Religion is as old as man. Literally religion is a principle of unification and harmonization, related to the Latin ‘religare’ which means ‘to hold back’ or to bond fast. Most people are likely to define it as, belief in God, supernatural spirits, or an after life. Or they are likely to name one of the great world religions, such as Hindus, Christianity, Buddhism or Islam. This is a concept intricately intertwined and interwoven with the concept of the God in the consciousness of the common man no less in the consciousness of intelligentia. It is the discovery of the Holy through interpretation, followed by all the many forms of communication through which persons interrelate. The ultimate reality can be differently described: reality beyond appearance; the depth of being; the power, which keeps everything that is in existence; the power of being. These different expressions are termed God. The concept of God or Absolute is the most important, most universal and central concept of religion. God is the highest reality, the highest value and the highest end. The relationship between God and the world has been discussed from time immemorial. In such conceptions, the main question has been one of transcendence and immanence.
God is a word used to express existence, which is so full, rich, deep, and powerful that it is indefinable in the most comprehensive concept. God is that which goes beyond objects, events, persons, and yet appears in and through all these. God is the foundation of all that exists, the ideal that fulfills human nature, the goal towards which human beings aspire. John Hick says, ".........................there is but one God, who is the maker and Lord of all; that in his finite fullness and richness of being he exceeds all our human attempts to grasp him in thought; and that the devout in the various great world religions are in fact worshipping that one God, but through different, overlapping concepts or mental icons of Him". 18. This is also reflected in the definition of religion in the Oxford Advanced Dictionary of English as "belief in the existence of a supernatural ruling power, the creator and controller of the universe who has given man spiritual nature which continues to exist after the death of the body". These definitions show that the essence of religion lies in our inner experience. We realize that there is an absolute power, which is superior to man. Therefore there exists a sense of human dependence manifested in terms of prayer, sacrifice and faith whose force of it has a major influence in the life of man.

The concept of God is that which originates from experience. The subject called philosophy of religion has shown that it is not a being generated by philosophical demonstration. Philosophy cannot prove either the existence or non-existence of God. God cannot be purely a matter of logic. Either God is an integral part of human experience or he is not even worth arguing about. Philosophy plays an important role in religion but as it is one that follows in both time and importance the actual religious experience or the religious interpretation of experience. Philosophy does not initiate religion, experience does. And yet without philosophy experience would lack logical structure. Philosophy reflects upon the experience, which seems to point beyond them to God. God’s existence cannot be proven but philosophy can and thus attempts to justify the God concept and give religious faith a rational foundation. 19

Though the human race has always been almost universally religious, there are those who criticize religion and say that a religion is nothing but the opium of people. Karl Marx and many of his followers fall in this line of thinking. Marx rebelled against the Hegelian philosophy, and said, “The most important task of the philosopher is not to know the world but to change it”. Marx made the irreligious criticism, saying, “man makes religion, religion does not make man”. Even today

thousands of people ask the same question—what is religion? Why is man so eager and interested to study and know religions? The problem gets complicated further because the various religions held by man on examination have differences between them and we are led to wonder why they should be classed together under the generic name of religions. Logically there should be some common feature or characteristics running through all of them, which could be identified as the essential feature of religion. The concept is something so individual, so elusive and diverse that it defies a definition. It is most difficult to define it satisfactorily. Innumerable definitions have been proposed and the very number of definitions is a proof of the difficulty of the task. Every definition proposed, would if it were accepted lead to a drastic purging of the lists of cults commonly included as religions, unless the definition is so vague as to be meaningless; for none of the significant definitions includes more than a fraction of the ‘religions’ of the world. Each definition is drawn to fit a particular religion determined by the definer’s personal attitude towards religion.

Religion as dialogue with God has to be understood in relation to what it is not. It is a dialectical notion, requiring the opposite pole to be meaningful. The religious is opposed to the profane. Whatever can show forth the ultimate, point to the depth of being; witness to the power of
being has a special importance for human life, because it can open up dialogue with God. What has no such potentiality is ordinary, or shallow, or profane. Special events, or objects, or persons, or relationships permit man to see through, to touch deeper levels of being. Touching deeper levels of being however is not equivalent to touching God. What man experiences is not God but nevertheless is sacred or religious, in the sense that it has power to suggest God or point to a reality beyond this world.

