not by proving his innocence and gradually rebuilding his reputation. Sangtuala, being overwhelmed by the feat of Fehtea and over-powered by the *Zu* that he has consumed at the celebration of Fehtea's slaying of the famed *tumpangchal*, makes a confession by declaring the series of machinations that has crushed the reputation of Fehtea, thereby clearing the latter's name. Fehtea is further rewarded with the ultimate in prize – the hand of the only daughter of the village chief. Although the endurance, perseverance and steadfastness of Fehtea in the face of social rejection and derision are also qualities that exemplify *tlawmngaihna*, these are often overshadowed by the display of masculine prowess in wrestling and hunting. Dokhuma's concept of the *pasaltha* as shown in *Tumpangchal nge Saithangpuii* is, thus, a combination of bravery, perseverance, *tlawmngaihna*, and physical prowess.

> Kan pi leh pute hmanlai nunphungin a ngaihsan zawng tak leh an hlutsak thil thlengin he thawnthu-ah hian a lang a. Lal khua leh tuia khawtlang daingul leh pasaltha, mi-kawlh sa-kawlh hmaa zam lo Mizo tlangval tlawmngaite fakawmzia leh ropui si-zia te chu khawvel hmaa pho lan theih ni ta se ka va ti em! Amaherawhchu, he Mizo ze chhuanawm tak lungphum hi kan innghahna ber mai ni se, tuma hmuh theih lohin kan phum bo hlen ang tih chu ka hlauh

[27] *Mikhual tlangval* – *Mikhual* –n. a stranger, one belonging to another village, a guest or visitor from another village. (*DLL* 314) *Tlangval* – n. a youth, a young man (*DLL* 512).

> em avangin, a tak inkawhhmuh mai tur hre lo mah ila, thawnthu tala kan insihhmuh theih beisei in he thawnthu hi ka ziak ta a ni e.
>
> The values of our forefathers and what they esteemed and held in high regard are clearly discernible in this story. How I wish that the world may see the honour and greatness of the stalwarts of the chiefdom – those *Pasaltha*, the young Mizo men who feared not the fiercest of men nor the most ferocious of beasts, embodying the code of *Tlawmngaihna*! It is my hope in writing this story that, as a tangible representation of *Tlawmngaihna* which has been fundamental to the Mizo ethos, it plays a role in the preservation of this admirable code, to prevent it from fading into obscurity. (7-8.)

The centrality of the concept of *pasaltha* to Mizo identity becomes more indisputable in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* both set within the *Rambuai* era. The Mizo people's political consciousness has been, in part, a product of colonialism, and yet it is also engendered through the relationship with the rest of what would eventually become sovereign India. The aspect of nationalism located in these works had their origins in the notion of a collective Mizo identity that was formed during the colonial times, and the withdrawal of the British brought up questions of 'belonging' within the independent Indian union. The notion of Mizo nation can be understood within the definition given by Anthony D Smith: "A named human population occupying a historic territory and sharing common myths and memories, a public culture, and common laws and customs for all members" (*Chosen Peoples* 24). In this ethno-symbolic approach, the nation is not a modern phenomenon but has been around since the farthest historical records as *ethnie,* and is neither confined to the western civilisation. *Ethnies* are constituted, not by lines of physical descent, but by the sense of continuity, shared memory and collective destiny, i.e. by lines of cultural affinity embodied in myths, memories, symbols and values retained by a given cultural unit of population (*National Identity* 29). Within this understanding of Mizo nationalism, the symbolic significance of the *pasaltha* as central to Mizo identity can be understood. *Rinawmin* opens with a chapter titled "Pasaltha". This chapter is not intrinsically significant to the plot except for the introduction of the major characters, and yet the symbolic meaning cannot be missed.

The shooting of a bear by a secondary character, Hrangluaia, a close friend of the protagonist, and who would eventually become a member of the Mizo National Army along with the protagonist, is described in detail. However, this incident has no bearing to the plot apart from the highlighting of Hrangluaia's hunting skill and the way in which the *Hlado* which accompanies the shooting is regarded by the now-mostly Christian populace, and especially the elders of the Church of their village. Although the depiction of the young men who are variously referred to interchangeably as 'volunteers' and Mizo Army is in the romanticised heroic tradition, they themselves are never referred to as *pasaltha* themselves. It seems to be the author's intention to establish a link between the *pasaltha* of old and the new *pasaltha* of Mizo nationalism. He aligns them with the idea of *pasaltha* as protectors of the people, their land, their customs, their religion and thus, Mizo identity. The slogans "Pathian leh Kan Ram Tan" ("For God and our Land/Country/Nation") and "Hnehna chu Mizote Pathian ta a ni" ("Victory belongs to the God of the Mizo people") bring into sharp focus the changing ideals that the *pasaltha* stands for. It is within this re-formulation of the institution of the *pasaltha* that it is witnessed, more than in the works dealing with the historically older periods, that Mizo identity is as much a matter of 'becoming', if not more, than 'being'. This nuanced conception, of 'being' and 'becoming' Mizo can be understood through Hall's "second position" ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 225-227). This position is not a total rejection of the first, but rather

> … a related but different view of cultural identity. This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather – since history has intervened – 'what we have become'. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side –the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, the Caribbean's uniqueness. (225)

Without acknowledging the impact of the historical processes that came to mould and continue to determine the very form of Mizo identity construction, it will

also not be possible to comprehend the significance of the “first position” (223-225) in how the Mizo people have come to see themselves.

> Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being.’ It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (225)

In *Rinawmin,* Dokhuma codifies the character of Rozuala as a *hnam pasaltha,* with a strong sense of purpose and justice, bound by an astute sense of loyalty to the idea of Mizo nationalism. The changes in the socio-political system and the ethos of the Mizo people are reflected in the values which Rozuala embodies. His loyalty and devotion to the nationalist cause is bound up intricately with his devotion and loyalty in his personal relationship with Ramhluni, and the hopes and aspirations of the lovers are conjoined with the goals of an independent Mizo nation. Yet when faced with the opportunity to kill or capture alive the very brother of his beloved, he volunteers for the job. The said brother, Kapmawia by name, has become a hated *kawktu*[28] – an informer, responsible for the capture of many of his fellow Mizo Army personnel and volunteers including his own brother. For him, the *kawktu* are traitors of Mizo *hnam*, cowards who operate behind veil, and hindrances to the nationalist cause. The reactions of the immediate family of Kapmawia reveal another layer of Mizo sense of honour and betrayal. While his mother in her grief curses the Mizo Army and their leader Laldenga, it is in the manner in which the father and Ramhluni

[28] *Kawktu* – an informer who collaborates with the Indian Army to identify members of the Mizo National Army (Scholar’s input).

are conciliated with the death that the question of ‘loyalty’ is implicated. Ramhluni has always regarded her brother’s collaboration with the *vai* as a transgression and it prompts her to report his action to Rozuala through a letter where she expresses the shame she feels for what her brother has been doing and she reassures him that she would, unlike her brother, stay loyal to God and the country, even if not for the cause itself but out of her love for Rozuala. Hence she has been able to come to terms not only with her brother’s death but even with the possibility of her lover being the killer of her own brother. It is the reaction of her father that the notion of Mizo-ness as a process and as a positioning becomes clearer. The author presents Ramhluni’s father as a staunch supporter of the Mizo Union and one who has been quite vocal in his opposition to the MNF movement, yet when it comes to his son’s involvement as a *kawktu*, he regards it as an embarrassment. So the news of his son’s death does not seem to shock him. He accepts Kapmawia’s death as inevitable, saying that he had, time and again, warned his son not to have any association with the Indian Army, and that his death, though a pity, is an inevitable reckoning for his son’s actions. Although the Mizo Union is posited as collaborators to the *vai* in the nationalist rhetoric of the MNF and while some of the Mizo Union youths are indeed depicted as having joined the Indian Army and bearing arms under their patronage in both *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* when the question positions the Mizo in relation to the *vai,* the ethnic elements of shared past, values and kinship ties are invoked. Thus Kapmawia who has never been part of the MNF movement himself is still regarded as a ‘traitor,’ violating an unspoken code of loyalty to a shared bond, “a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 7), which in this case is the notion of Mizo national identity.

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CHAPTER THREE

INTERPRETING IDENTITY IN JAMES DOKHUMA'S TEXTS

The historical experience of colonialism, the encounter with Christianity and modernity, and the political upheavals ushered in by the end of British imperial domination and the resultant creation of the Indian nation-state, all have unequivocally transformed the fabric of Mizo ethos. The chapter traces the processes of engagement with such transformative forces, specifically focusing on the disruption and continuities within the social structures, belief systems and cultural practices, highlighting that while traditional systems, modes of knowledge, affiliation and signification, are supplanted by new forms of knowledge and belief, yet the traditional indigenous elements persist, finding articulation in the formation of Mizo as an ethno-religious Mizo national identity. Since cultural identities are "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* 225), this chapter explores how the same is played out within the cultural and symbolic elements that pertain to Mizo identity formation within the selected texts. The signifying practices, through which meanings are made, and how the shared codes and meanings continue to mould the way the Mizo understand themselves, and the shifts in the modes of meaning making have been examined in their historical context to highlight the disruptions and continuities in the cultural identity of the Mizo.

The *Vailen* of 1890 brought the Mizo inhabited areas under British administration and though faced with pockets of resistance for several years, by the year 1894 when the missionaries arrived, the British had already set themselves up as the 'rulers'. "Christian missions in Mizoram followed the tradition of "the cross follows the flag" (Vanlalchhuanawma 97). While it may be debatable whether Christianity would make inroads without the enabling hand of the British administration, what is evident is that the introduction of this new belief system greatly 'helped' in the consolidation of the British colonial power, and vice versa the colonial set-up facilitated the spread of Christianity among the tribes. This synergistic force of the colonial administrators and the missionaries created 'ambivalence' in the ways the Mizo people eventually came to view themselves and their relationship to the *Sap* since the missionaries 'gave' the Gospel and the script to the Mizo people. The imposition of new forms of governmentality, introduction of

Christianity and writing, and exposure to forms of modernity have transformed the ways in which the Mizo define themselves. The traditional forms of identification, belief system, social institutions and cultural practices have undergone radical transformations, yet the ethnic elements persist through the negotiation with the forces of change. It is within this understanding of Mizo identity as produced through discursive practices that the chapter locates itself.

The impact of Christianity in the way Mizo people have come to understand themselves is one of the most striking features of the works of James Dokhuma. According to Margaret L Pachuau, "the contrast in terms of identity in the pre- and post-colonial paramenters have been vast because the colonized Mizo domains were previously under a culture that was inherently non-Christian and so subsequently had a different sensibility altogether, whether religious or secular" (182). In the Mizo context, the history of the people before the introduction of new forms of historiography through colonialism exists only in the form of oral narratives. "Most oral narratives are those handed down after much 'censorship', according to L. Pachuau who uses the term 'censorship' "in the context of the notion of a decided suppression and restriction that has been associated with Mizo orality" and traces this 'aspect of control and predominant editing" as having its beginnings with the advent of the missionaries, and the subsequent perception of the traditional Mizo songs, and other oral tradition as posing a 'threat' of luring the Mizo community back to their pre-Christian ethos. That this process of filtering out the elements which are regarded as 'pagan' persists is evident in the remarkable lack of mention it receives in written Mizo literary compositions. What was once such an integral part of their life like the religious practices and their belief systems have been left out even from Dokhuma's own *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii.* The religious practices, beliefs, festivals, sacrificial practices and their worldview are narrated in detail in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung.* Dokhuma highlights the centrality of the traditional religious beliefs and practices to the tribes and how they permeate all aspects of their lives, from their main agricultural preoccupation to diseases and ailments, to hunting and festivals. Each of the Mizo tribes had their own complex sets of rituals and taboos anchored on pre-colonial ethos. Yet in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii,* the story is stripped of

traditional religiosity. For instance, Fehtea's successful hunt of the *tumpangchal* [wild gayal] [29] which is the turning point in the story is celebrated by the whole village including his nemesis, Sangtuala. Yet there is no mention of the '*Arhnuaichhiah*'[30] ceremony/ritual which, according to *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, is mandatory (42), nor is there any religious connotation attached to the kill. The sentiment of censorship persist even in the Rambuai era as shown in how the Church elders admonish Rozuala in *Rinawmin* for performing the *hlado* citing its connection with the 'pagan' religion of the pre-Christian era and the fact that it was one of the first things that the *Zosap* had taught the Mizo Christians to stop practicing as the reasons (23-24). This 'censorship' lends itself in three forms in the selected texts, omission, revision and reinterpretation. Since the characteristic of orality is essentially fluid and dynamic, "the homeostatic tendencies of memory usually consign to oblivion what is no longer wanted" (Goody 25). What has been omitted and 'consigned to oblivion' can only be conjectured at this point, and based on what Dokhuma says regarding the centrality of the religious beliefs and practices to the pre-Christian Mizo tribes in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, it may be inferred that such elements had been filtered out even in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii.*

Revision and re-interpretation of the past through newer forms of discursive frameworks is most evident in the area of Mizo beliefs and worldview. Explaining the concept of '*sakhua*'[31] (religion, belief system) as the belief in the existence of a higher power, not only for the here and now but presiding over even the afterlife, he

[29] All translations of quoted texts and titles of works in this chapter are done by me, unless noted otherwise, for the sole purpose of this study.

[30] *Arhnuaichhiah* - the name of a sacrifice of a fowl offered in order to ward off impending evil feared because of some bad omen observed by a hunter (*DLL* 12). Dokhuma, however, denotes that the ritual is mandatory for the hunter who has killed a wild gayal (Tumpangchal) regardless of any bad omen observed (Scholar's input).

[31] *Sakhua* - n. 1. an object of worship, a god. 2. ancient ancestors who are worshipped by the Lushais. 3. the spirit who presides over the house or house-hold. 4. religion, religious rites and ceremonies (*DLL* 401).

claims that the ancestors of the Mizo tribes could have been the most *sakhaw*[32] *mi*[33] ("religious") of all the tribes/nations of the world:

> Chumi kawngah chuan Mizo pi leh pute chu khawvel hnamah hian an sakhaw mi ber hial awm e. An ni tin khawsak dan chu sakhuanaa khat a ni ringawt a.
>
> In that regard, the Mizo ancestors could have been the most religious of all the tribes/nations of the world. Their daily life was permeated with such religiosity. (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 27)

On the etymology of *sakhua*, he explains that *'sa'*[34] refers to a 'creator/maker', the maker of all tribes/nations, and *'khua'* means 'guardian, keeper and one who bestow blessings', and that the word, '*bia'* (worship) was not used in reference to the rituals and sacrificial rites, but rather used the term *'sakhaw hmang*' ("observing *sakhua*/performing *sakhua*"), stressing on the performativity of their religion: "Mizote chuan an sakhaw thil serh sang an hlanin 'bia' tih tawngkam an hmang lo va, an sakhua chu an be lo va, a hmana an hman avangin *Sakhaw hmang* an ti a ni" (27). Here Dokhuma's version differs from the more dominant account found in Vanlalchhuanawma's *Christianity and Subaltern Culture* where he writes: "The term for worship was *sakhaw bia*[35] or *sabiak,*[36] of which *bia* literally means *to hold*

[32] *Sakhaw*- an abbreviated form of *sakhua* (especially when used as an adjective and before an adjective). adj. religious, pious, devout. v. to be religious, pious, devout (*DLL* 400). *Hmang (hman)* v. to use, to treat (as), to be used to, to be in the habit of, to be addicted to, to spend or keep (as Sunday or Christmas at a certain place); to offer (a sacrifice. – Can only be used with this last meaning when the name of the special sacrifice referred to is mentioned) (*DLL* 158).

[33] *Sakhaw mi* – n. religious person, a religiously minded person, a devout or pious person. adj. religious, pious, devout. v. to be religious, pious, or devout (*DLL* 400).

[34] *Sa* – n. an object of worship; a god; ancient ancestors who are worshipped by the Lushais; the spirit who precides over the house or household; religion, religious rites and ceremonies. (this is an abbreviated form of *sakhua,* also used in conjunction with *biak* and *phun.* See *sa biak* and *sa phun.*) (*DLL* 396).

[35] *Sakhaw bia* - verb form of *sakhaw biak* – n. 1. The worship or worshipping of one's god, or ancient ancestors, or the spirit who precides over one's house or household. 2. The god, ancient ancestors, or spirit whom one worships (*DLL* 400).

conversation with, while in religious usage it meant to worship, to venerate, or to adore" (64). '*Sabiak'* and '*sakhaw biak*' are also found in the works of Liangkhaia, Vannghaka and Lalthangliana. Dokhuma's account also varies from the more common account in the titles assigned to the priests of the Lusei clan in that he claims while the *puithiam*[37] (priest) of the Lusei was the *Sadawt,* [38] the *Bawlpu*[39] was the priest of the Ralte clan and not of the Lusei. The *sadawt* did have an assistant/aide, the *Tlahpawi*[40] who could step in for the *sadawt* when the need arose. Liankhaia and Lalthangliana have not mentioned the *bawlpu* altogether while Vanlalchhuanawma has included the *bawlpu* along with the *sadawt* and the *tlahpawi* among the Lusei priests, and in Vannghaka's "The Old Mizo Religion", the *sadawt* and the *bawlpu* were two different classes of priest found in every 'Mizo' village, each having his own distinct function – the *bawlpu* "performed sacrifices to propitiate evil spirits that cause illness to humans. The priest would feel the pulse of the patient and prescribe a domestic animal to be killed for sacrificial offering for recovery," while the *sadawt* who would "offer sacrifices to the good spirit called *Pathian* (God)", and the "village chief's *sadawt* functioned as the official priest and as such was responsible for performing all the religious functions of the whole village community… the *Sadawt* also performed the family religious rituals (*sakhaw biakna)*" (169).

Ironically, Dokhuma himself resorts to using the adjective '*biak'* interchangeably with '*hmang'* throughout the text, which denotes the tendency to re-imagine the pre-Christian ethos oriented in 'performativity' from the Christian

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[36] *Sabiak* – n. object of worship (*DLL* 397).

[37] *Puithiam* – n. an exorcist; a priest (*DLL* 371).

[38] *Sadawt* – n. a private exorcist or priest, especially such as are employed by ruling chiefs (*DLL* 397).

[39] *Bawlpu* – n. an exorcist, a priest (*DLL* 33).

[40] *Tlahpawi*- n. an exorcist or priest whose duty it is to divine with a *tlah* and a *tlahpawina*. (*tlah* - n. a piece of bamboo with some of its outside covering partially stripped off, used along with the *tlahpawina* for divining.) (*tlahpawina* - n. a piece of wood used along with the *tlah* for divining.) (*DLL* 509).

understanding of 'worship'. The variations are not limited to these points, and in fact, no two accounts concur on the exact nature of the belief system nor on the performance of the rituals and sacrifices. Such is the nature of orality, and various factors may account for the diversity. One such factor is clearly the tendency to reframe the oral past based on the concept of a homogenous Mizo identity in the pre-colonial period. Dokhuma, time and again, reiterates two points – on the one hand, the diversity of cultural practices that existed in each village setting, with the various tribes having their own distinct norms, dialects, beliefs and practices, and on the other hand, the difficulty of differentiating these. These points become more pertinent when it comes to the representation of *sakhua* - the belief systems, worldview and practices, which was inextricably linked and inherently fundamental to the *hnam* identity:

> A hnama sakhaw nei hrang mi an nih avangin an biak dan pawh a dang hret hret a. Tin, hnam leh sakhua chu inkungkaih tlat a nih avangin an hnam an thlak dawn pawh in a sakhua an thlak tihna an ni a. Chu avang chuan miin a sakhaw kungpui leh a hnam a phun sawn avangin a hmingah pawh *Saphun* an ti a, *Sakung* an tih an phun thin.
>
> Since each clan or sub-tribe had their own *sakhua,* the ways in which they practiced their *sakhua* also varies from clan to clan. Moreover, *hnam* and *sakhua* are intricately interconnected, and thus when one changed their *hnam* it necessarily meant that they had also changed their *sakhua*. Therefore the process of *saphun* is a shifting of the tribal as well as the religious affiliations, a replanting of the *sakung.*[41] (27)

Hnam, in the literal sense refers to all of the following – "clan, tribe, nation, nationality, race" *(DLL* 169). In the context of Mizo identity formation, the concept of Mizo as a *hnam* gradually evolves into a politically charged identity having ethnic,

[41] *Sakung* – literally, the 'tree of *sa.*' It is a symbolic act of setting up the household 'religion'. According to Dokhuma, the 'planting' of the *sakung* is done not only in the case of *saphun*, the 'conversion' of *hnam,* but is also a prerequisite of setting up one's own household. It involves a series of rituals and sacrifices (Scholar's input).

linguistic, territorial and religious dimensions. However, in the above quoted text, Dokhuma's usage of *hnam* refers to specific clans or sub-tribes like the Lusei and the Ralte clans or sub-tribes. What is evident is that the conception of *sakhua* itself cannot be explained in terms of the common understanding of the word 'religion' as a system of faith. What is suggested here is that their understanding of *sakhua* is something that cannot be separated from their clan or tribe identity, and also that there is a certain fluidity to their clan/tribe identity. That one may 'convert' to another clan or tribe and through that 'conversion' convert his belief system appears to be a complete reversal of the common conceptions of 'conversions'. Within the same context he also says that most of the *saphun* happened to be from smaller tribes like Ralte to the dominant tribe, Lusei, and goes on to reiterate the inseparableness of *hnam* and *sakhua*:

> Hnam dangin mi sakhua an tawm ve khan an sakhua chauh a tawm a ni lo va, a hnam chena a inleh a ngai a. Lusei hnam kalphung chu sakhaw hnam a nih avangin an sakhaw zawmtu chuan an hnam pawh a zawm nghal lo thei lo.
>
> When a person from one clan adopts the *sakhua* of another clan, he not only changes his *sakhua* but his clan affiliation as well. Since the Lusei clan's system is also Lusei *sakhua*, the one who has adopted their *sakhua* cannot choose not to adopt the Lusei *hnam.* (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 28)

What must be considered here is that the pre-Christian belief systems of the Mizo tribes operated within a completely different paradigm from the western Christian belief system altogether. The religious/secular binary did not seem to exist in the pre-Christian Mizo ethos and nor was there a distinction between religion and ethnicity. In this regard, Lalsangkima Pachuau's argument becomes key to understanding the old belief systems he calls "Mizo primal religion":

> *Sakhua,* in its original use, has **a** much more narrow meaning and limited scope in the traditional Mizo society than what we today understand religion to be. Because the word has been used to translate the English word "religion," all that which conceptually accompanied religion in the English word has been gradually imported as the meaning of *sakhua* even at the risk

> of inundating the original meaning. This resulted in a certain kind of confusion as to the content and meaning of traditional Mizo religion (or primal religion). Whereas the scope of the original meaning of *sakhua* was very limited, the range of what could be considered religious in the traditional Mizo society itself was much broader. (2006, 34:1, 42)

He points out that there are two methodological flaws in the study of the traditional Mizo religion and religiosity that have resulted from this issue pertaining to the translation of the English word 'religion' into '*sakhua'* in the Mizo language. The first one is that "because of the choice of *sakhua* to 'translate' religion, the search for the primal religion of the Mizos has often been done within what *sakhua* refers to in the traditional society" and he contends that this "gravely restricts the meaning of the religion." He clarifies that "there is no doubt that *sakhua* was an essential part of the Mizo primal religion, but it did not constitute the whole religion." The second flaw, he points out, is that "the onslaught of modern western thought with its clear dichotomy between what is sacred and what is secular has deeply influenced existing descriptions of the primal religions of the tribal people. Such a framework is foreign and its imposition fails to do justice to the integrity of the religious concept." He maintains that "any study on primal religion of most tribal groups, such as the Mizos, must avoid the highly western sacred-profane dichotomy and look at the entire socio-cultural life system for the meaning of the people's religion and religiosity. This is because of the absence of a clear-cut sacred-profane dichotomy in tribal (and in many other eastern people's) worldview. The interconnectedness of different aspects of the society and the interlocking meanings of symbols of various domains of life do not permit such clear dichotomy as life is seen and treated as one whole" (41 – 42). In the light of this argument, it becomes clearer why Dokhuma's chapter on "Sakhaw Hman Dan" ("How *Sakhua* is Practiced") in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* is limited to the descriptions of several rituals and practices, and of the 'gods' or 'deities'. He claims that practice of *sakhua* is confined to those that relate to *Pathian*, [42] and that '*inthawina'*[43] (sacrificial rituals,

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[42] *Pathian* – n. God, the Giver and Preserver of Life. adj. godly, pious, religious, devout. v. to be godly, pious, religious (*DLL* 352).

propitiatory offerings) were offered solely to the *ramhuai*[44] (demons/spirits) since these malevolent spirits were thought to be the cause of all human ailments and had to be appeased. Yet within the same passage he writes that there were two types of *inthawina'* – one to *Pathian* and the other to *ramhuai*, and later in the passage, "Pathian laka inthawina pawimawh deuh deuh kan sawi hmain, pi leh putena ramhuai chi an thliar dan lo chhui hmasa ila" ("Before we talk about the propitiatory sacrifices to *Pathian*, let us first trace how our ancestors classified the demons/spirits"; 54), as if to suggest that *Pathian* and *ramhuai* cannot be totally differentiated. The concept of *Pathian*, like many other writers and scholars tend to do, is represented as a supreme, benevolent yet indifferent divine entity by Dokhuma in both *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* and *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*. In fact *Pathian* is the only spiritual being mentioned in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, and here the indignant chief of Darzo village, expressing his disappointment on his village *tlangval*, attributes their fortune of not having foes to the benevolence of "*Chunga Pathian*" in the phrase "Chunga Pathianin zahngaiin bawkkhupin min thlir a, ti hian do la lovin kan awm hlauh pawh a" ("*Chunga Pathian* [the God on High/the God above us] has been watching us (in a prone position) with kindness, we are fortunate to not have any foe"; 21). He uses this same phrase to explain how *Pathian* is conceived of as existing in the realm above mankind, and so has to lay down prone in order to observe mankind. Here he claims that *Pathian* is synonymous with the *Khua* in *sakhua*, that *Sa* represents a creator, while *Khua* was the guardian, protector and the source of blessing for mankind, and that *Pathian/Khua* was believed to be the one who designs and decrees everything (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 30). The general trend to interpret the traditional belief system of the Mizo along the Judeo-Christian tradition of monotheism is found not only in the early writings of the *Sap*, but also among the scholars even to this day.

