Forging a Third Space for Spirituality and Social Justice: The Dynamics of Mizo Revival Movements in Interweaving Christianity and Primal Religious Ethos

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Abstract
This article explores the dynamics of Mizo Christian revival movements in Northeast India during British colonialization, examining their interactions with primal religious consciousness and their impact on social justice. By considering their relationship with primal religion, the article reveals the social implications. It explores how the yearning for heaven within the revival movement relates to socioeconomic liberation in present life, particularly in the context of Mizo primal eschatology. Additionally, it investigates the influence of Mizo Christian spirituality, which is the byproduct of the revival movements, on the liberation of slaves and famine relief efforts. Furthermore, it highlights how the revival movements themselves operated as a liberating force, freeing the Mizo community from the constraints of Western Christian cultural hegemony. This article underscores the significance of Mizo revival movements in creating a third space that integrates elements of Christianity and primal religion, contributing to a transformative paradigm for social change in Northeast India.

Keywords
Mizo Christian spirituality, revival, third space, social justice, primal eschatology, slaves, famine

INTRODUCTION
This article explores the intertwining of spirituality and social justice within the vibrant tapestry of Northeast India, with a particular focus on Mizo Christian revival spirituality. It begins by examining the emergence of Christianity among the Mizo community and its perceived fulfilment.
of ancestral prophecies. The pivotal role played by revival movements in shaping Mizo Christian spirituality and integrating elements of Mizo primal religious cultural traditions is then explored. This revitalization process gives rise to a unique spiritual worldview, showcasing the dynamic nature of Mizo Christian revival spirituality through individual transformative experiences and the collective spiritual journey. The article contends that the inculturation of local and primal religious cultural elements into Christianity within Mizo revival movements challenges the dominance of Western-centric Christianity, serving as an act of resistance and liberation. This transformative third space allows for the incorporation of ancestral traditions and beliefs, transcending imposed cultural norms. The article also challenges the perception that the yearning for heaven within revival movements is purely otherworldly, asserting that it takes on a holistic dimension when understood in the context of Mizo primal eschatology, encompassing liberation from socioeconomic burdens. Furthermore, the emancipation of bawi (slavery) and the relief efforts for individuals affected by famine are examined as significant outcomes of the Mizo revival movements. This exploration serves to underscore how Mizo Christian spirituality, which was itself a consequential outcome of the revival movements, has left a lasting impact on the emancipation of slavery and the provision of relief for those affected by famine. While these impacts may not be directly attributed to the revival movements, it is important to recognize that Mizo Christian spirituality emerged as a byproduct of the revivals and played a substantial role in motivating the community toward such actions.

In the context of cultural and social theory, the concept of the “third space” refers to a metaphorical space that emerges when two distinct cultures, ideologies, or traditions interact and create a new hybrid space that combines elements of both. In this article, the term “third space” signifies Mizo revival movements as a bridge between Christianity and primal religion, forming a transformative paradigm for social justice in Northeast India. My usage of the term “third space” deviates from Bhabha’s concept, that is, the “hybridization of cultures resulting” from colonial encounters often carries connotations of “cultural illegitimacy and contamination,” illustrating how the colonized individuals, as victims of conquest, are unable fully to replicate or “mimic” the cultural
characteristics” of their presumed “superior” conquerors. On the contrary, the hybridity observed during the revival movement signifies resistance rather than mimicking. It manifests as a spontaneous resurgence of local cultural elements, unintentionally contextualizing and revitalizing these aspects within the prevailing cultural framework.

To ensure a comprehensive analysis of Mizo Christian spirituality within the context of primal religious consciousness, a wide range of sources is consulted, including colonial letters, ethnography, missionary writings, church leaders’ works, and local sources. By engaging with this diverse literature, the article aims to present a holistic understanding of the interplay between spirituality, social justice, and cultural dynamics within the Mizo community. Focusing specifically on the transformative period of revival that occurred over the course of four decades, beginning in 1906, this study acknowledges that it was during these crucial years that the entire Mizo tribe underwent conversion to Christianity due to the revival movement. It is within this timeframe that we also witness the formation of Mizo Christian identity through the revival, a process that intricately weaves Christianity with primal religious ethos and cultural elements.

