CHAPTER THREE

COLONIALISM AND CHRISTIANIZATION

This chapter deals with the transformation of the Mizos' traditional religion, culture and political framework due to the advent of colonialism and Christianization in Mizoram. Prior to European colonization and proselytization, Mizo culture comprised cultural practices and ceremonies that were unique. As mentioned in the previous chapter, like indigenous communities in other parts of the world, the Mizos had distinct practices, rituals and beliefs that constituted their social and cultural world. These included taking of heads during war, sacrifices to appease spirits, the social institution called Zawlbuk where young men were trained to be successful head-hunters and warriors, and practices such as the Bawi system. Since they had no scripts these were not recorded in writing, but were passed on from generation to generation in oral and performative forms.

In this chapter, the focus will be on some major changes that colonial rule introduced among the Mizos: administrative ban on headhunting and other practices that were held to be primitive, the discrediting of 'heathen' rituals, the abolition of slavery, and the introduction of formal education leading to the decline of the Zawlbuk. These interventions were guided by the objective of civilizing the Mizos, but they also served to make the Mizos more amenable to the colonial rule.

Colonization acted as an agent of change not only in terms of the transition from primitive to modern but also in terms of religious conversion. The spread of the colonial administration, the
conversion of the Mizos to the Christian faith, and the social changes brought by colonialism and modernization radically transformed Mizo life. This chapter will explore effects of these changes on the culture and practices of the Mizos.

Looking at the impact of European modes of conduct on the colonized Mizos, the main questions that come to mind are: What kinds of values are instituted, and how did they differ from the traditional values of the Mizo? What were the justifications provided by the colonial government for implementing changes that affected the social and cultural life of the Mizos? These interventions are analyzed as the imposition of a modern universalizing code of ‘human’ versus ‘savage’ by the colonizer and missionary. The study reveals how notions of ‘human’ versus ‘inhuman’ and ‘modernity’ versus ‘primitivity’ were used by the Europeans to interpret and intervene in the Mizo cultural world.

The Europeans’ entry into Mizoram started with the establishment tea plantations on the foothills of the Lushai range. The Europeans were engaged in the tea industry as managers and owners, and the plantations were frequently raided by the Mizos. The Lushai raids upon the plains territory became, therefore, a matter of serious concern for the European colonizers. Some believed that the Mizos raided the plains in order to obtain heads and branded them as ‘head hunters’, while others believed that it was to steal from the plantations and to take captives.

The Europeans who were engaged in the tea industry were frequently attacked by the Mizos. The raid led by Chief Bengkhuia Sailo angered the Europeans because Bengkhuia and his warriors attacked Alexandrapur, a tea-garden on a slight elevation in the Surma valley near Katlacherra. This incident affected the history of Mizoram profoundly. The attack on the Alexandrapur Tea Estate resulted in killing of its owner James Winchester, and kidnapping his six year old daughter Mary Winchester. The kidnapped girl was carried off to the village of Chief
Bengkhuaisailo near Sialsuk, a place in south of Aizawl. The whole Alexandrapur was
destroyed in the raid. Another serious attack involved the death of Lieutenant J.F. Steward of the
first Leinster Regiment along with three others on 3rd February 1888; this attack evoked deep
resentment and anger.

Ultimately, the British Government decided to launch an expedition to punish the offending
chiefs of the Lushai Hills. The operation was carried out under the command of Colonel Vincent
W. Tregear of the 9th Bengal infantry in January 1889. In this expedition Hausaka’s village was
burnt and some chiefs were captured. Lianphunga, son of Suakpuilala sent a party of raiders to
Chengry valley. In that raid, the raiders killed 101 persons and carried off 91 captives. On 11th
September 1889, the British Government decided to launch another expedition on a bigger-scale.

In that expedition, known as the Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1889-90, three columns—Bengal,
Burma, and Assam—took part. Another force composed of 400 men from the Surma Valley
Battalion of military police under W.W. Daly advanced. Daly came to the Aizawl range, and
built a stockade on a site which subsequently became the headquarters of the Lushai Hills
District; it was called ‘Fort Aizawl’. By the close of March, the Chin-Lushai Expedition had
successfully accomplished its task. Those responsible for the disturbance in the Chittagong Hill
Tracts were adequately punished. A mule track from Bengal to Burma was put into operation.

The object of these expeditions was to secure release of captives, set up posts and establish
communication, and to punish the chiefs and others who were responsible for raids.

The Europeans decided to take revenge on the Mizos for daring to raid and attack the level lands.
Their intention was to deprive the Mizos of the guns they had taken away and to free the
captives, especially Mary Winchester (whom the Mizos had named Zohuti). The colonizers
entered Mizoram to settle scores and to punish them for obstructing the work of the tea plantations. This excursion was called ‘The Lushai Expedition of 1871-1872’.

On 8th October 1871, a group of soldiers and a large number of coolies headed by General Brownlow departed from Chittagong on their way to Mizoram. Their main objective was to rescue Mary Winchester from Bengkhuwaia’s village. The expedition resulted in the destruction of 20 Mizo villages. After a series of attacks on the Mizos and negotiations with the chiefs of the villages, General Brownlow was able to free Mary Winchester along with 100 other captives. The General also made two Mizo chiefs, Lianlula and Rolura, to sign a treaty of peace, to refrain from raiding or attacking the tea plantations. The Mizo chiefs kept their promise and from 1873 to 1887 they stopped raiding the plains for a period which lasted for 14 years.

The second expedition happened when the Mizos started to raid the plains again in 1888. The reason for the raid was the suspicion that the Europeans, along with their Indian soldiers, were trying to expand their power, and the Mizo chiefs were afraid that they might try to control them. The colonizers wished to carry on their trade with tea plantations as well as expand their power without opposition from the Mizos; and they also wanted to punish the Mizo chiefs for troubling the plantations. So they decided that it would be best to put the Mizos under their rule. Hence the second expedition took place, but this time the colonizers were more aggressive and more successful than in the first expedition. The main objectives of this expedition were: to punish the tribes that had raided the colonial territory, to subjugate the neutral tribes, to explore the unknown part of the country between Burma and Chittagong, and to establish semi-permanent posts so as to ensure complete pacification and recognition of European power.