[43] *Inthawina* – n. a sacrifice, a sacrificial offering; that which is offered in sacrifice or has anything to do with such a sacrifice. adj. Sacrificial (*DLL* 214).

[44] *Ramhuai* – n. an evil spirit, a demon, a devil, a nat (*DLL* 376).

Vanlalchhuanawma credits the earliest interpretations in this tradition to the pioneer missionary, D.E. Jones and two of the British administrative officials, J Shakespeare and A.G. McCall, which were all oriented towards the belief in a supreme or at least a benevolent God, and a distinction between this benevolent being and the numerous 'spirits of evil' and hints at the difficulty faced by the colonial ethnographic writers in trying to grasp the traditional Mizo belief system, yet after he goes on to trace the accounts of the earliest Mizo writers, *Khua was* "almost identified as Fate" and as imminent, and he goes on to say that "in the process of the progressive understanding of God the Mizos developed an idea of different personalities in *Pathian,* known by different names. Here he lists out the "four such divine or rather heavenly personalities with various functions, as written by K. Zawla in *Mizo Pipu te leh an Thlahte Chanchin*: "*Puvana* (God in heaven)," "*Vanchungnula* (heaven's maiden)," "*Vanhrika"* who is "the god of science and magic", and *"Khuanu* (Mother Goddess)" (All translations: Vanlalchhuanawma 64). Dokhuma's version corresponds to this rhetoric in so far as he believes that these 'divine personalities' are variations of the same "*Chung Pathian*" (the only variation being *Puvana,* who he claims is also called *"Khuapa"*) but the point of departure is Dokhuma's admittance that these 'personalities' include those which are not exactly conceived of as *Pathian* (30). To Page DuBois,

> Polytheism is characteristic of many traditional cultures, and a loyalty to many gods can mark resistance to colonization and its demand to convert, to accept the conquerors' one god and abandon the deities, the ancestor-gods, and the ancestors. The prejudice against conquered peoples' religious practices, be they animism or polytheism, has often been linked to forms of racism, the view that phenotypically different human beings are racially inferior, their skin color along with their religions markers of primitivism and backwardness." (129-30)

The dominant narrative regarding Mizo *sakhua* is decidedly inclined towards a notion of a monotheistic concept of God, an attempt to align the spiritual entities with the notion of a supreme God above all other entities without labeling it as polytheism, and perhaps as a counter-narrative to the generalisation that the pre-

Christian Mizo tribes were animists. K.C. Vannghaka's "The Old Mizo Religion" may be cited as an illustration of this point. He declares, "The old Mizo religion is *monotheism,* but they also believed in the existence of minor gods bearing different names. However, some writers of Mizo history describe the traditional religion of Mizo as *Animism*… Such writers ignored any element of theism in the religion, which should be classified as *prima* rather than 'animism'. Though there was a certain element of truth in these characterization [sic] of Mizo religion, they were by and large, illustrations of the ignorance of those who claimed to have 'advanced' religions about the nature of primal religion" (2013: 165). While the latter part of the quotation seems to be aimed towards dispelling certain misconceptions, his declaration itself is paradoxical.

While the plurality of oral tradition itself as well as the heterogeneity of the pre-Colonial Mizo tribes, situated within the premise of the "interconnectedness of different aspects of the society and the interlocking meanings of symbols of various domains of life" that is found in Mizo orality points towards a complex belief system that cannot neatly fit into the scheme of any one of the classifications, yet this rhetoric served the evangelising mission of the first missionaries in Mizoram which sets into motion the processes of formulating and reformulating the very notion of Mizo identity. Some of the ways in which this new religion, although it has been effectively argued by scholars like Lalsangkima Pachuau, Vanlalchhuanawma and Joy L.K. Pachuau that the indigenous elements in Mizo Christianity have produced a religion that cannot be termed as 'foreign', have changed the understanding of religion itself can be illustrated from *Rinawmin.* First of all, in marked contrast to *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii,* the other selected novels, being set in the period after the introduction of Christianity, represent the Mizo as 'essentially' Christian. Mizo identity at this point of time, had acquired an ethno-religious dimension, more notably in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm.* In *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, the Christian festival – Christmas, in Mizo orthography *Krismas,* or *'Mas'* (*Mas* is a contraction *Krismas,* and is often used in the text, especially in the casual dialogues) has now come to be the time marker. In the selected texts, we see how *Krismas* or *Mas* has come to be regarded as the most important time of the year, although the

traditional agro-based cyclical time markers have not been relegated. The period covered in these three works is a period of 'Mizo Christianity'- a period when the Mizo people have come to totally identify themselves as Christians, practicising what can only be called 'Mizo Christianity', a hybridised identity of Christianity with indigenous elements, with a "national consciousness" that seeks to assert Mizo nationalism through the ideologies of an "imagined community." The significance of *Krismas* beyond the religious is seen in the ways the characters regard it – as a festival to be celebrated with their community in the indigenous traditions and reminiscent of the pre-Christian festivals – the feast that has come to be associated with the occasion and the necessary slaughter of a pig. The indigenisation of Christmas is seen in how the *Krismas ruai*[45] (feast) is accompanied by the *lengkhawm,*[46] and how it can stretch beyond the New Year. How the celebration of the New Year has come to be regarded as a Christian festival is not certain, yet we see how it is seen as a continuation or as part of the *Krismas* celebration itself. We also see how the characters understanding of the *Krismas* festival is bound up with their *khua*, their village. In both *Rinawmin* and in *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* we see how the '*vai'* (the Indian Army and all its personnel are collectively referred to as 'vai' in the texts), seeming to understand the religious and cultural significance of the *Krismas* and *Kum Thar ruai,*[47] choose to wait till the evening of the *Kum Thar ruai* to announce the intended 'grouping' of the villages:

> That year Hualtu celebrated Christmas in the presence of the Army. Yet, despite the times, the community singing and celebrations by the different churches went off better than expected. New Year too was celebrated eagerly just like other years. The soldiers in the village remained indifferent all the

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[45] *Ruai* - n. a feast (*DLL* 392).

[46] *Lengkhawm* – it denotes both the indigenous form of communal singing event as well as the type of songs sung at such events. The *lengkhawm* (the event) and the *lengkhawm zai* (the type of singing/song are hybrids of the indigenous folk and Christian elements. (Scholar's input)

[47] *Kum thar* – n. the new year (*DLL* 276).

while. Curfew was lifted during Christmas and New Year celebrations so that people moved about freely.

The day after New Year, even before the feasting was over, the Army there suddenly announced that everybody in Hualtu village should move to Baktawng the very next day. (“The Beloved Bullet” 171)

This tactic of ‘grouping’ required a few villages within the same zone to move to a designated village grouping centre which they term, ‘Protected Progressive Village’ (PPV), and which the Mizo people, equating it with Hitler’s ‘Concentration Camp’, referred to as “Public Punishment Village” (*Silaimu Ngaihawm* 68). The same plot line is employed by Dokhuma in *Rinawmin* where the separation of Ramhluni and Rozuala is caused mainly by the same grouping tactic. Dokhuma, in *Rinawmin*, consistently uses the term “*Khalhkhawm”*[48] to refer to the grouping, a term which translates to “to drive together, to round up”, appropriately suggestive of the corralling of cattle. To the female protagonists in both these works, *Krismas*, since the MNF uprising of 1966, becomes the most difficult times of their lives. The loss or absence of their lovers is felt most acutely during Christmas time. The lore of the lonely grave in *Silaimu Ngaihawm* is directly associated with *Krismas* since Ramliani has come to connect the loss of her lover, his grave and *Krismas.* The Christian festival of Christmas, to the Mizo Christian imagination, is thus intricately bound up with the socio-cultural identity of these works.

Another interesting change in the sensibility of the Mizo Christian is his attitude towards *Zu*[49] [Liquor], and this change may be traced in the selected works. In *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung,* Dokhuma records the various kinds of *zu*, how they are brewed, for what purpose, and for whom it is intended. He explains that since time immemorial, *zu* had played a central role in the life of the Mizo tribes. It is clearly evident from his description that not only drinking but the process of producing the drink themselves are community affairs, having deep cultural and religious

[48] *Khalhkhawm – v.* to drive together, to round up (*DLL* 248)

[49] *Zu* - Beer or any fermented liquor (*DLL* 570)

significances. No religious rite is complete without *zu,* and there are certain set codes to follow regarding how, when and which *zu* should be prepared depending on the rite or ritual that is being practiced. He also shows that drinking is an inclusive activity, one in which the elders and the children of the community are included. In *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, the religious significance of *zu* is left out altogether, along with any element of the 'old religion', yet depicts the socio-cultural significance in various ways. When the chief of the village wanted to show his appreciation of Fehtea's tlawmngaihna, he asked his daughter, Saithangpuii to serve Fehtea with *zufang*,[50] and although he tried to decline it, he was compelled to take a sip since it is regarded as an honour. The same process is repeated when Fehtea bagged the prized *tumpangsial*.

The extent of the missionary's intervention is hard to trace, yet we may safely say that the attitude towards *zu* changed due to the introduction of Christianity. D.E Jones, one of the first two missionaries reported during the early years of their mission that "One great difficulty to grown-ups in accepting Christianity has been to abstain from alcoholic liquors… And it will remain a stumbling block to many for a long time." (qtd. in Vanlalchhuanawma 141). While one of the reasons for the advocacy of abstinence from liquor could be the Welsh Missions' stance of abstinence, but another, and more strategic motive would be the fact that *zu* and drinking had been part and parcel of the 'old religion', and the 'pagan' culture of the Mizo tribes.

By the time Mizo identity evolved into a nationalist movement in the sixties, as seen in *Rinawmin*, the proscription of *zu* has become part and parcel of Mizo Christian identity. The indigenous form of Christianity that has become central to Mizo religio-ethno-nationalism is clearly discernable when the protagonist Major Rozuala, informs the rules and codes of 'Mizo Army' to his Battalion. Of the seven rules, the first four deals with discipline, loyalty, honesty, integrity and chivalry,

[50] *Zufang* – n. fermented rice and its liquor made in a smaller pot than ordinary beer or *zupui*, and used on less important occasions. This fermented rice is generally made of *kawnglawng* or *fazu.* It is eaten as a refreshment, and its liquor is also drunk as a beverage (*DLL 572*).

codes which had always been part of the Mizo tribal culture. But the last three points specifically highlight the practices of Mizo Christianity, and these were aspects which were never part of the Mizo traditional systems:

> 5. Zu reng reng in phal a ni lo. 6. A theih chhung chuan Chawlhni serh hram tur. 7. Mizo Army-ah chuan inkhawm hi thupek a ni.
>
> 5. The consumption of any type of liquor is prohibited. 6. The sanctity of the Lord's Day/Sunday should be observed. 7. Worship/Church service is mandatory in the Mizo Army. (105)

How the Church has become the regulator of the socio-cultural life is also evidenced in an episode in chapter -2 of the text where the local Church elders summon Rozuala, to chastise him for perfoming the *hlado. Hlado* is the hunter's cry or chant, raised on the occasion of the successful chase of specific wild animals. Bears, wild gayals, boars, elephants and tigers, all have their own specific *hlado* to be chanted at specific time and location in Mizo traditional system. It had its origin in the distant past, with different tribes having their own chants and indiscriminately applied to the killing of wild animals and enemies alike. However, like all forms of oral tradition, it eventually evolves into two types – the *hlado* for slain animals, and the *bawh hla*[51] for slain enemies. The *hlado* has featured regularly in Dokhuma's works, and among the selected texts, it is found prominently in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* and *Rinawmin.* The elders' objection to the *hlado* in *Rinawmin* is on the grounds that these chants are markers of the traditional values and belief systems, and that it goes against the teachings of the missionaries and also of the Church (23-25). Since the shifts in the power structure and the ways in which the Mizo has come to see themselves, the 'national consciousness' that resulted in a large-scale conflict with the Indian union will be the focus of the next chapter, suffice it here to say that the changes ushered in by the processes of colonialism and the subsequent exposure to globalisation have a far-reaching impact on the formation and re-formulations of Mizo identity.

[51] *Bawh hla* – n. the warrior's chant or cry; the chant or cry raised by warriors when returning from a successful raid (*DLL* 31)

The study of orality is significant in the postcolonial cultures as it pertains to the notion of identity. "Post-colonial cultural studies have led to a general re-evaluation of the importance of orality and oral cultures and a recognition that the dominance of the written in the construction of ideas of civilization is itself a partial view of more complex cultural practices" (Ashcroft et al. 151). The oral past, in the Mizo context, becomes a rich field of resources through which the Mizo continually affirms the sense of 'past', and through the re-interpretation of such a past, re-formulate Mizo national identity. In an article which studies the prominence of oral tradition in contemporary African writing and dealing specifically with the works of notable postcolonial writers like Bessie Head and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, M.J. Cloete and R.N. Madadzhe concludes that:

> …written African literature cannot be properly studied without viewing it as firmly rooted in oral tradition. Moreover, literature alters profoundly and often irrevocably with any change in society, whether political, economic, social, cultural, religious, or educational. No meaningful study can thus be made of any form of change without a sound understanding of the manifestation of the true nature of similar conditions in the past. Such knowledge can best be accumulated by studying relevant oral literature. (16)

The same may be said of written Mizo literature, especially the works of James Dokhuma, in that much of what the author has written is steeped in the oral tradition of the Mizo tribes, and his own writings bear witness to the changes in the social, political, religious and cultural dimensions of Mizo identity. As mentioned earlier in the previous chapters, *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* is based on an oral tale that Dokhuma believes is not particularly well known. The Mizo people, like most oral cultures, have a rich storytelling tradition. Mizo oral tradition abounds with origin myths, folk lores and folktales which display the Mizo imagination of an enchanted world where the lines between the human, the animal and the spiritual realms are usually blurred. Yet there are also human stories which depict the joys and sorrows, the struggles and triumphs of a people living in a world where they have to negotiate with the forces of the elements, the threats of the wild and of their enemies. These tales are often based on real incidents, and most often feature what may be

regarded as love stories. The plot of *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* belongs to this type of oral tale. In the Preface, Dokhuma has made an acknowledgement that his source is an oral story but one that is lesser known:

> He thawnthu hi awm sa behchhana ka ziak a ni a. Mahse chu thawnthu awm sa chuan thawnthu hming (title) a nei chuang lem lo a. Tin, thawnthu lar tak pawh a ni lo a ni ang, mi sawi ve pawh ka hre vak lo. Mahse thawnthu awm zawng a ni meuh mai. Chu thawnthu awm sa chu a sei vak lo a. Mahse thawnthu zir tlak leh awmze nei tak a nih si avangin, chu chu laimua hmangin a tuamtu leh cheimawina ka siam belh ta a. A tingaihnawmtu atan thiam vak lo chungin ka pawt fan (expand) velin ka duang danglam vak a. Mahse chu ka siksawi kual velna chuan a thawnthu lai hlawm chu a khawih che chuang lo.
>
> This story is based on an existing one. However, the original story does not have a title. It is not a widely-known story and I hardly know anyone telling it. Yet it is indeed an existing oral tale. That original tale is not of considerable length. Yet, since it is a tale worthy of contemplation with deeper significance, I have used this as the core of this narrative while fleshing it out and adding embellishments. In an attempt to make it more interesting I have, with humble effort, expanded and considerably restructured the tale. However, these modifications that I have made have not in any way affected the essence of the original tale. (*Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* 7)

Dokhuma's articulation of the processes of committing to writing what had hitherto been one of the many oral stories of the Mizo people has several significances for the present study. Some aspects of the 'original' tale mentioned here like the absence of a proper title and that it is a short tale, denote that the source tale is a typical Mizo oral tale. The difference between oral cultures and chirographic cultures is not only in the absence or presence of writing. While orality and writing cannot be regarded as excusive to one another, the influence of the technology of writing on the human thought processes has led to a restructuring of human consciousness, according to Ong:

> Without writing, the literate mind would not and could not think as it does, not only when engaged in writing but normally even when it is composing its thoughts in oral form. More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness. (77)

Marshall McLuhan goes even further to claim that "societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication" (8). The shift in how narratives are presented after the introduction of writing is already evident in the quoted lines from Dokhuma's "Preface" in these two aspects – that he has given a title to the tale, and also in lengthening and restructuring the narrative. The addition of a title to a narrative, in this case "Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii", and the breaking up of the tale into chapters, each having a title, may be regarded as evidence of chirographic conditioning. It is not unconventional for oral literature to bear titles, and Mizo oral tales are no different. What is unconventional, though, is the use of a title which does not bear the name of the protagonist nor is descriptive of the main events of the story. Most Mizo oral tales, whether they belong to myths, legends, fables or human stories, are conventionally referred to in several ways:

- by the name of the protagonist alone as in *Chemtatrawta or Mualzavata*;

- by the names of both the protagonist and a secondary character as in *Lalruanga leh Keichala*, or that of a love interest in the case of a love story as in *Zawlpala leh Tualvungi*, *Chawngmawii leh Hrangchhuana*;

- by the names of both the protagonist and the antagonist as in *Rungi nu leh Thialtea*, *Sakuh leh Sakhi*;

- or by a major event in the story as in *Thlanrawkpa Khuangchawi*, *Chungleng leh Hnuaileng Indo*.

As illustrated here, these titles are the names people give to these stories in order to identify them and differentiate them from other stories, and therefore are either self-explanatory or descriptive of the stories they refer to, and are always simple and straightforward. If Dokhuma had followed the oral convention, his work

would most probably be entitled one of the following - ‘Fehtea’, ‘Fehtea leh Saithangpuii’, ‘Fehtea leh Tumpangchal’ or ‘Fehtea leh Sangtuala’. The title given by Dokhuma to his work, however, involves a deeper noetic activity, more characteristic of a written culture. “Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii” literally translates to ‘Wild Gayal or Saithangpuii’ where Saithangpuii is the name of the village chief’s daughter. In the story, both the wild gayal and the chief’s daughter are presented as the ultimate dream of the men in the village. It has been the main topic of discussion of the menfolk in their *zawlbuk* for quite a while. To bag the head of the biggest wild gayal they have seen represents the utmost level of achievement in the *Pasaltha* realm. In a society where the hunting skill of a man is regarded not only as bringing fame and respect but even a passage to *pialral*,[52] the equivalent of heaven in the traditional Mizo belief system, the *tumpangchal* represents the culmination of their highest aspirations. To win the hand of Saithangpuii in marriage represents another type of achievement for the men of the village for various reasons – First of all, she is represented as an ideal woman, with physical features that most of the men find appealing coupled with qualities of feminine grace, industrious, energetic, kind and humble. Moreover, she is regarded as out of their league since daughters of chiefs usually marry sons of chiefs from other villages and a chief’s daughter marrying a commoner would be breaking tradition. In the case of Saithangpuii, it would carry the added benefit of eventually becoming the chief of the village if one happens to be lucky enough to marry her since she is the only child of their village chief. Thus the menfolk have turned these two ‘prizes’ into the ultimate question of choice between fame and glory on the one hand, and fortune and comfort on the other. The comparison has become such a favourite topic of the men that eventually the two became linked in a rumour that their chief would reward whoever bags the head of the *tumpangchal* with the hand of his only daughter.

However, the author has omitted an interrogation mark after “Saithangpuii” which renders the title to more than a question of choice between the prized wild gayal and the hand of the chief’s daughter. The title has a more significant meaning

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[52] *Pialral* - Lushai Paradise, literally means the further side of Pial river (*DLL* 365).

when applied to Fehtea, the protagonist. Having lost the respect of the majority of the villagers and suffering their derision and detestation through the evil machinations of the antagonist, Sangtuala, both the *tumpangchal* and Saithangpuii represent ways for Fehtea to finally disprove the falsehoods that have led to his disgrace and to reclaim his honour and respect. Such seems to be the intention of the author too since he has given the same "Tumpangchal nge Saithangpuii" as the heading of the chapter where Saithangpuii gives hints to Fehtea's aunt about her father's willingness to give her hand to the one who brings home the *tumpangchal*'s head. Thus the title becomes a question of which one of the two would help him regain his lost honour, and also whether he would be able to attain either one of them. This deeper significance attached to the title is clearly a characteristic of a written culture, more inclined towards an analytical and discursive understanding as compared to the titles given to the tales from Mizo oral tradition. This is not to suggest that an oral culture is intellectually inferior to writing culture, or that the pre-literate Mizo people did not have the capacity for analytical thought. Rather it highlights the fact that oral tradition operates within a different paradigm, that the tales from Mizo oral traditions bear titles only incidentally to differentiate them other tales and that the stories themselves have never been meant to be pondered upon and analysed like the written word. The headings given to each chapter of this work is again characteristic of a chirographic culture evident not only in the linear organisation of the narrative but where the visual element comes into play. The lengthening and embellishing of a shorter oral tale into a lengthier printed text itself is yet another aspect that documents the shift from orality to writing. Oral tales generally tend to have shorter plots. "In fact, an oral culture has no experience of a lengthy, epic-size or novel-size climatic linear plot. It cannot organise even shorter narrative in the studious, relentless climatic way that readers of literature for the past 200 years have learned more and more to expect – and, in recent decades, self consciously to depreciate" (Ong, *Orality* 140).

The dynamics of orality characterised by a certain level of fluidity and flexibility, and the multi-authoredness of oral tales are generally believed to be arrested at that moment when such tales are committed to writing. The very act of

writing down what has been told from generation to generation with variances dependent on who tells the story and to whom, may be regarded as a curbing of the processes of oral tradition and an imposition of fixity on an otherwise fluid and flexible art form. By committing to writing the story, Dokhuma has arrested the continual process of creation that takes place with every retelling of the tale process also 'claims' authorship to a tale that has been authored by every teller of the story before him. Yet considered differently, one may regard Dokhuma as having participated for one final time in the long tradition of the telling of this tale. He has not merely transcribed an existing tale but has rather performed, though using a different medium, the act of recreating the narrative. While the plurality inherent in oral narratives has been sacrificed at the moment of its transition into print, what has been gained in this case is the preservation of a "tale worth emulating," a tale which exemplifies the very 'essence' of Mizoness which needs to be 'preserved' and continually 'performed'.

> A thawnthuin kan Mizo khawsakzia leh kan mize mu hnu min varchhuah dan chu thu dang ni se, a thawnthu changtu miziaah entawn tur – dawhtheihna leh tumruhna te, rual elna leh dikna te a lang a. Chu chu keini Mizo thangtharte tan hian entawn tur pawimawh ber a nih si avangin, lehkhabu ngeia inthurochhiah tlak ni-a ka hriat avangin ka ziak ta a ni.

> The fact that the story is an important reminder of the traditional Mizo character and way of life is one thing, there is, exemplified in the character of the protagonist, traits worth emulating – patience and determination, competitive spirit and integrity. Since it is imperative of us younger generations of Mizo to aspire to such exemplary qualities, I have written this story which I feel deserves to be left as a legacy in book-form. (*Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* 7)

Believing *tlawmngaihna* to be the defining trait of a Mizo, Dokhuma has set out to portray the character of Fehtea to embody most of the qualities that are associated the ideas of *pasaltha* and *tlawmngaihna*. Since such is the author's intention, the characterisation of Fehtea falls within what Ong terms 'heroic "heavy"

characters'. To Ong, "oral memory works effectively with 'heavy' characters". Such characters are "persons whose deeds are monumental, memorable and commonly public." He explains that such characters are the outcomes of the need for mnemonic economy saying that the noetic economy of the nature of oral memory "generates outsize figures, that is, heroic figures, not for romantic reasons or reflectively didactic reasons but for the much more basic reason: to organize experience in some sort of permanently memorable form." He goes on to explain that "colorless personalities cannot survive oral mnemonics. To assure weight and memorability, heroic figures tend to be type figures" (*Orality* 69). He claims that "as writing and eventually print gradually alter the old oral poetic structures, narrative builds less and less on 'heavy' figures until, some three centuries after print, it can move comfortably in the ordinary lifeworld typical of the novel" (*Orality* 70). In the light of these observations, we may regard Fehtea as a typical oral 'heavy' hero. His defeat of the champions of Thingsai village in the wrestling match, his exemplary *tlawmngaihna* when tested by the village chief, his level of resilience in the face of the whole village's derision, his feat of bagging the head of the prized wild gayal, and his elevation to the level of a future-chief, are all achievements which may be regarded as no less than those of the Greek heroes of old within the pre-colonial Mizo's frame of reference. And no doubt he is a 'type figure' who may be called 'pasaltha huaisen Fehtea' with the epithet added in the mode of "wise Nestor, furious Achilles, clever Odysseus..." (*Orality* 69). Thus, Dokhuma's characterisation of Fehtea may be, in one way, regarded as the 'oral residue' of the Mizo oral tradition. However, it may be argued that Dokhuma does have the choice to make certain changes in the manner in which his protagonist is portrayed. His 'heavy' character does not arise out of the need for mnemonic economy since he his narrative is no longer 'performed' through oral strorytelling. It has come out of the author's unapologetically didactic purposes - of depicting in concrete terms the abstract idea of *tlawmngaihna*, and of preserving an oral tale which is at the brink of sinking into oblivion:

> Kan pi leh pute hmanlai nunphungin a ngaihsan zawng tak leh an hlutsak thil thlengin he thawnthu-ah hian a lang a. Lal khua leh tuia khawtlang daingul

> leh pasaltha, mi-kawlh sa-kawlh hmaa zam lo Mizo tlangval tlawmngaite fakawmzia leh ropui si-zia te chu khawvel hmaa pho lan theih ni ta se ka va ti em! Amaherawhchu, he Mizo ze chhuanawm tak lungphum hi kan innghahna ber mai ni se, tuma hmuh theih lohin kan phum bo hlen ang tih chu ka hlauh em avangin, a tak inkawhhmuh mai tur hre lo mah ila, thawnthu tala kan insihhmuh theih beisei in he thawnthu hi ka ziak ta a ni e.
>
> The values of our forefathers and what they esteemed and held in high regard are clearly discernible in this story. How I wish that the world may see the honour and greatness of the stalwarts of the chiefdom – those *Pasaltha*, the young Mizo men who feared not, the fiercest of men nor the most ferocious of beasts, embodying the code of *Tlawmngaihna*! It is my hope in writing this story that, as a tangible representation of *Tlawmngaihna* which has been fundamental to the Mizo ethos, it plays a role in the preservation of this admirable code, to prevent it from fading into obscurity. (7-8.)