**Fulfilled Prophecies of the Primal Religious Seers: A Brief Historical Survey of the Advent of Christianity among the Mizo Tribe**

Following the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo on February 24, 1826, which marked the end of the first Anglo-Burmese war, British colonization gradually extended its reach in Northeast India, encompassing the Mizo

1 Homi Babha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 86.

2 The Treaty of Yandabo, signed on February 24, 1826, at the conclusion of the first Anglo-Burmese War, marked a significant historical milestone by politically connecting Northeast India with the major Indian power for the first time. Prior to the war, Northeast India had never been a part of India, and the treaty itself was signed between the East India Company and the Kingdom of Burma. Article 3 of the treaty explicitly addressed the prevention of boundary disputes between the two nations, affirming that the British would retain control over the conquered provinces of Aracan, Ramres, Cheduba, and Sandway. This political integration of Northeast India into the broader Indian context through the Treaty of Yandabo had far-reaching implications for the region’s history and development. See Manilal Bose, *Historical and Constitutional Documents of North Eastern India: 1824–1973* (Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1979), 62.
tribe in Mizoram by 1893. The Mizo tribe was subdued and colonized after a series of skirmishes with the British, and the Lakher people in the southernmost part of Mizoram fell under British rule in 1924. The presence of the British in the region paved the way for the emergence of Christianity through the missionaries. The Mizo tribe traditionally followed their own local religion (sakhua), sometimes identified as animism or primal religion. The influx of Christianity is seen by the Mizo tribe as a realization of their ancestral prophecies. Before any missionaries ever set foot on the hills of Mizoram, two tribesmen fell into trance on two separate occasions and had a vision of two lights shining upon their land. In Selhkhuma’s vision, he saw that white people (later interpreted as British colonizers) would come and subdue the Mizos. Unknown individuals would come to Mizoram, and a mysterious light would shine upon North Mizoram. Near the Tlawng River, a commoner would rise to prominence. Another prophecy came from a man named Darphawka, originally known as Hathanga. He made several predictions after a series of visions in 1855, 1882, and 1890, respectively. According to his visions, the era of chieftainship would undoubtedly come to an end. A guiding light from an unfamiliar people would reach Mizo-land, and those who placed their trust in the new God would find salvation and forgiveness for their sins. Falling into trance and prophesying is not an alien phenomenon in the Mizo primal religious practices, as some individuals were often possessed by khuavang Spirit, and such persons are called khuavang zawl, meaning “possessed by

9 Chhunruma, “Darphawka Thu II,“ 16.
Khuavang Spirit,” or Zawlnei (prophet). Such was the case with these two men, known by the names Selkhuma and Darphawka.

After the deaths of these two men, J.H Lorrain and F.W. Savidge, who were sent by the Arthington mission of Leeds, sailed to India in 1891 and reached Mizoram in 1894. Prior to their arrival, William Williams, a Welsh missionary, had scouted and visited the hills of Mizoram in 1891 with hopes of starting missionary work among the Mizos. He had distributed some tracts but succumbed to an illness. In January 1894, upon arriving in Mizoram, the two individuals committed themselves to their endeavors for roughly three and a half years. Nevertheless, owing to a disparity in mission goals with their sponsor, Arthington, Lorrain and Savidge eventually left for Arunachal Pradesh and transferred their responsibilities in Mizoram to the Welsh Mission. In 1897, D.E. Jones, followed by Edwin Rowlands in 1898, from the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission, arrived in the area, laying the foundation for what would eventually evolve into the Mizoram Presbyterian Church. Subsequently, Lorrain and Savidge returned to Mizoram in 1903, and this time they were sent by the Baptist Mission Society, establishing a Baptist Church in Southern Mizoram, while the Welsh Mission was tasked with Northern Mizoram.

In the nascent stages of the mission’s work, people were not open to the message of the missionaries. However, when Jones visited the Pukpui

11 J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge were members of High Gate Baptist Church, North London. See Rev. G.O. Newport, From the Harvest Field, February 1894. Paper presented at the Bangalore Missionary Conference December, 1894. 10–12 (JM Lloyd’s Library and Archive, Aizawl, Mizoram).


