

Cultural Factors of Christianizing the erstwhile Lushai Hills (1890-1940)

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Abstract

Alexandrapore incident became a turning point in the history of the erstwhile Lushai Hills inhabited by simple hill people, living an egalitarian and communitarian life. The result of the encounter between two diverse and dissimilar cultures that were contrary to their form of living and thinking in every way imaginable resulted in the political annexation of the erstwhile Lushai Hills by the British colonial power, which was soon followed by the arrival of missionaries. In consolidating their hegemony and imperial designs, the missionaries were tools through which the hill tribes were to be pacified from raiding British territories. In the long run, this encounter resulted in the emergence and escalation of Christianity in such a massive scale that the hill tribes with their primal religious practices were converted into a westernised religion. The paper problematizes claims for factors that led to the rise of Christianity by various Mizo Church historians, inclusive of the early generations and the emerging church historians. Most of these historians believed that waves of Revivalism was the major factor in Christianizing the erstwhile Lushai Hills though their perspectives or approach to their presumptions are different. Hence, the paper hypothesizes that cultural factors were integral to the rise and growth of Christianity in the erstwhile Lushai Hills during 1890-1940 as against the claims made before.

Keywords : 'Cultural Factors of Conversion,' Tlawmngaihna, Thangchhuah, Pialral, Revivals.

I. Introduction

Bengkhuai, a Lushai chief's raid on the tea garden at Alexandrapore (Reid, 1978:10) resulted in the capture of Mary Winchester. The British Government sent the military expeditions, into the erstwhile Lushai Hills, from different angles, not only in response to the Alexandrapore incident but also to subdue other Lushai

chiefs. C. L. Hminga (1987:43) and Zairema (1978:1-2), pioneer church leaders opine that the Alexandrapore incident was the immediate cause for the arrival of Christianity. Consolidation of British rule in the erstwhile Lushai Hills further isolated the annexed tribes from all possible links with the plains people. Hence, the missionaries were given acquiescence of

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settlement, with a stringent condition of pacifying (McCall, 2003: 318) the tribes. With the arrival of the missionaries and the presence of colonial rulers, ancestral practices and traditions soon gave way to Christianity. At the initial stage Christianization was gradual but within a span of five decades, majority of the population of erstwhile Lushai Hills became Christians.

This paper highlights certain hypotheses to consider issues such as the factors involved wherein a populace which, in isolation had been living a culture handed down to them from their fore-bearers for centuries could suddenly surrender their practices. It seeks to locate whether British consolidation resulted as the consequence of the intended pacification. It also looks to find if Christianization was a cultural process of change or the impact of westernization comprising the work of both colonial and missionaries' hegemony. The emphasis of the paper is to analyse if there can be sufficient validation where cultural factors for the most part are dependent in the process of Christianizing the erstwhile Lushai Hills.

II. Methodology: 'Cultural Factors of Conversion'

In *Understanding Religious Conversion*, Lewis Rambo interprets his conversion model, "Religious Factors of Conversion." Rambo's intended research limits conversion within Christianity. Rambo questions the factors that make conversion viable for people especially in the modern world (1993:ix-xiv).² Rambo in-

roduces his stage model to integrate different disciplines in the study of conversion; a heuristic construction that will help study the process of conversion without claiming to cover everything or to eventually lead to a perfect understanding of conversion (Naomi Kok, 2006: 10; Rambo: 165).³ The "Cultural Factors of Conversion" theorised by Lewis Rambo comprises seven stages; 1. Context; 2. Crisis; 3. Quest; 4. Encounter; 5. Interaction; 6. Commitment; and, 7. Consequence, (Naomi Kok:10).

II.1 Rambo's use of Conversion

While admitting that no model can encompass the whole of reality, Rambo chooses four basic components of conversion: cultural, social, personal and religious systems. Changes in an individual's thoughts, feelings and actions often preceded by anguish, turmoil, despair, conflict, guilt, and other difficulties; religion as the sacred, encounter with the holy, constituting both the goal of a conversion. The important fact Rambo identifies in conversion is the idea of respect considering what the convert has to go through in the process (Rambo: 8-9). Rambo views that there is no one cause of conversion, no one process, and no one simple consequence; Rambo explains conversion, which he finds are of three kinds: a) Conversion is a process overtime, not a single event; b) Conversion is contextual and thereby influences and is influenced by a matrix of relationships, expectations, and situations, and; c) Factors in conversion process are multiple, interactive and cumulative (Rambo: 5-7). This connotes

conversion as a process, has its complications, is not immediate, repeatedly debated, and is a gruesome process that can be met with resistance or acceptance. Rambo thus defines:

Conversion is paradoxical. It is elusive. It is inclusive. It destroys and it saves. Conversion is sudden and gradual. It is created totally by the action of God, and it is created totally by the actions of humans. Conversion is personal and communal, private and public. It is a retreat from the world. It is a resolution of conflict and empowerment to go into the world and to confront, if not create, conflict. Conversion is an event and a process. It is an unending and beginning. It is final and open-ended. Conversion leaves us devastated – and transformed (Rambo: 176).