Another oral residue that permeates *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* and *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* is the lack of calendar chronology within the *Tumpangchal* story and in the lack of linear chronological progression in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*. By the time Dokhuma started writing in the sixties, literacy had reached a majority of the Mizo population, and the Gregorian calendar had been in use since the coming of the British in the late nineteenth century. Yet in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, the author has retained the traditional story telling convention where chronological years are not numbered. In *Rinawmin and Silaimu Ngaihawm,* chronological dates are maintained according to the Georgian calendar as these works are set in that point of time when such a calendar system had already been in use by the Mizo people. *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, on the other hand, is set is the pre-literate past, the *Vailen hma* – before the invasion of the British, as pointed out in the previous chapter. The indigenous conception of time, markedly different from the enumerated calendar system of the chirographic cultures, operates within a totally different frame of reference. It is cyclical as compared to the linearity of writing culture, and specific points in time are stored in the memory of the people through their association with

what was happening around them. Thus the cyclical famines like the *Mautam* and the *Thingtam* had served as markers of the cycle of time.

The traditional Mizo understanding of time is intricately linked with the cycle of nature - their conception of a year is governed by their agricultural cycle which in turn is governed by the cyclical seasons. In *The Silent Language,* Edward T. Hall uses the Hopi Indians' understanding of time as an example to illustrate how they (the Americans) find it difficult to imagine a system of time that is not governed by clocks and calendars. He says, "the Hopi are separated from us by a tremendous cultural gulf. Time, for example, is not duration but many different things for them. It is not fixed or measurable as we think of it, nor is it a quantity. It is what happens when the corn matures or a sheep grows up-a characteristic sequence of events. It is the natural process that takes place while living substance acts out its life drama" (169). This reflects how the Mizo conceived of himself - as part of the natural cycle of life and not as a being distinct and separate from it. Within *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, we see how Ralvani, Fehtea's aunt, counts the number of days using sticks. She does this to mark the number of days Fehtea and party, which includes her own husband, have been away in their hunting quest for the *tumpangchal*. The hunting party has set off with ten-day ration, and Ralvani has been keeping count of the days to know when to expect them back. We can see that counting days is significant for them only in so far as it relates to their specific human activity. Specific dates and years mattered little to the Mizo, and the age of a person is not measured by the years but by what that person can or may do. To illustrate this from the text, we never get to know the exact age of Fehtea from the story – he has only been described as "zawlbuk kai rual" which means 'old enough to board the *zawlbuk*'. The time covered by the story is, again, not made clear. There are many instances where Dokhuma explains what stage of the agricultural cycle they are in, to better explain the daily activities of the characters. However, only once does he mention which month it is - in Chapter two, he mentions that it is "Vawkhniahzawn thla" and that the rain has been incessant. In the Mizo month division

Vawkhniahzawn thla[53] corresponds with the month of July which is that time of the year when the monsoon rain hits. The author's description of the month and the rains is crucial to highlight the *tlawmngaihna* of Fehtea. Their village chief has set up a ruse to test the *tlawmngaihna* of the young men of the village and has chosen this particular night in *Vawkhniakzawn thla* when it has been raining non-stop. The chief sends the village *tlangau* (the village crier who also acts as the chief's messenger) to the *zawlbuk* to summon the young men to his house for some urgent matters. The relationship between the chief and the men in the *zawlbuk* is rather democratic and based on mutual respect in any typical village. Thus the young men of the *zawlbuk* can decline the 'summon' in principle but at the same time the code of *tlawmngaihna* binds them to carry out the wishes of the chief. The chief's summon in the middle of that rainy night is thus the perfect test to see who answers the summon. Fehtea turns out to be the only one of the *zawlbuk* to pass the summon test. He immediately leaves the *zawlbuk* for the house of the chief, and once he reaches there, the chief and two of his *upa* have another test in store for him. The chief tells Fehtea that he needs *tlawmngai* men to go to a distant village the very night itself. Through this pretext, the chief and his *upa* plan to find out the level of *tlawmngaihna* in their young men. Fehtea readily volunteers to leave for the said village alone immediately. The level of *tlawmngaihna* shown by Fehtea will be immediately understood by the Mizo readers for whom Dokhuma has intended this work by his mentioning of the rain and the time of the year. Thus the month – *Vawkhniahzawn thla* is used here as a device to conjure up to the imagination of the readers the willingness to brave the monsoon rains which never seem to let up, in the middle of a moonless night when firelight torches will not work due to the rain, to trod barefooted through the muddy roadless distance, all the while with the knowledge of the perils of the jungle filled with wild beasts and the threats of the forces of the elements.

We see the power of the spoken word in Sangtuala's influence on the young men of Darzo village, and in how he uses his clout to rope them in on his plots to bring down Fehtea through campaigns of slander. Sangtuala's schemes to tarnish

[53] *Vawkhniahzawn thla* – n. the moon or lunar month corresponding nearly to July (*DLL* 547).

Fehtea's image work exceptionally well in a community who swears by the maxim - "Pan lo-ah tho a fu lo" (53, 111) which means 'there must be some element of truth to it for people to say it so." Although no one has seen any proof of the veracity of the allegations, their willingness to believe in such slanders brought much pain and misery to Fehtea.

The term 'Mizo' when situated within a historical context, enhances several issues that are persistant and relevant even in contemporary discourses on Mizo identity. Most significantly, the issue of inclusion under the umbrella term, 'Mizo' needs to be addressed. In as early as 1938, Liangkhaia had included the Ralte, Hmar, Paihte and Pawih under the "Mizo Hnam Hrangte" (the clans/sub-tribes of the Mizo), yet had excluded the Mara from the list. With Dokhuma's work, the tendency to homogenise, though present, is admitted and explained by the author himself repeatedly. With the fluidity inherent in oral transmissions, the author admits that it is no longer always possible to differentiate between specific customs and rituals of the various tribes who have come to be collectively identified as Mizo people. All of the sixteen chapters of *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* are arranged under specific *Dan,* [54] which translates to "way, manner, mode, fashion, style, method, law, regulations, rule, code, custom, habit, usage, practice, wont, characteristic." The linguistic felicity of Dokhuma is shown in his choice of the terminology to include the religious practices, the social and individual customs, the habits and mores, and even the folk wisdom. Thus the work is a historical record of the ways of the people. Yet the other meaning of the term *dan* as law brings in another dimension to the work. The regulatory code, unwritten and yet pervasive in the pre-Christian ways of life, continues to remain embedded in the Mizo understanding of themselves. It becomes evident in how the Mizo people feel that there are boundaries which mark the limits as to how a Mizo may behave, as seen in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm.* It underlines an unwritten contract, the violation of which brings up questions of 'loyalty' to their fellow Mizo people. While *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* may seem like

[54] *Dan* – n. way, manner, mode, fashion, style, method, law, regulations, rule, code, custom, habit, usage, practice, wont, characteristic (*DLL* 102).

a straightforward record of the ways of some of the Mizo tribes, the orality of the tribes which has direct bearings on the cultural dynamics within the tribes, accounts for 'the ways' being regarded as 'the laws'. Chapter-1, "Dante Chu" ["The Laws/Codes"] is entirely dedicated to the exposition of the intersection of the orality, the customs and the legal aspects. He opens the chapter by pointing out that *"hmanlai Mizote"* [the Mizo people of the past/of the olden days], with the absence of any script, did not leave any written record. He then goes on to explain that the '*dan',* being handed down from generation to generation orally were subject to individual interpretation, hinting on the dynamism of the oral tradition:

> Tawngkama inzirtir chhawng mai an nih avanging an dante reng reng chu an hriatna atanga hmang leh rel mai a ni.
>
> Since their laws had been transmitted verbally, they were executed based on their own knowledge/memory. (1)

Here one can see the role of knowledge and memory, and how the interpretation of the customs and laws depend on the recipient. Explaining why these *dan* were surprisingly uniform even though the tribes had lived in separate villages with their own chiefs, and often separated by vast distances, Dokhuma says: "An hriat dan inang lo lai deuh awm leh an sawi khawm a, and dan lai ber chu la in an hmang zui mai thin a ni" ("when and if what they knew differred, they would discuss it among themselves and follow the middle path"; 2). We can also clearly see how *dan* is used as tantamount to 'law' in this context. The following lines reinforce this legal conception of *dan* – "Chung an dante chu an naupan lai atanga an lo zir leh hman chhoh nghal reng a nih avangin, Mizote zingah Dan Hremi (Lawyer) awm hranpa pawh a ngai lo va, awm an awm hek lo" ("Since these laws/codes had been learnt and practiced since childhood, there was never a need for a lawyer among the Mizo people, and there never was any"; 1). The chief of the village, under the traditional village system, held sovereignty over both the 'executive' and 'legislative' powers, according to Dokhuma, yet there is what may be regarded as a 'limitation' to the legislative power – the chief, or anyone for that matter, cannot forego or override what the author calls "*Dan Thlungpui"* – the fundamental tenets of the *dan.* This

aspect is reiterated in chapter-9, "Lal Lal Dan" ["The Nature of Chieftainship"] where he highlights both the democratic aspect and the sovereignty of the chieftainship.

> Mizo Lalte chu tunlaia *Democracy* ram lalte anga thlan lal (*elected*) an ni ve lo a. Mahse mipuiin an lal chu an duh loh chuan khaw dangah an pemsan vek thei a. Chuti anga an pemsan lal chu *General,* ho nei lo an sawi ang maiin lal khua leh tui nei lo (*despot without subjects*) an ni thei mai a. Chu an dinhmun chu hre ranin lal fing chu a khua leh tui lakah a inluling lutuk duh ngai lo.
>
> The Mizo chiefs were not elected to their positions unlike the leaders of the democratic nations of the present day. Yet the people had the option to migrate out of his jurisdiction. A chief who has been left by all his subjects is like a *General* without a troop – a despot without subjects. Knowing this, a prudent chief would refrain from ruling with a tyrannical hand. (125 – 126)

It must also be mentioned that Dokhuma also speaks about how the chieftainship gradually grew more autocratic as time goes on. He describes the power of the chief as absolute with no higher authority of appeal, and in the instance where the subjects find grievances in the chief's governance; they are left with no choice but to migrate away. ("Lal chuan khawtlang rorelna zawng zawng a pumhmawm vek a. A thu chu thu-tawp a ni a. Miin a rorel an duh loh pawhin tunlai angin a sang zawka lungawi loh thu thlenna (*Appelation Court of Justice*) a awm tawh chuang lo. Lal rorelna duh lo chuan pemsan mai loh chu kawng dang a awm lo"; 127). From the above discussion, it is evident that their understanding of *dan* is different from our understanding of the law as a system of set rules, operative within the legislative, executive and judicial systems of governments. Dokhuma's further explanation shows how their *dan* were intricately linked with their values and belief systems:

> Mahse chung an dante chu mi tinin an zahin an pawisa em em a, Dan pawisa lo chuan 'van ni an sal' an ti a. Dan bawhchhia chu malsawmah pawh tlaka an rin loh avangin, chung an dante chu a kawi a ngilin an zawm thlip thlep vek tih theih a ni.

> Yet these laws/rules were heeded and respected by everyone. Those who disregard the law/rule/code were believed to be accursed, and those who break the law/rule/code were regarded as unworthy of any form of blessing. Thus all such laws were heeded and followed by everyone. (1)

He further explains the authority of their *dan* and public's role in the jurisprudence thus:

> Sawi tawh angin eng dan mah chu ziaka nei an ni lova. Thiam loh chantirtu Dan bu a awm loh avangin an dan lek kawh dan chu a dik lo a thih theih ngawt lo. Hriatna dan dan hmang an nih avangin mi tin chu 'dan bu' niin dan bawhchhia chu mi tinin an thiam-lovin an dem thin a. Chuvang chuan mipui thiam-loh nih chu khawtlang thiam loh an sa nghal mai a. Chuvangin, Court-in thiam-loh a chantir ai mahin a zahthlak a, dan bawhchhiat pawh a hlauhawm ta zawk mah bawk a ni.
>
> As mentioned before, none of the laws were kept in writing. However, the absence of a Book of Law/written law did not make their jurisprudence any less legitimate. Since they based themselves on their oral knowledge, every person was a repository of legal knowledge, and every offender condemned by all. Conviction in such a public court automatically means condemnation by the whole community, which is a matter of shame and embarrassment, a fate considered worse than an actual 'court' conviction. (3)

In the title of *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*, the author uses the term '*kalphung',*[55] which means mode or manner, and also convention, instead of *'dan'*. This usage conforms to the author's closing remarks in the book: "he lehkhabu bung thupui tinah hian 'DAN' ti veka ziak hi, tunlaia 'law' an tih ang dan hi ni lovin, 'tih dan leh chin dan' a ni tih in hrethiamin ka ring a. Hmanlaia kan pi leh pute kal dan leh khawsak dan '*Culture'* an tih leh, chin thin dan *'Tradition'* an tih lam vek a ni tih chu

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[55] *Kalphung* – used in the same sense as *kal dan* – n. mode, manner, or way of walking, going, acting, doing, speaking, proceeding, or procedure; mode, manner, way, style, meaning. (also. *Kal hmang* and *kal zia*) (*DLL* 225).

in chhiar atanga in chian mai ka ring e." ("I suppose you have come to understand that 'DAN', used in all the chapter titles of this book, does not signify 'law' in current usage but rather 'ways and mores'. And I also suppose you must have comprehended through your reading that the focus of the work is on the culture and tradition of our forefathers"; 311). This comment does not seem to be an afterthought made in hindsight but rather part of the author's plan right from the start. At the onset, he establishes the legal aspects of the *dan*, exploring the notion of legitimacy of 'unwritten laws', and closes with what may be regarded as an admission that these *dan* that he has been referring to have been the cultural norms and the traditions all along. This device has effectively driven home the point that in the oral past such demarcations between the political, the social, and the religious, or the legal and the customary, did not exist, and that the norms and the customary laws operated through the dynamics of social obligations, indigenous belief systems, and other shared cultural meanings, which in turn is founded on the notions of identity and belonging. *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* may thus be regarded as a record of the codes of the tribe, and the author, through his writing, performing the role of a knowledge keeper. There is no evidence to suggest the existence of an official record/knowledge keeper in the Mizo oral past like there is in many other oral cultures. While the West African cultures have the *Griot*, other cultures have their *Elders*. The Mizo's knowledge keepers were the older male members of the community, and much of the transmission of knowledge were done in the *zawlbuk.*

> ...chung an dan inzirtirna hmun ber chu zawlbuk a ni a. Zanah zawlbuk meilum ai paho chu an titi a. Chung an titi chu mipa naupang leh tlangvalte chuan an ngaithla a. An titi tam ber chu: Ramchhuah thu leh rammut thu te, an tlangval lai chanchin leh thlawhhma chungchang te leh khawtlang inrelbawl dan te a ni ber a.
>
> The location for imparting knowledge about those laws/rules/codes was mostly the *zawlbuk* . The menfolk (married men) gather around the *zawlbuk* hearth to chat. The younger men and boys listen in on their talks. Their main topics of discussion revolved around hunting, hunting/warring expeditions,

> their bachelor days, their jhum and their customs and administrative processes. (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 1)

This shows that all the male folk of the village were privy to the knowledge of the elders, and also that knowledge itself falls within the male domains. According to the UNESCO, "Local and indigenous knowledge refers to the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. For rural and indigenous peoples, local knowledge informs decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life" (https://en.unesco.org/links). In this work, Dokhuma documents the indigenous knowledge of the tribes pertaining to the geography, agricultural processes, natural phenomenon and in the form of proverbs. He further dedicates a unit under the chapters, "Dan Dang leh Dan Tesep" ["Lesser laws/rules/codes"] to "Mizopa Science" ["Mizo man's science"].

Another important aspect of Mizo identity is seen in representation of the *Zawlbuk* as the seat of Mizo cultural ethos, and how the eventual abolition of the system brought changes in the manner in which the Mizo tribes were able to adopt the larger "Mizo Identity" in place of the micro village identity. The centrality of the *Zawlbuk* in the pre-colonial village set-up, as mentioned before, is reflected in the centrality of the Darzo village *zawlbuk* in *Tumpangchal nge Saithangpuii.* The story opens in a *zawlbuk*, the male dormitory found in every Mizo village till the early years of the colonial rule in the erstwhile Lushai District. While the village chief was the sovereign ruler within his territory, the administration of pre-colonial 'Mizo' village was democratic in spirit, in that the chief had his council of elders, albeit appointed by him, comprising of the more prominent and distinguished of the village males first of all, and also because the young men of the dormitory (under the guidance of a few *val-upa*[56] – the elders among the young men) could, and did, exert influence over the rule of the chief, and any sensible chief would definitely reckon with the opinions prevalent in the *zawlbuk*.

[56] *Val-upa* – n. a oldish young man, a middle aged man (*DLL* 542).

The dormitory system is a common feature in many tribal societies around the world, and is a common feature in the cultures of many of the tribes of the Northeast. By referring to the *zawlbuk* as a 'male dormitory' instead of a 'bachelors' dormitory' as it is sometimes called, it is hoped that a misrepresentation will be avoided. First of all, all the young men of the village were members of the *zawlbuk*, whether they were married or not – the qualifying criteria being age and physical development, and not marital status. Thus, adolescent boys, once they reached puberty and declared as having attained the status of *'tlangval'* ('bachelor') by members of the *zawlbuk*, automatically graduated to members themselves and were required to start sleeping there. The young men were never allocated sleeping areas in their own homes. However, unlike the *Moshup* of the Arunachali tribes and the *Morung* of the Angami Naga tribes, the *zawlbuk* continued to be the lodging of the young men even after they were married, till they finally moved out of their parents' house with their own wives and children to become "*in hrang chang*[57]*"* – having one's own household, to become the heads of their own families. The character Sangtuala, one of the *val upa,* in the *Zawlbuk* of Darzo village had been portrayed as a *pathlawi*[58]- a once-married but divorced young man (in his case, thrice), who continued to not only sleep in the *zawlbuk,* but was one of the most prominent of the *val upas.* Even before such an initiation to *zawlbuk,* the lives of the young boys were practically bound to it as the responsibility of collecting firewood and water for the *zawlbuk* was solely in the hands of the young boys of the village who would roughly be divided into age groups, with each group being taxed on the amount of firewood they had to collect each day according to their capacities. No male child, except the son of the chief and a few who had managed to distinguish themselves according to the codes laid out by the male fraternity, was allowed to shirk this responsibility – doing so would incur penalty.

[57] *In hrang chang* – used in the same sense as *in dang* – v. to live in one's own house and manage one's own affairs; to live in a separate house (as a married son not living with his father, etc., or as a *bawi* slave not living with his chief, etc.); to be on one's own; to be independent (*DLL* 198).

[58] *Pathlawi* – n. a youg married man or widower or divorced man; a man of marriageable age (*DLL* 352).

The married men who had become heads of their own families and therefore, no longer lodging at the *zawlbuk,* continued to play a vital role in the *zawlbuk* culture. As they no longer had to go courting, they would gather at the *zawlbuk* after supper, sitting around the hearth engaged in conversations on all topics covering all aspects of life in the village – accounts of hunting expeditions, wars, the codes and strategies of warfare, hunting, farming, village administration and relationships with other villages, the legends and lores, their history, beliefs, customs and traditions, and even their exploits regarding women. Such accounts informed by their experiences were the chief source of learning and knowledge for the young men gathered there. Coupled with the moral codes that inform the strict discipline with which all aspects of the *zawlbuk* were governed, the *zawlbuk* was firmly established as the educational and training institute of every village. The *zawlbuk's* significance in the society did not stop there. It also functioned as a place where all matters and plans regarding war, hunting expeditions and community fishing were discussed and decided. Furthermore, the more practical and immediate function of the *zawlbuk* was as a defence strategy of the village. In having all the young men with fighting capacity under one roof, precious time would was not lost in mobilising the warriors – a crucial factor especially where swift action could save the lives of the villagers in the instance of raid, put out fire before more houses caught it, or prevent preying beasts from stealing domestic animals as found in the story.

Another important element of the *zawlbuk* which found ample reference in the text is the centrality of 'wrestling' within the *zawlbuk* culture. Wrestling as a sport provided physical training to the inmates of *zawlbuk* (as well as the young boys of the village) which, in this capacity, could be equated to the present-day 'indoor stadium' and was a popular mode of entertainment inside the *zawlbuk* (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 208). Beyond this, however, through the articulation of wrestling with socio-cultural elements, it served as a 'space' where physical strength and skill provided the agency to contest as well as assert social standing not only within the *zawlbuk* community, but also between villages, as exemplified in the wrestling matches between the two guests from Thingsai and the local champions. Another function of the *zawlbuk,* which is also depicted in the opening scene, was to provide

sleeping accommodation to male guests from other villages. Such guests would have 'official' host houses where they would eat, stay during daytime and even help with their cultivation. More often than not, such guests would be complete strangers to the host's household or with only vague associations, yet the household they had approached would allow the guests to 'stay' with them for such was the protocol of hospitality in those times. However, if such guests were male, and if they are of the age when they themselves would be lodged in the *zawlbuk* of their own villages, they would then retire after supper to sleep in the *zawlbuk* of the host village. The young men of the *zawlbuk* would, sometimes, take the guests along to court the village maidens till it was time to retire, or they would, as depicted in *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, engage in wrestling matches as it was customary of the host inmates to challenge guests to such matches. As mentioned earlier, such matches would be loaded with a real sense of competition, though hidden behind the protocol of modesty, for the victories in such matches carried the implication of superiority in strength and valour of their respective villages. This underlying sense of competition gets played out in the match between Tlungirha, the champion from Thingsai village, and Fehtea.

The *zawlbuk* system which had for so long held a central place in the Mizo tribes' sense of identity also suffered a blow from colonialism. It could no longer serve as the centre of the village social life since the introduction of Christianity and the massive upheavals in the socio-political life of the Mizos. However, it is interesting to note that the Christian missionaries initially "found the *Zawlbuk* system "advantageous" for mission work and made use of it for preaching the gospel" (Samuel VL Thlanga, 63), that the pioneer missionaries – "Lorrain and Savidge found their first opportunities to interact with the Mizos in the *zawlbuk,"*and that "the early Mizo evangelists in the same way made use of the *zawlbuk* as a centre of their work which shook the institution to its foundation until it ultimately deteriorated into oblivion" (Vanlalchhuanawma 59-60).

The ways in which the Mizo National Army is structured, and the very code of voluntarism through which it functions bring out the persistence of the sense of 'fraternity' engendered through the performativity of *tlawmngaihna* in the *zawlbuk*

system. In the opening chapters of *Rinawmin* is denoted how the 'volunteers' of Mizo National movement are re-structured into an 'army' as 'Mizo National Army'. In both *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* the Mizo Army personnel are generally referred to either as 'Mizo sipai' or 'volunteers', regardless of the nature of their affiliation. The fact that they are not conscripted in the way a regular state's army would is first and formost, evidence of the nature of voluntarism which is a fundamental basis of *tlawmngaihna*. Secondly, the internal matters of the "Mizo Army" are handled, not in the form of strict orders coming from the top, but rather through discussion, negotiation and voluntarism. Moreover, the nature of how matters pertaining to 'operations' are discussed in *Rinawmin* is reminiscent of the dynamics of the *zawlbuk.* An instance of this set-up is denoted in the monthly meeting of the 'officers' of the 'battalion' to which Rozuala belongs in chapter fifteen. Here, the 'officers' consist of the lowest, "2/Lt" (the second lieutenant) to the highest, the "CO," the Commanding Officer. In the discussion on the matter of the *kawktu*, hierarchies usually associated with army structures are not maintained, with even the lowest in rank having a say in the discussion. Furthermore, in the way the officers volunteered for the operation, we see the *tlawmngaihna* operating within the system (153-157). The dynamics of the *zawlbuk* is re-enacted in the way the Mizo Army itself is structured, and this in turn aligns the Mizo Army with the *pasaltha* of the pre-Christian traditional era.

