CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Divided into a number of clans, the Mizos, formerly known as the Lushais, belong to the Mongoloid stock of the Kuki-Chin group and claim their origin from Chhinlung, a place which has not been ascertained to any degree of certainty, as their traditional home. But all their tradition and folklore suggest that they originally came from southern China, probably from the mountains of Szechwan, and in the course of their westward move they had made some settlements in Burma among the Shans, particularly in the Chindwin valley before their arrival in the present land. While living in Burma they had acquired a certain degree of civilisation. Still they continue to practise jhuming as their main livelihood and chieftainship as their system of administration.

The pre-British society of the Mizos was structurally fabricated by a chief as its head. In theory the chief was a despot within his village and he could ask his subjects to supply him all things he needed. Disputes, criminal and civil were tried by him with the assistance
of his council of elders called upa who served as the backbone of the chief by taking part in his day-to-day affairs. The chief was however, a benevolent ruler because the fame of the chief mainly lay on the number of villages under his jurisdiction. The villagers could leave their chief for another village if they found him too despotic or cruel. The puithiam (priest) was assigned for religious performances. The other "officials" who enjoyed a socially higher status than the common people were the zalen, the ramhual, the thirdeng and the khawchhiar. This class of people did not pay tax to the chief, except the ramhuales. The common people paid their "tax" in paddy. There was no fixed rate or amount to be paid and the amount depended upon the demand of the chief. Though there existed social distinctions, there was no distinct social class barriers. Everyone was like a big family sharing things in common.

The distinct feature of the Mizo society was the existence of the bawiship which was markedly different from slavery. Bawis were those who surrendered themselves to the chief for any reason. The majority of bawis belonged to the weaker sections of the people and poor widows who could no longer support themselves. The chief provided them with food and protection in return they
helped him in his household and other works. Every bawi became "bawi" with his own consent. A similar institution called sal (slavery) was mainly formed by persons who were captured in time of wars, raids, etc. Unlike bawis everyone could keep sal at his own disposal. A chief captured in war was neither a sal nor a bawi, but was kept by the victor chief as his friend. Generally speaking these different groups of people could earn their freedom by paying traditional ransoms which varied from person to person and from time to time.

The Zawlbuk institution had played a significant role in moulding the Mizo society. It was the place where the young learned discipline through the older inmates of the Zawlbuk. It was the nerve-centre of the Mizo society.

The warring nature of life of the Mizos in the early society obliged the people to admire and value the valiant and the one who possessed tlawmgaihna, an unwritten code of etiquette demanding selflessness in any needed situation. Without the Zawlbuk and the men who acquired the virtues of courage and tlawmgaihna no village life was safe and secure from attacks by other villagers. Men who acquired these quality were held in high esteem and
were honoured by offering of zu with cups specially made of bamboo. They were indeed precious for the chief because they were the custodians of honour and were also protectors of the common people by their acts of bravery in time of war or raids.

Zu played a unique role in the social life of the Mizos. It was an essential ingredient in every social and religious performance. There was hardly any ceremony performed in which zu was not served. In spite of its common use in the community life of the Mizos, zu, however, rarely brought an ugly repercussions inside or outside the family.

The community life of the early Mizos can be pictured through the community work (hnatlang) where all people, big and small, involved on an equal footing. The nature of work always varied from time to time. There were occasions in which such free services were rendered, for instance, a man, unable to cultivate his jhum, was helped through this voluntary social work which was the spirit of hnatlang. A house belonging to a widow was constructed in the same spirit and the building of a chief's house was done through such community labour. Prior to the British rule paid labour was unknown.
The status of women were not equal to that of the men and they occupied an inferior position in every aspect of life. Notwithstanding this position women contributed much to social work and there was no marked difference in their worth from that of the men, especially in matters concerning jhuming.

In a patrilineal society like that of the Mizos, marriage was solemnised as a bond of family tie. Parents were extremely careful in selecting partners for their children. They looked into the past history of the family and marriage would be solemnised only when no blemish was found. Bride's price existed and it was paid in kind, and the price was normally fixed in terms of mithun. On the day of marriage the bride's family killed a female pig of which a certain portion of the meat was also given to the groom's family. With it the family of the groom had to prepare a feast for the public or only for special invitees. The feast prepared on that day was called lawisa. The peculiar nature of the marriage is that the puithiam, the religious head, did not solemnise the weddings and did not take part in the nuptial ceremony. The marriage was performed with no religious connotations.