In the beginning, it was difficult for the Europeans to rule over the Mizos because of resistance from the Mizo chiefs and their subjects. The chieftain Pi. Ropuiliani was a person of exceptional
abilities, whose love for her people and her defiant spirit were legendary. Ropuiliani had succeeded as chief her husband Vandula, who was killed by the colonizers. Ropuiliani’s sons and her followers would not allow the colonizers to live in peace, and she was determined to do anything in her power to see that they left Mizoram for good. Ropuiliani and her son Lalthuama stood as an exceptional force against the colonizers, and though her position was weak in terms of arms and men, it was strong in terms of influence. When the colonial administration imposed house tax and forced labour, Ropuiliani replied: ‘My subjects and I have never paid any tax to anyone, neither have we done any forced labour. We are the owner of this land. We must evict and chase out any and everyone who is an alien’.

When she was ordered to surrender her gun, she just ignored it. She was taken captive by the colonizers, and died in a Chittagong jail on 3rd January, 1895.

After this expedition the relationship between the Europeans and Mizos went from bad to worse. Mr. Browne, a captain in the British army, was killed on 9th September 1890, while he was on his way to Shillong. Mr. McCabe, who succeeded Browne as the Political Officer at Aizawl, attacked, captured and destroyed the villages of the following chiefs: Hrangkhupa, Lalhrima, Hmingthanga, Lalsebuta and Thanruma. Then McCabe moved towards the village of Chief Kalkhama, who finally surrendered to him. This expedition was carried out with a force consisting of 6,871 men, excluding the police. The last expedition took place during the winter of 1895-96. This was directed against the chief Kairuma and his groups, who were also fighting against the colonizers. Kairuma was paying a tribute to the chief of Falam, when he was attacked by the military forces from North and South hills district, which made it impossible for him to escape. Kairuma finally surrendered in 1895. Other instances of resistance against the colonizers happened in early 1906, when four chiefs, Vanphunga of Khandaib, Irlanga, Zataia, and Zataia’s
brother united to oppose the missionaries in their work of conversion. The missionaries had tried to convert the youths, and the chiefs were highly infuriated at this, because anything that separated the young men of the Zawlbuk and the Chief would damage the structure of their village life.

The first Christian missionary to set foot in Mizoram was Reverend William Williams, a Welsh missionary working in the Khasi Hills. He became interested in the Mizos after seeing a number of Mizo chiefs in the British Jail at Sylhet. He arrived in Aizawl on the 20th March, 1891. At that time Aizawl was being made into a town. Williams had a wonderful time with the Mizos, and learned some aspects of the Mizo culture; he also conducted religious meetings and distributed pictures of Jesus Christ. He tried to find two Mizos whom he could take along with him to Khasi hills, where they could be taught the Bible, but failed to do so. During that time the British officers and their followers who came to Mizoram were attacked by the Mizo chiefs and this was the reason why the government did not allow Williams to stay in Mizoram. Therefore, he left Aizawl, the capital, on April 17 with a strong determination to start a mission in the Lushai Hills.

The founder of this mission was Robert Arthington of Hunslet Lane, Leeds, England. From the year 1850 onwards, Arthington took a deep interest in the work of the missionaries. Two missionaries, namely Lorrain and Saidge, entered Mizoram and were appointed to start gospel teaching, from Assam to the hills of Mizoram. It took them a year to obtain a permit to enter Mizoram, because during that time the Mizo chiefs were still trying to protect their land from the European intruders. The government would not allow missionaries to enter Mizoram. But the two missionaries were determined to reach Mizoram, so they paddled down the river Tlawng. They reached Sairang, Mizoram on the 11th January, 1894. Their first work was to invent a script for the Mizos, since the Mizos had no script. They were able to publish a Mizo primer with the
title *Mizo Zir Tir Bu* in 1896. They even translated *The Bible* in 1895, and started educating the Mizos. The two missionaries built a house for themselves on MacDonald Hill, which is still called by the same name, and used it as a place for gathering converts in worshipping God. This was recorded as the first church in Mizoram.

There are two questions that need to be asked here. What impact did the introduction of literacy have on a culture that depended upon oral and performative traditions for its continuance? Did the invention of a script eventually work to make the Mizos amenable to the colonial rule?

To answer these questions it is important to look into the educational system before the coming of the British. The only system of imparting knowledge was in the oral and performative form which was passed on through generations to generation. The oral form of imparting knowledge was disrupted when the missionaries brought literacy to the Mizos. Their primary object was to convert the Mizo people to Christianity, which was to them the only true religion. Christianity being a religion based on scriptures, the Bible, the invention of a Mizo script was the first necessary step for conversion; and the translation of the Bible the next. From the missionaries’ point of view, this was not a disguise attempt to destroy the Mizos’ culture, but a well-intentioned desire to save them from damnation. Nor was it a ruse to bring them under colonial rule, to make them more amenable to administration. From their experience, the missionaries learned that mere religious preaching would not be fruitful enough to uplift the Mizos. Unless they had education, they would not be able to understand or appreciate the scripture. Lack of literacy would always stand as an obstacle to winning them over to Christianity. Creating institutions of Western education, however, was also a governmental priority, and in this the interests of both missionaries and administration coincided. Thus, A. Porteous, a political officer of the northern Mizoram wrote in a letter in 1897:
I desire to point out that, although it is now seven years since Aijal was occupied, nothing whatever has yet been done by Government in the way of commencing to educate the Lushais.\textsuperscript{vii}

The objective of the Government in educating the Mizos was to maintain law and order in the territory while that of the missionaries was to convert the local people to the Christian faith, and Western-style education provided a common platform. Therefore, it was felt necessary for the missionaries to start schools to educate the converts so that they could read the bible, a requirement that was essential for all Christians. Thus invention of script was a much needed task. Once the script was invented, the missionaries started their work in educating the people. If it also served to make the Mizos more amenable to rule, it was plausibly not a part of the missionaries' intention. Two agencies worked in tandem to convert the Mizos as well as command and rule over them. On the one hand, the missionaries' objective was to enlighten the minds of the people by teaching them English through Mizo language and introducing formal education, to make them accept the Christian God. On the other, the colonizer's objective was to occupy the land and govern the people by making and enforcing new laws that they could read. The introduction of literacy surely had a notable impact on a culture that depended upon oral and performative traditions. It had a far reaching significance in the life of the Mizo people. C.L. Hminga has argued strongly that:

The Mizo conversion to the Christian faith changed the physical appearance of the village, the social life, the customary practices and belief of the Mizo people.\textsuperscript{vii}

The extension of education made the continuation of the Zawlbuk increasingly difficult. With the introduction of formal education, the young men found it difficult to spare their time for collection of firewood for Zawlbuk. Many bachelors who were supposed to sleep in Zawlbuk
were also keen to attend schools. From the point of view of the Mizos, literacy could provide them opportunities for improving their lives and obtaining secure jobs with the government. Since most of the schools were in bigger towns, villagers who wanted to attend schools had to leave their village. As a whole the efforts of the British government and the Christian missionaries produced both constructive and destructive transformations in the traditional mode of life. As a result of Western education and religious conversion, the Mizos began to disavow all their traditional lore as inferior, lacking in civilized virtues, pagan, not fit for those converted to the new faith. The Zawlbuk which was the institution central to the traditional learning became irrelevant, and its decline was inevitable. To their justification, the missionaries believed that colonialism was providential, allowing people to encounter the saving grace of God.

The colonial success therefore was integral to God’s plan to bless the world. They also believed that occupying other lands and educating their occupants was driven by a moral imperative to modernize primitive economic relations and to civilize the barbarians.iii

Since Lorrain and Savidge were transferred from the Arthington Mission, the mission sent Reverend David E. Jones to replace them in Aizawl. Jones arrived on 31st August 1897, and Lorrain and Savidge remained in the Lushai Hills for almost a year, assisting him. Lorrain and Savidge had prepared the ground for the Christianization of the Mizo people during their four-year stay in Mizoram. They invented a Mizo script using the Roman alphabet, they opened the first school on 1st April, 1894, translated the Bible (Luke, John and the Book of Acts) into Mizo language, and, finally, translated seven Christian songs from English to Mizo. Another Welsh missionary, Edwin Rowlands, came to Mizoram in December, 1898 and proved to be of great
help to Jones. It is recorded that the first two Mizo converts, Khuma and Khara were baptized by Jones in December 1898, along with two Khasi tribesmen.

Lorrain and Savidge went back to England. During this time, the South Lushai Hills was administered by the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) as their mission field. The Baptist Mission requested Lorrain and Savidge to return to Mizoram as missionaries of the BMS, on condition that the BMS would send someone to continue their work among the Abor-Miris people in Sadhya (now Arunachal Pradesh), to which they agreed. They arrived at Lunglei on March 13, 1903, more than five years after they had left Aizawl, headquarters of North Lushai Hills. They started working in a village named Serkawn and they spent most of their time in constructing churches, new schools, hospitals and a printing press. They preached the gospel as well as learned Mizo language in order to persuade as many people to give up the old traditional practices and adopt the ways of Christianity. The arrival of Lorrain and Savidge marked the introduction of the Baptist Mission's denominational churches in Mizoram, namely the Presbyterian Church in the North and Baptist church in the south of Mizoram.

The next section discusses the effect that colonial rule and missionary activity had on one of the most important aspects of Mizo society, the bawi system. Though translated as 'slavery', bawi was very different from the form of slavery that prevailed in Europe and was therefore subject to misunderstanding. Lewin, a colonial writer who had understood this difference, wrote thus:

The slavery in these hills, if, indeed, it can be called slavery, was of the mildest description, and was the deliberately adopted custom of the majority of the people, not bondage imposed by force.
According to Lewin, the house of a *Lal* (chief) is like a harbour of refuge. A criminal or fugitive who took shelter in the house could not be harmed if he became the slave of the *Lal*, under whose protection he had placed himself. Morris, a missionary from the Welsh Calvinistic Mission, also talks about the existence of slavery in the Lushai Hills. In the early Mizo society, there were three categories of *Bawis*, namely the *inpuichhung bawi*, *chemsen bawi* and *tukluh bawi*, as well as the *sals*. According to these colonial writers, the *bawis* were bound to the families and were held as captives, but what they failed to mention was that in Mizo society, the children of the *bawi* or *sal* grew up in the captor's house as his own children and as a rule they were so well treated that they seldom wish to return to their former house. Like the *bawi*, the *sal* could buy his freedom by paying the ransom demanded by the *Lal*, which was usually a mithun.

Major McCall the district superintendent and in charge of the Lushai Hills from the 1938, has stated that:

A *Bawi* was an individual who was dependent upon a Lushai Chief. There were three main categories into which *Bawis* fell. ... The term *INPUI CHHUNG* means literally, within the big house, ‘IN’ being house, ‘PUI’ big, and ‘CHHUNG’ within. This term was applied to a person who in poverty, sickness, or distress, had sought, and received, protection at the hands of the chief. The *CHEMSEN BAWI* was in a different position as may be indicated by the meaning of the term, *CHEM* being a knife, and *SEN* meaning red, or in short a murderer. Such a person would seek sanctuary with the Chief, regardless of cost, in return for protection in the face of certain retribution if his plea failed.... the *TUK LUT BAWI* meaning the *Bawi* "who promised to enter", the *TUK* meaning promise and *LUT* meaning to enter. This type covered the defeated in battle who, save their skins, surrendered themselves and, perhaps, their ultimate families to the Chief."
The practice of Bawi came under attack when a missionary physician called Dr. Peter Fraser came to Mizoram in 1908. To Fraser, the bawi system appeared indistinguishable from the slavery system, which had been abolished by the British government in 1833. His argument was that the bawis were treated in the same manner as slaves in those days. Fraser challenged the district authorities by criticizing the bawi system, which had been ignored by both the missionaries and administrators. He started to collect evidence to prove that the bawis were ill-treated by their chiefs, and he found support in this work from Khawvelthanga, a chief of Maubuang. Together they worked for the freedom of the bawis in Mizoram. Ultimately a written proposal was sent to H.W.G. Cole, the Superintendent, insisting that all the bawis should be freed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the name of King Edward.