Owing to the lack of recorded history, early references to the people who now occupy present-day Mizoram called them 'Lushei clans', 'Lushais', and then as one of 'the hill tribes of Assam' in the official documents of the British imperial administration. Joy L.K. Pachuau situates the genesis of 'Mizo identity' to the period when the colonial administrative control took shape after the British had decided to formally occupy the 'Lushai hills'. "True to the British colonial methods elsewhere, British contact with the 'tribes' was followed by the entire paraphernalia of information gathering" (93). Through surveys, the British were mapping the topography and at the same time, the people. Initially, ethnographic materials on the inhabitants were collected to "identify the 'tribes' that had perpetrated the raids", but it graduated to a concern over the threat of the customs and traditions of the past

disappearing through the changes brought about by the policies of the imperial rule: "…seen as a way of connecting the people with their own histories and was often scripted as a service to a people who lacked the technology to do so." Thus the collection and publication of ethnographic materials "became an imperial tool of governmentality" (95). Here we have the first attempt to record the 'oral narratives' of the tribes, one of the many changes made on the indigenous ways of life to facilitate imperial administration. Another significant change being the classification of the tribes on linguistic lines which "meant that the fluidity and movement of and between 'tribes' that had always been a feature of the Mizo past was forced to come to an end" (97). As for the topographical mapping and boundaries and demarcations created there from, which eventually 'fixed' the tribes to specific territories, brought about notions of and identification with territoriality, and the end of the migratory culture of the tribes. The British policy of indirect rule by not doing away with the chieftainship but making the chiefs along with their villages their subjects also disrupted the existing notion of hierarchy while establishing new hierarchies based on colonial ties, and the 'divide and rule' policy was evident in the groupings of chiefs spatially and on kinship lines. The tribes, in the face of all these changes, naturally had to re-negotiate their concepts of self due to the dissolution of their social, political and cultural structures they had identified themselves with. Thus, the crystallisation of identity and social practice within the parameters that the British had set out for was in fact the genesis of the formation of 'Mizo identity', and Pachuau asserts that "this crystallization took the form of a binary, in the creation of a 'self' vis-à-vis an 'other'". The creation of Mizo and *Vai,* binary as evidenced from the title of the first 'chanchin bu' – *Mizo leh Vai Chanchin Bu* [*Newspaper/Newsletter of the Mizo and the Vai*] launched in 1902, was, she maintained, through the conscious creation of the *Vai* as the 'other' of the Mizos by the colonialists. She also observed that such a binary was possible only because the tribes had, by this time, begun to accept the macro identity of 'Mizo' due to the disruption of the chief/village micro-identity.

The construction of the Mizo identity by this point in time was, thus, a direct outcome of the British imperial policies to consolidate the colonial hold. Since all the

existing modes of self-identification had been replaced by colonial systems, the situation "created the scope for Mizos to be reflexive about their own situation and past" (Joy L.K. Pachuau 108). A significant characteristic that the process of Mizo identity formation came to take on was "the need the Mizos felt to record their past," which, again, was enabled by the colonial situation – while the introduction of the script and the dissemination of literacy through the missionaries was certainly a factor, another interesting factor was that the Mizos, very early on in the assumption of their 'new' identity sought a validation for the same.

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CHAPTER FOUR

CONFLICT AND IDENTITY FORMATION

This chapter will seek to understand the role of conflict in the formation of Mizo identity while focusing on key moments in the history of the Mizo people. The centrality of the notions of the 'self' and 'the/an other' to identity will inform this chapter's attempt to trace the significance of conflict in the formation and evolution of Mizo identity. Through such reconfigurations, Mizo identity, by the 'Rambuai' period, had taken on the form of ethno-religious nationalism. Thus, the notion of Mizo 'nationalism' as represented in Dokhuma's works will be examined in detail. Although varied and vague in its application, the notion of cultural identity itself is always based on the understanding of the 'self' in relation to an 'other' – the self-other distinction, the 'us' and 'them' constructed on the perception, of whatever degree of validity, of sameness and difference. The 'sameness' principle underpins the question of inclusion - who is a Mizo. Inversely, the 'difference' principle frames the contours of Mizo identity by exclusion. The issue becomes quite complex when it comes to Mizo nationalism and national identity since the idea of nationalism itself has been the site of much debates across contemporary discourses.

A "Memorandum" submitted to the then Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri on October 30th, 1965, by the Mizo National Front (MNF) opens with the following passages:

> This memorandum seeks to represent the case of the Mizo people for freedom and Independence, for the right of territorial unity and solidarity; and for the realization of which a fervent appeal is submitted to the Government of India.
>
> The Mizos, from time immemorial lived in complete Independence without foreign interference. Chiefs of different clans ruled over separate hills and valleys with supreme authority and their administration was very much like that of the Greek city state in the past. Their territory or any part thereof have never been conquered or subjugated by their neighbouring states. However, there had been border disputes and frontier clashes with their neighbouring people which ultimately brought the British Government to the scene in 1844. The Mizo country was subsequently brought under the British political control in December 1895 when a little more than half the country was

> arbitrarily carved out and named Lushai Hills (now Mizo district) and the rest of their land was parcelled out of their hands to the adjoining people for the sole purpose of administrative convenience without obtaining their will or consent. Scattered as they are divided, the Mizo people are inseparably knitted together by their strong bond of tradition, custom, culture, language, social life and religion wherever they are. The Mizos stood as a separate nation even before the advent of the British Government having a nationality distinct and separate from that of India. In a nutshell, they are a distinct nation, created, moulded and nurtured by God and Nature.[59] (Zamawia 972)

In the first passage, the Mizo National Front demanded for the recognition of the Mizo people as a nation, with the autonomy and sovereignty due to such, and the second paragraph contains, in a nutshell, the ways in which this 'Mizo Nation' is imagined. In his oft quoted definition of the 'nation', Benedict Anderson proposes that the nation "is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." Justifying the term 'imagined', he goes on to say that "it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (*Imagined Communities* 6). As a proponent of the constructivist approach, he even points out the 'drawback' of his fellow constructivist – Ernest Gellner's famous quotation – "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist" (qtd. in *Imagined Communities* 6), in that there is an implication of the existence of 'true' communities. To Anderson, "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined." Thus, "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (6).

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[59] Extracted from "Memorandum Submitted to The Prime Minister of India by The Mizo National Front General Headquarters, Aizawl, Mizoram on October 30, 1965" published as 'Appendix-VII' in R. Zamawia's *Zofate Zinkawngah,* 2nd ed., 2012.

The 'style' in which the 'Mizo nation' is imagined in the memorandum, significantly, reiterates an amplified form of Mizo nationalism as expressed in "Mizo Union Memorandum" submitted to "His Majesty's Government and the Government of India and its Constituent Assembly" through the Advisory Committee in 1947.[60] The arguments in both memorandums, submitted eighteen years apart, espouse a Mizo national identity structured on ethnic, historical, cultural and religious principles. The assertion of Mizo traditional sovereignty and 'independence' before the advent of British colonial power, the insistence on the ethnic kinship of the Mizo tribes in areas that covered the Lushai Hills District and the adjoining areas, and how these tribes have become scattered through territorial divisions "carved out arbitrarily for administrative purpose" by the imperial government. If a nation is imagined as "both inherently limited and sovergeign", the Mizo nation is imagined as finite in its ethnic and territorial boundaries, and sovereign and unconquered since "time immemorial," yet disrupted by "the advent of the British." The nation being imagined as "limited" denotes that it "has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations" (Anderson 7). The "Mizo Union Memorandum" is even more emphatic in its insistence on the ethnic contours, drawing sharp boundaries with "the other nations" or ethnic groups inhabiting the surrounding areas, claiming that "[t]he Mizos have nothing in common with the plains nor with the Nagas or Manipur, etc. They are distinct block" (Lal Thangliana 429), and at the same time stressing on primordial Mizo identity:

> Wherever they go and wherever they are, they carry with them their primitive customs, culture and mode of living in its purest origin, always calling and identifying themselves as Mizos. (429-430)

[60] Referred to as "Mizo Union Memorandum" or "Mizo Memorandum Submitted to His Majesty's Government, Government of India and Its Constituent Assembly through The Advisory Sub-Committee by The Mizo Union." Published as "Appendix II" in Lal Thangliana's "Mizo National Front Movement: A Sociological Study," 427-437; K. Remruatfela, *Indian Union Chhunga Zofate Rin Luh Kan Nih Dan*, 49-55.

The Mizo Union memorandum goes on to reject the terms Kuki and Lushai, listing out specific names of the tribes and sub-tribes to frame the contour of ethnic inclusion:

> Only the word Mizo stands for the whole group of them all : Lusei, Hmar, Ralte, Paite, Zo, Darlawng, Kawm, Pawi, rhado, Chiru, Aimoul, Khawl, Tarau, Anal, Purm, Tikhup, Vaiphei, Lakher, Langrawng, Chawrai, Bawng, Biate, Mualthuam, Kaihpen, Pangkhua, Tlanglau, Hrangkhawl, Bawmzo, Miria, Dawn, Khumi, Khianu, Khiangte, Pangte, Khawlhring, Chawngthu, Vanchiau, chawhte, Ngente, Renthlei, Hnamte, Tlau, Pautu, Pawite, Vangchhia, Zawngte, Fanai, etc. closely related to one another cultural!v, socially, economically and physically thus forming a distinct ethnical unit. (430)

What is clearly evident is that by the time the Mizo people came to raise their political voice, they had already imagined themselves as a nation. Moreover, a side-by-side comparison of the MNF memorandum and the Mizo Union memorandum reveals that the MNF memorandum is closely modelled after the latter, not only in thought and content, but down to the very phrases chosen to articulate Mizo identity, nationhood and primordial sovereignity. Joy L.K. Pachuau's comment on the MNF memorandum, thus, equally applies to both:

> The leaders of the MNF were clearly resorting to history to claim their right to independence. In historicising their past, the 'Mizo' identity was considered a given and therefore 'primordial'; although past histories of feuding chiefs belonging to different clans were not denied, there was an insistence that they all had recognized themselves as 'Mizos'. In claiming that colonial intervention had bifurcated their territory, they were also claiming for themselves an ancient territorial identity that did not recognize the boundaries that had been created by state intervention, whether colonial or post-colonial. In maintaining that there were connections between the various fragments thus created, they chose to stress the 'primordiality' of their 'united' identity. (83)

While much of the ways in how Mizo nation and Mizo national identity are imagined in these two memorandums are similar, the significant difference lies in the fact that while the MNF memorandum was submitted to declare ‘independence’ from India, the Mizo Union memorandum sought for “full self-determination within the province of Assam” (Lal Thangliana 436). The main point of divergence, then, is in the way the ‘sovereignty’ of the Mizo nation is imagined, and this difference in political ideology is what plays out in the pages of *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm.* D. Smith states that “as there are many kinds of nationalisms, so concepts of the nation assume different forms and national identities are subject to considerable change over time” (*Chosen People* 25), and based on this admission of plurality, he frames a ‘working definition’ of nationalism as “an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’ (24). Seen from the light of Smith’s conceptions, we may assume that there are at least two strands of Mizo nationalism in the selected texts, overlapping at several points but distinct in the way “the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity” is envisioned in their ideologies.

If Mizo identity had its beginnings in the colonial times, its ‘national consciousness’ had become a major factor in the political arena by the time the British cessation became an eventuality. It should be mentioned that although ‘Mizo identity’ has been used consistently in this study to denote the social collective identity taken on by the tribes right from the time of colonial times, under the political administration of the British until 1946, the official term given to them by the British administrators was ‘Lushai’ and the area they inhabited was christened ‘the Lushai Hills’ and placed as a district of Assam. The term ‘Lushai’ was a mispronunciation of *Lusei,* the name of the clan/tribe that was ‘ruling’ a majority of the region at the moment of the British arrival. It was only in 1954, years after India’s independence, that the name Lushai Hills District was changed to Mizo District.

‘Political consciousness’ among the Mizo people began to take shape with the emergence of a new class of educated ‘commoners’ and those who have had wider

exposure to the outside world, either through their participation in the I World War as a labour force under the British and those who had been given the opportunity to study outside of the Mizo inhabited areas. According to Malsawmliana, "The Mizos had never been exposed to modern political system until they came under the British rule. Thus, any political consciousness hardly existed in Mizoram (then Lushai Hills) before 1920s" (242). Then the Lushai Students Association which came on to take the name Mizo Zirlai Pawl, was formed in 1924 in Shillong, and branches of the Association began to crop up in various cities and towns including Guwahati and Aizawl. During this decade, the demand for representation to Assam Legislative Assam was made but came to nought, but it stands as testimony to how the Mizo people during the early decades had already formed a distinct collective identity apart from the chief-village affiliations, and we can see the growing annoyance towards the chieftainship system that was continued and 'adopted' by the British administration to serve their own cause of ruling the people. It was during the same decade that the Mizos witnessed the breakdown of the *Zawlbuk* system. Thus, what is evident is that the changes brought about by the colonial encounter and their institution of new systems of administration, education and religion had already moulded the 'Mizo' into a new identity within a few decades. Mizo nationalism, like other nationalisms in colonised countries, had its beginnings with the newly created 'educated class'. Actual political activism in the Mizo context, however, was only revived in the wake of the British withdrawal from India about two decades later and it led to the formation of the first ever political party within the Lushai Hills called 'Mizo Commoners Union", soon renamed "Mizo Union" in 1946. Sangkima attributes "the hectic political activities in the neighbouring areas of Assam and Bengal, ill-feelings between the Mizo chiefs and the commoners, development activities adopted by the administration and others" (qtd. in Malsawmliana 243-244) as the main factors that led to this political consciousness awakening.

To Joy L.K. Pachuau, it was "the political climate and events surrounding British proposals to withdraw from the region and Indian independence that made it possible for the Mizos to formalize the articulation of their identity." She further adds that use of the term 'Mizo' in Mizo Commoners Union "was definitely a shift to

new ways of perceiving themselves" (125). To highlight the significance, she pointed out that the Young Mizo Association (YMA) was still known as 'Young Lushai Association'. Tracing the significance further, she writes:

> According to R. Vanlawma, under whose leadership the Mizo Union was formed and who was instrumental in naming the party, this represented a conscious decision to use 'Mizo' as it was self-referential. It was the term the colonialists had used. Moreover it helped in providing broader parameters for Mizo identity, beyond the now traditional colonial frames of encapsulation. Mizo was the only ethnonym that could also incorporate those 'tribes' outside the borders of the then Lushai Hills districts who did not speak the Lushai/Mizo language, but who were still seen as being kin to the larger 'Mizo' family… In other words, the formalization of their identity had an incumbent problem, that of membership, and in the Mizo case it led to the de-recognition of boundaries created in colonial times; alternatively, it can also be seen as the beginning of the aggrandizement of identity claims. (125)

The conscious decision behind the use of the term Mizo, then, was political, and the aim of such a move to not only reclaim the right to name themselves but to provide "broader parameters for Mizo identity" beyond what the colonialists had demarcated had a far reaching influence on the idea of a 'Greater-Mizoram' that became one of the main rallying cries of the Mizo National Movement in the sixties. The narrative that the tribes had always belonged to a 'family' before the colonial methods of administration brought about their separation by imposing hitherto unknown forms of fixed boundary had a great appeal to the imagination of the Mizo community.

The anxiety regarding the possibility of the withdrawal of the British was indeed, one that could not be taken lightly. Their future was uncertain, and opinions greatly vary as to what would be best for the Mizo people when the British finally left, or on the issue of whether they would have the option to choose to which country they would like to be attached to. In *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* the Mizo Union is often seen as collaborator to the *Vai* and thus, enemies of Mizo

nationalism. By the time of the MNF uprising, the Mizo Union had been holding political power for more than a decade. Yet in the inception of the Mizo Union we have seen the first articulations of the much of the ideology behind what came to be played out as Mizo nationalism under the MNF movement. The aims and objectives of the Mizo Union according to Laldinpuii were: a) The Mizo Union is formed for the integration of the Mizo both inside and outside the Lushai Hills, b) To bring about better relations between the general public and administrators, c) To show the Mizo masses the ways by which they occupy their rightful places and positions, d) To bring about all round progress in all aspects of Mizo life and to raise the position of women, e) To be the organ for expression of the views and wishes of the Mizo people in every way and at any time, f) To mend whatever is defective and to preserve whatever is good in our customary laws (qtd. in Malsawmliana 246). Lalchungnunga gives a slightly differently version with an indication that the original 'Constitution of the Mizo Union' has been obtained from Vanlawma, who was the initiator of the formation of the political party: "The principal objectives of the party were to achieve a rightful status for the Mizos; to develop better understanding between chiefs and commoners; to unify the common people; general uplift of the Mizo people; to become the democratic representative and spokesman for the whole of Mizo people; and to popularise Mizo language" (146). In both versions, it is clear that the main concerns were the 'rights and status' of the Mizos, the tension in the relationship between the chiefs and the common mass, and the desire to have a platform for self-representation. Yet the most pressing concern, though not explicitly mentioned in the 'aims and objectives', was that of the desire for 'independence' once British cessation became inevitable, and Vanlawma expresses this point in his autobiography, *Ka Ram leh Kei (My Country and I)*:[61]

> A thil tum te chu thukhuh takin, "Mizo mipui te chu an nih ang tak leh an dinhmun dik tak a awmtir turin," tiin kan dah a.
>
> Hetih lai hian indona an hneh chuan British chuan min chhuahsan an tum tih kan lo hre thawi tawh a, min chhuahsan hunah chuan tuma hnuaia awm lova

[61] The translation of the title is as given in the original work.

> keimahni hnam ngei ro inrel ve kan chak em em a, mahsela Sap hnuaiah khan thlamuang takin ralthuam lam pawh ngaihsak hauh lovin kan lo khawsa rei tawh a, kan lal te pawh lal ni tak tak lo mah sela khua leh tui te tan chuan hnawksak mai lo nihna lai a lo awm bawk si a, keimahni chakna ringa independent thei tur chuan kan impumkhat hlawm tha tawk lo hle tih kan hria a, chuti chung chuan Hindu milem be ho hnuaia awm lah kan hreh em em bawk si a, chuvang chuan huam zau tawk tak tur in kan dinhmun tur dik taka awm thei tur ti zawnga dah hian a huam tha berin kan ring a ni.
>
> The aims and objectives (of the Mizo Union), deliberately left vague and reserved was framed thus - "The Mizo people should be accorded their rightful status and dues."
>
> We already had an inkling of the British's intention of cessation if they were to win the war (if the Allied force won WWII), and we had been having hopes of self-governance once they did withdraw. However, we had been living a peaceful and 'unarmed' life under the British for quite a period of time. The chiefs, though without real authority/sovereignty, had only become a burden and nuisance to their subjects at this point. So we were well aware of how unprepared we were for total independence. Still the idea of being governed by the idol-worshipping Hindu people was not acceptable to us. Therefore, to in order to be non-committal and to keep the options open, we felt it was in our best interest to frame it in terms of rights and status. (136-137)[62]

The sudden surge in the passion for the Mizo Union among the masses was, by all accounts including that of Vanlawma, the appeal of the idea of the abolition of chieftainship. The nature of their dilemma, the uncertainty of their future and the need to consolidate the Mizo *hnam* identity to 'claim' their 'nationhood' became a serious concern. Vanlalchhuanawma sums up the political scenario as it pertains to

[62] All translations of quoted texts and titles of works in this chapter are done by me, unless noted otherwise, for the sole purpose of this study.

the relationship between the chiefs and the commoners of the time as recorded by several writers thus:

> The basic motive of the MU became blurred when the party began to grow rapidly and dissension began to appear among the leaders. Ray[63] says with some truth, that the formation of the Mizo Union was a move against the *Lal*s and it was therefore looked upon by the British as opposition to British rule. He contends that the growing resentment of the people against the chieftainship ultimately led to the formation of the first political party in Mizoram. According to Liangkhaia, even after the Mizo Union was declared open for all Mizos, the Lals remained reserved about it. Vanlawma complains that the people understood little about the Union's larger interest in seeking the best possible future for Mizoram, because of their obsession with the single objective of the Union movement, the *Lal*s immediately resorted to forming a Council of *Lal*s. (381)

Ch. Saprawnga, another leader of the Mizo Union, agreed that "though it was anti-British sentiment which was the primary motive of those who established the Union movement, it was anti-chieftainship that most influenced the commoners' support for it. He himself encouraged the people along these lines (Vanlalchhuanawma 381). What is evident here is that the political consciousness of the mass, the commoners – the *Hnamchawm*[64] was at this point, focused on the changing ways in which they identified themselves. The need for the chief had been greatly reduced since there was the presence of the British for governance, yet the British government at the same time 'subjected' the chiefs to their own administrative convenience, to act as collectors of fees and taxes and to provide *kuli*,[65] impressed labour. Thus the role of the chief was no longer what it used to be, and it had in fact become clear to the *hnamchawm* that their chiefs had become tools in the British colonial enterprise. Moreover, as we have already mentioned, the

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[63] Vanlalchhuanawma is referring to Animesh C. Ray's *Mizoram: Dynamics of Change* (2012).

[64] *Hnamchawm* – the common people, all save those belonging to the ruling clan (*DLL* 169).

[65] *Kuli* – n. an impressed labourer. v. to work as an impressed labourer (*DLL* 275).

transition from identity bounded to a chieftaincy with its fluidity, to a larger identity not based on allegiance to a chief but rather to a larger one in which old hierarchies have crumbled had a great appeal to the Mizo tribes. "Rather than seeing themselves as the inhabitants of different territories or as the subjects of different and contesting chiefs, Mizo now began seeing themselves as the inhabitants of a common territory that belonged to everyone" (Joy L.K. Pachuau 123-124). Chieftainship was eventually abolished, with the passing of the Acquisition of Chiefs Rights Act in 1954, two years after the Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council came into being in 1952 and nearly seven years since the withdrawal of the British. It became the legacy of the Mizo Union that they had been the emancipators of the commoners, and Ramhluni's father in *Rinawmin* proudly announces his allegiance to the party:

> MNF-te chu eng ang pawhin pungin tam mah se kei chu ka ni ve chuang lo ang. Mizo Union, lal bantu leh Zoram phurrit su kiangtu hi ka thlah dawn kumkhua lo.
>
> Even if the MNF has grown multifold in number, I will not become one of them. I will never, ever part with Mizo Union – who had abolished chieftainship and had eleviated Zoram's burden. (15)

And Zaikima's father, Thangchuanga, in *Silaimu Ngaihawm* reiterates the same sentiment. When he hears of his son's intention to join the MNF movement, he informs his son that a Mizo Union "Councillor" [Sic] will be visiting that evening and he advises his son to pay heed to what the "Councilor" has to say. Zaikima, however, replies with what he thinks of the Mizo Union:

> Ho mai mai, Mizo Union-ho, hnam ngaihtuah phak lo, lal chauh duh hotu thusawi ka ngaithla peih lo."
>
> I don't care, I can't be bothered to listen to any leader of the Mizo Union - who cannot even comprehend the issue of *hnam*/nationalism, and who are only after power. (39)

To this his enraged father replies:

> I va han a tak em! Mizo Union tluka hnam hmangaihtu tu nge awm? Hnam an hmangaih avangin Sailo lal an ban tawh a, kum kha leh chen hnamchawm rap beta lal hrawt-khumtu ber an ban tawh aliamah Mizo hnam tan thil dang eng nge tul awm tawh? District Council ni se kan hnam nena in mawi tawk tak kan dil lohin mi pe lehnghal. Kan hotute tluka fing leh hnam hmangaihtu tu dang mah an awm lo…”
>
> How foolish you are! Is there anyone who is more dedicated to Mizo *hnam* than the Mizo Union? They had abolished Sailo chieftainship out of their concern/love for *hnam*. Apart from doing away with the age-old tyranny over the *hnamchawm*, what more is there to achieve? They have even given us a District Council which is quite sufficient for our *hnam*. There is no one more prudent and patriotic than our leaders… (39)

While this part of the deal was indeed delivered by the Mizo Union, the more complex and serious issue, as expressed by Vanlawma, on the future of the Mizo *hnam* after the British rule, introduced party politics to the newly formed political awareness of the Mizo people. This outcome of the issue would also have a more lasting impact on the idea of Mizo nationalism which persists even today. The decision to withdraw from India was a fulfillment of the British empire’s promise, but the sudden and unprepared nature of the withdrawal left the country in turmoil. While the infamous Partition was played out along Hindu/Muslim lines costing millions of lives, the issue of affiliation as played out among the Mizo tribes, thankfully evaded bloodshed but came very near to it, according to Vanlawma. In the days leading up to 15th August, 1947, tensions between the two factions in Mizo Union had reached a breaking point. Vanlawma’s faction tried to prevent the District Superintendent from hoisting the Indian flag on the 15th, and according to Vanlawma, there were men who were ready to take up arms to prevent the hoisting. There was also the threat of an all-out shooting if the other fraction made good with their intention of organising a celebratory rally:

> August 14, 1947 a lo thleng a, a tuk chu British chhuah ni tur a ni a. Bawrhsap Macdonald-a kha Pu Penn an a thlak a, rei lo te chauh a awm a,

> Peter-an a rawn thlak leh tawh a, a ni chu chumi tuka India puanzar reng reng Aizawla zar lo tur in kan hrilh lawk a a awih chiah phei chu kan beisei lova, mahsela zar tir hauh loh kan tum avangin hrilh lawk; tha in kan hria a, kan hrilh lawk a ni a.
>
> Chung lai chuan indo ban hlim chhawn a ni a, silai chi hrang hrang te, grenade te Aizawl leh a chheh velah a la tam em em mai a, sipai bang te leh tang lai mek te chuan min puih an chak em em mai bawk a, chumi August 14 zan chuan an inpuahchah a, tlangval thenkhat te chu an tlaivar zak a ni.
>
> When August 14, 1947 arrived, the British withdrawal was to happen the next day. Superintendent Macdonald's place had been briefly filled by Pu Penn, and he in turn had left and Peter was the Superintendent at the time. We informed him not to hoist the Indian flag anywhere in Aizawl the next day, although we did not expect him to heed us, we decided that we had to inform him since we were adamant on not letting any flag hoisting take place.
>
> Since the war had only ended recently, there were many guns and grenades accessible in and around Aizawl, and several war veterans as well as those who were still enlisted were enthusiastic to help us, and so several young men stayed up the whole night on the14th August, 1947 in preparation (for a fight). (193)

Bloodshed was averted, after all, through the prudence of the Superintendent. The political developments leading up to this situation are significant for the present study in that the seed of discontent for the MNF uprising had already been sown during what transpired within the political domains during this period and more specifically in how there was a split in the political aspirations of the newly politically conscious Mizo people.