A distinction must be made between these notions of religion, as contact with God through what is not god, and the concept of direct religious experiences. In the first case religion is a result of some special experience being interpreted as pointing to God. In the second it is a unique experience, or a peak experience, and is associated with a special feeling or a particular sense. Mysticism is the best example of such an exclusively religious experience. Such religious experience is the principle source of established religions and continues to nourish every vital religious tradition. In direct religious experience or mystical experience-the reality of God or ultimate reality is given in an experience rather than being suggested or pointed to. The immediate experience of God carries with it its own interpretation. Like every

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experience, it requires interpretation but the interpretation is more forced than derived. The mystic has no problem identifying his experience as an experience of God. The problem arises when expression or communication is attempted. Some mystics simply conclude that what they experienced is ineffable and remain silent. Others resort to dialectical and contradictory expression. In any event, the interpretation of the experience as a God experience is evident and forceful. The interpretation tends to claim the person very much as the interpretation “This is a table” is forced upon someone confronted with the sense data. In this it is different from interpretation in the sense of a person organizing data into a meaningful unity by his own efforts.

By the religious dimension of experience or a religious interpretation of experience we mean the viewing of certain experiences of life from the perspective of an ultimate reality beyond. Certain experiences upon reflection and closer examination are recognized as special. They give man a pause, creating a sense of awe and mystery, an overarching purpose or an ultimate reality. The experiences point beyond themselves. They resist the judgment “that’s all there is”. Not only do the experiences point beyond, but they point to “a personal more” that is supremely important—the “more” man call God. They do not prove God’s existence, but rather point to him as possible.
As James F. Drane points out there again, has to be a destination between experiences interpreted as pointing to God and the existence of God is not the same as the relationship between an experience of the table and the existence of the table. In the latter case we are in an area of direct perception. Experience of the table implies its existence. The table is a physical reality without whose actual presence the perception would be impossible when we talk of God or the divine reality we are not talking about a sensible being with legs and arms, in space and time. God, if he is, is altogether different sort of reality. Since, its existence is of a different type, it requires a different type of perception. Our intention here is to look into different human experiences in order to inquire about the possibility of their being interrupted as pointing to God or suggesting the possibility of God.

If one were to hold the non-existence of God as a dogma, then every human experience, which might be interpreted as pointing to God, would be automatically judged mistaken. Every instance of direct religious experience (mysticism) would have to be explained away by reducing the alleged experience of God to some other type of experience. On the other hand, to be open to the possibility of certain experiences being interpreted as pointing to God is to move away from dogmatic
atheism without going over to a dogmatic theism. Being willing to entertain the possibility of god does not presume the existence of God. If one rejects the dogmatic atheism, which would settle the question once and for all, experience of any sort notwithstanding, then the possibility of God’s existence is presumed. This saves God from absurdity and leads a person to take seriously the claims of mystics. This, however, does not prove the existence of God\textsuperscript{21}.

No one experience is guaranteed in every case to open man up to God. For some, it might be an experience of birth of one’s child; or the experience of the death of loved one; or some event or relationship. It is these special moments that question the purpose of life or the source of being, suggesting the possibility of a “more” on whom we depend, and to whom we owe our existence. For the acutely religious existence as it were opens itself onto a deeper level. It poses questions about ultimate ground and ultimate purpose. They give him a chance to consider the importance of the “other dimension’ of human life. These human experiences which open onto the deeper levels of reality are media through which the religious “objects” may be disclosed. According to the theists his experience of God or the ultimate reality is the most important, most

universal and central concept of religion. God is the highest reality, the highest value and the highest end. God becomes related to world and it is this relation between God and the world that has been discussed time and again. The main question has been one of transcendence and immanence. Accepting God as the first or primary cause of the world presumes hat the materials with which the world is made exists outside God. This leads to the difficulty of a duality between God and the materials of the universe, and the necessity of establishing a relation between the two. If God is believed to be the material cause of the world responsible for creating the world out of his own self, then he becomes subject to the difficulty of assimilating within himself such elements as the physical nature of the world, lack of harmony, absence of uniformity, etc. The problem of duality rises again if God is believed to exist outside the world, while the nation of his omnipresence is open to objections having their origin in the world of religion where he has to assume the form of a person in order to be able to answer prayer and reward, faith, devotions, etc. In the process of discussion of his manner of relation o the world, philosophers have given various possible alternative theories.

One of the early theories relating to God and the world is the theory of deism. It states that God exists apart from the world. He is completely external or transcendent of the world. It believes in God as
the creator and basis of the universe but denies the possibility of any relation between God and man. Deism holds that God is the first cause of the world, who created the world out of nothing by his, will at a particular time. He is the cause that causes natural law which function as secondary cause of the world. God performs the function of a protector and caretaker and interferes in the functioning of the world when the need arise. The relationship between God and world is indicated by analogy of the watchmaker and the watch where the relation of the watchmaker with the watch ends once it is made. In the same way all relations of God with his creations ends once the universe is made and the world functions on its own\textsuperscript{22}.