III. Identifying the Mizo and their Origin

H. Lalrinthanga, in tracing the different traditions about the usage of the term Mizo concludes with acceptance of the primary knowledge gained by J. Shakespear (1898-1904), the first Superintendent of erstwhile Lushai Hills. J. Shakespear's identification of the term Mizo has more factual statement considering his expertise of knowing the Mizo from his own experience, and his comparison with other ethnic groups (Shakespear, 1975: 1). Shakespear wrote: *Among the people themselves the Lusheis are sometimes spoken of as Duhlian, at the derivation of which I will hazard no guess, and the gen-*

eral population of the hills is spoken of as Mizo ('introduction'). The Mizo are believed to belong to the Sino-Tibetan (or Tibeto-Chinese) in origin. In his analysis of the Mizo, Baveja tells an interesting story of a conversation he had with an elderly Mizo person who says that the Mizo people, in a very ancient legend, were involved in the construction of a long and thick wall in China, and was once living there (Baveja, 1970: 1). The uniqueness of the Mizo migration is that it was not *en masse* but sporadic with a hiatus of years in between their migration, the first batch arriving around 16th century. Lalrimawia explains that 'the oral traditions available and the ethnography of Mizo language as of Mongoloid by some, Tibeto-Burman by other could probably point to some possibility. And in the southwards they moved into present Burma. They settled peacefully in the Shan State, Kabaw Valley and in Khampat. They planted a Banyan tree at Khampat with the hope of returning before they were forced to leave Khampat by a defective ruler century' (Lalrimawia, 1995:14).

III. Encounter of Cultures

Geography of Mizoram did not allure Colonial British attention since it offered nothing new. Their isolation and inter-village skirmishes kept them busy for decades. The expansion of the tea gardens and elephant hunting gradually threatened their isolation and their self-acclaimed sovereignty (Ralte, 2008:1). Hence, Mizo chiefs raided villages under the British jurisdiction causing damages and alarm. Kipgen analyses the following factors of

raids by Mizo chiefs with the following objectives: First they were directed against kindred clans whom they drove out of their hills; second, they were directed against tea gardens encroaching upon their lands; thirdly, it provided booties of war and slaves to serve their chiefs; and, lastly, the prized trophy of head-hunting (Kipgen, 1997:130). Ralte, puts the factors of Mizo raids in the following way which are closely similar to Kipgen's proposed factors: a) To secure their territory; b) For want of Iron and metals which were forged into weapons of war and for use in agricultural works; c) Head-hunting; and, d) For want of vengeance (Ralte: 35-37). The raids led to the two Lushai Expeditions.

III.1 The Lushai Expedition 1871-72

Zatluanga reasons the cause of the arrival of the British Government by analyzing that 70 years before 1854, Mizo chiefs had raided the plains 19 times (Zatluanga, 1996: 178). There were continual raids also in 1750, 1776, 1777, 1826, 1842, 1844, 1847, 1849, 1865 and 1868. Though advances were made to avenge these raids by the British army, it usually ended in mutual agreement and peace treaties (Ralte: 1-28; McCall: 45-47). But it was the numerous and spontaneous raids by Mizo chiefs during 1870-1871 including the famous raid on Alexandrapore tea garden, killing of Mary Winchester's father and abducting her on 23rd January, 1871 that provoked Lushai Expedition of 1871-72 (Reid: 10; Zairema: 10; Hminga: 43). According to A. S. Reid, the reason

for the expedition sent by the Governor-General in Council was:

It was the desire of the Supreme Government to show the Lushais that they are completely in our power, to establish permanent friendly relations with them, to induce them to promise to receive our native agents, to make travelling safe to all, to demonstrate the advantages of trade and commerce, and to prove them in short, they had nothing to gain but everything to lose by acting against British Government (Reid: 17).

The Lushai Expedition of 1871-72 begun in December 1871. Mary Winchester was rescued by Brig. General Brownlow, assisted by T. H. Lewin, a courageous and honourable British Civil Officer. Lewin recollects, "the results of the four months may be summed up very briefly: We had recovered Mary Winchester, and released from captivity upwards of one hundred British subjects; two powerful tribes had been effectually subjugated, and twenty of their villages which had offered resistance had been destroyed, while the principle chiefs of those tribes had personally tendered their submission, and entered into solemn engagements with us for future good behaviour (Lewin, 1977: 288)."