Village in 1899–1900 in the southern part of Mizoram where Darphawka had received a divine revelation, the populace flocked to hear the teachings of the missionary. Intrigued by this unusual receptivity, Jones sought to ascertain the reasons behind the villagers’ keen interest in the gospel, and thus he conducted an inquiry. During the course of his investigation, local denizens apprised Jones of their cognizance of Selkhuma’s and Darphawka’s visions and prophecies. When Lorrain and Savidge returned to southern Mizoram on March 13, 1903, they were greeted by a group of Christians, many of whom were close friends and relatives of Darphawka. Jones also recorded that Lawmi and Khumi, the two daughters of Darphawka, were among the first Christians in Mizoram to be persecuted for their acceptance of Christianity. Accordingly, in the history of Christianity in Mizoram, the Welsh mission (Presbyterian Church) in the North and Baptist mission in the South came to be understood as the fulfilment of the prophecies.

Revival Movements and the Formation of Mizo Christian Spirituality: The Dynamic of Inculturation

Traditionally, the belief in the presence of a plethora of spirits who actively engage in human affairs was foundational to the Mizo primal religion. It was a “spirit-centered worldview.” The Mizo traditionally understood the benevolent spirit (Khuavang) and other spirits to be involved in the affairs of human beings, bringing blessings and providing sustenance and nurturing to all created beings, both living and non-living, including nature.

20 Jones, Autobiography, 36.
Therefore, the Mizo traditionally view God (Spirit), humans, and the world as having an integral unity.²³ Accordingly, the spirit-centric worldview of their primal religion pervaded all aspects of Mizo traditional societal life²⁴ where there was “no clear-cut dichotomy of sacred-profane” in their worldview.²⁵ They believed in living for and caring for others, and they were willing to go to great lengths, even sacrificing their own lives, without expecting any rewards.²⁶

Meanwhile, the interaction between Christianity and the Mizo primal religion presented a formidable challenge, primarily influenced by the attitudes of British colonizers, missionaries, and certain early local church leaders. While certain primal cultural elements were deemed as having value, Mizo traditional religion was often considered as paganism or heathen²⁷ or devil worship.²⁸ Prior to the revival, the church taught that local drums (khuang) and traditional songs were associated with carnal celebrations and pagan demonic worship and therefore not suitable for Christian worship.²⁹ So the church prohibited Christians from observing traditional sacred days, festivals,³⁰ and sacrifices,³¹ because these practices

²⁴ Lalhimtanga, Material Culture of the Mizo (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 91.
²⁵ Pachuau, “Mizo ‘Sakhua’”: 42.
²⁶ Mizo culture is traditionally characterized as a “culture of sharing” in which people freely share their possessions, services, and time with others in the community. In this culture, wealth is not measured by how much one accumulates, but rather by how much one shares or spends for the betterment of the community. See K. Lalawmzuala, “Mission in Post Modernity: A Tribal Perspective,” Mizoram Journal of Theology 3, no. 2 (July–December 2012): 62.
²⁸ R.A. Lorrain, 5 Years in Unknown Jungle for God and Empire (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 2012), 71.
²⁹ Zairema, Random Notes (Aizawl: Zorun Community, 2009), 130.
³⁰ Mizoram Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, Presbytery Meeting, Minutes of the Presbytery Meeting, April 1910, Resolution No 1 (J.M. Lloyd’s Library and Archive, Aizawl, Mizoram).
³¹ Mizoram Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, Presbytery Meeting, Minutes of the Presbytery Meeting April 1910. Resolution No 3 (J.M. Lloyd’s Library and Archive,
were considered devil worship. As a result, both church leaders and Christians in general were discouraged from singing any Mizo traditional songs, and the use of Mizo melodies and poetic words was considered un-Christian.

But this adverse attitude was increasingly confronted when Mizo Christian revival movements began in 1906, leading to an inculturation of some primal cultural elements into Mizo Christianity. During the revival of 1919 the use of local primal drums spread to almost every church at this time. And this revival lasted longer than the first two revivals in 1906 and 1916, because the use of drums prompted more people to dance, bringing the revival spirit to their hearts. The revival was not merely longer but also more powerful than the previous ones; it spread all over Mizoram and crossing the border to the neighboring states of Tripura and Manipur. Many new Christian songs were composed in the local tune and became the main songs used in the church. Unlike the hymns translated from English, these newly composed songs expressed

Aizawl, Mizoram).