According to Romila Thapar, "A comment frequently made is that since historical facts do not change, how can history change? This reflects a lack of awareness of the sources and methods currently being used in historical interpretation. The facts may not change, although sometimes they do as a result of

fresh information or new ways of analyzing old information, but the interpretation of these facts can change. History is not just a directory of information; it also involves analyzing and interpreting this information" (22). While this expression applies to most of what has been discussed and will be discussed, it becomes pertinent especially to what transpired within the political arena during the period when the Mizo Union came into being in 1946 and the Independence Day of 1947. In 2013, a symposium was organised by the Mizo Students Union where the question of "India Union Hnuaia Mizoram Kan Luh Dan" ["How Mizoram Came Under the Indian Union"]. Here, prominent scholars and well known politicians and statesmen deliberate on the question of how and when Mizoram became part of the Indian Union. It is apparent that even today, not only opinions but what had been believed to be facts have not been settled and agreed upon ("Symposium on India Union hnuaia Mizoram kan luh dan," youtube).

Several questions persist regarding how and when the Mizo people and their land came under the Indian Union. The pressing issue for the Mizo people's future after the transition of power centres on a few key questions – whether they would become part of the Indian Union, and if so, would they still be able to retain some form of autonomy, whether it would be better to be part of Burma since the Mizo people were ethnically related to the people, especially the Chins, whether they wanted to be part of the then newly formed Bengal region of Pakistan, or whether they actually had the option to become a crown colony along with the other tribal-inhabited areas. The idea of becoming part of Pakistan was rejected categorically by all factions of the Mizo tribes right from the start. However, the uncertainty of the British Empire's intention for the predominantly Christian tribal areas as well the clash of interest between the Mizo Union and the Chief's council magnified the dilemma further. While the Mizo Union, regardless of faction, championed the abolition of chieftaincy, the Chiefs held the hope of resuming their former sovereignty once the British government withdrew. It should be pointed out that at this point in time, all sides within the Mizo political domain concurred in their belief that the Mizo people had become part of British India only with the 'conquest' by the

British, and therefore did not consider themselves as part of India or subscribe to the idea of Indian nationalism.

The British occupation of the area that was then known as the Lushai Hills lasted for less than six dacades. "The Northern Lushai Hills was put under Assam from 3rd June 1890. Captain Herbert Browne, Personal Assistant to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, designated the Political Officer was to exercise general control over all departments with headquarters at Aizawl" while "[t]he South Lushai Hills was attached to Bengal and placed under the Lieutenant Governor. From 1st April 1891 Charles Stewart Murray of the Bengal Police was appointed Superintendent with the Headquarters at Lunglei," and "[b]esides Fort Lungleh, Fort Lalthuama and Fort Tregear were established with a base at Demagari... it was declared that for administrative purposes Demagiri should be considered to be part and parcel of the South Lushai Hills" (Zorema 144 – 145). Although there continued to be resistances from many of the chiefs, the "British India Governor General Foreign Department" issued a declaration that the Lushai Hills have become part of British India on Sept 6, 1895 (Hluna, "India Union Hnuaia Mizote Kan Luh Dan"). On how the Lushai Hills District was created and how and when it was placed under British Assam administration, Zorema says:

> ... on 27th January, 1898, the British Government of India accorded its approval of the transfer of South Lushai Hills to Assam. With that, the whole Lushai country came under the charge of the administration of Assam with effect from 1st April of that year. A Proclamation by the Government of Assam placed the Lushai Hills (Amalgamated) under the charge of an officer who will be styled 'Superintendent of the Lushai Hills' and appointed Major John Shakespear to be the first Superintendent. The administration of the district was vested in the Governor/Chief Commissioner of Assam acting under His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor General of India, the District executive administration being vested in the Superintendent, his Assistants and the chiefs and headmen of villages. (146)

What is denoted here is, first of all, how much of the Lushai Hills area came under British administration and how it had come to be associated with Assam. Secondly, it clarifies how the present area came to be constituted into Lushai Hills District with the boundaries that later on would be contested not only for the 'Greater Mizoram' cause but also in the present-day boundary issues with the state of Assam. Thirdly, we see how the chiefs fit into the British administration to become 'agents' of the colonial power, a fact which came to play a central role in the political imagination of the Mizo people, and which became the major factor in the decision to opt for joining the Indian Union.

Furthermore, with the formation of the Lushai Hills District, "notifications were issued to remove all British Government of India and Provincial enactments applicable elsewhere within British India from operation within the Lushai Hills, with the exception of certain Acts which were specifically introduced. The district was, moreover, brought under the provisions of the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation 1880 and the Scheduled District Act, 1874," according to Zorema (147). JV Hluna suggests that such a policy, already in use in other hill areas, was opted by the British as the least expensive method to prevent the Mizo people from further disruption of the interest of British India. He further mentions that two regulations – Chin Hills Regulation 1896 (Regulation V of 1894) and Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation 1873 (Regulation V of 1873) were put in place to restrict entry of the *vai* into the Mizo inhabited Lushai Hills District. Assam was given Provincial Legislature by the Government of India Act 1919, but Mizoram and other hill-tribe areas were declared 'backward tract' and thus had no representation in the Assam Legislature. The Government of India Act 1935 which gave more autonomy to the provinces declared the Lushai Hills as 'Excluded Area' (Hluna, "India Union Hnuaia Mizote Kan Luh Dan"). "The term excluded here implies that Lushai is outside the the control of the Provincial Legislatures, responsibility to Parliament for its administration vesting in His Excellency the Viceroy as Crown Representative, who has empowered, on his behalf, His Excellency the Governor of Assam, as Agent to the Crown Representative, to administer the Lushai Hills" (McCall 241). Earlier in 1926 (1924 according to Hluna), a few young men from Kulikawn, Aizawl were

arrested on account of their activities in seeking representation in the Assam Legislative Assembly (Malsawmliana 243). This 'Excluded Area' status, according to Malsawmliana, "alienated the Mizo people from mainstream India", and also adds that "Mizo has different distinct culture and traditions which was far different from Indian culture. So there was a need to formulate the future of the Mizo hills in respect of administration" (241).

Two important points that pertain to the future of the Mizo people that are evident here are: first, the exclusion of the Mizo people from 'mainstream' Indian politics in the pre-Independence period and in the Indian Independence movement. Secondly, the recognition that there was no historical, cultural, linguistic or ethnic relatedness between the Mizo tribes and mainstream Indians, or to use Lalsangkima Pachuau's term, 'Indic-Indians'. These points had far reaching implications on Mizo identity and the future of the Mizo people. Paul B Chonzik's interpretation of the inclusion of Lushai Hills in the 'Excluded Area' falls in line with what Malsawmliana has said about the alienation of Mizo people from mainstream India, but goes further to directly assert that such an 'isolation', of not only the Mizo tribes but "other areas inhabited by the so-called 'backward tribes'," had been the motive of the British administration all along, and had a far reaching impact on the politics of Mizo identity:

> This isolation had been the aim of the British administration since their occupation of these areas. Thus, acts and regulations were passed disallowing free intercourse of plainspeople with the hill tribes. Reforms introduced in other parts of British India were not made applicable to these hill areas. This isolation had bred a feeling of 'otherness' from the rest of the country, which gave way to the search for identity, resulting in the assertion of ethnic groups within the wider Mizo group. However, there continued a strong current of one-ness among the various Mizo tribes. Thus since independence was granted to India and Pakistan, there ensued a parallel movement of self-assertion on narrow ethnic lines among the Mizo tribes and a movement for re-unification of the Mizo group. (148)

Condemning the British's policy towards the Mizo people, Lalchungnunga claims that it is such a legacy that was inherited by 'Free India' after the British had withdrawn and which had irrevocable consequences on the future of the Mizo people:

> Certain sections of Mizos tend to believe that the British policy of 'non-interference' in the day-to-day life of the Lushais and in the chief's administration of the village, and the subsequent system of administration adopted by them in the various forms of regulations and Acts, were governed by the British "respect" for local customs and traditions. Some would even go to the extent of holding the view that it was out of "love' that the colonial ruler saw to it that special treatment was given to the Lushais. While these attitudes towards the British are not totally baseless, the more objective analysis... would reveal the fact that basically it was governed by the principle and objective of keeping the Lushais, who were then known by them as the "wild hill tribes", tamed and unable to attempt any uprising at the least possible cost. The consequences of this are now inherited by the free India. The fact that the Lushais were not permitted to have any political activity till the 1940's and that they were divided and given to the charge and control of different regional authorities just for the sake of "administrative convenience" and further that they were left in that state during the British transfer of power to the ex-colonies, would go to suggest that basically the British had none or little concern about the political future of the Mizos. (67-68)

While the "the colonial frames of encapsulation" had drawn borders that separated the Mizo-inhabited areas by the creation of the Lushai Hills District for the convenience of colonial administration, the intension of the British administration in declaring the tribal inhabited hill areas as 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded' did seem to be, to some extent, concern for the hill tribes since they felt, according to McCall, that "an emancipated people, like the plainsmen are better equipped to develop their own political future. A backward people, like the Lushais, cannot easily

start" (235). Thus Sangkima summarises the intent of the act and the reaction it received from the "Indian leaders":

> ... In other words, Mizoram was outside the control of the Provincial Legislature... The object of section 91 was not to impose on the tribal people Parliamentary institutions and the ordinary civil and criminal law for more civilized communities. The politically conscious Indian leaders resented strongly about the status of the tribal people under the Act. Subsequently, it led to a hot debate among the members of the Constituent Assembly. (56)

The germination of the 'crown colony option' for the hill areas that was proposed later seems to have come from the notes made by the British administrators during this stage when proposals were made for the exclusion of these areas from the constitutional amendment of 1935/36. According to R. Syiemlieh, "All officials thought that the hill areas in north-east India should be excluded from the proposed constitutional changes," and he points out that one such administrator, John H. Hutton, who was the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills, "in a note to the Assam Government, which was subsequently placed for the Simon Commission's consideration... pointed out that on grounds of race, history, culture, language, politics, finance and education the hill districts of Assam should received consideration for their exclusion. He showed that the interests of the hill districts would not be served by having them included in the reforms but that they would suffer very serious detriment by being tied up to the politically more advanced plains districts, while the latter were likely to suffer in the future if joined with people of an irreconciliable culture in an unnatural union which would ultimately only entail discomfort for both parties." Syiemlieh goes on to quote Hutton's words of caution: "History is full of instances of lamentable results of attempting to combine alien populations into political units. The danger can be avoided here at the outset" (181).

However, the lack of specific provisions – financial and political, made for the Lushai Hills, and the fact that the Lushais had no vote nor "any direct share in the responsibility for the good Government of this land" resulted, much of the time, in negligence of the development of the Lushai people until Sir Robert Reid came to be

the Governor of Assam, according to McCall (238-240). In what became known as the Reid-Coupland plan which was proposed along the lines of the ideas already flouted by Hutton to the Simon Commission earlier in 1928-1929, “the Crown colony would include the Chittagong Hill Tracts (now in Bangladesh), the Chin and Kachin areas (now in Burma/Myanmar) and the following areas in India: Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya and mountainous areas in Assam,” and while “the plan lost out at the time of Partition, it did not disappear overnight. The Reid-Coupland plan continues to be part of political discussions in Northeast India, as a model for an independent mountain state,” according to van Schendel who cites several historians in his chapter titled “Afterword: Contested, vertical, fragmenting: de-partitioning ‘Northeast India’ studies” (276). The ‘mountain state’ referred to here is yet another conception that came to nought, involving a large part of the same geographical areas but under independent India, and one in which the Mizo Union also, at least for a short period, participated until they moved on to favour a demand for a ‘Mizo state’ (Malsawmliana 255-257).

Opinions on the impact of the Acts and the labels that went with them like ‘backward tracts’ which ensured the separation of the hill tribes from the politics of ‘Mainland India’ vary but are all valid. The ‘alienation’ and ‘otherness’ of the Mizo tribes from the rest of India, as contended by Malsawmliana and Chonzik may be true to a certain extent. Lalchungnunga’s argument regarding the intent of simply ‘taming’ the ‘wild tribes’ for the protection of the British had no concern for the future of the Mizo people except for their own convenience also seem valid in that even though the colonial narratives mentioned above were put to action only up till the point of their departure, and the plans and proposals for the future of the hill tribes never came under serious consideration. The colonial narrative, as already evident from what has been discussed, claimed genuine concern for the welfare of the inhabitants of the hill areas, and this narrative is anchored on the sameness-difference binary. Syiemlieh quotes Sir Robert Reid’s comment on the tribes he administered as Governor of Assam thus:

> They are not Indians in any sense of the word, neither in origin, or in language, nor in appearance, nor in habits, nor in outlook and it is by

> historical accident that they have been tacked on to an Indian Province. On both sides of the so called watershed and frontier were to be found Kukis, Lakhers, Chins, Nagas, Khamtis and Kachins, having common customs, common languages and living under similar social conditions. These tribes common to both frontiers were divided between two administrations when the logical answer was to unite them into one administration. (188-189)

Yet no reparation was made before or during the transition of power to undo the separations through colonial processes of mapping and fixing boundaries.

Thus, the recognition that the inhabitants of these 'Excluded Areas' were historically, ethnically, linguistically, culturally and even in religious beliefs different from the mainstream Hindu Aryan Indians and the measures they had taken in the form of these acts did prevent assimilation, and to the Mizo national movements, it became a strategic tool to assert their distinctness and to claim the legitimacy of their cause.

> The protection of the tribes from the demographic engulfment and from the cultural assimilation by dominant groups is acceptable as a sound policy. But it also noted that the resultant non-involvement and non-participation of the Lushais in the wider socio-political process sustained the independent orientation of the tribes, the further consequence being that their regional sentiment was reinforced to the extent of letting them feel they were never part of India. The Mizo National Front movement which gained prominence during the sixties bears this fact out. (Lalchungnunga 78)

It facilitated the imagination of a pristine Mizo culture that had to be 'preserved.' It also legitimises their will to reclaim their pre-colonial sovereignty. Lalchungnunga further makes a hindsight observation that "had the British administration opened an opportunity for the Lushais to participate in the political process outside their Hills along with the policy of protecting them from outside exploitation, the regional feeling of the Mizos may not have gone to the extreme" (78). The political 'othering' created through the process of 'exclusion' by the British is here attributed as the main cause of the Mizo national movement that eventually

culminated in a protracted armed conflict. As discussed in the last chapter, the crystallisation of Mizo identity, after its genesis through colonial constructions, took the form of the Mizo/*Vai* as the self/other binary, through the conscious construction of the *Vai* as the 'other' (Joy L.K. Pachuau 104-105).

Yet in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* the conflict undercuts a simple Mizo/*Vai* encounter. Other elements come in the form of differences in political ideologies between the MNF and the Mizo Union. Among the Mizo Union, furthermore, while there are those who do not support the movement but do not act in blatant opposition to the MNF, there are others who in many instances, act as 'collaborators' of the *Vai* – the Mizo Union activists who either act as *kawktu* ("finger-pointer", informant) or those who have taken up arms against the MNF army, as found in both novels. While many of the *kawktu* belong to the Mizo Union, again, there are others who act as *kawktu* for other reasons as well, and these 'enemies' of Mizo *hnam* are none other than their fellow Mizo people. The political developments have been discussed at length here since this study attempts to understand how the Mizo Union, whose initial ideology was no different from that of the Mizo National Front, came to be perceived as 'traitor' to the 'nationalistic cause' in the MNF movement as seen in both *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm.* The Mizo people, at that junction of British withdrawal, were not unified when it came to the question of what type of self-governance they wanted to form. This question involves the formation of new power structures. More importantly, it becomes a question of reformulation of identity and belonging. Thus a flurry of political activity ensued. The two strands of Mizo nationalism found in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm* are conceived through several common contours of identification, yet the main point of divergence is seen in the way the notion of 'independence' is understood. While the Mizo Union conceived of independence in terms of modernist political ideology, the MNF's interpretation of the same is situated within ethnic and religious paradigms. 'Independence' has been the moot point of Mizo political arena right from the period of the first political party, and it underpins the factionalism that ensued from the early stage until it culminated in the formation of the MNF, although the issue of

abolition of chieftainship is imbricated in the ways in which the notion of 'independence' is imagined.

As mentioned earlier, there already was factionalism within the Mizo Union party very early on from its inception based on its political aims – one faction favouring entry into the Indian Union, while the other faction which came to be known as the "Right Wing" held on to the ideology of 'independence' (Hluna, *Political Development in Mizoram* 19). A year after the Mizo Union came into being, the second political party – the United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO) was officially formed. Locally referred to as *Zalen Pawl* (Free Party/Freedom Party), who advocated that the "Mizo people would have better and bright future if they opt out of India and join Burma instead of India Union." (Lalthlengliana, qtd. in Malsawmliana 247). The first expressed objective of UMFO – "In looking for a country with which to identify ourselves we should seek one we admire and which can give us some benefits" (Lalchungnunga 159), we see that Mizo independence was not the agenda, but that they believed that the Mizos should be able to choose the country with which they identify themselves based on what they they thought would best benefit the Mizo people, and thus, the reasons they gave for their advocacy of joining Burma are: "a) Burma being smaller than India, the Mizos might have a larger voice in affairs generally; b) Mizo participation in public affairs may have greater scope in Burma; c) Mizos are very close to the Burmese ethnically; d) Mizos would have greater autonomy in Burma; e) It was said that the Draft Constitution of Burma had a provision for the possibility of opting out of Burma by any of the hills-people after ten years" (Lalchungnunga 160-161). The *Lal* wanted to revert back to the micro-sovereignty of their chieftaincy, to reclaim the traditional autonomy within their own "hills and valleys." It finally boils down to two main campaigns:

> Thus, the campaign for a separate state within the Indian Union and a sovereign state without the Indian Union dominated the district both appealing – though to a different degree – to the ethnonational feelings of the people. The MNF campaign led to an armed revolution which opened a

> chapter in the history of the district. (Lalsangkima Pachuau, *Ethnic Identity* 85)

As denoted in the previous chapters, Mizo as a 'macro identity' of tribes came into being and was solidified through the colonial encounter and the imperial administration following the annexation of the land of the tribes. The disruption of their former systems of affiliations, on the one hand facilitated the adoption of the larger social identity, but at the same time necessitated a validation of the new identity through the construction of imagined 'continuities'. The pre-colonial Mizo tribes identified themselves with the names of their chiefs and not so much with fixed territories. The semi-nomadic nature of the tribes, necessitated by their method of cultivation, meant that every chieftainship shifts its settlement every few years. Moreover, such affiliation with the chief also had certain fluidity in that the individual could, at any time, shift his alliance by migrating to a different village at will. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the notion of *hnam* as 'tribe' or 'clan'- the ethnic marker of the tribes was not rigid or fixed either. The individual could 'change' his tribe through the provision of *saphun*, by which process he simultaneously 'changed' his *sakhua* – his religious alliance. In addition to these fluidities, the fact that the Mizo tribes were an oral culture, characteristically dynamic and heterogeneous, lends another aspect to the fluidity of identity in the pre-colonial times.

Thus, Joy L.K. Pachuau states that "[f]or the 'Lushai' tribes, indeed, identities were created in movement," and she contends that "the struggle between the colonialists and the indigenous can be seen as a contestation between an identity founded on territory and territoriality and an identity founded on movement, which made the forcible 'rooting' of a people to a fixed space even more significant" (100; 101). However, we may argue that territory and territoriality did not only have a significance with the tribe, but that their idea of territory and territoriality was bound up with their sense of justice and honour, and was the cause of much of the conflicts and violence in the pre-colonial times. In fact, it is the notion of territory and territoriality that differs, and more specifically it is the notion of a territory fixed and bounded that is alien to the Mizo tribes. If one looks at Dokhuma's accounts from

Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung, the shift in the conception of territory in the pre- and post-British era becomes apparent:

> Hmanlaia an indo chhan tam ber pawh an dikna (rights) humhalh an tum vang a ni phawt a. Chutah lal tinin mahni ram humhalh an duh theuh a. Phai vai an run fona chhan pawh an sai ramchhuahna ngawpui tha Saphovin thingpui huana an vah chereu zau zel vang a ni pakhat a. Chung chu an indo chhan a nih si chuan, tunlai khawvel Sawrkar indo chhan aia a nep chuanna a awm chuang lo... He kan Mizoram hi humhalh tumin kan pi leh pute chuan lu tam an lo hloh tawh a Thisenin an lo lei a, tun hi min thlen ta chauh a ni zawk.
>
> The cause of most of their wars was fore mostly, the safeguarding of their rights. Moreover, each chief wanted to defend and protect his territory. One of the reasons behind the raids (carried out by the ancestors) was the fact that the *Sap* had been deforesting and devastating their elephant hunting grounds to expand their tea plantations. If such were the causes of their wars, the causes were not any less justifiable than the causes of modern governments... In their fight to retain/protect this very Mizoram, our ancestors had lost many lives. They have bought the land with their blood to secure us our territory of today. (255-256)

Here Dokhuma explains their notion of territoriality, of what they believed was rightfully theirs, and how the ancestors had sacrificed their lives to assert and lay claim to their territory. In the same work, however, Dokhuma also states:

> Mizorama Bawrhsap a lo lal chinah chuan lal reng rengin lalna lehkha 'Ramri lehkha' an tih mai chu Bawrhsap hnen atangin an la a, chu chu an lalna lehkha ve ber chu a ni. Khaw tin lal chuan ramri an nei vek a. Chu an lalna ramri chhungah chuan thuneihna vawrtawp neiin an awm a; lal zawng zawng chu an 'independent' vek mai a ni. Vailen hma phei chuan ramri pawh fel taka thliah a awm meuh lo. A huai huai leh khua leh tui nghah apiangin an thut zau mai a ni.

> After the Superintendent became the head of Mizoram area, all the chiefs collected from him the 'Ramri Lehkha' – 'Boundary Papers', and that paper is the token of recognition of their chieftainship. Each village chief had a territorial boundary, in which he reigned supreme and all the chiefs were independent sovereigns. Before the advent of the British, there were hardly any clearly delineated boundaries. The chiefs who had the most power and villagers simply staked the widest territories. (126)

These lines have Dokhuma describing the notion of territory from the colonial understanding of territory as fixed and bounded spatially. The latter conception of boundary and territory as valid only if it exists in 'paper' demonstrates the shift from the former notion of territory and territoriality, and how this colonial legacy of 'mapping' the territory had a direct bearing on how the Mizo came to understand themselves. In an article titled "Maps, Mission, Memory and Mizo Identity" which deals with an examination of "the role of imperial maps, Christian mission, shared memories and collective consciousness in the formation of Mizo identity," Lal Dingluaia, a faculty member of Aizawl Theological College, throws light on the intersection of this mapped territoriality and the element of divine ordination which Mizo identity has come to assume in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm.* He explains the basis of the concept of a 'greater Mizoram' that stretches across the areas adjacent to the present day Mizoram, and which came to be one of the demands of the Mizo national uprising, the Mizo's indignation with how the imperial power imposes its political map on the Mizo tribes, and traces several key elements that came to have direct bearing on Mizo identity of the 'Rambuai' period and beyond. A point in connection with the 'raids' carried out on the Cachar plains needs to be mentioned here as it pertains to the discussion of territoriality which is interlinked with the traditional belief system of the pre-colonial Mizo tribes:

> In traditional Mizo belief, to attain the status of thangchhuah which entitled a person's soul to reached pialral, or heaven, one needed to kill an elephant and other wild animals on the chase. To have a successful elephant hunt, a solemn kawngpui siam sacrifice was performed and a holiday had to be observed if the hunting party succeeded. The meat was shared by whole villages, and the

> elephant tusks were traded and also used as earrings which were the most precious ornament of Mizo women. One of the blessings they bestowed upon a new born baby boy was to say, 'He will become a brave man/warrior and shoot an elephant'. Losing this territory greatly undermined every aspects of their lives. (242-243)

By drawing this connection, Lal Dingluaia establishes that for the pre-colonial Mizo tribes the land, the act of hunting, their values and their belief systems are all interconnected in a complex worldview that is clearly distinct from the colonial. Significantly, one of the first ways in which the colonial rulers exerted their power in the transformation of Mizo culture was through impositions of new and alien form of justice and prohibitions of various practices integral to the Mizo way of life. Lawmsanga, another ordained minister, commenting on the prohibitions of raids, headhunting and elephant hunting, by the British administrators to curb what was regarded by the western imperialists as "savage and barbaric practices," expresses that:

> ...the prohibition of elephant hunting and killing of enemies (not murder in the village) severely affected the Mizo religion since these were requirements in 'ram lama thangchhuah' to earn salvation and a place in pialral (heaven). Therefore, the Mizo religion was paralyzed when the British administrators strictly prohibited raiding villages and killing elephants and one of the means of gaining salvation collapsed. (76)

Although the latter has reiterated the same point that Lal Dingluaia has made, the frame of reference here is Christian, and we see a reframing of the pre-Christian cultural ethos within Mizo Christianity. The ideology behind the MNF movement, as reflected in both their memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India in 1965, their 'Declaration of Independence' the following year in which Dokhuma himself was a signatory, and in Dokhuma's *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, strikingly echo this pre-colonial worldview, albeit anchored on a different religious system. D. Smith, in his critique of the 'internal colonialism' thesis of ethno-

regionalism, brings out the complex nature of "ethnic separatists' relationship with territory:

> Land is indeed vital to ethnic separatists, but not simply for its economic and political uses. They are equally interested in its cultural and historical dimensions; what they need is a 'usable past' and a 'rooted culture'. Ethnic nationalists are not interested in any land; they only desire the land of their putative ancestors and the sacred places where their heroes and sages walked, fought and taught. It is a historic or ancestral 'homeland' that they desire, one which they believe to be exclusively 'theirs' by virtue of links with events and personages of earlier generations of 'their' people. (*Nationalism and Modernism* 63)

The significance of territory linked with cultural associations to Mizo nationalism further converges with the very idea of 'freedom' in the instance of village grouping – the 'counter-insurgency' measure which was resorted to by the India government. As denoted in the previous chapter, village grouping is basically the rounding up of the inhabitants of three or four villages into a single one designated "grouping centre" known as 'Protected Progressive Village' (PPV), which Dokhuma informs us in *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, is referred to as "Public Punishment Village", and likened to the 'Concentration Camps' devised under Adolf Hitler's holocaust programme (68). In the same work the author gives a description of the trauma faced by the Hualtu villagers on receiving orders for their relocation to Baktawng as part of this village grouping:

> Hualtu tui liaka seilian, mahni khawtlang bak tlang dang lunglen ngai lo pitar leh putarte chuan mahni duh reng vanga Baktawng tlanga pem tur ni lova, vailian khalhkhawm avanga Baktawng tlang pan tura nawr liam an an ni mai tur chu an ngaithiam thei thlawt lo va; mualpho e, zahthlak e, bal e, an dawn thei tawh lo va, an tap rawih rawih hlawm a.