III.2 The Lushai Expedition of 1889 and the Chin Lushai Expedition of 1889-1890

The Lushai Expedition resulted in peace between the Mizo chiefs and the

British for merely a decade. On 3rd February, 1888, Lieut. John F. Stewart and his escort were ambushed and killed by Hausata, a Lai chief with his warriors numbering 250 – 300 in South Lushai Hills (Reid: 39, 41-43). The news reached Calcutta on 6th December, 1888 where a council sanctioned The Lushai Expedition of 1889 led by Colonel V. W. Tregear. The objectives were for submission of the raiders, retrieve the arms and ammunition of Lt. Stewart, release the captives and establish a military post in the central and dominant post in Mizoram Kipgen: 135).

On 8th January, 1889, a party of about 600 men led by Lenphunga and his brother Zaroka, sons of Sukpial descended on the Chengri valley in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and within 2 marches of Rangamati burnt 24 villages (Reid: 11). The Government of India decided to send the Chin Lushai Expedition of 1889-1890. The objectives were to punish the raiders of Chengri village, establish a stockaded godown with sufficient guard at Changsil, punish Lenphunga as severely as Commander Daly's means permit i.e. unless Lenphunga surrenders himself unconditionally and gives up all captives (Reid: 15-17).

The result of the Expedition of 1889 was the establishment of Fort Lungleh. The Lushai Expedition of 1889-90 led by Daly and joined by Col. Skinner on 30th January, 1890, released captives of Lenphunga numbering 63 in all (Reid: 16). Daly built a stockade in Aijal which later became the Headquarters of the erstwhile

Lushai Hills District with the Assam Column building posts at Aijal and Changsil, establishment of Fort Tregear Fort Lungleh strengthened.

IV. Arrival of the Mission Societies: Brief Introduction of Initial Works

Christian Mission followed the consolidation of British imperial rule in 1890-91. The native's reception of the missionaries was quite different from those they accorded to other Europeans. Since the missionaries could not find coolies to carry their belongings and had to carry it themselves, the native people were bewildered and surprised, calling them 'Wandering Sahibs' and 'Mad Sahibs (Llyod, 1984: 26; Hminga: 58). Some were appreciative of their arrival who believed that the missionaries intended nothing but the good of the Mizo (Llyod: 31). Some were suspicious of their arrival saying, *"the Government is certainly clever. It says, 'Let us not try to make the Lushais slaves by the power of the sword. We shall use fair words and kind deeds and, when we have a firm hold on them, we can do just as we like with them.' This is why they sent these sahibs here (Llyod: 31)." William Williams, a Welsh missionary working in the Khasi Hills, was the first ever foreign missionary to set foot on the soil of Mizoram in March of 1891 to explore prospects of mission work. The General Assembly of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists in 1892, assigned him the responsibility of looking after the Lushai Hills mission. However, his untimely death in 1892, delayed the start of the project.*

In the meantime, two missionaries James Herbert Lorrain and Frederick William Savidge, sent by the Arthington Aborigines Mission (AAM) had entered the region and started mission work after arriving at Aijal in 1894. They introduced alphabets in Mizo language along with translated works of the Gospels, a grammar and Dictionary (Kyles, 1994: 18). Their arrival and works upset the British Government's proposal of making Bengali the court language (Hminga 49). Their first convert Taibunga unfortunately died before baptism (Lalchhuanliana, 2007: 39; Kyles, 15-18). They left Mizoram as AAM withdrew from Mizoram.

The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission, later known as Welsh Presbyterian Mission (WPM) was also preparing themselves for sending missionaries to Mizoram. The Mission Committee selected David Evan Jones in 1897 and officially declared him as the first missionary of WPM to Mizoram, set sail to India after his ordination in May 1897 (Kipgen 199). He arrived at Aijal on 31st August, 1897 along with a Khasi teacher Rai Bahajur. Warmly welcomed and taught the basic work and Mizo language by Lorrain and Savidge. By the end of 1898, Rev. Edwin Rowlands joined D. E. Jones. Rowlands was a musically gifted man with experience in teaching when he was in Texas, USA (Llyod 26). The WPM had four major objectives, education, preaching, medical and literature through which they spread the gospel (Zaithanga 16)

Having received the approval of the WPM, the Baptist Missionary Society

(BMS) sent its first missionaries to Mizoram in 1903 to work in South Lushai Hills. They were none other than Lorrain and Savidge. The two BMS missionaries set up a station at Serkawn with the permission of the local officer, and in close cooperation with the WPM. They did remarkably well towards spreading the gospel among the Mizos in the south. From the beginning, Lorrain took the responsibility for pastoral care and organization of the church; and Savidge, educational and medical work. The first baptism under BMS was on 20th January, 1904 where 23 converts were baptized; and the first Communion Service held on the day after the baptism at Sethlun Church; Medical Mission was also began in 1919 (Hminga, 2003: 10-11).