32 R. Dala, “Kristian! I Hria Em?,” Kristian Tlangua (December 1911): 4–6. ("Christian, Do You Know This?" Christian Herald)

33 Mizoram Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, Presbytery Meeting, Minutes of the Presbytery Meeting, April 13, 1911, Aizawl, Resolution No. 10:4 (J.M. Lloyd’s Library and Archive, Aizawl, Mizoram).


39 Lloyd, On Every High Hill, 57.


the feelings and temperament of the Mizo people, striking a deeper chord with them than the translated English hymns. Christians were able to express themselves more spontaneously through singing and dancing with these new songs written in the tune of their primal religious context. The Mizos utilized the revival movement as a powerful tool in their struggle for cultural hegemony and proved to be successful as it enabled them to effectively challenge the encroaching Western influence. This cultural incorporation not only deepened their connection to their ancestral heritage but also reinforced the relevance and relatability of their faith within the Mizo context.

Before delving further, it is imperative to underscore the intrinsic symbiosis between Mizo Christian spirituality and the transformative Mizo revival movements. Even though there were instances of Christianity before the revival, such as the baptisms of Khuma and Khara in 1899, it was the revivals that significantly drove the spread of Christianity. The conversion of the entire region to Christianity occurred over a span of four decades during these revivals. These movements not only sparked widespread conversion but also played a key role in shaping a unique Mizo Christian identity by blending local cultural elements and values. Accordingly, Mizo Christian spirituality that emphasizes dancing, singing hymns written in Mizo traditional tunes, and using of local drums is the byproduct of Mizo revival movements. The inculturation essence inherent in the revival movements ushered in a transformative era in which the entire Mizo tribe embraced Christianity. Vanlalthlana astutely observes, underscoring this transformative shift, that the revival rendered Christianity a cherished possession among the Mizo. The impact of the revival movements extended beyond the ecclesiastical boundaries, as Christians who were converted through the revival continues to uphold Christian values and virtues of love and the Mizo primal ethos in society.

44 Lalsangkima Pachuau, Indian and Christian: Historical Accounts of Christianity and Theological Reflections in India (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2019), 146.
45 Vanlalthlana, Doctrine of Grace: Augustine’s Doctrine of Grace and Human Free Will and an Appraisal from a Mizo Christian Perspective (Delhi: ISPCK, 2010), 204.
this sentiment, another Mizo theologian, Vanlalrova, delves more deeply into the spiritual landscape, identifying the profound fusion of spirituality with the bedrock of Christian mission within Mizo Christianity, a fusion he aptly terms the “Mission Spirituality of the Mizo Christians.” This intricate fusion, Vanlalrova asserts, is not only fuelled by the evangelical fervor ignited by the Mizo revival movements but is also profoundly enriched by the assimilation of the traditional Mizo ethos, encapsulated by the principle of tlawmngaihna—a profound embodiment of selfless sacrifice, chivalry, and altruism.46

Although Mizo primal concepts such as hnatlang (community voluntary works), perceived by Hlawndo as analogous to the New Testament’s diakonia, were already integrated into Mizo Christian spirituality prior to the initial revival, the practice of traveling and voluntarily preaching the gospel (beihrual, fangrual, chanchin tha dak), rooted in hnatlang, was observed both during and after the revival occurrences. Thus, according to Hlawndo, an interplay of this cultural concept of hnatlang played a role in both the revival and the expansion of Christianity in Mizoram.47 In this intricate tapestry of interwoven interactions, Mizo Christian spirituality emerged as an organic byproduct of this transformative revival episode. Its roots are intricately entwined with the revival’s profound impact. Pachuau aptly remarks, “Any talk on Mizo Christian spirituality cannot but begin with the experience of revival in the history of Christianity in Mizoram.”48

THE SOCIOECONOMIC LIBERATION EMBEDDED IN THE YEARNING FOR HEAVEN IN REVIVAL SPIRITUALITY: A FUTURISTIC YET REALIZED ESCHATOLOGY

The prevailing perception of Mizo Christian spirituality often highlights its emphasis on matters transcending the earthly realm, as exemplified during the revival movement. This emphasis is evident through the frequent selection of hymns written to traditional tunes that express a longing for heavenly realms and similar themes, which serves as compelling evidence