The majority of the chiefs did not support Fraser's idea and held that the bawis were not slaves. However, the matter was placed before the Assam Government, which ordered Fraser to sign the following agreement, or to leave Mizoram if he was unwilling to do so.

"I hereby undertake that during my future residence in the Lushai Hills, I will confine myself entirely to work of a medical missionary...that I will interfere in no way whatsoever in Lushai complaints or disputes. ... I undertake to consult the Superintendent before making extended tours in areas which the Superintendent may consider... to visit...I agree to leave the Lushai Hills within one month."  

Fraser refused to sign, and he was temporarily expelled from Mizoram. After his departure, the issue was taken seriously and a decision was made by the government. As McCall puts it, the colonial government resolved that:

1. The use of the word Bawi be discontinued.
2. The maximum liability of a bawi to be freed is Rs. 40, or 1 mithun for a whole family.

3. A bawi might leave his master at will.

4. In case of chimens bawi and tuklun bawi any claim put forward be limited in specific amount of the consideration.

5. Claims made by chiefs to bawis be same as in all other customary cases among the general public.\textsuperscript{xiii}

In a seminar presented by Lalrinmawia, on “Bawi Custom in Lushai Hills”, dated 28\textsuperscript{th} & 29\textsuperscript{th} October 1982, the Assam government proposed a change for the future status of bawis.

1. A date should be fixed after which the bawi contract could not be entered into.

2. The government would pay the customary ransom of Rs.40 if the bawi was freed.

3. Persons so redeemed and released be at liberty to leave the chief’s house or to remain there as they wish.

4. Let the chiefs know that they would be presented in the court when need arose.

5. Government should recover ransom from persons on whose behalf the same was paid.\textsuperscript{xiv}

Therefore, keeping these points in mind, the Government of Assam replaced the word ‘bawi’ with a new term, ‘chhunte’ or ‘awmpui’ which means ‘inmates of the house’. The bawi custom in the early society was a system that had evolved through ages and was a recognized institution. The bawis were actually domestic servants or personal attendants of the chief. The system was misunderstood as slavery by some colonizers who had no knowledge of the status a bawi had. As
a result of the various petitions by Dr. Fraser and negotiations with the government, the colonial
government put the bawi system came to an end in 1927.

The next section discusses the abolition of Zawlbuk. As stated earlier, Zawlbuk was an important
social institution. According to Sangkima, there were two reasons for the formation of Zawlbuk.

One was the common practice among the tribal people to attack other tribes, leading to frequent
inter-tribal feuds. Killing of enemies and taking their heads was not considered unlawful in those
times. The man who brought home the head of the enemy was respected and admired as a
warrior. The other reason was that, in those times each clan preferred to stay together as a family.

Traditionally Mizo villages were situated on hill tops, as there was scarcity of sufficient flat land
for the construction of houses, and they used to stay together for fear of being attacked by
another village. As mentioned before, inter-clan feuds frequently took place. The zawlbuk
became an important institution, especially for the boys, where they were taught the art of
warfare, bravery, singing and dancing, self-discipline, wrestling, hunting, etc. Young boys from
the age of seven would visit the zawlbuk every day, but were not allowed to sleep in it. They
were ordered by their seniors to do petty jobs such as procuring fire-wood and drinking water.
When they reached the age of fifteen, they would have to undergo a test conducted by the
valupas, elders in charge of the zawlbuk, to become a member. The young man was asked to pull
out the longest hair from his pubic region and tie it around a bamboo pipe. If he succeeded in this
test, he was considered an adult and would be formally admitted to the zawlbuk by announcing
his name in the presence of the other inmates. He was then qualified to give orders to the young
children, and to learn the art of wrestling and hunting. He was also allowed to go hunting and
court girls in the community.
Elder people and valupas would narrate stories of their ancestors, origins, migration, myths, legends and folktales, the traditions and the practices of the community. Chatterji has stated that the *zawlbuk* formed an integral part of Mizo culture: "... Zawlbuk was a nerve-centre of the Mizo society by shaping the Mizo youth into a responsible adult member of the society."

With the coming of colonization, the *zawlbuk* could not withstand the transformations that took place. This resulted in the eradication of the social institution. Sangkima has mentioned some factors responsible for the abolition of the *zawlbuk*. The first was the establishment of European administration. Earlier, the authority lay in the hands of Mizo chiefs, but after colonization the chief's authority was reduced and he was made dependent on the colonial government. The chief could exercise powers only under the orders of the government. This directly affected the law and administration of the *zawlbuk* and it gradually declined in importance. Formal education was another factor responsible for the decline of this institution. The missionaries introduced formal education among the Mizos, and parents were persuaded to send their children to schools where they were suppose to gain more knowledge. What was overlooked was that the *zawlbuk* trained initiates in life skills that were essential to the survival of the community, for which modern western education was irrelevant. The last factor that was responsible for the abolition of the *zawlbuk* was the recruitment of Mizos in the colonial army. When the First World War broke out, many Mizo men were drafted into war service. These young men returned with a different outlook, adopting modern ways of living. The result was that the Mizo people were led to think that their past life with discipline learnt in the *zawlbuk* was not very conductive to their material growth. Therefore, they believed that their only way to improve was to break away from their old ways of living and embrace the modern Christian religion. As Chatterji observes:
People, thus, began to feel that the best way to improve their future lot was to break away from their indigenous way of living.\textsuperscript{321}

Some colonial administrators and missionaries, however, attempted to counter the deterioration of the Zawlbuk. Parry for instance, argued that the zawlbuk was important for Mizo society, when compared to the Lakhrs one of the sub-clans:

\begin{quote}
I ascribe much of the indiscipline among the Lakhrs to the fact that they have no bachelor's house or equivalent to the Lushai Zawlbuk.\textsuperscript{322}
\end{quote}

