Preface

The reason why I have chosen this topic is to challenge the present colonial legacy of history writing that has internalised history writing of the Mizos for a long time. In opposition to colonial legacy, to justify my argument, we may state that the earlier Mizo history writers were colonial products. Here, Logocentrism is circled around the evangelical and philanthropic activities of the west which are imposed upon the ‘inferior’ Mizo culture, as well as the activities of colonial officials who superficially looked at the Mizo society carrying the load of the “Whiteman’s burden”, a belief that the white ‘races’ are more civilized over other cultures. Therefore, for the colonial writer and the internalized Mizo local writers, the practices of the Mizos were narrated as acts of barbarism, animism etc. However, if we are to shift the centeredness of this Eurocentric view we have to locate how these symbols have meaning in their existence from the perspective of the Mizo worldview and the multiple layers of meanings that are attached to its structure. The local knowledge cannot be abandoned at all, as it carries certain meanings that are clear to the views of the tribals themselves. Therefore, the important themes such as hunting and agricultural production have been chosen as the fields of investigation. These two themes can be looked upon as agents of change within the worldview of the Mizos. However, I feel that the earlier British writers and the subsequent writers did not give due importance to these two agents of change. I may project that they were silent about these subjects, but they might have picked these up “accidentally” to fulfil their own interests and agenda.

In this thesis the chapters are organised on the basis of thematic unity and arranged in a way that they bring about the narrative clearly. Therefore, the beginning chapter is on historiography of the Mizos, to examine the sources and the limitations for using these sources. The chapter also poses a challenge to normative-colonial periodising by using local knowledge of bamboo famine, the possibility and the limitations. Mizo history emerged from centuries of orality to textuality abruptly during the colonial period, thereby falling into the colonial trap of periodization. As a concept, periodization employed the colonial writers charted a tripartite of Indian history in which process the regional particularity in the Mizo case was totally
overshadowed. An interface with the sources has helped problematize this question and also showed a new path which this thesis proposes based on the Mautam.

As the continuation of the process, chapter 2 highlights important themes of Myth of origin and theories of migration. The myth of origin is circled with Khampat and Chhinlung which are reinvented and interpreted. The Myth of origin is highlighted as the important instrument of identity formation among different clans of the Mizos who now lived beyond the states and international borders in the present period of the nation states. Textualising and formalisation of these myths among earlier Mizo writers are also one of the topics discussed here. The chapter also takes a journey of migration basing the historicity of these myths and the progress of migration from the east to the present Mizo hills. The method here is based on linguistic affinity (taken from historical linguistics) and folk narratives of the Mizos and the neighbouring tribes, archival sources and the early literatures are used to support these arguments.

In the third chapter the central focus is on geographical spaces which are regarded as sacred, which gave meaning to their existence and the cultural networks that are imbibed within it. Though colonialism has uprooted many aspects of Mizo society and replaced them with colonial categories, the colonial concept of space couldn’t be fully established as the earlier sacred geography continues to exist and resurface in many narratives like myths. Another aspect was accessing the impact of sacred in the psychic development of human beings which eventually affects their cultural progress. Thus, geographical markers and the sacred geography continued to co-exist in the construction of space.

The fourth chapter shows how social hierarchy is constructed in Mizo society. In this context we will be looking at Thangchhuah as the social ladder in Mizo society. We will also examine relationships between multiple semiotic modes used to construct hierarchy, and also show the importance of going beyond our traditional notion of language to look at how social actors employ a range of semiotic resources in organizing and interpreting social relations. These systems act oppositionally as well as cooperatively to produce situated ideas of social inequality, ideas built out of disequilibrium of bodies in space, of referents in language, and distribution of resources, as well as contradictions in the
interactions of these signs. Language, gesture, spatial relations, and food sharing are all used as resources to construct hierarchical relations in the imminent creation of rank among the pre-modern Mizo society. The language interpreted in dress, construction of the houses and ceremonies set up the order of hierarchy. At the concrete level these are the markers of change as they showed historical change over a period of time.

The summary of the research marks the final chapter wherein a detailed summary of the decision are presented beginning with a survey of the sources and the themes with their findings together with the discussion that informed these thematic surveys, summary of the whole work is presented discursively. Ultimately the thesis ends out by spelling the central focus.