48 Pachuau, Indian and Christian, 146.
of this focus for most individuals. However, it is decisive to situate the yearning for heaven within the primal religious consciousness of the Mizos. By doing so, one can comprehend its consequential impact on their socioeconomic plight. In essence, the yearning for heaven becomes a form of celebration, symbolizing their liberation from the burdens of economic hardship. This is because, according to Mizo primal eschatology, attaining entry into pialral (paradise) in the afterlife is incredibly challenging for the common people. This privilege is reserved exclusively for the revered warriors known as Thangchhuah. The title of Thangchhuah is bestowed upon men of great courage who have succeeded in slaying formidable creatures such as bears, snakes, elephants, and others. Additionally, only a select wealthy few who have performed the khuangchawi feast are eligible for this esteemed status. This feast is not a one-time event but, rather, a series of lavish public feasts, potentially totalling seven or eight in number. Organizing such feasts requires significant financial expenditure and may even take a lifetime for the wealthiest individuals to complete.

The couples who host these feasts are honored by being seated on a Khuanghlang, a bamboo stretcher, which is carried by the people as they march through the streets and into the town square. Hence, the yearning for heaven expressed in the theme songs of the Mizo revival cannot be dismissed as a case of being “Too Heavenly Minded, No Earthly Good.” This is because the old costly practice of sacrifice that placed a financial burden on individuals was abandoned with the advent of Christianity, especially during the revival movement. As a result, this shift alleviated the economic burdens faced by the community and provided a pathway toward liberation and spiritual fulfilment. Thus, the yearning for heaven in their revival songs should be rightly construed as celebrating liberation from the present socioeconomic burden imposed by the traditional feasts. The fear of evil spirits and demons started to dwindle, and people began to trust

50 Lloyd, On Every High Hill, 15.
51 L.H Lalpekhluu, A Study of Christology from Tribal Perspective with Special Reference to Mizoram North East India (PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2004), 106.
52 Mizo Thilhlui Thenkhat (Objects of Mizo Antiquity) (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1993), 13.
medicine and prayers for healing as a substitute for relying on old sacrifices. Some primal religious practices, such as feasts and sacrifices *khuan chawii*, were abandoned.\(^{53}\) This shift in belief and practice is a significant indication of the transformative power of the revival, which impacted not only the spiritual but also the cultural and socioeconomic aspects of the Mizo people.

**Breaking the Shackles: Mizo Revival Spirituality and the Liberation from Slavery (bawi)**

The revival spirituality, often underestimated or overlooked, encompassed more than just a disembodied focus on a vertical relationship with God; it also served as a powerful force in the emancipation from slavery. The concept of *bawi*, or slavery, held a distinct position within traditional Mizo society. It encompassed three distinct categories, each serving a particular purpose. Firstly, there were the *chemsen bawi*, individuals who sought refuge at the chief’s house due to their criminal backgrounds. Secondly, the *tukluh* were individuals who betrayed their comrades and joined the victorious side during times of war. Lastly, *inchhungpui bawi* was a category permitted by the British colonial government, primarily intended for destitute and elderly individuals.\(^{54}\) Thus, according to the colonial government, the *inchhungpui bawi* seemed well suited to the people and provided maintenance for the poor, old, and destitute, and attempting to alter it would be extremely unwise.\(^{55}\) The initial state of the *bawi* was relatively favorable, but over time, their circumstances deteriorated. Several individuals were forcefully expelled from their villages, while others endured severe and inhumane treatment. On occasion, specific chiefs went to the extreme of insisting that a *bawi* be executed and interred alongside their own resting place, symbolizing a twisted representation of their grandeur. When the British government opted to grant freedom to the *bawi*, the chief insisted upon

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\(^{53}\) Hmuaka, Zoram Thim ata Engah, 154.

\(^{54}\) See J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clan* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1975), 48; Letter from The Hon’ble Mr. B.C. Allen, I.C.S., Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner Assam to The Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign and Political Department. No. 5028 P., June 23, 1915, Shillong (Mizoram State Archive, Aizawl, Mizoram).

The complexity of the *bawi* institution lies in the stark contrast between chiefs who showed kindness towards their *bawi* and those who were extremely cruel. While some chiefs treated their *bawi* with compassion, ensuring their well-being and granting them certain rights, others subjected them to unimaginable brutality and suffering. This stark dichotomy within the system highlights the inherent contradictions and injustices that characterized the institution of *bawi*. Further, if a daughter of a *bawi* was to be wed, the *bawi* had to provide a sum of 3 British pounds (£3) to the chief as compensation for their care. This practice reveals that the *bawi* system, despite being portrayed as a means of providing support to the destitute, was not entirely devoid of financial obligations.