When Parry assumed his work in 1926, the zawlbuk bore a deserted look in almost every village, and the institution had already been abandoned. Since he was convinced of its importance in the Mizo society, he instructed to all the chiefs to revive the zawlbuk in Mizoram:

\begin{quote}
I had noticed that in few villages the Zawlbuk is no longer maintained. All the chiefs are hereby informed that every Lushai Village must keep a Zawlbuk.\textsuperscript{323}
\end{quote}

McCall, too, was convinced of the importance of Zawlbuk, and in Lushai Chrysalis stated:

\begin{quote}
The Zawlbuk is the Bachelors' barrack where young boys and youths learned all the discipline that has ever been possible in Lushai social life. Naturally, some of the practices could hardly expect the sanction of strict Church ideas, and this fact has provided the opportunity for Lushai religious leaders to condemn Zawlbuks, in pursuance of the prevalent tendency among Lushais to destroy and eliminate all the dates from a period prior to the Christian era.\textsuperscript{324}
\end{quote}

McCall linked the decline of the Zawlbuk to Christianization, though it was the native mission employee rather than the religion or the church itself that he blamed.
It was, however, the Lushai Mission employees who were the prime movers in the matter of abandoning the ZAWLBUK system. The missions were left to view the notion sympathetically or alternatively, to oppose it with vigour. The latter alternative basically conflicts with their principle of encouraging self-expression and Lushai initiative, and must be abhorrent to the personnel of the missions.

Rev. F.J. Raper, a Baptist missionary, also took keen interest in the reconstruction of the zawlbuk. He organized the Mizo youths to keep up the values which had been sustained by the institution. He even provided them materials like petromax lights and indoor games such as carom, to revive their interest in the Zawlbuk. In spite of all such efforts, however, the zawlbuk's decline was continued until the institution eventually disappeared.

Rev. Mangkhosat Kipgen, a former principle of Eastern Theological College, gives the following reasons for the Mizo church leaders' opposition to the zawlbuk.

The first defect of the system, in view of the church leaders was the spreading of rumours and indulgence in unhealthy gossips, centered on women, by some lesser caliber elders who visited the Zawlbuk only to create confusion among the inmates. These gossips centered on clandestine love affairs from their younger days and other scandal in the village. As the chief and elders could not take disciplinary action against the inmates of Zawlbuk when they stood united, the victims of these gossips, invariably women were not given space to rectify their accusations. The natural consequence was... the encouragement of gossip and clandestine love affairs.

Another reason advanced is that it gave an opportunity for adultery. "Even the married young men with two or three children had to sleep in Zawlbuk. They would visit their wives at home
under the cover of the dark of the night and then go back to Zawlbuk. Sometimes other men would impersonate as the husband, who was expected, and sleep with the wife (with or) without her knowledge.

A third reason given was economic instability. "Frequent absence of the young men from the family also resulted in economic unsteadiness and the disruption of the filial ties with parents."

A final reason given is that "the static nature of Zawlbuk, which was designed to perpetuate the traditional cultural norms and values, was seen as a hurdle for progressive social change. Thus the Zawlbuk was an obstacle for the Mizo church leaders who wished to see a transformed society in their life-time." As will be clear, all four accounts miss the crucial point that colonialism had transformed Mizo society in such a manner that the Zawlbuk lost its relevance, and was reduced to a relic that served little purpose. When, due to transformations in cultural practices, rituals or ritual institutions are no longer socially efficacious they become etiolated and wither away. That was precisely what happened to the Zawlbuk after the advent of Western education and the changes in the ways of life consequent on modernization. The decline of the Zawlbuk meant the disappearance of oral and performative traditions, as well as the skills that were essential to tribal life.

In the pre-colonial period, Zawlbuk played a key role in defending the community and ensuring security and peace. But when the colonial government was established, this function was taken over by the administration and the Zawlbuk became redundant. As Chatterji observes,

After the annexation, clan feuds and village warfare were forbidden by the British government, security, peace, law and order was restored to its maximum level. In other
words, the colonial administration had taken over the role of zawlbuk in the defense and security of the villages and the importance of zawlbuk inevitably declined in the minds of the majority of the Mizo people.\textsuperscript{xxv}

Rev. Lloyd was a missionary who worked for several years in Mizoram. He contributed towards the growth of the Christian church from the period they arrived in the Lushai land. He, too, was of the view that: "When the British administration took over the land and restored law and order, zawlbuk was no longer necessary."\textsuperscript{xxvi}

Therefore, though some colonial administrators and missionaries tried to revive the institution, it was not able to survive the changes that colonization introduced. The zawlbuk was abolished by the Mizos themselves and not by state ban. McCall mentioned that the abolition of zawlbuk brought an unforeseen relief: it was said that the village children could not study their books, or that they could not be controlled if they were to stay in zawlbuk.\textsuperscript{xxvii} One of the factors that were responsible for the deterioration of zawlbuk, it has been noted, was the introduction of Western education among the Mizos. The parents would prefer to send their children to formal schools because they realized that they would gain more knowledge that was more useful to conditions of life under colonization. The influence of the Christian pastors and missionaries was so strong that the village chief had no option but to abide by the new system, and was in no position to uphold tradition. As McCall put it:

It is in this way that a Chief, playing a lone hand, is in no position to insist on old customs, if the church and educational mission teachers have cast their spell over the people to adopt other ways of living. If he did, he would merely lose his villagers, who would migrate to a more easygoing village.\textsuperscript{xxviii}
As discussed above, some missionaries were aware of the harm which could be caused by the irresponsible abandonment of social practices, and in the case of zawlbuk, “a conscientious effort has been made to encourage its preservation under a different organization, called the Young Lushai Association, originally initiated by the Rev. David Edwards, B.A.”

McCall succeeded Parry as the Superintendent in 1932, and decided to evolve a concrete policy on zawlbuk; he arranged a public meeting on 1st January, 1938 at Thakthing, Aizawl. The speakers in the meeting expressed their dislike of the zawlbuk system and favoured its abolition. They argued that it was no longer relevant to the Mizo; therefore, McCall withdrew Parry’s order for its re-establishment in 10 days time. “Thus, from this time onwards Zawlbuk fell into complete disuse and relegated to insignificance and people began to abandon it, and in course of time it became an institution of the past.”