> The elders of Hualtu village who had been nurtured by the spring waters of their village, who had never longed for any place but their own, could not reconcile themselves with the idea of being herded off by the *vailian*, not out

of their own volition but by force, to Baktawng village. Such was the trauma that they wept and wailed aloud. (66)

The trauma has more to do with having to leave their ancestral village instead of just their individual homestead, and thus, it is not so much the idea of material loss but rather the uprooting from the emotional and symbolic ties with the geographical space, the sense of belonging that cuts across the historical, the symbolical and the communal, and what underpins the trauma, as seen from the author's description, is the violence of having lost a sense of agency - the sense of power to choose to which, where and how they belong. The practice of relocation is not alien to the Mizo's relationship with geographical space. As denoted in the earlier chapters, the Mizo tribes, owing to their system of farming, would continually shift the location of their villages, and therefore would identify more with the name of the chief than with the name of the territory itself before the advent of the British whose policies greatly curtailed the freedom of movement the villages used to enjoy. Yet the idea of *pem*[66] (relocation) on the personal level was not alien to them either. This notion of fluidity has been discussed in the previous chapter in connection with the complex democratic relationship of the chief and the villagers. The villagers were not bound by any dicta to any village, and the people had a choice to leave at will. In *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii,* we find Fehtea contemplating on moving away during the peak of his sufferings, yet he eventually makes the choice to stay on in Darzo village for two reasons – his father's will to live out his days in Darzo village, and his own desire to prove his worth instead of escaping from his burden the cowardly way (58). Such is the level of agency involved in their affiliation with their villages, and this in turn implicates a sense of belonging that is voluntary and determined by other cultural and social forms of attachment.

The grouping of villages thus robs the Mizo people of their sense of having choices, of agency, the power to 'imagine' their community. Furthermore, the complete disruption of the way of life for the Mizo people brought about by the

[66] *Pem* - To migrate (as family from one village to another); to emigrate, to immigrate (*DLL* 356).

installation of new power structures within the 'grouping centres' greatly impacts the ways in which the Mizo people view themselves through their relationship with the 'other' - the *Vai,* the Indian Army. In both *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, we find the slogan of the MNF, "Pathian leh kan ram tan" (For God and our country) predominantly. These two works are based on the Mizo National Front uprising, the former, *Rinawmin*, written during the peak years of the armed movement while the author himself was incarcerated for his participation in the said movement, and the latter composed decades later. This slogan, especially in *Rinawmin*, is a recurring motif, and the title 'Rinawmin' itself is inextricably linked to the notion of loyalty to 'God' and to the 'country'. On the genesis of this slogan, R. Zamawia, in his work, *Zofate Zinkawngah* [*In the Course of Zofa/Mizo People's Journey*], has stated that he and J. Sawmvela, both holding high ranking positions in the MNF movement, came up with the idea of "PATHIAN LEH KAN RAM TAN" and how they decided to fashion it after the Boy Scout slogan which he learned during his 'Boy Scout days', "For King and my Country". Significantly, they decided, at the same meeting, to replace the English formulaic letter ending, "yours faithfully" with the Mizo term "*Rinawmin"* which may be translated to 'faithfully, being trustworthy, in good faith, or loyally.' He goes on to say that they issued a circular to inform all 'volunteers' of the movement that "*Rinawmin"* should be used for all correspondence between themselves, explaining how the usage began and how it was continued to be used consistently by the "Mizoram (Ramhnuai) Sawrkhar" ("The Underground Government of Mizoram") (250).

In *Rinawmin,* the protagonist Rozuala who has just returned from the 'MNF Special Assembly' in Aizawl, informs the volunteer unit from his village that the Vice-President Pu Lalnumawia had announced the order to replace "*I rin tlak*" (the conventional formal letter ending in Mizo language which translates to 'one you can trust") with "Rinawmin" and he goes on to explain that "Rinawmin" should not be limited to correspondences within the movement but that it applied to all correspondences (26). The author lays great store by the term, as evident in how every time 'Rinawmin*'* or 'rinawmin' is found in the text, it is highlighted in bold and placed within single inverted commas, or in all upper case, and sometimes, both

in bold and upper case, except once where the term is used as an actual ending to a letter. The theme of loyalty in *Rinawmin* is inextricably bound up with the notion of loyalty in the personal relationships as well. In the author's description of Rozuala and his battalion, this notion of loyalty is highlighted:

> An Battalion pawh sakhaw lama kaihruaitu ber a niin, nulat tlangval lah khaw tina ngaihzawng nei zel zul chi a ni si lo. Ramhluni bâk nula hmangaih dang a nei lovin Mizoram tan a inpumpek a. A ram leh Ramhluni bâk chu engmah dang chungah rilru a nghat lo. Ram tana a thawh theih ve tawk hlawhtlinna chu Pathian kutah chauh a awm tih a hriat avangin Pathian kutah a innghat hmiah a. Pathian chhâla ram tana thawktu an nih angin an zingah ho ve fe fe tawk chu awm mahse, an vaiin Pathian biak an ngai pawimawh ṭheuh a. Nula pawh thlahlel ve tho hlawmin nawmsip bawl pawh duh ve tho mah se, Pathian hnenah ṭawngṭai an ngai pawimawh ṭheuh a. An ram luah thuthlungah pawh 'HNEHNA CHU MIZOTE PATHIAN TA A NI SI A' tih a ni rêng a.

> He has been taking the leading role in upholding religious worship in his battalion and he is not the type to womanise. Giving his heart only to Ramhluni, he has devoted himself to his land/nation. His heart is set only on his land/nation and Ramhluni. With the conviction that the materialization of the cause he has fought for rests in God's will, he has commended himself fully in God's hand. While there are some of them who live less astutely, having taken their oaths in the name of God, the worship of God remains a matter of great importance to all of them. And though they are not immune to the desire to fool around with women sometimes, they remain committed to the worship of God for they know that their national cause hinges on the belief that 'victory belongs to the God of the Mizo people.' (171-172)

This notion of "Mizote Pathian" ("the God of the Mizo people") in the phrase "HNEHNA CHU MIZOTE PATHIAN TA A NI SI A*"* ("Victory belongs to the God of the Mizo people") is found twice within *Rinawmin.* The phrase seems to have been derived from several biblical verses: Proverbs 21:31 – "The horse is made ready

for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD;" the last sentence of 2 Chronicles 20:15 – "This is what the LORD says to you: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's," and Psalm 3:8 – "Salvation belongs to the LORD. Your blessing is upon Your people." (in some versions, victory/deliverance comes from the Lord) among others (New International Version).

To understand such an interpretation of the Mizo national movement in religious terms, especially along the 'Covenant" tradition of the Old Testament, one needs to look into the context within which the movement itself is positioned. One of the main professed catalysts for the movement is the perceived threat of assimiliation – religious and cultural, into the Hindu nationalism of the post-Independent period, as seen in the "Declaration of Independence". (*Zofate Zinkawngah* 976-977) Lalsangkima Pachuau argues that:

> One should remember that for many Northeasterners, until recently, the Indic India was a culturally foreign and a historically distant phenomenon. Various movements for autonomy and independence among the tribals have to be seen then as largely a response to the national majority's aggressive efforts of assimilation and domination. The fear of assimilation, domination, and oppression has been intensified by the mainstream's antipathy toward conversion to Christianity as well as by the rise of Hindu fundamentalist influence in the years following the Indian independence. (*Ethnic Identity* 26)

The armed movement, through the perspective of the Mizo National Army (MNA)[67] in *Rinawmin*, is one of rightful defense of their 'God-given' territory, and that they are "hnam chhantu" ("defender of the Mizo *hnam*"; 152). The author also describes the Mizo Army in such terms:

[67] Mizo National Army (MNA), also referred to as 'Mizo Army' in the selected texts, is the army division of the MNF.

> …chung hun laia an ramhnuai rilru-ah chuan Pathian chauh lo chu hmachhuan dang an nei lovin Mizoram chu Pathian hminga chhanchhuah an tum tlat a ni.
>
> The underground army in those days had nothing but their trust in God to rely on, but they were committed to bring deliverance to Mizoram in the name of God. (172)

Drawing parallels from the Bible, the Mizo Army likened their condition to the oppressive rule of the Biblical Jewish king Herod, who initiated the murder of all infants within Bethlehem region in a bit to kill off the baby who, according to the Magi, would become a great king. The notion of freedom is intricately interwoven with the narrative of their movement, and thus the land, their faith, and the shared feeling of persecution permeate the nationalism of *Rinawmin. Rinawmin* may be read as MNF narrative in that on can see the protagonist and the movement representing the ideals of Mizo nationalism in all their idealisations. *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, on the other hand, gives voice to the Mizo Union point of view, and it depicts a more objective view of the political scenario of the time. What can be discerned is the change in the author's own beliefs regarding the MNF movement, his faith and dedication to the movement finding their expression in *Rinawmin*, written while he was incarcerated for his involvement in the movement, while *Silaimu Ngaihawm* casts the author as more mature, objective and even disillusioned with the movement, it being written almost three decades later.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the politics of Mizo identity formation in the works of James Dokhuma with specific focus on *Rinawmin* (1970), [68] *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* (1981), *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* (1991), and *Silaimu Ngaihawm* (1995). Anchored on the standpoint that identities are constructed within discourse, the discourses within which Mizo identity are represented are located within three historical moments – the pre-colonial 'beginnings' in the oral past, the colonial period of negotiation and the post-colonial period of 'Mizo nationalism'. The socio-cultural forces at play in the construction of Mizo identity are examined within their historical specificities and juxtaposed with Dokhuma's concept of Mizo identity and the cultural resources through and within which they are conceptualised.

In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Hall states that "cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture," and that it "is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute return." Although the politics of Mizo identity construction draws heavily on the notion of such an essential Mizo primordial existence at various points, the study is grounded on the premise that Mizo identity is constructed through discourse, and treats the notion of an essential Mizo primordial existence as a discursive element within the history of Mizo identity politics. Thus, the following lines sum up the theoretical position that the study maintains throughout, that cultural identity

> ... is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental "law of origin." (226)

James Dokhuma, who is keenly aware of the 'instability' of Mizo culture and identity denotes what he believes to be the responsibility of the Mizo people:

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[68] All translations of quoted texts and titles of works in this chapter are done by me, unless noted otherwise, for the sole purpose of this study.

> ...kan hnam dan neih theuh chu hman fing leh changkang apiangin vawn him an tum a. An vawn him chu an hnam damna (survival) a nih pawh an hre chiang em em bawk a ni.
>
> The more advanced and foresighted communities have always tried to preserve and sustain their cultural specificities, knowing fully well that the survival of their communities depends on such preservation. (*Rilru Far Chhuak* 73)

Yet at the same time, the 'mourning' of the 'loss' of some 'essence' is discernable in all the works under the consideration of this study, underpinning an essentialist notion of a recoverable 'authentic' past. His expressed reason in 'taking up the pen' and his very conception of the role of the writer as the 'custodian of culture' place him within the essentialist discourse. Yet implicit in how he expresses his concern for the 'preservation' of Mizo culture is his belief that the essence of being Mizo can and should continue to be performed in the constant negotiation with the forces of "history, culture and power." It was during his three-year incarceration as a political prisoner for his involvement in the Mizo national movement that he decided to start writing with the purpose of continuing to serve the idea of Mizo nationalism. The three years served in various prisons saw him writing fervently, at least as much as prison life allowed him, and he declared his reason behind the decision to start writing, in a preface to another book of his, *Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna* [*Dictionary of Archaic and IdiomaticTerms*]:

> Chutia ka tan lai chuan kan ram tana ka tihtheih tawk ni-a ka hriat chu lehkhabu ziak a ni a. Chu chauh chu kan ram tana ka tihtheih awm chhun, mahse ka la tih ngai reng reng si loh chu tan turin ka han tintuah ta a.
>
> As I was thus incarcerated, I realized that the only thing I could do for our *ram* – country/nation was to write. It was the only viable choice for me to serve our 'nation', and so I decided to venture into unfamiliar territory. (vi)

For Dokhuma, Mizo identity is a *hnam* identity which, in his conception, is both ethnic and nationalist, the Mizo is a nation, and writing is 'performing' Mizo national identity. Thus Mizo identity in his works can be read in two contexts – in a

broader context, the author himself is considered as engaged in the 'imagining' of Mizo national identity, and in the narrower context of textual reading where Mizo identity is 'performed', 'imagined' and 'constructed' within the stories of the selected texts. The 'modernist' notion of nationalism, as theorised by Ernest Gellner, Karl Deutsch, Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, posits that nationalism is a modern phenomenon, arising out of modernisation and modernity, and facilitated by the breakdown of traditional systems of kingship, beliefs and sacred languages (Smith, *The Nation in History* 60-61). Most theories of nationalism that have dominated the discourse since the late twentieth century agree that the 'nation' is socially constructed. As Anderson puts it, the nation is "an imagined political community," and that it is "imagined as inherently limited and sovereign." The boundaries drawn in the imagination of the nation renders it as "limited" and the members within this imagined boundary imagine themselves as sharing a "communion", a sense of community which "is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship." It is this "fraternity", the sense of unity and communion which "makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings" (5-7). This sense of communion is "generated and sustained by symbolic forms, such as, songs, films, cultural practices like stories, traditions, history writing" (Nayar 176). In order to understand how Mizo nationalism fits into this 'modular' understanding of the nation and nationalism, the historical specificities must also be taken into account. The colonial experience, as well as the manner in which the Mizo tribes negotiated with the changes brought about by modernity, have profound impact on the ways the Mizo people understand their collective identity and in how they conceive the Mizo nation. Timothy Brennan who, in "The National Longing for Form," observes that although nationalism as an ideology originates in the imperialist countries:

> … these countries were not able to formulate their own national aspirations until the age of exploration. The markets made possible by European imperial penetration motivated the construction of the nation-state at home." Thus he

> asserts that "European nationalism itself was motivated by what Europe was doing in its farflung dominions. (Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* 59)

It is through the oppositional relation with its 'other' that European nationalism formulates their home nation as the centre of a larger formation. Thus the Indian postcolonial theorist Partha Chatterjee opines that the very conception of nation is 'western', and based on this understanding of nationalism as a western construct he traces how the same is reproduced in the anti-colonial nationalist movements. Nayar sums up Chatterjee's argument in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* as follows:

> Anti-colonial/nationalist movements adopt the idea of progress or modernity from the West and launch the idea of a nation. Chatterjee argues that natives transform the Western idea of a nation in three stages. In the first stage, the natives accept modern Western ideas of progress and modernity. In the second, the elite in the colony turn to folk and popular cultural forms in order to generate both mass support as well as a new form of identity based on local cultures. Finally, in the third stage, the Western and folk cultural forms are projected as a native nationalism by the elite. The anti-colonial movement is based on the projection of the Western model mixed with the folk elements as a truly 'national' idea. Chatterjee terms nationalism a 'derivative discourse' for this reason: that anti-colonial nationalism is built on the conceptual framework and ideas of progress and history given by the West. (177)

While the Indian anti-colonial nationalism was constructed through such processes, Mizo political consciousness also developed along the same lines in the 1920s. It was the colonial enterprise which engendered the notion of Mizo nationalism very early on through the education provided by the missionaries and the colonial administrators, the exposure to the 'world outside' through the Mizo participation in the two World Wars, and through the exposure to other parts of British India. The newly emerged educated 'elites' began to imagine the Mizo as a nation during the colonial period, and the 'folk elements' relied heavily on Mizo orality. Real political activism was seen, however, only when faced with the

precarity of the Mizo national future in the wake of the British cessation in the 1940s (Malsawmliana 243-244). The nationalism that emerged was in many ways, imagined through the ideals of modernity and modern democratic systems, and the invocation of the indigenous elements – shared history, ethnicity, customs, culture and homeland, all align with the modernist conception of the nation. What best illustrates the politics of Mizo national identity is the claim of pre-colonial 'sovereignty' which runs parallel with the rejection of the traditional Mizo chieftaincy. The two strands of Mizo nationalism in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, both imagined through the modern paradigms, invoking, at varying degrees, an essentialised notion of the Mizo, are seen to imagine the sovereignty of the Mizo differently.

Anderson is not alone in insisting on the element of 'sovereignty,' and it is in the imagination of the nation as sovereign that it lines up squarely with the modern notion of the nation state. According to Ermest Gellner, "nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (*Nations and Nationalism* 1), and that it is "it is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round" (56). In the light of Gellner's statement, the nation is only realised through nationalism, and so the Mizo nation did not, and could not have existed during the colonial period, or after until the creation of limited sovereignty in the form of statehood in 1987. Moreover, the nationalist cause found in the selected texts would be characterised as 'regionalism' and 'seperatism' within the larger process of Indian nation building. Therefore the study turns to the ethnosymbolic approach, focusing on Anthony D Smith's understanding of the "ways in which the nation is imagined." For Smith, "the drama of the nation has three climatic moments, each of them glorious: its golden age, its ultimate national destiny, and the sacrifice of its members" (*Chosen Peoples* 218).

The origins of the Mizo tribes are shrouded in the oral past, and much of what the Mizo tribes know about their history is through the oral tradition. This factor, it appears, greatly facilitates the 're-imagining' project when it comes to Mizo identity and nationalist identity formation. As Said puts it, "reading and writing texts are never neutral activities: there are interests, powers, pleasures entailed no matter how

aesthetic or entertaining the work" (*Culture and Imperialism* 385), for Dokhuma, writing becomes a nationalist project. It is thus significant that the first book he undertook to write had him choose to *re-tell* an oral tale which he claims contains the kernel of Mizo identity – the values and beliefs of 'the ancestors' captured in a tale handed down from generation to generation, and embodied in the character of Fehtea. The romanticised portrait of Fehtea, the *pasaltha*, being held up for future generations "as a tangible representation of *tlawmngaihna"* is Dokhuma's way of continuing the nationalist cause even while being confined within prison walls, aligning himself with what Pramod K Nayar calls the two components of nationalism in literature and the arts:

> (i) It helped writers seek a pre-colonial past that would help them define the nation and
>
> (ii) It projected a destiny, a future shared by and common to all people within the space of that nation. (176)

Thus, to him, the most definitive trait, the essence of Mizo identity and what he wanted to hold up as specimen for the preservation of Mizo cultural identity is the code of *tlawmngaihna*. He does contend that the ethos of the ancestors has become latent, and he expresses his wish that such a code, as exemplified by the character of Fehtea be held up as a concrete manifestation of the ethos behind the practice of *tlawmngaihna*. In his representation of Fehtea's *tlawmngaihna,* Dokhuma portrays Fehtea as a *pasaltha*. *Tlawmngaihna*, as a Mizo code of life characterised by altruism, self-sacrifice, chivalry, valour and humility, is not exclusive to the *pasaltha*, nor is it confined to the males of the society, but also practiced by the young women of the village, according to Dokhuma (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 221-222). It was the code of ethics upon which the village administration was anchored before the whole socio-political structure was disrupted through colonial intervention. In *Tumpangchal nge Saithangpuii*, *pasaltha* is a combination of bravery, perseverance, *tlawmngaihna*, and physical prowess. The endurance, perseverance and steadfastness of Fehtea in the face of social rejection and derision are also qualities that exemplify *tlawmngaihna*.

Pasaltha, in Dokhuma's conception is, however, not 'a relic of the past' and he demonstrates how it has lived on in the Mizo ethos through his portrayal of the protagonists in *Khawhar In* and *Rinawmin.* In *Rinawmin,* and to a lesser degree in *Silaimu Ngaihawm*, the romanticised notion of *pasaltha* resurfaces, and this time not limited to the protagonists but to the hnam *sipai*, the Mizo army of the MNF movement.

> Since the ultimate national destiny can never be known, though many may hope to divine it, all we can be sure of is that it will come about only through the commitment and self-sacrifice of its members, and that is what the nation must continually uphold, remember, and celebrate. What we might term 'destiny through sacrifice', therefore, forms the final sacred foundation of national identity, at once seen and unseen, actively cultivated, and a silent presence. (Smith, *Chosen Peoples* 218)

Thus, the *tlawmngaihna* and the distinction of *pasaltha* are shown, not as immutable, but re-articulated within the changing socio-historical processes. While the impetus for the MNF uprising does deploy the romanticised and mythologised form of an essential Mizo identity, in Dokhuma's articulation, the characters set in the 1960s yet exemplify these 'essences', though in a much different setting. The ultimate self-sacrifice of Rozuala and Sanglura, along with numerous other unnamed *pasaltha* of Mizo nationalism, aligns them with this 'final sacred foundation of national identity", and their deaths link the glories of the *pasaltha* of old, the new *pasaltha*, and the concept of the 'glorious death.'

The study has also focused on the construction of Mizo identity through the dynamics of Mizo orality and highlights how the evolution of the Mizo worldview has shaped the very historiography of the oral past. *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* and *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* have both been considered, and the study identifies the persistence of orality in the post-literate understanding and representation of the past, and also discusses the revisionist tendencies denoted in how Mizos have attempted to record and reclaim the oral past. In committing to writing what had been an oral tale in the case of *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii*, and the oral tradition of the cultural

history of the Mizo people, the author may be regarded as establishing a continuity from the oral to the written culture. The factors that came to the forefront in this aspect is not only the shift in human thought processes that Walter J. Ong has maintained as the direct outcome of the transition from oral to writing/print culture, but also the centrality of Mizo Christianity in the Mizo consciousness. This is not surprising since the Mizo script and Christianity both originated with the pioneer Welsh missionaries in 1894. The origin of the Mizo tribes is shrouded in the oral past. There were hardly any written record about the Mizo people before the colonial encounter, and in such an absence historians rely heavily on origin myths and oral tradition to trace the origin and the migratory routes of the Mizo tribes. Though there is no consensus, it is generally believed that they probably started their migration from the southern part of modern day China, and had followed a route through the plains of present day Myanmar in several waves and within a timeline spanning centuries before they finally entered the present day Mizoram. The various processes of dispersal along their migration continue to impact the relationships between the tribes even today, and it has formed the basis of some of the issues that inform Mizo identity discourse. There were various tribes and clans of the pre-colonial times, each having their own dialect and cultural practices, dispersed across present day Cachar, Mizoram and Chin hills. In the Mizo imagination, and especially in the articulation of Mizo national identity in both the narratives of the Mizo Union and the MNF in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* this ethnic kinship intersects with the claim of pre-colonial traditional form of territorial sovereignty. The orality of the Mizo is constantly invoked in the re-definition of the Mizo within a modernist, westernised concept of nationalism.

Thus, we may conclude that for Dokhuma, the very process of negotiation between the elements of culture and the political reality becomes Mizo identity – the negotiation with the 'essentialised Mizo' and the 'instability' which rests on the temporality and constructedness of Mizo identity. The seemingly paradoxical nature of these positions sustains the tension which the 'search' for identity is founded on. Since Mizo nationalism, like all nationalisms, is anchored on an imagined community, imagined through Mizo identity which is a "becoming' – a continual

process, Mizo nationalism is also a process – of becoming, and of being through the points of stops and in the trace, in the differential of an ever deferred meaning in Derridean term. One cannot think of the process of becoming as following a linear path towards some essential or permanent Mizo identity, a foreclosure, either by the same logic that one cannot conceive of Mizo identity as having an essence that can be recovered. Thus, the very process of becoming is what being Mizo is all about. Dokhuma's own conception of nationalism confirms this position – he insists on 'nationalism beyond party politics', he at first believed and participated in the MNF movement only to gradually distance himself from the cause as the cause gradually became too "this-worldly" (Smith), he goes on to advocate a nationalism beyond party politics, which is not at odds with the idea of integration within the Indian nation-state. It no longer is grounded on notions of sovereignty, territoriality but rather a fervent ideal based on the ideals of liberal democracy. The independence of the mind rather than political self-determination, not the 'liberation' of a 'this-worldly nation,' but of the spirit, the eternal spirit of the chainless mind. Thus the *search* for an essential past, the *negotiation* of Mizoness through historical, political and cultural moments, and the discourses which aim towards *'finding'* Mizo identity – all these are ways of "becoming" Mizo, of performing Mizoness since there is neither an essential metaphysical substance nor a 'finished product'- a complete, fully realised Mizo identity.

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Glossary

Note: *Except where noted otherwise, all entries in the glossary are sourced from* Lorrain, James Herbert. *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*. The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1940.

Arhnuaichhiah – the name of a sacrifice of a fowl offered in order to ward off impending evil feared because of some bad omen observed by a hunter. (*DLL* 12) Dokhuma, however, denotes that the ritual is mandatory for the hunter who has killed a wild gayal (Tumpangchal) regardless of any bad omen observed. (Scholar's input)

Bawh hla – n. the warrior's chant or cry; the chant or cry raised by warriors when returning from a successful raid.