Though this theory had been accepted by a number of western philosophers like John Toland, Mathew and Thomas Chubb, it had never been a part of the Indian tradition. There are a number of difficulties with this theory of Deism. Firstly, it is logically inconsistent because it is impossible to create anything out of nothing. Logically, something, which is completely non-existent, cannot exist and that which does exist cannot become completely non-existent. Hence the theory proceeds from a wrong premise. According to the Deists, God created the world by his power, which he also uses in maintaining the world. Now even if the

\textsuperscript{22} A.R. Mahapatra, God and the world, pg 83.
relation between God and world is rejected, it becomes necessary to accept that there is a relation between the world and his power. Now if God's power is related to the world, so must he be related to the world. If God's power is within God and the power establishes relation with the world, then God cannot remain away from it. Accepting God as being distinct the world would be limiting him, making him imperfect. What is particularly important is that the Deist's God is indifferent to the fate of the universe that he has created. One cannot have a relationship with a God that is external and out of this world and so, it is spiritually inadequate.

In Polytheistic religions, we have a multitude of Gods. There is scarcely anything in the world that has not at the same time been deified, or at least regarded as the emblem, the manifestation, and the temporary dwelling place of some god. Sacred stones and mountains, trees and oases; ruling chiefs and kings, the family hearth, the sun, the moon, and the stars, the ancestors, heroes of the tribe, the rain and lightning, etc. All these and innumerable others have been worshipped as divine, or have at least shared divine honors through a contagion that spreads to everything intimately associated with the God. Out of these overlapping and conflicting deities, Gods emerge into special prominence and under their sovereignty a pantheon of Gods is formed, with distinctive
functions but all related to each other. The king God in this pantheon e.g. Shiva in Saivism, Pathian in Mizo religion absorb the nature and functions of the rest and the other Gods become different manifestations of one supreme deity known by other different names in different aspects.

The type of Monotheism most likely resulting from this line of reflection is generally viewed as Pantheism, or the doctrine that the world in all its changing form is the expression of the one all-pervading Divine life. It conceives God as absolutely immanent in the world. The term is derived from two Greek words, Pan and Theos, meaning that God is everything and everything is God. It establishes an identity between God and the world and refutes the deist position of God as the fundamental or primary cause of the world. It states that all things exists is God and nothing exists beside God. God is infinite and omnipresent. God and the world are two forms of an identical reality, hence both are indivisible. God and the world are necessarily co-existing and eminently present in all that makes up the world. Everything, every event, every mind and every mental function, all are God and nothing else. He is the sole reality. Since God is the only reality, all multiplicity is reduced to an unreal appearance.
In the Western thought pantheism is found in the thoughts of Spinoza who believed that God is infinite, ever existent, independent, self-conscious and without personality. Thought and extension are the chief qualities of God and everything found in this world are nothing other than a distortion of either thought or extension. Living beings are distortions of thought and their bodies the distortions of extensions. All material objects are distortions of extension, which is the quality of God. Nothing falls outside the Absolute and everything is the Absolute. God is infinite and omnipresent. This theory is related with the Upanishadic saying “aham Brahmasmi” and “sarvam khalvidam Brahma”\(^{23}\). The world like God is without beginning, limited neither by time nor space. Hence we can observe the principle of Vishishtadvaita of Ramanuja. God is coextensive with the universe.

One of the main criticisms of this theory is in its explanation of the universe. It theorizes that God is real and infinite and the world is finite and temporary. In the face of these contradictory qualities it becomes difficult to accept that the world is only a manifestation of God because even a manifestation must possess some recognizable elements of that which it manifests. Pantheism also says that God is real and independent. It implies that finite self has no independence and freedom.

\(^{23}\) Quoted from A.K.Mahapatra, God and the world, pg 84.
This provides a blow to morality and the nature of the self. God is also believed to permeate the world, if so, He inherits all the ills and defects of the world possess. The world is finite, many, impermanent and material; and if God is omnipresent in the world he must possess all these qualities. If so, it becomes impossible to accept such a God. Lastly, the theory fails to satisfy the demands of religion. In it, God is not a personal Being, so, man does not have a distinct personality of his own. All his religious activities and functions become meaningless and impossible unless some distinction between the worshipper and the worshipped is accepted.

Another theory explaining the relation between God and the world, presuming God as the first as well as the material cause of the world is the theory of panentheism. This is a reconciliatory theory of both Deism and Pantheism. It states that the world exists in God, but is not identical with God. God is considered as both transcendent and immanent. Based upon the concrete metaphysics of Hegelian Idealism it takes up an organic view of the relation between the infinite and the finite, God and the world. It believes in God as the highest personality, the creator, supporter and defender of the world.
The term theism may also be used to mean the same as panentheism or concrete monotheism. God is infinite and yet endowed with all the qualities of a creator, protector and sustainer of the world. God in his immanent relation to the world includes time and space within Him, though in His transcendence He is above time and space. Therefore this theory can be said to cover most theories. In the Western thought we have Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, Hegel etc while in the Indian side we have Ramanuja Charya contributing to on this literature.