The Mizo's belief in the existence of several gods led to the worship of them and the offering of animal
sacrifices with a view to propitiating them. They believed that these spirits caused harm and illness to men unless sacrifices were abundantly offered. They also believed that these spirits lived in the big stones, big trees, caves, precipice, cliff, etc. and therefore, these stones and trees were worshipped. They also trusted in the existence of one supreme God from whom all things originated. They were aware that they needed not to worship him with any offerings. In their religious belief the Mizos did not connect their gods, even God, with the Pialral and Mithikhua, the two abodes of life, after death. The main tenet of their religious belief was the attainment of the eternal joy in Pialral.

Complete isolation from the rest of the world in the wake of modern civilisation is impossible. Their contact with the British occurred in the 19th century through their raids. The first recorded raid occurred in 1826, when a certain number of people were killed and many others were made captives. The Mizos justified their acts of raid and claimed that the British always encroached on the land belonging to them. Their hunting grounds were turned into tea plantations thus causing a great loss of ivories to the Mizo chiefs. The developments between them
thus brought the British Government to permanently occupy the hills in 1890. The British Government was, however, careful enough to effect a switch-over to a new system of administration for the tribes. Realising that immediate change would be too much for them the Government adopted a policy of "wait and see", thereby slowly bringing them under their full control.

The introduction of British rule in the hills had brought about notable changes in the social and cultural life of the people within a short period of time. The range of changes differed in every aspect of the society. In some areas changes occurred rapidly, in some aspects they were gradual, and still in other fields, changes were very slow. In general the changes which had taken place in the Mizo society as a result of the British administration, the Christian missionaries, education, etc. were favourably rapid.

The contributions of the British administration in introducing changes into the indigenous people were remarkable. During the colonial rule of over half a century the Government undertook many developmental programmes in line with the administrative policies. The chieftainship was retained with limited power and the government made good use of the chiefs in carrying out their policies.
Roads were constructed for the imperative need of the administration throughout the area and this opening up of new and better communications broke the barriers among the different villages which had earlier never been connected. Formal education was started by the Government with a view to removing the ignorance of the local people. The management of education was later handed over to the Missions whose exchequer was found not very sound. Financial assistance was then given to the mission in the form of grants.

Soon Christian missionaries appeared and worked for the spread of their religion. The spread of Christianity among the Mizos was swift and soon covered the entire Mizos. As a result, within a short span of time, the chief-oriented society was converted into a Christian-oriented society on the pattern of the western culture. One of the factors for the rapid change was the prophecy current among them that very soon a new religion would come to them substituting the existing one. Therefore, when Christianity arrived in the Mizos in 1894, it was considered as the fulfilment of the prophecy that the white men across the ocean would bring a new religion. In the initial stage, the missionaries, therefore, had no
problem with the local people in propagating the new-found religion. Thus within less than a century all the indigenous inhabitants embraced Christianity.

As it spread quickly, the influences of Christianity in effecting changes were found imperative. Head-hunting was abandoned by the people when they were enlightened by the teaching of Christianity and due to the efforts of the administration. Induced by conscience people began to stop this notorious practice. In abandoning the institution of Zawlbuk the case was, however, different. It was not the policy of the government that brought about the end of Zawlbuk in the society, but was primarily due to the changed attitude of the people themselves. The outcry of the people in the second decade of the century was against the institution where formal education was properly set in among the people. In spite of Government pressure for its continuance, the people voted for its abolition. The elimination of bawiship in the Mizo society was another story that was different from that of the Zawlbuk and head-hunting. For persons alien to the Mizo society bawiship appeared to be in the same class as social criminals or like an abhorrent institution having similarities in many
respects. In the true sense of the term, however, bawiship was like a refuge where the poor and the needy people found shelter and protection with food and warmth. Its abolition was, therefore, not easy, mainly because people still favoured its existence. No attack on bawiship was heard from the local people until it was vehemently assaulted by the foreign missionary in the person of Peter Fraser.