Mission work among the Maras who inhabit the extreme southern part of the land was started by the Lakher Pioneer Mission (LPM), founded in 1905 by Reginald A. Lorrain, the younger brother of Rev. J. H. Lorrain. R. A. Lorrain and his wife became the first missionaries of LPM. After undergoing medical training, they set out for Mizoram in 1907, arrived at the BMS station at Serkawn in March where they spent the monsoon season of 1907 learning the Mizo language. They resumed their journey with J. H. Lorrain and his wife and reached their mission Headquarters, Serkawr on 26th September, 1907 (Hlychho, 2009: 170). Within five years, the two missionaries greatly developed Mara literature (Kipgen: 204-205). The Lushai Hills by this time was enga-

nged with three foreign missions, the WPM, BMS and LPM. The consolidation of colonial rule enabled the propagation of education, medical and theological missions aided by native workers, thus becoming the forces behind the christianizing of erstwhile Lushai Hills.

IV. Cultural Factors of Conversion in the Erstwhile Lushai Hills

Conversion is a product of the interactions among the convert's aspirations, needs and orientations, the nature of the group into which they are being converted and the particular social matrix in which these processes transpires (Rambo: 7). The following is an analysis of the Rambo's model in understanding Christianization of the erstwhile Lushai Hills.

IV.1 Context

The importance of context is repeatedly mentioned. It is the most comprehensive of all the stages as it overarches all the other stages (Pitulac & Nastuta, 2001: 84). John Gration remarks, "every conversion is in context, a context that is multifaceted, embracing the political, social, economic and religious domain in which a person is living at the time of his or her conversion. Thus whatever the meaning of conversion, it never takes place outside a cultural context." (Gration, 1983: 157).⁴ Nieuwkerk, analysed life stories of potential converts through a biographical approach to bring the history and identity which originates in a given context (Nieuwkerk, 2008: 431).

To understand Mizo culture, it is necessary to have a background study of Mizo

life. In identifying Mizo, as migrants to erstwhile Lushai Hills from Burma in a hiatus of decades, it is possible to understand the cultural context in which they built their world view. Joshua Iyadurai found that the context in which the potential converts who attested themselves were open access to understanding their background (Iyadurai, 2010: 505). In Mizo context, because of the interdependence between the two entities, one cannot split the individual and the environment as they are mutually complementary. This conforms to Rambo's proposition that the political, social, religious, and cultural worlds are shaped by people and vice-versa (Rambo: 166).

Mizo context is multifaceted embracing the social culture which comprises the individual and the family later forming the larger cultural context which Rambo referred to as micro-context. In addition, the other aspects of economy, politics and religion form the macro-context. There exist a strong connection between the micro and macro-context. In politics, the *foci* common to all villages is the chief as the paramount and of those villages under him with all land holdings belonging to him (Sangkima, 1992: 35-36). Self-reliance and self-sufficiency forms the economy. Under the ethos of *tlawmngaihna* and *hnatlang* flourished communal life (Sangkhuma, 1995:34).⁵ Hence, nothing could be done outside the context of the Mizo society. Young girls were trained at home and boys at *zawlbuk*⁶ after reaching a certain age. In the religious sphere, this

stage constitutes the emergence of crisis, which pervades both the individual and the whole cultural life.

IV.2 Crisis

Crisis explores disorientations or disruptions in the world of the potential convert caused by the interaction and experience of forces both internal and external. Crisis can be triggered by certain social disorders, political oppression, and also by dramatic personal events that lead to the quest of religious solutions for solving problems (Pitula & Nastuta: 84; Lewis Rambo and Charles Farhadian, 1999: 23). Crisis becomes an undisputed catalyst for change.

What originates crisis? “Disenchantment” in their religion remains the major factor. Further research have proved that crisis stimulate quest when the potential convert faces too much negative experiences in their present religion. Apart from disenchantment, inadequate nurturing is the other factor. For Rambo, much of the literature in the human sciences has emphasized “social disintegration, political oppression, or something very dramatic as instigating crises (Rambo: 44).” In Mizo cultural setting, religion pervades the individual, the family and the society. The pervasiveness of religion takes the form of propitiatory sacrifices which had to be made in all aspects of life (Shakespeare, 70; Joy, 2014: 5; Dokhuma, 2008: 31-101).⁷ Therefore, the crisis in the Mizo society comprises the catalysts needed for conversion (Rambo: 48-55).⁸ Religion, comments Hossein Habibitabar, has two

conceptual functions; personal and social (Habbittabar, 2012: 9517-19). In Mizo culture, ancestral religion could not offer everyone solace, meaning, freedom from fear and the ever threatening and oppressive village priest. From a holistic overview, crisis in the Mizo religious culture was eminent, and it is therefore pertinent that it triggered quest.