This theistic conception of God best corresponds to the various revealed religious traditions but is again logically inconsistent for philosophers due to its both immanent and transcendent nature. Theism differs from pantheism in that it thinks of man and nature both dependent upon God their Creator and thinks of God as engaged in purposive combat with evil tendencies in the world. The God of theism is not the Sum Total of Reality as in pantheism, his nature is defined in terms of ethical character and purpose as a principle of Justice or Redemptive love, which, while it has already established the basic structure of our world, is still actively at work in it for its transformation and improvement.
In humanistic religions of China and Japan, the unification of the God-world is in a different way - by absorption of nature into an orderly human social system.

Taoism is a purely metaphysical and mystical religion. Other religions have their mystical aspects; Taoism is mysticism. Some would query whether it is a religion at all and suggest that it is pure metaphysics. It is the study of the universe and the place and function of man and all creatures and phenomena in it. 24

The word ‘Tao’ is always left untranslated as it is regarded as indicated is not that of the brain or rational mind, but a supra- rational quality. 25 It was founded by Lao-tze, a Chinese sage. To him the great thing in the universe was Tao. It may be variously translated as the “way”, “road”, “path”, “nature”, “power”, etc. It probably meant, “the way the universe goes”, or “nature”. To come into harmony with the way was, according to him, salvation. He did not make his chief appeal to gods or spirits. Nature was superior to them. To come into harmony with the Tao was the supreme aim. He sought to accomplish this by a kind of mystic quietism 26.

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24 J.C. Cooper, Taoism-The way of the mystic, pg 10
25 J.C. Cooper, Taoism- The way of the mystic, pg 10
26 George A. Barton, The religions of the world, Pg 348.
Okakuro-Kakuzo writes, "The Tao is the Passage rather than the Path. It is the spirit of Cosmic Change- the eternal growth that returns upon itself to produce new forms. It recoils upon itself like the dragon, the beloved symbol of the Taoists. It folds and unfolds, as do the clouds. The Tao might be spoken of as the Great Transition. Subjectively it is the Mood of the universe'. 'It is the principle of all energy, yet energy it is not, but merely one of its manifestations. It is the eternal principle of all life, but no life can express it, and all bodies, all material forms, are but its changing and momentary raiment'. Sometimes it is called 'The Mother of all things; the primordial creative cause, the self-existent source, the unconditioned by which all things are conditioned, for although it does not create it is the source of all creation, the animating principle of the universe; it is “the unchanging principle which supports the shifting multiplicity”

In no circumstances can the Tao be thought of or used as 'God'; that term is too confined, too restricted, and in any case, not permissible since Taoism is a non-theistic religion. That is not to say it is a-theistic, for the atheist is as vitally interested in the idea of God as the theist and devotes as much time and energy to writing and arguing against his..."
existence as the theist writing for him, and both use the personal ‘he’ for God, while the Tao is totally impersonal. Nor is there any word in Chinese which may be fairly translated ‘God’, for T’ien is also completely impersonal and is ‘Heaven’, or ‘The Heavens’, or ‘The powers that be’, as well as heaven as a state of being. Taoism is non-theistic because the limitations of the finite human mind are realized, practically and sensibly. The transcendental would no longer be transcendent if it could be described, formulated, named. “Only the limited can be understood (in individual human mode) and be expressed.”29 The unlimited cannot be positively expressed since all expression depends on formal concepts30.

Non-theism not only avoids the pitfalls of anthromorphism but also puts the stress on the otherness of the divine, which, nevertheless, is not wholly transcendent but equally immanent. Western theistic thought, if not definitely anthropomorphic, is, as Giles says, ‘undeniably anthropopathic’.31 As there is no such element in any of the three religions of China, Western writers consider these as too profoundly impersonal. “Only in decadent Taoism and Buddhism did a pantheon of gods arise, gods to whom appeal could be made and devotions offered,

29 Rene Guenon, Symbolism of the cross.
30 J.C. Cooper, Taoism- The way of the mystic, pg 11.
31 Giles, Taoist teachings.
and who embodied all the superstitions of decadence. Not until then was there any personalization of the forces of nature into gods mostly heavenly and stellar deities.”

Confucianism is again a Chinese tradition, an ideology developed by Confucius. It refers to Confucius himself and the ethical teachings he transmitted to the later ages.