One remarkable effect of conversion was that people soon began to give up their primitive pre-notion that bad spirit or demons known to Mizos as huai inhabited caves, trees, stones, etc. They soon abandoned such notions which often caused social retardations in the life of the people. This changed attitude had enabled them to take a right view of nature. Their ideas had shifted from conservatism to liberalistic ones. They now dare to judge things by themselves using their own conscience. They were now free from the influences of haunted demons. At the same time, due to the activities of Christian missionaries people changed their habit of drinking from zu to tea. Since zu drinking was forbidden among the native Christians, they began to drink tea instead. When this became popular among them, the non-believers also followed the suit. Unfortunately this forbidden treat
did not long remain forbidden even among the Christians for the simple reason that they began to interpret the Christian teaching in their own way and that zu did not do any harm to their Christian way of life. Marriages still retained manifestations of traditional primitive forms, although it is solemnised in the Church.

The system of education as introduced by the missionaries in Mizoram was that of the English pattern, primarily with a view to making the people read Bible. In the beginning, the method was very simple. Science subject was not introduced. In spite of all this drawbacks or demerits, the contributions of the Christian missionaries to education were significant. As a matter of fact, due to their small beginning, the Mizos now claim a comparatively high literacy percentage in the country, Mizoram being the highest in Northeast India.

Before it was abolished, the institution of chief­tainship had suffered from two severe attacks under the British rule and then during the early years of the District Council. The final exit of chiefs as the traditional head of the society took place in 1955 when political pressure was too formidable. When the political
movement was intensified the chiefs were one of the main targets of attack because they had been considered as a stumbling block to the future political destination of the people. But the abolition of chieftainship was a grave blunder ever committed by the administration as well as the people in Mizoram. The abolition may be justified on the ground that people had been suffering long enough under the arbitrary rule of the chiefs. But the other side of the coin is that people had enjoyed complete freedom in a sense that they could leave the chief's village whenever they found the chief too despotic. They could migrate to another village to escape from the harsh treatment meted out by the chief. Even viewed from the present day situation, the abolition appears to have been a serious mistake. It is still believed that if the chiefs would have ever ruled today with a limited powers as they did under the British and under the District Council, it would have been better in view of local administrations because the chiefs had a traditionally deeper sense of oneness with the people and the land than the elected body - the Village Council - through which the Government now runs its administration in the village level. The main defect of the Council is that it is unable to harbour any sense of personal involvement. This
has resulted in administrative loopholes in the village level. It further enshrines corrupt practices among the general public.

The Mizos had gone through different stages of change during the course of the British colonial rule where one peculiar character noticeable in the people was their adaptability. This trait enabled people to adjust themselves to the altered situation thus paving the way for rapid change in every sphere of life. This ideal was acquired through what is called *tlawmngaihna*. When the people opposed the British advent and when they were defeated, they could accept defeat with confidence. They accepted Christianity as their new religion. Its activities, with the exception of the vested chiefs, were not thwarted by anyone else. The spread of formal learning was highly welcomed everywhere but without any awareness of its impact. But they soon learned that education was a gateway to progress in life. This determined their future course of action.

As regards their economy, the people still depended very much on bare sustenance from their land. It is learnt that in normal time they managed themselves with the produce they made in jhum cultivation. But when famine occurred their sufferings knew no bounds as they
had no other means to fall back. But with the coming of the British there was a steady improvement in their economy and they had to rely on the British when there were severe famines. They exchanged their agricultural produce with the goods sold in the trade marts set up within the chiefs' territories or elsewhere outside Mizoram.

The rapid change in the society as brought forth by various factors has a profound effect on the cultural life of the people. The indigenous customs and practices are too fast disappearing from the society and no firmer replacement has set in. People do not know how to adjust themselves in a free society where social obligations and norms are not observed. They do not know how to live in a transition between the primitive and the changed society after the British. The people are no longer customarily bound by any social obligations. This makes the society a permissive one in the sense that there are no social laws or obligations to curb impetuosity. The transformation of the society from primitive to modern way of living not only affected the individual but the whole general life thus bringing about social instability. One can say that the people at present are in a dilemma. The good old customs and practices are given up in the name of Christianity and education, while Christian
values and education have not yet succeeded in shaping the core of values or principles, thus bringing about social imbalances. Due to this, differences of opinion have arisen among the Christians bringing harms to the good image of the church. Rift among them is an inevitable outcome. As a result, different local Christian denominations have been established. Misuse of their social freedom led the people to develop new ideas on political aspirations which finally led them to a secessionist movement which had erupted in 1966. The idea of such movement also finds support mainly from various sections of the Christians who insistently link their religious philosophy with their political aspirations. Such people always try to have Christianity as their political backing.