V.3 Quest

Rambo’s third stage, termed “Quest,” according to Iyadurai is “to find a solution from the difficult situation, faced in crisis, the potential convert move forward in their spiritual quest to start looking for more knowledge of a new religion to test its workability (Iyadurai: 516; Bowen, 2009: 52; Rambo: 166).” It is human nature to look for something better than their present state. The convert is motivated by the desire to experience pleasure without pain, maintain a conceptual system, enhance self-esteem, establish gratifying relationships, and attain a sense of power and transcendence (Rambo: 167). In their quest for such elements in their lives, the Mizo relied on their belief in life-after death (Pachau, 2002: 47; Challiana, 1982: 54-56). To reach *Pialral* was not easy. One had to attain *thangchhuah* status. There were two types of *thangchhuah*. The first one was called *in lama thangchhuah* and the other *ramlama thangchhuah* (Kipgen: 120). In *in lama thangchhuah*, the performer must be wealthy and ready for a series of feast and ceremonies (Sangkima: 56-58).⁹ For *ramlama thangchhuah*, one must kill a bear, a bark-

ing deer, a wild mithun, a stag, and a wild boar. He should also kill a hawk and a viper (Sangkima: 58). To attain this status through wealth display or hunting skills was beyond the ability and resources of the vast majority, becoming the prerogative of a few exclusive individuals or families. Hence, for the commoners the hope of taking an abode in *Pialral* seemed elusive. The majority of the people lived in a vicious circle of crisis, triggering a quest which rested solely on an option outside their religious culture.

V.4 Encounter

In the fourth stage, the advocates of a new religion or information about fulfilment meets the potential converts. This stage introduces two different parties, the quest seekers and the advocates. New relationships are built which could either change the condition of the potential convert, positively or negatively. The advocates are unrelenting and imaginative in their approach towards the seekers. Potential converts in seeking what they want, are also active in estimating the advocate's ability. Relationship, not time is the factor considered in this stage.

Encounter needs time, patience, mentor and guide since there is always the possibility of negative reaction. The attention paid to the newcomer, the care and interest shown, the warmth and support offered by the community are some elements that have a great impact on the potential convert, and conversion carried on only if the potential convert considers the social cost of his religious choice, the tension, and

even the social stigmatization worth his while (Pitulac and Nastuta: 85-86). For the Mizo, encounter between the advocates and those filled with crisis and quests happened only after the consolidation of the British Empire and the arrival of missionaries in erstwhile Lushai Hills.

Rambo includes the nature of the advocate which comprises secular attributes, religious beliefs, the theory of conversion and motivation, making careful analysis of the advocate's strategy which includes degree of proselytizing, strategic style, mode of contact and benefits of conversion (Rambo: 66-82).¹⁰ In erstwhile Lushai Hills, some forms of encounter seemed to be effective in dealing with their crisis and quest. The use of a certain degree of proselytization in the advocate's strategy resulted in the recruitment of native workers as advocates and sent out in groups or individuals to preach the gospel as in the case of Khuma and Khara, the first two baptized Mizo Christians (Zairema: 11; Lloyd: 28.).¹¹ Since the well-to-do families were negative towards missionaries, the first converts to Christianity among the Mizo were from the periphery. Many early converts to Christianity did enjoy the benefit of conversion which was mostly economic well-being (salaried jobs) and political protection.¹² Ethical ethos especially *tlawmngaihna* was preserved as it served Christianity. Chiefs who despised the Christians and their attitudes began to be agents of persecution of the Christians (Zairema: 11).¹³ Persecutions were severest in *Khandaih* village (Zairema: 11).

V.5 Interaction

Interaction has to do with a more intensive and extended change/interchange between the advocate and the potential convert since the potential convert decides to continue with the religious group and starts to go beyond the mutual interest to “more intense levels of learning (Kim: 130; Rambo: 167).” In P. J. Kahn, & A. L. Greene, “Seeing Conversion Whole: Testing a Model of Religious Conversion,” the key element of the interaction stage is encapsulation which is “the creation of an environment in which communication and social interaction are controlled in order to allow the potential convert to experience the new religious ideas (Kahn, & Greene, 2004: 236.)” In creating such environment, physical, social and ideological encapsulation gives the potential convert new identity since they enforce the values and lessons of the new religion without any outside infiltration.