Confucianism had a sacrificial cult of veneration for Heaven and for ancestors, and it allowed for sacrifices of incense and foods even to “semi-deified” historical personages, including Confucius himself. But it had no organized priesthood outside of the recognition of the emperor himself as a “high priest”, the only person qualified to sacrifice to Heaven, and the heads of families as mediators between the ancestral spirits and the living. Civic leaders were the usual presiding figures at ceremonies held in Confucian temples throughout China, although the descendents of Confucius himself had a special place— as government appointed sacrificial officials. And so, Confucianism had a secular priesthood, which was not clearly separated from the rest of society. It did not have monastic orders. In fact Confucian emphasis on family life and progeny was in principle opposed to clerical or monastic celibacy.

32 J.C. Cooper, Taoism- The way of the mystic.
while Confucian teachings of social responsibility abhorred any self-imposed isolation from society unless it was motivated by social protest.

Each of the above theories has attempted to explain the relation between God and the world but each possesses its drawbacks and advantages. Even theism philosophically has its own disadvantages. No one theory is completely satisfactory. Each theory finds its own justification according to the standpoint from which it is judged. Therefore, it would be useless trying to extract some literal least common denominator from all these conceptions of God. Logically they cannot be reconciled. However, they all reflect a common human quest. A quest for an ideal Source of Help and Object of devotion: a being much greater, more enduring, and more worthful than humans on whom we may confidently lean on for support and give ourselves to its service. Even the most fragmentary idea of God is a part of this quest. We see man's devotion reliance even in the most naive personification of the god-world polytheism.

To have a common intention amongst the various ideas of God, sociologists after Emile Durkheim first admit that there is something sacred and holy in the social ties that bind together families, tribes and nations. Some religions like the Chinese worship the family oven and
household gate, the Japanese has its emperor as its beloved head, some believe in ancestral ghost etc, all which are firmly held as if their life depended on it. They all owe religious reverence to their family, community, nation from which the very stuff of their life is drawn increasing their strength and security for a meaningful existence. It is a matter of relationship and connection to their social group giving meaning to their personality by enmeshing in a network of social connections identifying themselves with the larger social life that surrounds them.

This underlying idea has led scholars like J.H. Driberg to define religion as- “Religion is that which binds, it knits the community together and gives it stability. It is a faith or more correctly, a system of philosophy, which establishes mental attitude and invoking the aid of mythology and tradition is the sanction for conduct and ensures the correct emotional response to the community’s environment”. Alban. G. Widgery too defines it as –“the sharing in social life, not primarily as a result of biological processes or for secular benefits, but as fundamental to the religious zeal”. Falling in the same line of thought is Emile Durkheim who conceives religion as that which is inseparable from society. For him, religion and society are inseparable and to each other, virtually indispensable. His claim is that –“religion is something
eminently social” He insists that although as individuals all of us make choices in our lives, we make them within a social framework that is given for us from the day of birth. We speak a language that we did not make; we use instruments that we did not invent, we invoke rights that we did not found, a treasury of knowledge is transmitted to each generation that it did not gather itself”. Religion therefore serves society by providing from infancy onward the ideas, rituals and sentiments that guide the life of every person within it. Therefore, for him religion is that which concerns the “sacred”- identifying sacred with what is socially worshipped as divine.

Secondly one can also admit that there is something sacred and holy in the powers of nature by which man’s life is surrounded and supported. Since the beginning, man’s relation has been greatly dependent on Mother Nature. In all environments men have reckoned upon the support of some powers as allies in their struggle with the more unfriendly forces. Sun, rain, soil etc have been recognized as gods and goddesses in every quarter of the globe. This has led to the worshipping of nature, defining God in terms of nature, as that which is divine.
In modern civilization though the habit of personifying the forces of nature has been given up, man is still the child of nature and when he succumbs to degenerative or nervous disease, he is taken from his artificial environment and sent back to nature to bask in the sun’s rays of the sun and swim in the brine. Though he does not feel the same sort of devotion towards nature as before yet there’s still a kind of trustful dependence on it.

Finally there’s something sacred and holy in man’s inward sense of unrealized possibilities, which makes him turn rebel against himself and his environment and dream of better things yet to be. Voice of the Gods have always been heard in the utterances of certain men who when filled with the divine spirit have cried out against the existing order of things, prophesied doom in the midst of general prosperity assuring new and better age in times of disaster and despair. These are the seers with the ability to discern the hidden possibilities of the existing situation.

Pantheistic religions allow moral self-discipline and social self-enlargement, e.g., through obedience to the rules of the Hindu system, as stages in the road towards self-identification with the All. Theistic religions put nature and the providential control of God; and they call upon their adherents to express their devotion to God. All highly
organized religions are at one in the verdict that man’s trust and allegiance can rightly be offered to a being or beings made manifest partly through human institutions, partly through nature, and partly prophetic discernment of ideal values and possibilities. There is a persistent tendency in the higher religions to push back of all particular social bodies, natural objects, and prophetic words to some more ultimate and enduring reality of which they are regarded as the temporary expressions or "manifestations". This tendency arises from the universal religious quest for something sufficiently great and enduring to be lifted above the flux of things in which we are involved. In and through these temporal realities something more enduring and more unified is glimpsed to which we commit ourselves with unreserved devotion. "The One endures; the many change and pass"; and this enduring One is for religion no dead philosophical abstraction, but a living unity like that which binds the members of a family to one another, across many generations.