Bawlpu – n. an exorcist, a priest.

Chhinlung chhuak - *Chhinlung* n. the name of the mythical rock from beneath which the progenitors of most of the present human race are said to have issued. (*DLL* 80) *Chhinlung chhuak* – those who have emerged from the *Chhinlung.* (Scholar's input)

Dan – n. way, manner, mode, fashion, style, method, law, regulations, rule, code, custom, habit, usage, practice, wont, characteristic.

Duhlian - A name given to the upper classes or clans in the *Lushai* Hills and to the dialect they speak – which is regarded as the purest form of the *Lushai* language.

Hlado - The hunter"s cry or chant which is raised directly [after] a wild animal has been killed in the chase. It is also chanted along the way home, and at the entrance of the village.

Hnam - clan, tribe, nation, nationality, race

Hnamchawm – the common people, all save those belonging to the ruling clan.

Hnamdang - another clan, tribe, nation, or race; a person belonging to another clan, tribe, nation, or race; a foreigner.

Inbuan – v. to wrestle, to wrestle together, to have a wrestle. adj. wrestling.

In hrang chang – used in the same sense as *in dang* – v. to live in one's own house and manage one's own affairs; to live in a separate house (as a married son not living with his father, etc., or as a *bawi* slave not living with his chief, etc.); to be on one's own; to be independent.

Inthawina – n. a sacrifice, a sacrificial offering; that which is offered in sacrifice or has anything to do with such a sacrifice. adj. Sacrificial.

Kalphung – used in the same sense as *kal dan* – n. mode, manner, or way of walking, going, acting, doing, speaking, proceeding, or procedure; mode, manner, way, style, meaning. (also. *Kal hmang* and *kal zia*)

Kawktu – an informer who collaborates with the Indian Army to identify members of the Mizo National Army. (Scholar's input)

Khalhkhawm – v. to drive together, to round up.

Kum thar – n. the new year.

Lal - A chief, chieftain, chieftainess, a sovereign, a monarch, a king or queen. The word means "lord."

Lengkhawm – it denotes both the indigenous form of communal singing event as well as the type of songs sung at such events. The *lengkhawm* (the event) and the *lengkhawm zai* (the type of singing/song are hybrids of the indigenous folk and Christian elements. (Scholar's input)

Lusei – n. the name from which the English word 'Lushai' is derived; but, whereas we English-speaking people apply 'Lushai' to the whole tribe, the tribesmen themselves apply Lusei to only the upper classes, and speak of the lower classes as Lutawi ('Longheads' and 'Shortheads' respectively.) (*DLL* 304). While Lorrain has used the term 'upper classes,' it may be more appropriate to call them the 'ruling tribe' or the 'dominant tribe' of a majority of the

region when the British arrived, since there were also areas in which other tribes ruled (Scholar's input).

Mautam - the name given to the periodic dying down of the [mau] bamboos and to the subsequent famine.

Mi – a person, a man, a thing, one, people, kind, sort, which; the person, the man, the thing, the one, etc.; anyone, someone, others, another.

Mikhual tlangval – *Mikhual* –n. a stranger, one belonging to another village, a guest or visitor from another village. *Tlangval* – n. a youth, a young man.

Pasalṭha – v. to be brave, manly, heroic, valiant, stout-hearted, courageous, daring fearless, intrepid. n. a person who is brave and manly; a brave, a hero; a famous or notable warrior or hunter.

Pathian – n. God, the Giver and Preserver of Life. adj. godly, pious, religious, devout. v. to be godly, pious, religious.

Pathian zawnchhuah ram – a land discovered/sought out by God. (Scholar's input)

Pathlawi – n. a youg married man or widower or divorced man; a man of marriageable age.

Pem - To migrate (as family from one village to another); to emigrate, to immigrate.

Phuba la – to avenge, to revenge, to take revenge, to take vengeance.

Pialral - Lushai Paradise, literally means the further side of Pial river.

Puithiam - n. an exorcist; a priest.

Ram - Forest, jungle; country, kingdom, territory, realm, domain, land, estate, place, homeland.

Rambuai - literally, 'troubled land', *Rambuai* is most commonly used to denote the peak period of conflict in Mizoram from 1966 to 1969 (Scholar's input).

Ramhuai – n. an evil spirit, a demon, a devil, a nat.

Ruai - n. a feast

Sa – n. an object of worship; a god; ancient ancestors who are worshipped by the Lushais; the spirit who precides over the house or household; religion, religious rites and ceremonies. (this is an abbreviated form of *sakhua,*... also used in conjunction with *biak* and *phun.* See *sakbiak* and *saphun.*)

Sabiak – n. object of worship.

Sadawt – n. a private exorcist or priest, especially such as are employed by ruling chiefs.

Sakhaw- an abbreviated form of *sakhua* (especially when used as an adjective and before an adjective). adj. religious, pious, devout. v. to be religious, pious, devout (*DLL* 400). *Hmang (hman)* v. to use, to treat (as), to be used to, to be in the habit of, to be addicted to, to spend or keep (as Sunday or Christmas at a certain place); to offer (a sacrifice. – Can only be used with this last meaning when the name of the special sacrifice referred to is mentioned).

Sakhaw biak – n. 1. The worship or worshipping of one's god, or ancient ancestors, or the spirit who precides over one's house or household. 2. The god, ancient ancestors, or spirit whom one worships.

Sakhaw mi – n. religious person, a religiously minded person, a devout or pious person. adj. religious, pious, devout. v. to be religious, pious, or devout.

Sakhua – 1. an object of worship, a god. 2. ancient ancestors who are worshipped by the Lushais. 3. the spirit who presides over the house or house-hold. 4. religion, religious rites and ceremonies.

Sakung – literally, 'the tree of *sa.*' It is a symbolic act of setting up the household 'religion'. According to Dokhuma, the 'planting' of the *sakung* is done not only in the case of *saphun*, the 'conversion' of *hnam,* but is also a prerequisite in setting up one's own household. It involves a series of rituals and sacrifices (Scholar's input).

Sap - a sahib, a white man, a government or other official.

Saphun – v. to adopt the object of worship, god, religion or religious rites and customs (of another). n. one who has adopted the god, religion, or religious rites and customs (of another); a proselyte, a convert.

Thangchhuah - The title given to the man who had distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase or by giving a certain number of public feasts. The wife of such a man also shares his title, and they and their children are allowed to wear the *thangchhuah puan* (the name of a cloth worn as a mark of distinction by one who has acquired the coveted title of *Thangchhuah*). The possession of this title is regarded by the *Lushai* as a passport to *Pialral* or Paradise.

Tlahpawi- n. an exorcist or priest whose duty it is to divine with a *tlah* and a *tlahpawina*. (*tlah* - n. a piece of bamboo with some of its outside covering partially stripped off, used along with the *tlahpawina* for divining.) (*tlahpawina* - n. a piece of wood used along with the *tlah* for divining.)

Tlawmngaihna - 1. to be self-sacrificing, unselfish, self-denying, persevering, stoical, stouthearted, plucky, brave, firm, independent(refusing help); to be loth to lose one's good reputation, prestige, etc; to be too proud or self-respecting to give in, etc. 2. to persevere, to endure patiently, to make light of personal injuries, to dislike making a fuss about anything. 3. to put one's own inclinations on one side and do a thing which one would rather not do, with the object either of keeping up one's prestige, etc, or of helping or pleasing another, or of not disappointing another, etc. 4. to do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient it may be to oneself or to one's own inclinations. 5. to refuse to give in, give way, or be conquered. 6. to not like to refuse a request, to do a thing because one does not like to refuse, or because one wishes to please others. 7. to act pluckily or show a brave front.

Vailen - modified form of *vailian.*

Vailian - literally, "the upsurge of the *Vai".* It refers to both the large-scale expeditions of the British (1872 and 1889-1890), and the period of British occupation (1890-1947) (Scholar's input).

Vai - natives from the plains of India. (Scholar's input)

Val-upa – n. a oldish young man, a middle aged man.

Vawkhniahzawn thla – n. the moon or lunar month corresponding nearly to July.

Zawlbuk – the large house in a Lushai village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night. (*DLL*, 562) Dokhuma points out in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* that even married men continue to lodge in the *Zawlbuk* until they move out of their parents' home to set up their own house. (206)

Zohnahthlak – An ethnonym used to denote all the *Zo* tribes, and is considered to be more inclusive than the term *Mizo.* (Scholar's input)

Zosap - the white missionaries were referred to as *Zosap,* while all white Europeans are included in *Sap.* (Scholar's input)

Zu - Beer or any fermented liquor.

Zufang – n. fermented rice and its liquor made in a smaller pot than ordinary beer or *zupui*, and used on less important occasions. This fermented rice is generally made of *kawnglawng* or *fazu.* It is eaten as a refreshment, and its liquor is also drunk as a beverage.

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ABSTRACT

THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN SELECT WORKS BY JAMES DOKHUMA

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

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THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY IN SELECT WORKS BY JAMES DOKHUMA

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In partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English and Culture Studies of Mizoram University, Aizawl.

This thesis examines the politics of Mizo identity formation in the works of James Dokhuma with specific focus on *Rinawmin* [*Faithfully*] [1] (1970), *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* [*The Wild Gayal or Saithangpuii*] (1981), *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* [*The Mores of the Mizo in Olden Times*] (1991), and *Silaimu Ngaihawm* [*The Beloved Bullet*] [2] (1995). Anchored on the standpoint that identities are constructed within discourse, the discourses which pertain to Mizo identity formation are located within three historical moments – the pre-colonial 'beginnings' in the oral past, the colonial period of negotiation and the post-colonial period of 'Mizo nationalism'. The socio-cultural forces at play in the construction of Mizo identity are examined within their historical specificities and juxtaposed with Dokhuma's concept of Mizo identity and the cultural resources through and within which it is conceptualized in his works. The term 'politics of identity' in this study refers to both the more formal and organized "discourse and action within the public arenas of political and civil society," as well as a broader understanding of "the practices and values that are based on subscription and ascription to various and often overlapping social and political identities" (Hill and Wilson 2-3).

James Dokhuma (1932-2007) was one of the most prominent writers in the Mizo language, and unarguably one of the most prolific too. Dokhuma had written between 450-500 essays, and had composed 42 poems out of which 36 had been published. Out of the 42 books published by him, thirteen are novels, four dramas, three biographies, a few historical accounts, a dictionary, studies on Mizo language usage, religious treatises, a collection of essays, educational books, and miscellaneous others. His literary output is numerous as well as diverse, and such work like *Chawngkhum Dan Tlang Huat Loh* [3] cannot be put into categorization in

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[1] All translations of quoted texts and titles of works are done by me, unless noted otherwise, for the sole purpose of this study.

[2] *The Beloved Bullet* is a translation of *Silaimu Ngaihawm* by Margaret Ch. Zama, published in *Fresh Fictions,* Katha, 2005, pp. 151-186.

[3] The title is derived from an idiomatic phrase which roughly translates to "done in the manner of Chawngkhuma's antics against which no one takes offence," and is used to denote no offence intended. Chawngkhuma was a humorous man of yore (Scholar's input).

terms of genre since this work, though taking the form of a drama with characters and dialogues, is in actuality a collection of anecdotes shared by each characters. A recipient of numerous awards for his literary contribution including a Padma Shri, Dokhuma's most lasting legacy is his contribution in the area of Mizo culture and language. Born in Sialsuk village on 15th June 1932 to be the second youngest among thirteen siblings, James Dokhuma hailed from a family of poets/song composers – two of his elder siblings, Romani and Laltanpuia have made their names as folk song composers. Although he had received formal education only till Class – V, after which he joined the Indian Army at the tender age of fifteen, his experience in the army went on to influence and inform several of his literary works. He joined the Mizo National Front (MNF) movement in 1961 and was one of the sixty-four signatories in the declaration of independence in 1966. After two years of guerrilla life in the underground serving as a Member of Parliament in the underground government, he was critically wounded in an Indian Army ambush and was captured. He spent the next three years in jail, and it was during his incarceration that he started writing his novels. Writing, he believed, was the only way he could continue to serve his political dream of Mizo nationhood. After his release in 21 June 1971, while he did not go back to join the underground movement, he continued to 'perform' his beliefs through his writings as well as his participation in the political arena. The ideals of freedom that sustained Dokhuma's spirit during his incarceration are intrinsic to his ideal of what he termed '*Hnam*[4] *Politics'* which, he explains, is 'nationalism' which is "above and beyond partisan politics," in *Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna* [*Dictionary of Archaic and Idiomatic Terms*](iv).

One of the most defining moments in his life is undoubtedly that point in his life when he was critically wounded and captured by the Indian Army in the jungle and the weeks that followed when he was put in solitary confinement. Having taken four bullets and believing that he was on his last breath, he called on God with all his heart. He was then captured and kept in solitary confinement in a small dark room for several days without food and deprived of medical aid, incessantly interrogated

[4]*Hnam*- clan, tribe, nation, nationality, race. (James Herbert Lorrain's *Dictionary of the Lushai Language,* henceforth *DLL,* 169).

while his wounds were left festering. All the while, however, he refused to succumb even as he was fully aware of the perils he was steeped in. Having lost all hope, he had made peace with the idea of death, and this bolstered his resolve to remain loyal to his beliefs. Empowered by the knowledge that the power over life and death solely rests with the supreme God, his mind and spirit remained unfettered and could not be confined within prison walls. This was his conceptualization of *zalenna,*[5] which is freedom and independence of the mind and the spirit, which echoes the revolutionary ideals of Byron's "Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind! / Brightest in dungeons, Liberty! thou art," with which he opens the essay "Ka Zalenna," (*Rilru Far Chhuak* 69-72). Like the 'prisoner of Chillon,' his mind refused to succumb although his body was in fetters, and Dokhuma was inspired to take up the pen when he saw the quoted lines scribbled on the walls of 'Cell No. 1' at Gauhati District Jail in which he eventually began his writing career, according to R. Zamawia. (619)

This notion of *zalenna* underlines his belief in *Hnam politics*, a term he himself translates as 'nationalism.' (*Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna* iv) As denoted earlier, writing is a nationalist project for him and in most of his works is found this explicit authorial intention. Although the genres, subject-matters, and treatments of his works are diverse, they all cater to at least one of the "hnam nunna lungphum*"* ("foundations for the survival of the nation") – territory, religion, *hnam* language, and culture and tradition, as explicated by him in "Mizote Mawh" [*The Responsibility of the Mizo People*] (*Rilru Far Chhuak* 205-210) While he believes that the thrust of *Hnam Politics* is the preservation and protection of four fundamental tenets of *ram leh hnam*[6] which are territorial integrity, welfare and progress of the people, religion, and cultural identity, he believes that he can leave a lasting legacy only in the preservation and protection of Mizo identity through his

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[5] *Zalenna* – from *zalen* – n. a freeman; one who is free to very much as he wishes; one who is free from being under authority; one who enjoys the freedom of a village, town, city or country. v. to be free etc (as above) adj. Free (*DLL* 557).

[6]*Ram leh Hnam*– Ram = Forest, jungle; country, kingdom, territory, realm, domain, land, estate, place, homeland (*DLL* 375); *leh* = and, if, or (*DLL* 289); *Hnam* – see above. *Ram leh Hnam*– land and the people; nation (Scholar's input).

writings, the other three being out of bounds for someone without political power. (*Mizo Tawng Kalpung* [*Usage of Mizo Language*] 1) Here he is reiterating the reason behind his decision to start writing as expressed in the first works ever written by him, and this sense of purpose informs most of his works. Thus, for Dokhuma, writing is first and foremost, political activism towards the cause of 'Mizo Nationalism'.

"Cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture," according to Stuart Hall who continues that "it is not a fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute return" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 226). Although the politics of Mizo identity construction draws heavily on the notion of such an essential Mizo primordial existence at various points, the study is grounded on the premise that Mizo identity is constructed through discourse, and treats the notion of an essential Mizo primordial existence as a discursive element within the politics of Mizo identity. Thus, the following lines sum up the theoretical position that the study maintains throughout, that cultural identity is

> ... always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental "law of origin." (226)

The 'mourning' of the 'loss' of some 'essence' is discernable in all of the selected texts of Dokhuma under the consideration of this study, underpinning an essentialist notion of a recoverable 'authentic' past. His expressed reason in 'taking up the pen' and his very conception of the role of the writer as the 'custodian of culture,' place him within the essentialist discourse. Yet implicit in how he expresses his concern for the 'preservation' of Mizo culture is his belief that there is an intrinsic vulnerability and an instability to Mizo identity, and therefore the essence of being Mizo can and should continue to be performed in the constant negotiation with the forces of "history, culture and power." Mizo identity, to James Dokhuma, is as much about 'becoming Mizo' as it is about 'being Mizo'. In the following passage

from his essay, "Mizo Ka Ni Ka Zak Dawn Lo" ["I Am Mizo and I Am Not Ashamed"], his self-ascription of 'being' a Mizo is most pronounced:

> Kei pawh 'MIZO' ka ni a, ram leh tawng (hrang) ka nei a. Chu bakah hnam dan leh kalhmang zepui danglam riau mai nei hnam ka ni bawk a. Khawvela 'ber' nih ka kaina awmchhun pawh 'MIZO' ka nihna hi a ni.
>
> I am a Mizo, having my own land and my own language. Additionally, I belong to a *hnam* with its own unique culture. My only claim to distinction from the rest of the world is, indeed, my being a 'Mizo'. (*Rilru Far Chhuak* 74)

Through this declaration, he 'positions' his Mizo identity within the articulation of ethnic identification, territory, language and culture. His essentialist conception of Mizo identity becomes even more apparent when he clarifies that linguistic affinities or even the adoption of Mizo customs and traditions do not qualify anyone to assume a Mizo identity:

> Hnam dangte chuan Mizo nih tumin, pai hauh lovin ṭawng pawh thiam mah se, hnam dang Mizo ṭawng thiam tak a ni ve ringawt ang a. Tin, kan khawsak dan leh kan hnam kalphung ang zawng zawng zawmin khawsa ve mah se, hnam dang Mizo nih châk tak a ni satliah ve ringawt ang.
>
> If someone from another *hnam* with an aspiration to become a Mizo display even a native-speaker level of Mizo language proficiency, he/she would still be just an outsider who is exceptionally fluent in Mizo language. Even if that person adopts our customs and traditions, he/she would never be more than someone wishful to be a Mizo. (74)

Yet in the same essay, he goes on to imply that being Mizo 'by blood' is not enough, that there are certain ways in which Mizo-ness is performed- that it is about 'becoming':

> ...keima ngaih ve danah chuan ka Mizo nihna tak hi ka thisen atanga ka pianpui chu ni mah se, ka che zia leh ka nun hian min ti-Mizo zawk. 'A Mizo

> lo em mai' kan tihte hi an thisen leh pian leh murna chu Mizo ngei chu an ni asin. Mahse an Mizo lohna chhan chu an chezia atangin a ni fo thin.
>
> In my opinion, although the real essence of being Mizo is by blood and by birth, it is my conduct and how I live which identify me as a Mizo. The ones we regard as 'un-Mizo' are indeed Mizo by birth – however, it is usually their behaviour which invalidates their Mizo-ness. (75-76)

Within Dokhuma's narratives, therefore, what emerges is that Mizo identity is the performance and the process of becoming Mizo against and in negotiation with the forces of transformation brought about by the historical processes. This process is not only situated solely within the Mizo's relationship with 'the other' of any given moment as denoted in his texts, but through an adherence to a code of solidarity based on shared commonalities, which calls for constant re-affirmation through practice, and the violation of which is the antithesis of Mizo-ness.

Chapter I: An Author: James Dokhuma

The introductory chapter delves into the life and works of James Dokhuma, highlighting the chief aspects of his works and it also gives a brief literature review of works done on the author and his works. A brief biography of the author is given in this chapter to highlight the formative influences of the author and to understand what writing means to him. An estimation of some of his most notable works foregrounds the key concerns of the author.

Language, according to Benedict Anderson, has played a major role in the formation of nations, and although he contends that it is not a requisite for nationalism he has also denoted the unifying power of a common language. Language has played, and continues to play, a pivotal role in the construction of Mizo identity and nationalism in fundamental ways. Several of the different tribes that have now come to collectively call themselves 'Mizo' had their own dialects in the past. While some of them still do speak their own dialects, *Mizo ṭawng* (Mizo

language) from the Lusei[7] dialect *Duhlian*[8] has become the *lingua franca* of all such tribes, ensuring a sense of community. Moreover, Mizo national consciousness has its origins in print and the language of print. Furthermore, the fear of linguistic assimilation is one of the expressed grounds for the Declaration of Independence made by the Mizo National Front (MNF) in 1966. Thus, understandably Dokhuma, drawing links between culture, religion and language, warns against the appropriation of other cultures and religions even though he has nothing against learning other languages in itself (*Rilru Far Chhuak* 208-209). Sharing Stuart Hall's view that "language is central to meaning and culture and has always been regarded as the key repository of cultural values and meanings" (*Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* 1), he equates the survival of Mizo language to Mizo identity and to this end he warns against mass borrowings from other languages as well – *"*Mahni hnam tawng humhalh lote hnam chanvo chu hnam ral a ni lo thei si lo.*"* ("A culture that fails to preserve its language is bound for extinction"; *Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna* xi) Apart from his works on Mizo language – *Tawng Un Hrilhfiahna* and *Mizo Tawng Kalphung*, his concern for Mizo linguistic identity is reiterated in many of his essays on Mizo culture, and is also clearly discernable in his own usage of the language in his fictional works.

Most of his fictions tell stories of love, romance and human relationships, and his natural flair for storytelling is always evident in these stories, usually following a straightforward plot progression. His mastery of the Mizo language which has earned him the title 'Father of Mizo Lexicography,' informs his style in his fictions. Yet, these stories are more often than not, political and conform to Dokhuma's expressed

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[7] *Lusei* – n. the name from which the English word 'Lushai' is derived; but, whereas we English-speaking people apply 'Lushai' to the whole tribe, the tribesmen themselves apply Lusei to only the upper classes, and speak of the lower classes as Lutawi ('Longheads' and 'Shortheads' respectively.) (*DLL* 304). While Lorrain has used the term 'upper classes,' it may be more appropriate to call them the 'ruling tribe' or the 'dominant tribe' of a majority of the region when the British arrived, since there were also areas in which other tribes ruled (Scholar's input).

[8] *Duhlian* - A name given to the upper classes or clans in the *Lushai* Hills and to the dialect they speak – which is regarded as the purest form of the *Lushai* language (*DLL* 118).

purpose of writing. Several of his fictions are contemplations on the question of race. He addresses this issue through the theme of inter-racial relationships in *Irrawaddy Lui Kamah* [*By the Banks of the River Irrawaddy*] (1982), *Hmangaihna Thuchah* [*A Message of Love*] (1982), *Goodbye Lushai Brigade* (1983), and *Kimoto Syonora* (1984). These works are all based on historical wars, and except for *Hmangaihna Thuchah* which is set in the Bangladesh war of 1971, all others are set in the Second World War. The historical backdrops provide Dokhuma with the platform to bring together characters from different cultures and races. None of the inter-racial relations in these works end in conjugal union. While Dokhuma questions not only the colonial rulers' attitude but even the *Zosap,*[9] the white missionaries' attitudes towards the 'native' Mizo on the question of inter-racial marriage in *Goodbye Lushai Brigade,* the Mizo protagonist, Lalthanpuia in *Hmangaihna Thuchah* also makes a choice of his 'fellow-Mizo' girl over a Marathi girl. Dokhuma's attitude reflects his views on the sanctity of marriage, his standpoint on the question of ethnic identity and the idea of belonging-ness, The protagonist's choice, made after much consideration, is not based on financial prospects in which case Sarah Bibi, the Marathi Christian girl has a much higher leverage, nor is it on the grounds of differences in religious beliefs since the issue does not arise. It is not even on the question of who he loves more. It all boils down to the question of shared ethnic identity – the fact that Lalremmawii is a fellow Mizo girl is what clinched the deal for Lalthanpuia. Though the protagonist has had exposure to other cultures, and while the nature of his profession has removed him from his 'home', his rootedness in the idea of Mizo identity comes to the fore, considering shared background, homeland, and a common language as the deciding factors for a permanent union. Marriage, with its implication of permanence, is reserved for those who 'belong' together and not with the 'other'. Interestingly, *Hmangaihna Thuchah*, where the relationship is between a Mizo and a *Vai*, is the only novel dealing with inter-racial/communal relationship where the separation of the lovers is a result of the

[9] *Zosap* - the white missionaries were referred to as *Zosap,* while all white Europeans are included in *Sap.* (Scholar's input)

deliberate choice of the protagonist, and also the only one where the protagonist is put in a position where he has to choose between a Mizo and a *hnam dang*[10].

While the question of Mizo ethnic boundaries are explored in these works through inter-racial and inter-communal relationships, the formalized Mizo national identity becomes the main concern in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm.* The ethnographic works and the tales retold from the rich Mizo oral culture also comes under the agenda of Dokhuma's nationalistic cause, where he embarks on a journey of symbolic recovery of a past that has become increasingly inaccessible due to the disruptions brought along by the historical and socio- political factors of colonialism, modernity and Christianity.

Chapter II: Mizo Identity in the Works of James Dokhuma

This chapter seeks to understand Mizo identity as represented in Dokhuma's works within contemporary discourses on identity. A brief historical overview traces the development of contemporary theoretical positions to highlight the issues that pertain to the study of identity, and to justify the theoretical underpinnings and approaches of the study. Mizo identity cannot be understood without its cultural, socio-political and historical specificities, and therefore, attempt has been made to locate the forces at play within such a context, and to examine the representation of Mizo identity in the selected texts.