Rambo and Farhadian remarks, “Relationship for the potential convert is important as they form the network of transformation. The closer the relationship between the advocate and the potential convert, the greater is the chance of religious change. Participating in ritual practices facilitates more intense learning and brings it beyond intellectual level. The potential convert in rhetoric will also begin to use language of transformation used in the new religious group (Rambo and Farhadian: 29-30).” The potential converts start to transform their worldview gradually estranged from the world of crisis in

the previous religion. The help of the advocate in relationship, rituals, rhetoric and role playing has consolidated their position in the new religion which was a quest they had been immersed in. It was interaction that brought about changes not only in the individual but also in the larger Mizo context. The interaction between the missionaries and the Mizos translated into the establishment of churches where the new converts could express their joys, sing hymns of praises, were gifted with leadership, and was soon a force to reckon with. Theology was developed and enriched in vernacular (Rambo and Farhadian: 31).¹⁴ With the use of medicines many social “fears” were dispelled. Priests forbade the people from using it (McCall: 208-209).¹⁵ The interaction between advocates and converts who bonded in a strong relationship brought innumerable changes to Mizo culture. Interaction gradually resulted in the priests and chiefs virtually tagging along the lines of potential converts.

V.6 Commitment

Kok remarks that in the interaction stage, when change takes place on different levels of personality, commitment is often expected since the new convert learns how they should behave and think as a new person (Kok: 11; Rambo: 168). Commitment becomes the consummation of the conversion process, the consolidation stage. Central to it, is the converts reconstruction of their biographical memory and deployment of a new system of attribution in various spheres of life

(Gooren, 2007: 345). For Rambo, decision making plays a crucial part in commitment. Decision strengthens the person's involvement and willingness to be part of the new group. Apart from decision making, Rambo also identifies rituals, surrender, testimony and motivational formulation in commitment. It is a public enactment of the decision made. Surrender, which is the consolidation of transformation, plays the most difficult part in commitment since it is an inner yielding of control, and complete devotion to a new group or environment because of the paradox of conflict and sustaining surrender (Rambo: 168.) For Rambo, commitment does not postulate whether it is genuine or authentic. Surrender is.

Many Mizo church historians have suggested that strands of revivals that shook erstwhile Lushai Hills in the big four waves were factors responsible for the escalation of Christian population. Numerical growth, as suggested, cannot be contested. Liangkhaia, one of the prominent church leaders and early Mizo church historian attests the fact that the revival in 1906 did not produce such a wave since Christian population was scanty (Liangkhaia, 2006: 22, 44).¹⁶

There were some non-Christians who entered church services during revivals out of curiosity because there were new and exotic displays and acts during singing and dancing. Curious onlookers committed themselves to Christian service. Moreover, the revivals also resulted in the Christianization of chiefs and Mizo offi-

cial serving under the colonial administration (Lalchhuanliana: 153-154). In all the themes brought by the revivals, the Cross of Christ in 1919, was positively received in great magnitude as it brought to light the suffering of Christ, for suffering was an experience greatly familiar to the Mizo (Lalchhuanliana: 151).

V.7 Consequences

From the first experience of crisis and quest, the convert is always exploring. In such experience, for some, consequence is a radically transformed life while other has sense of mission, purpose, peace and quiet (Rambo: 170). This stage is important because it is where the converts will review, reinterpret and revalue their experience (Rambo: 170). The various consequences of conversion in Mizo culture, from the individual's life to the communitarian life are visible, the most prominent being the change in religious landscape. It has led to abandonment of superstitions, fears and practices, brought a feeling of oneness to an ethnic group always at skirmishes and battles with one another, a feeling of nationhood/identity, preservation or indigenization of culture and Christianity, an escalation in theology especially enriched by hymns composed in vernacular, growth of church and the need to evangelize. Since then, churches have begun sending missionaries outside erstwhile Lushai Hills and in evangelical missions at home with committed converts as missionaries.

VI. Conclusion

“Cultural Factors of Conversion” is a working model that is helpful in critically

analyzing the stages in which the Mizo rejected their age-old belief system and accepted Christianity in its place. It helped the researcher to focus on each factor and stages involved. Though Rambo did not claim his model to be perfect or inclusive, it is sufficient to explore and highlight the presumed factors necessary for this paper. In synthesizing the model with Christianization, the findings coincide with the set presumptions of the paper.