More specifically with reference to the topic of my thesis let me state that religion is part and parcel of the Mizo society. It is the product of the thinking and experience of our forefathers. They formed religious ideas, they formulated religious beliefs, they observed religion,

36 Quoted from Walter. H. Horton, God, pg 9.
ceremonies and rituals, told myths, which carried religious meaning, and they evolved laws and customs, which safeguarded the life of the individual and his community.

Traditional Mizo religion functioned more on an individual basis rather than on communal lines. "One of the great landmarks in the history of mankind, the distinction between the system of group relationship and the system of individual relationship coincides, broadly speaking, with the distinction between savagery and civilization; the boundary between the lower and the higher strata of humanity runs approximately on the line between the two different modes of counting kin, the one mode counting it by groups the other by individuals. Reduced to its most general term, the line of cleavage in between collectivism and individualism; savagery stands on the side of collectivism; civilization stands on the side of individualism"\(^37\). For example, the community holds its beliefs; the ceremonies are performed mainly in or by a group of the family, by relatives or by the whole population of one area. The religion is an essential part of the way of life of each people. Its influences cover all of life from before the birth of a person to long after he has died. People found it useful and meaningful in their lives, taught them informally to their children

\(^{37}\) James Frazer: Folklore of the Old Testament, i227.
through conversation, myths as well as through practice. Young people also learnt it through participating in religious activities such as ceremonies, festivals, rituals and so on.

Since Mizo religion belonged to the people, no individual member of the society could stand apart and reject the whole of his people’s religion. To do so would mean to cut himself off from the total life of his people. An individual could not live in isolation from one’s own community.

In the Mizo worldview, there is no distinction between sacred and the secular or religious and non-religious or between the spiritual and material things of life. Every component was closely interrelated with the other. If one component was affected the whole cultural structure was affected. The realm of the supernatural reached all aspects of human life and all human activities. The scale of values and cosmology of the people were determined by their notion of the supernatural. Religion, for the Mizos meant an encounter, acknowledgement of, and obedience to the reality of the presence of God. Religion permeated every aspect of life because of which there could be no irreligious people in traditional Mizo society. In fact, it was impossible to live without religion since Mizo traditional religious life were inseparable, like the two sides of the
same coin. Being orally traditioned, the Mizo did not have any written creed to be recited but these creeds were instead written and passed on from one generation to another. It was written in the hearts and experiences of the people and the village and the society itself was a living creed. It is not centered on any great historical person; rather it is that which centers on nature/creation. Therefore, religion existed within the whole system of their being.

Before the Britishers brought Christianity into the state, the Mizos lived an entirely isolated life. Occasional contacts with their neighboring areas did not affect their way or style of life in any form. “Their culture politics, economy, social life and religion were not influenced, nor they were oppressed and exploited. They were sovereign in their own ways, under no outside rule or pressure” 38 Therefore, it was their traditional values that were supreme until the inception of the new religion i.e. Christianity.

Lieut. Col. John Shakespear and Major A.G Mc Call were the first two non-Mizos to study sakhu in ‘Lushai-Kuki Clans, 1912’ and ‘Lushai-Chrysalis, 1949’ respectively where both characterizes the religion as animism and stress more on the propitiatory sacrifices. Rev. 38 F. Hrangkhuma, Christianity among the Mizos in Mizoram.
Liangkhaia was the first Mizo to have a serious study of sakhua in ‘Mizo Chanchin’, Published in 1938 and in ‘Mizo Sakhua’.

Religion is the normal way of looking at the world and experiencing life itself. We cannot understand the Mizo society without understanding its religion. It is well integrated into the different areas of their lives. It is their religion, which gave Mizos a sense of security in life. Within their religious way of life, they know who they were, how to act in different situations, and how to solve their problems.