The concept of identity as it is understood in cultural studies is derived from a long tradition of philosophical questioning. Edgar and Sedgwick give credit to "those approaches to the problem of identity that question what may be called orthodox accounts of identity," stating that "cultural studies draws on those approaches that hold that identity is a response to something external and different from it (an other)." What they term 'orthodox accounts of identity' locate the "self' as a subject which is "stable and independent of external influences" (167), and it is this conception of the subject as 'knowing subject' which is stable is what Stuart Hall

[10] *Hnam dang* – another clan, tribe, nation, or race; a person belonging to another clan, tribe, nation, or race; a foreigner (*DLL* 169).

calls 'the Enlightenment subject.' Tracing the development from such a position to arrive at "the postmodern subject", Hall acknowledges the contributions of George Herbert Mead's 'symbolic interactionist' approach. Psychoanalysis, Marxist ideas and the influence of Foucault further contribute to the understanding of the 'subject' as:

> ... conceptualized as having no fixed, essential or permanent identity. Identity becomes a 'moveable feast': formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us… It is historically, not biologically, defined. The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent 'self'. ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 275-277)

Hall further adds that there is within us "contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about," reinforcing the notion of the temporality of identity, and claims that "if we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or 'narrative of the self' about ourselves." Thus, instead of "a fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity… we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities any one of which we could identify with – at least temporarily" ("The Question of Cultural Identity" 275-277).

The disruption brought about by colonialism to the ways of the Mizo tribes coupled with the introduction of a new system of belief resulted in a complete overturn of the Mizos' political, social and cultural systems. The enormity of the impact of colonialism on the whole Mizo cultural experience is immediately evident from the periodization of Mizo history into *Vailen hma* and *Vailen hnu* (pre- and post-*Vailian*). [11] The colonial experience, the forces of modernity and the introduction of Christianity have left a lasting impact on the ways in which the Mizo tribes define themselves. The disjunction brought about by the colonial experience of

[11] *Vailen* – modified form of *Vailian*. *Vailian* literally translates to "the upsurge of the *Vai".* It refers to both the large-scale expeditions of the British (1872 and 1889-1890), and the period of British occupation (1890-1947) (Scholar's input).

the tribes, along with the inherently fluid and malleable nature of an oral culture have, on the one hand erased traditional frames of identity, and on the other hand helped expedite the more homogenized Mizo identity. *Tumpangchal Nge Saithangpuii* and *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* being set in the pre-colonial past are considered as important acts of "imaginative rediscovery," of the past, of a search for an essentialised Mizo identity. Yet the tribes who eventually come to adopt the collective 'Mizo identity' were, before the advent of the British, numerous tribes and clans identifying themselves through their village-chief affiliations. Dokhuma turns to the oral past to 'recover' a 'usable past', since "the future of nations is always dependent on their members' understanding and faith in their pasts, and on the conviction that there is no destiny without history, and no present and no future without a sacred and usable past" (*Chosen Peoples* 216).

For him, *tlawmngaihna*[12] is the defining factor, the essence of Mizo-ness, and the *pasaltha*[13] is the embodiment of this essence, although he contends that *tlawmngaihna* is not confined to the male domain. *Tlawmngaihna*, as a Mizo code of life characterized by altruism, self-sacrifice, chivalry, valour and humility, is the code of ethics which governed the whole social functioning of the village. It is the "Mizo philosophy of life," according to Vanlalchhuanawma who explains it as "a précis of the whole Mizo traditional discipline" (55). Dokhuma's concern with the 'preservation' of this 'essence' of being Mizo is most evident in his representation of Fehtea in *Tumpangchal nge Saithangpuii*. Fehtea is represented as the embodiment of *tlawmngaihna* and a *pasaltha* at the same time, and Dokhuma, while elaborating on the 'essence,' in a way acknowledges its temporality:

> ... he Mizo ze chhuanawm tak lungphum hi kan innghahna ber mai ni se, tuma hmuh theih lohin kan phum bo hlen ang tih chu ka hlauh em avangin, a

[12] *Tlawmngaihna* – self-sacrifice, unselfishness, etc; or being self-sacrificing, being unselfish, etc. (as under the verb *tlawmngai*) (*DLL* 513). For *tlawmngai,* see glossary.

[13] *Pasalṭha* - a person who is brave and manly; a brave, a hero; a famous or notable warrior or hunter (*DLL* 352).

> tak inkawhhmuh mai tur hre lo mah ila, thawnthu tala kan insihhmuh theih beisei in he thawnthu hi ka ziak ta a ni e.
>
> It is my hope in writing this story that, as a tangible representation of *Tlawmngaihna* which has been fundamental to the Mizo ethos, it plays a role in the preservation of this admirable code, to prevent it from fading into obscurity. (7-8)

The centrality of the concept of *pasaltha* to Mizo identity becomes more indisputable in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* both set within the *Rambuai* era. The Mizo people's political consciousness has been, in part, a product of colonialism, and yet it is also engendered through the relationship with the rest of what will eventually become sovereign India. The nationalism we find in these works had their origins in the notion of a collective Mizo identity that was formed during the colonial times, and the withdrawal of the British brought up questions of 'belonging' within the independent Indian union. Since cultural identities are historically defined, "far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 225). Establishing a link between the *pasaltha* of old and the new *pasaltha* of Mizo nationalism, Dokhuma, in *Rinawmin,* aligns them with the idea of *pasaltha* as protectors of the people, their land, their customs, their religion and thus, Mizo identity. The slogans "Pathian leh Kan Ram Tan" ("For God and our Country") and "Hnehna chu Mizote Pathian ta a ni" ("Victory belongs to the God of the Mizo people") bring into sharp focus the changing ideals that the *pasaltha* stands for. "Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past." It is within this re-formulation of the institution of the *pasaltha* that it is witnessed, more than in the works dealing with the historically older periods, that Mizo identity is as much a matter of 'becoming', if not more, than 'being'. That 'being' Mizo is not enough, that it calls for a 'becoming' to sustain itself – "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'' (Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" 223-225).

Chapter III: Interpreting Identity in James Dokhuma's Texts

The historical experience of colonialism, the encounter with Christianity and modernity, and the political upheavals ushered in by the end of British imperial domination and the resultant creation of the Indian nation-state, all have unequivocally transformed the fabric of Mizo ethos. The chapter traces the processes of engagement with such transformative forces, specifically focusing on the disruption and continuities within the social structures, belief systems and cultural practices, highlighting that while traditional systems, modes of knowledge, affiliation and signification, are supplanted by new forms of knowledge and belief, yet the traditional indigenous elements persist, finding articulation in the formation of Mizo as an ethno-religious Mizo national identity.

The *Vailen* of 1890 brought the Mizo inhabited areas under British administration and though faced with pockets of resistance for several years, by the year 1894 when the missionaries arrived, the British had already set themselves up as the 'rulers'. "Christian missions in Mizoram followed the tradition of "the cross follows the flag" (Vanlalchhuanawma 97). While it may be debatable whether Christianity would make inroads without the enabling hand of the British administration, what is evident is that the introduction of this new belief system greatly 'helped' in the consolidation of the British colonial power, and vice versa the colonial set-up facilitated the spread of Christianity among the tribes. This synergistic force of the colonial administrators and the missionaries created 'ambivalence' in the ways in which the Mizo people eventually came to view themselves and their relationship to the *Sap*[14]since the missionaries 'gave' the Gospel and the script to the Mizo people. The imposition of new forms of governmentality, introduction of Christianity and writing, and exposure to forms of modernity have transformed the ways in which the Mizo understood themselves. The traditional forms of identification, belief system, social institutions and cultural practices have undergone radical transformations, yet the ethnic elements persist through the

[14]*Sap* - a sahib, a white man, a government or other official (*DLL* 404).

negotiation with the forces of change. It is within this understanding of Mizo identity as produced through discursive practices that the chapter locates itself.

The impact of Christianity in the way Mizo people have come to understand themselves is one of the most striking features of the works of James Dokhuma. According to Margaret L Pachuau, "the contrast in terms of identity in the pre- and post-colonial parameters have been vast because the colonized Mizo domains were previously under a culture that was inherently non-Christian and so subsequently had a different sensibility altogether, whether religious or secular" (182). The religious practices, beliefs, festivals, sacrificial practices and their worldview, narrated in detail in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung,* highlight the centrality of the traditional religious beliefs and practices to the tribes and how they permeate all aspects of their lives, from their main agricultural preoccupation to diseases and ailments, to hunting and festivals. Each of the Mizo tribes had their own complex sets of rituals and taboos anchored on pre-colonial ethos where the religious-secular divide as it is understood today did not seem to exist. The term *Sakhua*,[15] understood as 'religion' in current usage had a much narrower meaning, denoting the household rites and rituals (Lalsangkima Pachuau 42), and was only part of the whole belief system. More importantly, *sakhua* was inherently linked with *hnam* (in this context, *hnam* refers to the clan or sub-tribe), and each *hnam* practiced their own distinct *sakhua.* Through the ritual known as *saphun* one could 'convert' the *hnam* by which process he would simultaneously 'convert' his *sakhua* (*Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* 28). The pre-Christian belief systems of the Mizo tribes and the modes of kinship affiliations operated within a completely different paradigm from the western Christian belief system altogether. The persistence of such an understanding of the religious hinging on the ethnic is seen in the articulation of Mizo national identity as an ethno-religious identity in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* most clearly exemplified in the slogan "Hnehna chu Mizote Pathian ta a ni si a" ("Victory belongs to the God of the Mizo people"). In these works, the Mizo National Front movement itself is scripted as a

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[15]*Sakhua*– 1.an object of worship, a god. 2. ancient ancestors who are worshipped by the Lushais. 3. the spirit who presides over the house or house-hold. 4. religion, religious rites and ceremonies (*DLL* 401).

movement for the protection and 'liberation' of a God-given homeland, and the Mizo Army as "*hnamchhantu,*" [16] the defender and/or liberator of the Mizo nation," having taken their oaths on the Bible.

The decline of the *zawlbuk*[17] and the sovereignty of the *lal*[18] which herald the disruption of the traditional modes of self-ascription and belonging further leave a lasting impact on Mizo identity formation. The crumbling of such traditional systems opens up the space for new forms of identity formation. Colonial policies which greatly undermine the micro-identity based on village-chief affiliation, in turn, expedites the macro-identity which eventually develops into a national identity, imagined along the lines of modern democratic aspirations. The abolition of chieftainship is, in fact, a direct outcome of a new way of imagining Mizo identity – as a nation.

While "the construction of identity," as Said contends, "involves establishing opposites and 'others' whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from 'us'. Each age and society re-creates its 'Others'" (332), for the Mizo, according to Joy L.K. Pachuau, the 'other' does not play "a significant role in constituting who they are. The story the Mizos write of themselves does not place their narratives against or in conjunction with the larger 'Indian' ethos." She observes that "Mizo identity construction is", to a large extend, "inward-looking, self-referential, with the 'other' being invoked only in cross-boundary contact" (16). For Dokhuma, the boundaries of Mizo identity need to be safeguarded, yet it is through the "inward-looking, self-referential" processes that Mizo identity is sustained.

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[16] *Hnamchhantu* – defender/protector/rescuer of the tribe/nation (Scholar's input).

[17] *Zawlbuk*– the large house in a Lushai village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night (*DLL* 562). Dokhuma points out in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* that even married men continue to lodge in the *Zawlbuk* until they move out of their parents' home to set up their own house (206).

[18] *Lal* - a chief, chieftain, chieftainess, a sovereign, a monarch, a king or queen, an emperor or empress, a rajah or ranee (*DLL* 283).

Chapter IV: Conflict and Identity Formation

This chapter is an attempt to understand the role of conflict in the formation of Mizo identity, focusing on key moments in the history of the Mizo people. The centrality of the notions of the 'self' and 'the/an other' to identity informs this chapter's attempt to trace the significance of conflict in the formation and evolution of Mizo identity and its assertion of Mizo nationalism. Through such reconfigurations, Mizo identity, by the *rambuai*[19] period, had taken on the form of ethno-religious nationalism. Thus, the notion of Mizo 'nationalism' as represented in Dokhuma's works has been examined. Conflict, in this chapter, signifies both the ideological and the physical conflicts that are played out in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm.*

Although varied and vague in its application, the notion of cultural identity itself, is always based on the understanding of the 'self' in relation to an 'other' – the self-other distinction, the 'us' and 'them' constructed on the perception, of whatever degree of validity, of sameness and difference. The 'sameness' principle underpins the question of inclusion - who is a Mizo. Inversely, the 'difference' principle frames the contours of Mizo identity by exclusion. The issue becomes quite complex when it comes to Mizo nationalism and national identity since the idea of nationalism itself has continued to be the site of much debates across contemporary discourses.

In his oft quoted definition of the 'nation', Benedict Anderson proposes that the nation "is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." Justifying the term 'imagined', he goes on to say that "it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." To Anderson, "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined." Thus, "[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (*Imagined Communities* 6).

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[19] *Rambuai* - literally, 'troubled land', *Rambuai* refers to the period of political unrest in Mizoram, especially to the peak years of conflict from 1966 to 1969 (Scholar's input).

The 'style' in which the 'Mizo nation' is imagined in both the memorandums submitted by the Mizo Union[20] and the MNF[21] eighteen years apart are quite similar in that they both espouse a Mizo national identity structured on ethnic, historical, cultural and religious principles. The assertion of Mizo traditional sovereignty and 'independence' before the advent of British colonial power, the insistence on the ethnic kinship of the Mizo tribes in areas that covered the Lushai Hills District and the adjoining areas, and how these tribes have become scattered through territorial divisions carved out arbitrarily for administrative convenience by the imperial government are the claims on which the arguments of both memorandums are based. If a nation is imagined as "both inherently limited and sovereign", the Mizo nation is imagined as finite in its ethnic and territorial boundaries, and sovereign and unconquered since "time immemorial," until the disruption of such traditional modes of organisation by "the advent of the British." The nation being imagined as "limited" denotes that it "has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations." The main point of divergence, then, is in the way the 'sovereignty' of the Mizo nation is imagined, and this difference in political ideology is what plays out in the pages of *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm.* Anthony D. Smith states that "as there are many kinds of nationalisms, so concepts of the nation assume different forms and national identities are subject to considerable change over time" (*Chosen People* 25), and based on this admission of plurality, he frames a 'working definition' of nationalism as "an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential 'nation' (24). There are at least two strands of Mizo nationalism in the selected texts, overlapping at several

[20] Referred to as "Mizo Union Memorandum" or "Mizo Memorandum Submitted to His Majesty's Government, Government of India and Its Constituent Assembly through The Advisory Sub-Committee by The Mizo Union" (1947). Published as "Appendix II" in Lal Thangliana. "Mizo National Front Movement: A Sociological Study," pp. 427-437; K. Remruatfela. *Indian Union Chhunga Zofate Rin Luh Kan Nih Dan*, pp. 49-55.

[21] "Memorandum Submitted to The Prime Minister of India by The Mizo National Front General Headquarters, Aizawl, Mizoram on October 30, 1965" published as 'Appendix-VII' in R. Zamawia. *Zofate Zinkawngah,* 2nd ed., 2012.

points but distinct in the way "the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity and identity" is envisioned in their ideologies.

If Mizo identity had its beginnings in the colonial times, its 'national consciousness' had become a major factor in the political arena by the time the British cessation became an eventuality. What is clearly evident is that by the time the Mizo people came to raise their political voice, they had already imagined themselves as a nation. 'Political consciousness' among the Mizo people began to take shape with the emergence of a new class of educated 'commoners' and those who have had wider exposure to the outside world, either through their participation in the First World War as a labour force under the British or through opportunities to study outside of the Mizo inhabited areas. In *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm,* the Mizo Union is often seen as collaborator to the *Vai* and thus, enemies of Mizo nationalism. By the time of the MNF uprising, the Mizo Union had been holding the political power for more than a decade. Yet in the inception of the Mizo Union we have seen the first articulations of the much of the ideology behind what came to be played out as Mizo nationalism under the MNF movement.

The changes brought about by the colonial encounter and their institution of new systems of administration, education and religion had already moulded the 'Mizo' into a new identity within a few decades. Mizo nationalism, like other nationalisms in colonized countries, had its beginnings with the newly created 'educated class.' Actual political activism in the Mizo context, however, was only revived in the wake of the British withdrawal from India about two decades later and it led to the formation of the first ever political party within the Lushai Hills called 'Mizo Commoners Union", soon renamed "Mizo Union" in 1946. To Joy L.K.Pachuau, it was "the political climate and events surrounding British proposals to withdraw from the region and Indian independence that made it possible for the Mizos to formalize the articulation of their identity." She further adds that use of the term 'Mizo' in Mizo Commoners Union "was definitely a shift to new ways of perceiving themselves" (125). The sudden surge in the passion for the Mizo Union was the appeal of the idea of the abolition of chieftainship. Thus, the ideals of democracy became another factor in the already fraught environment. The nature of

their dilemma, the uncertainty of their future and the need to consolidate the Mizo *hnam* identity to 'claim' their 'nationhood' became a serious concern. The need for the chief had been greatly reduced since there was the presence of the British for governance, yet the British government at the same time 'subjected' the chiefs to their own administrative convenience, to act as collectors of fees and taxes and to provide *kuli,*[22] impressed labour. Thus the role of the chief was no longer what it used to be, and it had in fact become clear to the *hnamchawm*[23] that their chiefs had become tools in the British colonial enterprise. Moreover the transition from identity bounded to a chieftaincy with its fluidity, to a larger identity not based on allegiance to a chief but rather to a larger one in which old hierarchies have crumbled had a great appeal to the Mizo tribes. "Rather than seeing themselves as the inhabitants of different territories or as the subjects of different and contesting chiefs, Mizos now began seeing themselves as the inhabitants of a common territory that belonged to everyone" (Joy L.K. Pachuau 123-124). Chieftainship was eventually abolished, with the passing of the Acquisition of Chiefs Rights Act in 1954, two years after the Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council came into being in 1952 and nearly seven years since the withdrawal of the British. It became the legacy of the Mizo Union, that they had been the emancipators of the commoners in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm.* In these two works*,* the conflict undercuts a simple Mizo/*Vai* encounter. Other elements come in the form of differences in political ideologies between the MNF and the Mizo Union. Among the Mizo Union, furthermore, while there are those who do not support the movement but do not act in blatant opposition to the MNF, there are others who in many instances, act as 'collaborators' of the *Vai* – the Mizo Union activists who either act as *kawktu* ("finger-pointer", informant)[24] or those who have taken up arms against the MNF army, as found in both novels. While many of the *kawktu* belong to the Mizo Union, again, there are others who act as

[22] *Kuli* – n. an impressed labourer. v. to work as an impressed labourer (*DLL* 275).

[23] *Hnamchawm* – the common people, all save those belonging to the ruling clan (*DLL* 169).

[24] *Kawktu* – an informer who collaborates with the Indian Army to identify members of Mizo National Army and their sympathizers (Scholar's input).

kawktu for other reasons as well, and these 'enemies' of Mizo *hnam* are none other than their fellow Mizo people.

The Mizo people, at that junction of British withdrawal, were not unified when it came to the question of what type of self-governance they wanted to form. This question involves the formation of new power structures. More importantly, it becomes a question of reformulation of identity and belonging. Thus a flurry of political activity ensued. The two strands of Mizo nationalism found in *Rinawmin* and *Silaimu Ngaihawm* are conceived through several common contours of identification, yet the main point of divergence is seen in the way the notion of 'independence' is understood. While the Mizo Union conceived of independence in terms of modernist political ideology, the MNF's interpretation of the same is situated within ethnic and religious paradigms. 'Independence' has been the moot point of Mizo political arena right from the period of the first political party, and it underpins the factionalism that ensued from the early stage until it culminated in the formation of the MNF, although the issue of abolition of chieftainship is imbricated in the ways in which the notion of 'independence' is imagined.

Chapter V: Conclusion

The chapter sums up the various threads of Mizo identity development, with the conclusion that for Dokhuma, the very process of negotiation between the elements of culture and the political reality becomes Mizo identity – the negotiation with the 'essentialised Mizo' and the 'instability' which rests on the temporality and constructedness of Mizo identity. The seemingly paradoxical nature of these positions sustains the tension that the 'search' for identity is founded on. Since Mizo nationalism, like all nationalisms, is anchored on an imagined community, imagined through Mizo identity which is a 'becoming' – a continual process, one cannot think of the process of 'becoming' as following a linear path towards some essential or permanent Mizo identity or a foreclosure either by the same logic that we cannot conceive of Mizo identity as having an essence that can be recovered. Thus, the very process of 'becoming' is what 'being' Mizo is all about. Dokhuma's own conception

of nationalism confirms this position – he insists on 'nationalism beyond party politics', a nationalism which "seeks to reform the world in its own image, a world of unique and authentic nations" (*Chosen Peoples* 15), and advocates a nationalism beyond party politics, which is not at odds with the idea of integration within the Indian nation-state. In "Hnam Inpumkhatna," ["National Integration"] he argues for Indian national integration, calling for tolerance and peaceful co-existence despite differences based on Christian principles and proverbial Mizo wisdom (*Rilru Far Chhuak* 114-119). His nationalism here is not grounded on notions of sovereignty hinged on territoriality but rather on the ideals of liberal democracy - Justice, liberty, equality, of the mind. The aspiration is independence of the mind rather than political self-determination, not the 'liberation' of a territory but of the spirit, the eternal spirit of the chainless mind ("Ka Zalenna," *Rilru Far Chhuak* 69-72). Thus the *search* for an essential past, the *negotiation* of Mizoness through historical, political and cultural moments, and the discourses which aim towards *finding* Mizo identity – all these are ways of "becoming" Mizo, of performing Mizo-ness since there is neither an essential metaphysical substance nor a 'finished product'- a complete, fully realized Mizo identity.

Glossary

Note: *Except where noted otherwise, all entries in the glossary are sourced from* Lorrain, James Herbert. *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*. The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1940.

Hnam - clan, tribe, nation, nationality, race.

Hnamchawm - the common people, all save those belonging to the ruling clan.

Hnam dang – another clan, tribe, nation, or race; a person belonging to another clan, tribe, nation, or race; a foreigner.

Kawktu - an informer who collaborates with the Indian Army to identify members of Mizo National Army. (Scholar’s input)

Kuli - n. an impressed labourer. v. to work as an impressed labourer (*DLL* 275).

Lal - a chief, chieftain, chieftainess, a sovereign, a monarch, a king or queen, an emperor or empress, a rajah or ranee.

Lusei – n. the name from which the English word ‘Lushai’ is derived; but, whereas we English-speaking people apply ‘Lushai’ to the whole tribe, the tribesmen themselves apply Lusei to only the upper classes, and speak of the lower classes as Lutawi (‘Longheads’ and ‘Shortheads’ respectively.) (*DLL* 304). While Lorrain has used the term ‘upper classes,’ it may be more appropriate to call them the ‘ruling tribe’ or the ‘dominant tribe’ of a majority of the region when the British arrived, since there were also areas in which other tribes ruled (Scholar’s input).

Pasaltha - v. to be brave, manly, heroic, valiant, stout-hearted, courageous, daring fearless, intrepid. n. a person who is brave and manly; a brave, a hero; a famous or notable warrior or hunter.

Rambuai - literally, ‘troubled land’, *Rambuai* refers to the peak period of conflict in Mizoram from 1966 to 1969. (Scholar’s input)

Ram leh Hnam - *Ram* = forest, jungle; country, kingdom, territory, realm, domain, land, estate, place, homeland; *leh* = and; *Hnam* – see above. (*DLL*) *Ram leh Hnam*– land and the people; nation. (Scholar's input)

Sakhua – n. 1. an object of worship, a god. 2. ancient ancestors who are worshipped by the Lushais. 3. the spirit who presides over the house or house-hold. 4. religion, religious rites and ceremonies.

Sap - a sahib, a white man, a government or other official.

Saphun - v. to adopt the object of worship, god, religion or religious rites and customs (of another). n. one who has adopted the god, religion, or religious rites and customs (of another); a proselyte, a convert.

Tlawmngai - v. 1.to be self-sacrificing, unselfish, self-denying, persevering, stoical, stouthearted, plucky, brave, firm, independent(refusing help); to be loth to lose one's good reputation, prestige, etc; to be too proud or self-respecting to give in, etc. 2. to persevere, to endure patiently, to make light of personal injuries, to dislike making a fuss about anything. 3. to put one's own inclinations on one side and do a thing which one would rather not do, with the object either of keeping up one's prestige, etc, or of helping or pleasing another, or of not disappointing another, etc. 4. to do whatever the occasion demands no matter how distasteful or inconvenient it may be to oneself or to one's own inclinations. 5. to refuse to give in, give way, or be conquered. 6. to not like to refuse a request, to do a thing because one does not like to refuse, or because one wishes to please others. 7. to act pluckily or show a brave front.

Tlawmngaihna – n. self-sacrifice, unselfishness, etc; or being self-sacrificing, being unselfish, etc. (as under the verb *tlawmngai*).

Vai Len - modified form of *vailian.*

Vailian - literally, "the upsurge of the *Vai". * It refers to both the large-scale expeditions of the British (1872 and 1889-1890), and the period of British occupation (1890-1947). (Scholar's input)

Vai - natives from the plains of India. (Scholar's input)

Zalenna – from *zalen* – n. a freeman; one who is free to very much as he wishes; one who is free from being under authority; one who enjoys the freedom of a village, town, city or country. v. to be free etc (as above) adj. free.

Zosap - the white missionaries were referred to as *Zosap,* while all white Europeans are included in *Sap.* (Scholar's input)

Zawlbuk - the large house in a Lushai village where all the unmarried young men of the community sleep at night (*DLL* 562). Dokhuma points out in *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* that even married men continue to lodge in the *Zawlbuk* until they move out of their parents' home to set up their own house. (206)

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