Mizo culture in context is a mixture of complexities comprising social, economic, religious and political. It is within this context that crisis can originate in the life of the people. Crisis comprises suffering of the people, fear and suspicions, the unbearable burden of having to provide animals for propitiatory sacrifices which unresolved their problems. Crisis triggered a quest. Quest is evident from *Pialral*, which was out of reach for the commoners. With crisis and quest still lingering, encountering an agent who could provide them a way out was an open alternative. People saw transformation in the new alternative leading to commitment resulting in the escalation of Christian population. Commitment thus led to a far reaching consequence. Christianization of

erstwhile Lushai Hills is traditional transition, a kind of conversion which is a movement of a group from one religion to another and often takes place in a context of cross-cultural contact and conflict. It goes parallel in process with religious preference and replacement of the old faith (Rambo: 14; Thangaraj, 2015: 24-25, 28-30).

The application of Rambo's model has been found to give sufficient relevance to the research subject undertaken. Findings point to Christianization as a cultural process. The revivals were not the only reason in the escalation of Christian population. Westernization was too dominant and systematic to be countered by the Mizo. It can be construed that much of the process in the seven stages has been applied to each aspect of Mizo culture to understand that cultural factors are indeed responsible for the Christianization of the erstwhile Lushai Hills. It was cultural factors that led to rapid rise of Christians in erstwhile Lushai Hills during the years 1890-1940. Rambo's model becomes relevant and pertinent in Mizo context since Christianity not only changed their ancestral religious practice, but the whole of their worldview.

End Notes

- 1 The author uses the terminology 'erstwhile Lushai Hills' in reference to present Mizoram for the simple fact that Mizoram as a state did not exist during the time frame chosen for the study.
- 2 Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), xi-xix. His work is done through numerous interviews of converts from

different variety of backgrounds; men and women who had embraced the Unification Church, Jews who had become Christians and vice-versa, Japanese secularist turned Christians, and Chinese people with little or no religious background who adopted Christianity because of official government discouragement. With a background of being raised in the Church of Christ, he takes nothing for granted but in fact, he questions and deliberates and details every element of the church. Interviews with eminent scholars, participation in seminars and conferences, vast reading on published conversion material are the sources that led to his proposed model. This model is a result of his vast travel and meeting of people who had conversion experiences.

- 3 Rambo stresses that the order of the stages is not the same for everyone, and is not “universal or invariant.” In developing his model, Rambo uses a methodology comprising: Observation, Description, Empathy, Interpretation, and Explanation. In developing his model, Rambo uses a methodology comprising: Observation, Description, Empathy, Interpretation, and Explanation.
- 4 John Alexander Gratton (1926-2012) spent 15 years as a Christian Missionary in Africa before starting his academic career and founding the missions and intercultural studies graduate department at Wheaton College, Illinois. He laid the foundation for mission degree in intercultural studies and helped to create practical, missions-related programmes such as Teachers of English to Speaker of Other Language Programme. Chicago Tribune, 3rd February, 2012
- 5 H. Lalrinthanga, *Church and State: Relationship in the Mizo Socio-Political Life 1952-2006* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), 3-4
- 6 A bachelor’s dormitory. It is a large building in the centre of any village where every male is obligated to stay. It is most useful during inter-village raids as it is the quickest way to be at arms.
- 7 The reasons for such need of propitiatory sacrifices were the Mizo religious consciousness that arose out of fear of spirits considered superior and harmful to them. As forwarded by researchers dealing with crisis in religious change, the factors put forward are not strange for the Mizo before the acceptance of Christianity. In fact, the individual, family and the society was in a religious crisis, a crisis from which they could not free themselves. Even though Mizo economy was small scale and could barely feed families, the insistence of religious demands was not neglected. In fact, economy suffered the most due to religious demands. Sacrificial demands were made in cases of unnatural death, barrenness, any kind of sickness that befell a member. Animals were demanded for sacrifices deemed necessary for natural death, death of infant below three months, death during child-birth, any case of unnatural deaths and burials. The presence of the village priest in the Council of Elders connotes political influence on religious culture. The religious delegates were not just part of the selected village members but important officials given specific duties. In such cases, it was the duty of the religious delegates to strengthen religious practices, need for sacrifices and

even forbidding and introducing religious ceremonies. Demands were always made of animals ranging from a fowl to anything the Priest considers necessary, a demand which could not be met by every family. Shakespear, *Lushai Kuki Clans*, 70.