It may be noted that there is no word in the Mizo language for religion as such. The Mizo language of course has words referring to religious ideas, religious practices, prayers, etc. ‘Sakhua’ is the nearest Mizo equivalent used for the translation of ‘religion’. It is a compound word formed from ‘sa’ and ‘khua’, which latter came to be known as ‘sakhua’. It is difficult to give a particular definition of sakhua; different interpretations have been given even amongst the Mizo scholars themselves. In short the term would refer to God, called Pathian. Saiaithanga in his book entitled ‘Mizo Sakhua’ defined it as - “The Mizo sakhua is simply worship of ramhuai, jungle spirit”39 In the attempt to define the meaning of sakhua scholars like Lal Biak Thanga have given a

39 Saiaithanga, Mizo sakhua, pg 1.
literal interpretation of it - 'sa' as meat and 'khua' as village or nature whereas Zawla infers as - “The original roots of the term sakhua are 'sa' and 'khua' each of which means Pathian, and a combination of the two makes sakhua.”40 This definitions run in parallel with Liangkhaia’s definition of sakhua as - “The main object of our worship were ‘sa’ and ‘khua’ and we combine the two to make ‘sakhua’41. Hrangthiauva and Lalchungnunga too are of the view that sakhua is the belief of worship of one good unseen God, Pathian, residing in heaven, the creator of all and one who blesses and protects his creations. It is this Pathian, along with the good spirits believed to reside everywhere, above and below the earth that is worshipped. According to Lianzika, a priest in the pre-Christian Mizo religion affirms that ‘sakhua’ is a search for an unknown God to whom Mizos rendered worship and service 42. Sa was usually literally translated as meat because male pigs were killed meant to venerate the ‘Sa’. This meat was cooked and eaten by members of the particular clan. Members of other clans could not share this meat. Members called 'dawisa kil pui thei' meaning those members who could share the sacrificial meat only were allowed to share the sacrificed meat. The male pig meant for a sacrificial worship was a ‘vawkpa sutngahak’43. Vawkpa means a male pig; ‘sut’ means ‘a post inside a house supporting

40 Zawla, Mizo pg 78.
41 Liangkhaia, Mizo sakhua pg 2.
42 K. Vanlaltlani in thesis.
43 Zatluanga, Mizo chanchin, pg 77, Mizo Academy of letters, Aizawl.
the ride pole'\textsuperscript{44}; 'nghak' means 'to wait'. Therefore 'vawkpa sutngahak' can be translated as a special male pig (reared by the family/clan) waiting to be lifted and placed on the 'sut' (the post). The male pig was killed by a 'sadawt' of the particular clan. 'Sa' literally means 'meat' and 'dawt' means 'to pierce'. The two words combined together can thus be translated as one who kills the animal for sacrifice i.e. it means a priest. The 'sadawt' guided the family or clan as to when or where the sacrifices were to be offered. Most of the clans offered the sacrifice mainly in the evening while the 'Lusei' clan particularly performed it a little latter just when stars start to appear in the sky \textsuperscript{45}. Each sadawt chanted his own 'thiamhla'. Thiamhla is an incantation or an invocation or a mantra chanted by the 'sadawt' (priests) to the deity of the clan. This thiamhla may be the same or different from the thiamhla of other clans. The sadawt (priests) invokes 'sa' on behalf of the clan. The thiamhla is as follows -

\begin{quote}
\textit{Hual ang, hual ang Chhunga te chhungkua}

\textit{Thla hual ang, nipui dam chen, thlapui dam chen}

\textit{Dam turin, chhuah lam leh tlak lamah.}

\textit{Tui dung leh tlang dungah, a kalna apiangah}

\textit{Hniak rem rap turin khuanu'n min veng rawh se,}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{44} James Herbert Lorrain (Pu Buanga), Dictionary of the Lushai language (2nd rpt), Calcutta.
\textsuperscript{45} Zatluanga, Mizo chanchin, pg 78.
The above thiamhla means- 47

Let us protect, protect Chhunga’s family,
Protect his life, till the sun and the moon shines,
For a long life, east or west.
Anywhere he goes, by the rivers or the hills,
May khuanu watch over for a prosperous life,
Accept this precious offering of mine.

After the invocation, the priest pierces the pig to death and rubs the blood of the sacrificed animal on the forehead and elbows of each member of the particular clan. Parts of the sacrificed animal known as ‘saserh’ (‘sa’ - meat; ‘serh’ - sacred) is separated and the rest of the meat is cooked and eaten by members of the clan. This is how a clan got their identity and was given their clan deity. Now, since the deity they worshipped was meant to protect them from illness, misfortunes, calamities, disaster etc, when a person becomes unhealthy or met with any kind of misfortune they would say, “In sa biak hi a dik lo a ni” meaning “your ‘sa’ is not right”. On the other hand, if a person/clan was healthy and was prosperous in life they would say “In sa biak hi in be fuh a ni” meaning “the ‘sa’ you’ve worshipped is good/right”. But, there

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46 Zatluanga, Mizo chanchin, pg78.
47 Own translation
was hardly any case where a person blamed his ‘sa’ for any misfortune that he met.