The main reason for the decline of the zawlbuk, as mentioned above, was the transformation brought about by European intervention in Mizo society. The introduction of formal education through establishment of schools and the vigorous church activities in converting the people to Christian faith resulted in popular disapproval to the way of living promoted by the zawlbuk. Inter-tribal feuds became less frequent, and there was therefore little need for skills in warfare. Western education replaced the education provided in the zawlbuk. As a result the Mizos began to lose their indigenous moorings without gaining substantially the constructive features of western life.

We will now turn to the practice of taking of heads, which was in many ways central to the Mizo way of life. But first, it is important to understand the difference in the codes of conduct between
the Mizos and their European colonizers, which led to the demonization of Mizos as ‘head-hunters’. This raises a number of important questions:

1. How did conversion to Christianity change the Mizo outlook, leading to the disavowal of some of the Mizo practices?

2. What did head-taking signify to the Mizos, as a result of which it could be a sign of value?

3. How did it come to be devalued by the Europeans, as ‘inhuman’ and ‘barbaric’?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to look into the reason for the practice head-hunting among the Mizos. An integral part of the Mizo cultural universe, the taking of heads was a sign of bravery and courage, and it was practiced by the warrior to display his valour. It served to glorify him even in death, so that he would be remembered as a successful head-taker. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, taking of heads for the Mizos was the way to obtain safe passage into Pialral.

Victory in warfare was also an opportunity for claiming prestige for the warrior’s lineage. As Parry puts it:

The causes of war were desire for gain on the part of the elders and hope of glory on the part of the young warriors, who longed for a chance of showing their prowess. When a warrior slew an enemy in battle he would shout out his name, the names of his father and his grandfather, and the name of his clan, and would boast of his courage and the success of his arms. 

Sometimes, if the war was fought in a distant land, it was difficult for the warrior to carry the head back to his village, and he would take only the scalp to prove that he was not lying. He
would bring home not only the scalp of his enemies, but also of those of his friends who died during the warfare.

Headhunting was not only one of the most distinctive features that set the Mizo apart from the colonizers, a ‘proof’ of their ‘difference’, but was also one of the main reasons for conflict between the Mizos and the Europeans. Ordained as a minister by the Presbyterian Church of Wales, John Hughes Morris has recorded:

The inhabitants (of the Lushai Hills) were regarded by the few European then residing in Bengal as the fiercest and most barbarous of all the Hill tribes within the province, notorious for their head-hunting expeditions to the neighbouring plains. The object of these raids was to obtain skulls with which to adorn the graves of their ancestors.xxxii

Lloyd has also mentioned how the Christian missionaries also considered the Mizos “nothing but vicious marauders and head hunters.”xxxiii

A missionary named Laura Hardin Carson mentions that the Mizos decorated their houses with human skulls. The practice of head-hunting was considered ‘inhuman’, ‘barbaric’ and ‘uncivilized’ by the European colonizers. But for the Mizos, it was a significant act that constituted one’s identity, and the Mizos considered this traditional practice as the ‘sign’ of a distinct ethnicity. The warrior status was no doubt considered prestigious for every male member of the village, and it was only by the number of heads he took that a man would be recognized as a warrior. Warriors who brought home a human head were held in high honour for their bravery, courage and skill. Head-hunting was linked with not only valour but also generosity, and was also essential to the performance of the Feast of Merit called Thangchhuhah.

In death the headhunter was memorialized, and while living he was considered a hero. The heads taken by a warrior served as symbols of value, on which depended the social status of the
headhunter. But for this it had to be carried out according to rules. Thus, headhunting was right when it followed the right procedure, that the head should be taken from a dead and not a living body. The victor must shout his own name before killing his enemy, so that the spirit of the enemy would recognize the victor’s voice after death, and serve him in his next life.

Headhunting was a ritual of war; the head of the victim being a trophy for the victor. But it also signified a value that could guarantee a good afterlife, valour, respect, wealth, and social status. It pointed to a form of salvation which was not only attained after death, but in present life. It began as a life of blessing shared with and enjoyed by the whole village, and continued into the next life, in Pialral.

The resistance of the Mizos to the colonizers’ attempts to ban headhunting can be seen as a response to a code that was alien and which they found inexplicable, given the symbolic value that they accorded to this practice, and not proof of their ‘depravity’. The term “head-hunter” was coined by the Europeans, but in the Mizo word, it was taking the heads of their enemies. The Mizos were identified as ‘Milula Hnam’ which literally means ‘Head taking tribes’. The colonizers strongly held that warfare in a civilized society was different from headhunting. But for the Mizos, the practice of headhunting was acceptable because it had a cultural significance, as a sign of valour; for the Europeans, on the other hand, beheading a human was a sign of barbarism. At first, no attempts were made either by the administration or by the missionaries to abolish it, as in the case of zawlbuk and bawi system.

We will discuss one incident that led to the abolition of head-hunting in Mizoram. An English plantation owner named Winchester was murdered and his five years old daughter Mary was taken as captive. This incident led to the military expedition of 1871-72, which has been mentioned earlier. The objectives of the British were to rescue Mary from her captors Benkuhaia,
chief of Sailam village, and to suppress head-hunting as well as establish law and order in the land. The expedition proved to be successful not only in getting Mary back, but also paved a way for future occupation of the tracts. It was in this expedition that the Mizos suffered heavy loss: houses and granaries were burnt down, cattle and domestic animals were taken away. Whenever the offenders were captured they were severely punished by sending them to exile or by execution. The British administrators used physical force to suppress the practice, and new laws were imposed stating that if the practice was repeated the chief of that village would be executed. The fear of losing their chief proved to be very effective and instrumental in curbing the practice among the Mizos.

The complete abolition of head-hunting was possible only after the missionaries entered in Mizoram. The Christian missionaries taught the people that killing of human beings was an act against God and was considered a sin. Moreover, with the extinction of zawlbuk and bawi system, there were no more inter-clan feuds, and thus the practice of head-hunting too gradually lost relevance.