- 8 Rambo describes the catalysts for conversion in terms of different categories: “mystical experience,” “near-death experience,” “illness and healing,” “the question, is that all there is?” (i.e., a growing sense of dissatisfaction with life), “desire for transcendence,” “altered states of consciousness” (e.g., higher state of consciousness without the use of drugs), “protean selfhood” (e.g., a search for meaning and for a more stable sense of self), “pathology” (e.g., emotional illness), “apostasy” (i.e., leaving a religious tradition), and “externally stimulated” forces (e.g., colonial powers or the activity of missionaries or advocates)
- 9 Sangkima narrates, “The first ceremony was sakung a ceremony for a son soon to have his own separate family with the killing of the largest pig. The next ceremony called chawng needed the slaughter of three pigs and large amount of zu. The next ceremony was sedawi chhun that needed 40 pots of zu, one mithun, a boar and two small pigs. Zankhuang was the next ceremony that required a mithun, a boar and a small pig with zu. The next ceremony was Mithirawplam, a feast in honour of ancestral spirit and similar to sedawi chhun and chawng. It was a feast which required 70 pots of zu, a he goat and a sow. Khuangchawi was the grandest of all the sacrifices and the final stage with more animals slaughtered than other sacrificial ceremonies. The performer fed the chiefs and his Council with a sow, he should also kill 3 grown mithun, 2 boars and 2 young pigs and a female mithun for the children. On the third day the couple and their daughter would throw cotton, hen, brass pots, clothes, money for the people and a dance was performed in this occasion. After all ceremonies, the performer was called thangchhuahpa and was entitled Pialral.”
- 10 Secular attributes include ethnicity, class, economic background and their uncritical support of colonialism; religious include Roman Catholics or Protestant, their educational background; theory of conversion being goals, process, inducement, ideas about indigenous practices, and motivation being God s will, Christ command, nationalism, service. They are tolerance, translation, assimilation, Christianisation, acculturation and incorporation. The important issues in this stage as can be seen from Rambo s proposal are the advocates strategy and missionary adaptation.
- 11 Khara was given a job and he reconverted to the old religion. It was not only Gospel that was preached, the theology of Christianizing was conditioned and ingrained to such an extent that anyone accepting Christianity was compelled to preach and make converts. It was the youngsters who were the most enthusiastic. The youths were organised by Jones who taught them, trained them, and took them with him until he was confident enough to let them on their own. The enthusiasm of the youth highlights their hunger for something meaningful to learn and contribute. The chiefs or his Councils and well-to-do families were seldom interested in the Gospel and reacted negatively. The Gospel initially reached only the margins or the periphery. This strategy was adopted

because the marginal were poor and unattached to power structure, freedom to explore new options of financial security and role dislocation,

- 12 Missionary adaptations, at the initial stage, were quite tolerant about the life style of the people. They were concerned with putting the oral language into written form, translating the Bible and hymns for use in order to ready themselves for whatever they had to face. Assimilation of certain dialects was visible especially in reference to the Lai tribes in the south since preference was given by the missionaries to the Duhlian tongue. In addition, mimicry of hair style, dress-code and western life was gradually developed. The main objective, Christianization was carried on without much haste. Moreover, since the advocates of encounter were part of missionary enterprise put to pacify the tribes, they were politically protected.
- 13 The encounter in the long run, give rise to salaried Christians, formed educated elites, and abolition of many cultural practices which threatened the people who were nationalistic in their attitude, Christians would be driven out sometimes in the darkest hour of the night, during extreme climatic conditions. Sometimes non-Christians would have a common *zu* drinking occasions on Sundays giving longing to the old life. Many Christians in fact returned to the old faith.
- 14 The rise of educated Mizo Christians changed Mizo culture gradually. They were not only salaried, they were soon to become doctors, experts in agriculture, excellent traders, teachers of mission schools. They were in the position in which they could earn their own life's alternative. In all these changes taking place, attitudes of personality also changed. The intertwined mission, colonialism, medicine and education gave rise to an elite class of people who were in a position to change their economic way of life giving them a new identity.
- 15 Sickness and misfortune are believed to be caused by malignant and evil spirit. What they believed were real to them. Hence, the priests forbade medicine. Perhaps coincidences without evidence were superstitiously covered up by the Priest. Medicine changed the perception of „fear of spirits. McCall comments that without the crippling and constant sacrifices and village feast, by which a man could rise in the social scale to be well deserved by his Chief and people, a Christian in a salaried job can become materially more powerful even than a village Chief.
- 16 In the second revival of 1913, revival fire spread in sporadic places of Christian presence. In the third revival in 1919, revival began from the south. In was the third revival that made Erstwhile Lushai Hills a Christian majority. Pre-1919 revival, there were just 12,495 Christians; in the census of 1931 the population of Erstwhile Lushai Hills was 1,24,404 with Christians numbering 59,123.109 The fourth revival occurred in 1935 though there are contestations among church historians regarding the date. Moreover, the uniqueness of the conversion in erstwhile Lushai Hills is that rise of converts took place in between revivals. Events happened in between revivals of which mention can be made of Christianization of villages, epidemic, natural calamity (flowering of

bamboo, famine), sectarian movements and persecutions. In such severe conditions, individuals and groups still came to announce their faith in the new religion.

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