‘Sa’ is the origin to which a person individually belonged by birth and refers to the God of an individual first and next of a family or of a clan to which an individual belonged. ‘Khua’ is the other word used with ‘sa’ to form the compound word ‘sakhua’ (religion/God). The term ‘khua’ has two meanings i.e ‘nature’ and ‘village’. The most commonly translated version is as ‘nature’ from which the term ‘khuanu’ arises, meaning Mother Nature. It was believed that this ‘khuanu’ was the protector of ‘khua’ i.e. village (the 2nd meaning of ‘khua’). From this, also arises, ‘khuavang’. Both ‘khuanu’ and ‘khuavang’ were meant to be village protectors, protecting not only members of the village community but even their animals. Therefore ‘khua’ was a village deity known to be the watcher or keeper of a khua (village); a village guardian. The meaning of the term is seen in the saying- “Khuanuin min veng rawh se” meaning “May ‘khuanu’ (Village protector) protect us”. ‘Nu’ here means ‘mother’; therefore ‘khuanu’ is identified as a female deity.

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48 K. Vanlalchuanawma, Revival movement and the church in Mizoram.
49 Ibid.
50 Rev. Liangkhaia, “Mizo sakhua” in Mizo Zia Rang, Published by Mizo Academy of letters, pg3
**Khua** was worshipped by the offering of a ‘sial’ i.e a mithun. The mithun was killed by a ‘sadawt’ (priest) of the village chief’s clan. He performed the required rituals and chants the following ‘thiamhla’ which runs as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Haw khuain aw, ka chalvawm lo chhang ang che,} \\
\text{Pi Biaki khuain aw, ka chalrawn lo chhang ang che,} \\
\text{Pu Biaka khuain aw, ka chalrawn lo chhang ang che.}
\end{align*}
\]

Meaning: -

- Oh, *khua*, answer my mithun
- *Khua*, worshipped by grandmother, answer my mithun
- *Khua*, worshipped by grandfather, answer my mithun

The ‘*khua*’ that is prayed to in this ‘thiamhla’ is the mother goddess ‘*khuanu*’. After this ‘thiamhla’ is chanted over and ritualistic procedures are over, the sacrificer of the mithun pierces the mithun with a spear and quickly enters into the house, followed by his wife and the ‘*sadawt*’. Since, ‘*khua*’ was a village deity, the protector of the village, none of the members of the village were allowed to go out of the village

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51 Liangkhaia, Mizo Awm Dan hlui, Aizawl 1970.
52 Own translation
53 Liangkhaia, Mizo Awm dan, pg 3.
for seven days. The following seven days were observed as sacred days\textsuperscript{54}. Though an individual donated the mithun, the sacrificial meat was shared amongst over villager without any discrimination. Being a sacrifice to a village deity, the meat was shared by everyone in the village.

Therefore, as Liangkhaia identifies ‘\textit{sa}’ referred to one’s clan identity and \textit{khua} to the village guardian or protector\textsuperscript{55}. Zairema, Zawla and Liangkhaia all fall in the same line of thought identifying ‘\textit{sakhua}’ as the guardian spirit of a clan or of a family\textsuperscript{56} or also as a ‘family god’\textsuperscript{57}. This means that ‘\textit{sa}’ was considered as ‘\textit{Pathian}’ (God), the origin of the various clans indicating God as the Creator whereas ‘\textit{khua}’ means ‘\textit{Khuavang}’ or ‘\textit{Khuanu}’, regarded as the protector of khua (village). \textit{Khua} thus signifies Him as the sustainer, Protector and Designer of man’s destiny. As mentioned earlier, since Mizo traditional religion was a community religion, individual deities and community deities were inseparable. It was probably due to this that in course of time, ‘\textit{sa}’ and ‘\textit{khua}’ were both combined together to form the compound word ‘\textit{sakhua}’ commonly translated as ‘religion’ in the English version.

\textsuperscript{54} Liangkhaia, Mizo chanchin, Mizo Academy of letters, 1976 pg 25
\textsuperscript{55} Liangkhaia, Mizo chanchin, Mizo academy of letters, 1976 pg 25
\textsuperscript{56} Zairema, “Kristian nih hmaa Mizo sakhua” in Mizo miziaa thu, Aizawl Synod Publishing Board, 1988, pg 36.
\textsuperscript{57} Zawla, Mizo pg 61.
Therefore, contrary to the critiques of Mizo religion, 'Sakhua'/religion, is not the worship of mere evil spirits 'ramhuais' but a bond with an unknown power believed to protect their clan or family. Specific sacrifices were offered for sakhua. Other common sacrifices offered were that which were meant to drive out or please the malicious spirits which troubled them in times of sickness, afflictions etc, in life. Sakhua can thus be defined as the belief and worship of an unseen and unknown power, a relationship between God and human beings interrupted frequently by the 'ramhuais' (evil spirits).