Although the ban on headhunting was undertaken by the colonial administration to promote peace and eradicate all forms of violence, it also provided an opportunity to extend control over the Mizos and make them more amenable to European rule. Therefore, the administrators prohibited headhunting as "barbaric, savage and uncivilized," while the missionaries considered it a "heathen" activity. The combined effect of the administrative bans and evangelic persuasion was the repudiation of headhunting by the Mizos as they embraced Christianity and modernity.

We will now look at the transformation of the religious beliefs of the Mizo after the coming of the European missionaries. According to Geertz, religion is a system of symbols that motivates the manner in which the order of existence is constituted and made to appear as real.
First, I would like to discuss the importance of dreams and visions in the Mizo life which was in a way connected to the dawn of a new religion. According to Kipgen, the way had been prepared for the coming of Christianity to the Mizos through visions and dreams. Mizo people traditionally believed in dreams and visions as warning, prediction, and guidance in human affairs.

Most of their clan Gods and sacrificial system had their origin in dreams. They were believed to be the means of communication with human, used by supernatural beings, both good and evil.

Shakespear, in *The Lushei Kuki Clans* also indicated that dreams were 'the means' to notify the people when it was time to perform a sacrifice. For instance:

Should a tiger bite the dreamer, kel-khal (a sacrifice of a goat) is most urgently needed, and if not performed the dreamer will certainly die. Persons who dream this dream are so frightened that they will not leave their house after dark, nor stir beyond the village during the day, for fear of a tiger seizing them.

I will mention two such men who had premonitions about the coming of a new religion before the advent of colonialism. These two men lived in the southern part of Mizoram who had dreams about the coming of white people into their lands and spreading gospel to them. Rev. H.W Carter in his work has stated that the first of them Selkhuma prophesized the coming of christianity as:

The horizon will be stirred, then will come the annihilation of all human beings. There will be lights in the South and the North. One who has never been a chief will rule at the source of the Tlawng River.
The second man named Darphawka had dreams before the advent of Christianity. The first of the dreams in which Pathian spoke to him took place in 1880, and the last in 1890. One of the earliest references to Darphawka's prophecy was made by an author M.E. Bowser in 1928.

Between forty and fifty years ago, in a village in distant Lushai land a man had a dream.

In the night a voice spoke to him, saying: “A great light will appear from the west and shine upon Lushai: follow the light for the people who bring it will be ruling the race”.

Accordingly, the gospel came from the West and took control over the Mizo people. It was said that the first gospel was preached in Darphawka's village, and most of the people were prepared to welcome the new religion because of Darphawk's dream.

The important question here is: how far were these incidents true, and to what extent did they serve to prepare the Mizos to accept the new faith and their new rulers? Accounts of the Mizos' adoption of the new faith are replete with such justifications, which gloss over the violence involved in imposing colonial hegemony.

As mentioned in chapter 2, Mizo religion involved worship of various spirits, good and evil. Unlike Christians, the Mizos believed in a supernatural world ruled by Pathian and which included a large number of spirits. Some were good spirits who never harmed the people, and some evil spirits to whom they would offer sacrifices to appease them. The sacrifices were usually made to those spirits who were believed to cause illness and misfortune in the family. These beliefs also show how their religion was connected with the present life, unlike Christianity is concerned with the afterlife.

To elaborate the difference between Mizo code of conduct and Christian ethics, we will discuss the practice of Tlawmngaihna, which was (to use Foucault's term) a practice of the self: the
Mizos' was a practice-oriented morality. *Tlawmngaihna* was a practice of the self through external or public acts, whereas in Christianity the self is constituted by confession and self-realization which are forms of interiorisation. In Christianity, morality deals with the salvation in the afterlife, but in *Tlawmngaihna*, it deals with the life on earth which is integrated into the Mizo religion. *Tlawmngaihna* is a performative act, where the elements of being *tlawmngai* manifest in action, in the way one hunts, responds to natural calamities or entertains guests. In Christianity one is bound by a morality that is code-oriented, where the norms are universal and not bound to the specific contexts of one's life and social status.

With the advent of Christianity and colonization the Mizo world view was transformed into a new set of doctrines and beliefs. The traditional deity, *Pathian* was identified with God; the concept of *Thangchhuah* or the means of salvation which needed several costly sacrifices, was superseded by faith in God; *pidral* was transformed into eternal heaven in the light of the gospel. The transformation of a society from primitive to modern affected not only the individual, but also the life of the whole society and the life of its symbols in one way or the other.

The conversion to Christianity led to a re-articulation of cultural practices, either their renunciation as being incongruent with Christian values or their recovery without their former religious significance. After the introduction of Christianity there were many changes that took place in the Mizo society. There was a strong tendency to look at the cultural practices of the past as obsolete. The new concepts introduced by the church were not in tune with the traditional culture, and it strongly criticized and prohibited many of the earlier traditional practices like using of drums, traditional form of dance, tunes and songs, taking of heads, the process of *inthawina* (sacificial rituals) and drinking of zu (rice beer) etc. Rev. Llyod notes that, “There
was even a time when in any village it was easy to distinguish the Christian from the non-Christian by his personal appearance.\textsuperscript{viii}

According to Sangkhuma:

Male church members were expected to cut their hair short, unlike the earlier way of keeping long hair, and women who used to wear saiha bengbeh (ivory earrings) were asked to remove it if they were Christians.\textsuperscript{xxix}

Due to this feeling of opposition towards traditional culture, the zawlbuk was also seen as a hindrance to development. As mentioned above, even when the British officials attempted to revive it, the Christianized Mizos were not in favour of its continuation. The Feast of Merit Thangchhuah which was celebrated in high esteem was no longer found to be relevant. The occasion of felicitating the Tlawmngai by offering him with a big mug of Zu (rice-beer) was discontinued due to the church's ban on the consumption of Zu. Zu in Mizo Society published by the Tribal Research Institute, states that, "Zu was considered sacred and unblemished diet due to its connection with religion, and formed an important item in all religious ceremonies ..."\textsuperscript{xxi}

According to Llyod, the ban on Zu "meant not merely abstinence but a discontinuing of numerous religious and social rites because Zu was always part of those rites."\textsuperscript{xxii} Llyod observed that the would-be converts had to give up drinking Zu and surrender the 'Kelmei' amulet. This was the tuft of a goat that had been specially sacrificed, it worn around the neck to ward off evil spirits. Giving up of Kelmei meant giving up of the old belief system.

D.E. Jones the first missionary to be sent by the Calvinistic Methodist Mission to the Mizo Hills, persuaded the Mizos to give up spirit worship by equating Pathian with the Christian God, in
order to make the new faith more acceptable to them. C.L. Hminga cites a statement made by Jones:

Believe on "Pathian" Jehovah and worship Him, then you don't need to sacrifice to demons any more. Even when you die you shall go to pialral.

McCall describes the transformation thus:

Christianity was, from the economic or material point of view, not a costly religion, nor has very much been demanded of the converts, except regular church attendance and the giving up of Zu, if he or she happened to be a Zu drinker. ... Also within the Christian orbit a Lushai could, it was readily seen, acquire a status of material and cultural advantage, which had not been easily possible within the indigenous social framework.

In earlier times, there were countless spirits to appease. Various animal sacrifices were offered to these spirits as a form of protection from the evil spirits. For the poor people, it was difficult to perform such sacrifices and, therefore, there was no certainty if they would safely arrive at the Mitthi Khua after death. Edwin Rowland, a Welsh Christian missionary, wrote in a report of 1899 which stated that:

During the first tour, we witnessed one of the Lushai feasts, in which, as they say, they worship their God. They generally sacrifice to demons, of whom they are in great fear; but two or three times a year they worship their God. Two of these feasts are held; one after the clearing of the land for sowing, and the other after the "harvest home."

Mizo writers like Selet Thanga (school teacher), J. Malsawma (a high government official) and Liangkhaia (a prominent church leader) are of the view that the Mizos believed in spirits, but they also stressed that the fact that these spirits were believed to be wicked, jealous of human
possessions, ever ready to do mischief. The point they stressed is that the sacrifices offered to these spirits was to distract them from causing illness and misfortunes in the family. The hawlpu (exorcists) paid little respect to the spirits to which he offered sacrifices. He, like most of the people, believed the spirits to be ignorant and easily deceived. According to Rev. Lloyd:

Lushai sacrifices were intended rather to divert or dissuade evil spirits from tormenting men and women. There was no permanent altar. An altar was made fresh every time it was required. ... The evil spirits were believed to be small (rather like gnomes and pixies).... Tiny clay models of the things which Lushais considered most precious were offered to the evil spirits (models for amber necklaces, tame buffaloes and so on). Hens were killed and the beaks, the entrails and claws sacrificed on the altar. The evil spirits assumed that they were being given the hens complete. They were easy to deceive and there was no harm in doing so.\textsuperscript{xvi}

The teaching of the missionaries emphasized that such sacrifices were unnecessary, and the mission also provided medicines which would help them in curing illness. As McCall writes:

Sacrifices and are no longer a necessity. Medicine is a cheap and more certain cure for disease than the costly sacrifices of old. Without the crippling and constant sacrifices and village feast, by which a man could rise in the social scale to be well deserved of his Chief and people, a Christian in a salaried job can become materially more powerful even than a village Chief.\textsuperscript{xvii}

The accounts, both colonial and contemporary, are not merely descriptions of what are held to be 'true' state of affairs, but are also prescriptions for a preferred mode of belief, and therefore justifications for conversion.
The missionaries offered a very simple and new way of Thangkhua, which was to believe and accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. It did not require any feast or animal sacrifice, to ensure salvation after death. Under the impact of Christianity the Inthawina (sacrificial) system disappeared within a generation, though the belief in the existence of spirits did not disappear completely. When the missionaries converted the Mizos to Christianity, the concept of Saphun (traditional practice of conversion) still remained in the minds of the people. It can also be understood as conversion from the Mizo traditional family into the more 'civilized' missionary’s western race or society. Therefore, this approach saw the missionaries as the masters of Christianity and those who played advisory roles to sustain the life of the church; whereas the Mizo Christian converts were seen as the subordinates, who cut themselves off from their religion, abandoned their social and cultural traditions and were completely committed to Christianity.

According to R.S. Sugirtharajah,

...religious conversion means a shift from one religion to another, but also more importantly, from one community to another. It is a change of outlook and an orienting of one's life to a different focal point, but it also means leaving one's own cultural heritage and joining a Christian community whose style of worship and church structure follows western cultural patterns.xlvii

Therefore, from the above discussions it is clear that, the introduction of the European rule and coming of Christianity in Mizoram led to notable changes in the social life of the people. However, the pace of change differed from one area to another. The rapid changes in the society had profound effect on the cultural life of the people. People were no longer bound by customary
obligation. The old customs and practices were given up in the name of Christianity and formal education.
Endnotes:

1 Office Record of the Office of Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District Aijal (No. DG. 7/63/13 dt Aijal, 13th June 63).


6 AR, Letter No. 677 dated Fort Aizal, the 28th January 1897.


11 Ibid., p. 127.

12 Ibid., p. 127-128.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

\textsuperscript{v} N. Chatterji, \textit{Zawlbuk as a Social Institution in the society}. 1975, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{vi} Ibid. p. 30.

\textsuperscript{vii} Ibid. p. 26.

\textsuperscript{viii} Ibid., p. 28.

\textsuperscript{ ix} N. Parry, \textit{The Lakher}. 1932, p. 28.

\textsuperscript{x} A.G. Mc Call, \textit{The Lushai Chrysallis}. 1949, p. 211.

\textsuperscript{xi} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{xii} J.D. Baveja, \textit{The Land Where the Bamboo Flowers}. 1974, p. 21.


\textsuperscript{xiv} A.G. Mc Call, \textit{The Lushai Chrysallis}. 1949, p. 211.

\textsuperscript{xv} Ibid., p. 212.

\textsuperscript{xvi} Ibid.

N.E. Parry, The Lakher. 1932, p. 205.


Mangkhosat Kipgen, Christianity and Mizo Culture. 1997, p. 188.