The *inchhungpui bawi* system, embedded within traditional Mizo society, serves as a compelling case study for examining the dynamics of power, control, and social justice. This system, originally justified as a way to provide support for the poor and destitute, reveals underlying complexities and hidden motivations. At its core, the *inchhungpui bawi* system represents a social structure characterized by unequal relationships and limited agency for those categorized as *bawi*. Despite being framed as a refuge for the downtrodden, the *bawi* were deprived of equal status, living without wages and unable to free themselves due to fear of displeasing the chiefs. This asymmetry of power and the resulting exploitation raise critical questions about the intersection of social structures and justice within Mizo society.

The revival movements emboldened the Mizo Christians to speak out against such institutionalized practices of slavery. One prominent figure in the struggle for liberation was medical missionary Peter Fraser, who began to serve among the Mizo in 1908. Both Christians and non-Christians saw Fraser’s efforts as “Christ-like suffering,” and he is often credited as a key

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59 Letter from The Hon’ble Mr. B.C. Allen, I.C.S., Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner Assam to The Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign and Political Department, No. 5028 P., June 23, 1915, Shillong (Mizoram State Archive, Aizawl, Mizoram).
figure in the movement for abolition. He pleaded with the government to abolish the system, and argued that the system was equivalent to slavery, but the government argued that it was not slavery. H.W.G. Cole served as the superintendent during that period, with the missionaries and the new Christians advocating for its abolition, while the administration and the local traditional chiefs, who represented the old customs, supported the system. As a result, the government imposed restrictions on Fraser’s movements and eventually asked him to leave Mizoram. Digging deeper, it becomes apparent that the colonial government had ulterior motives in maintaining the bawi system. Their vested interests in preserving harmonious relationships with the chiefs overshadowed genuine concerns for social justice. One of the confidential official documents of the government shed some light on this matter; it says:

Sir Archdale Earle is of opinion, after consulting the local officers, that the only possible way of carrying this proposal into effect, without the gravest injustice to the Chiefs and a distinct breach of faith on the part of the government would be for government to pay off the chiefs and so finally release the bois and abolish the bois system.

Economic constraints and geopolitical factors further complicated the situation, forcing the colonial government to seek alternative strategies that would appease both the chiefs and the missionaries. For instance, due to the war in Europe, the colonizers were not in a position to sanction such an amount of money, and the military police battalions were also

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61 Vanlalchhuanawma, Christianity and Subaltern Culture: Revival Movement as a Cultural Response to Westernization in Mizoram (Delhi: ISPCK, 2006), 201.
65 Letter from The Hon’ble Mr. B.C. Allen, I.C.S., Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to The Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign and Political Department, No. 5028 P., June 23, 1915, Shillong (Mizoram State Archive, Aizawl, Mizoram).
66 Letter from The Hon’ble Mr. W.J. Reid, C.S.I., I.C.S., Commissioner, Surma Valley and Hill Districts to The Chief Secretary to the Hon’ble the Chief Commissioner
depleted for the purpose of providing reserves for the regular army.\textsuperscript{67} So the colonizers sought to avoid any internal trouble that might arise.\textsuperscript{68} The only option available for the government was to find an alternative way to pacify both the chiefs and the missionaries. In order to do so, the term \textit{bawi} was no longer allowed to be used, \textit{bawi} were allowed to leave their chief, and the chief could claim the price of the \textit{bawi} from the government. Otherwise, the \textit{bawi} could approach the government to report that he/she no longer desired to be a \textit{bawi}.\textsuperscript{69} But changing the name \textit{bawi} did not have significant consequences.\textsuperscript{70} In 1927, the government replaced the term “\textit{bawi}” with a new term, \textit{chhungte} or \textit{awmpuite}, meaning “inmates of the house.”\textsuperscript{71} Fraser presented a petition to his regents, urging them to address the system in the British Parliament. Eventually, the Parliament ruled in favor of the abolition of the \textit{bawi} system in the Lushai Hills in 1927.\textsuperscript{72}

However, before Fraser began to plead with the government, some native Christians had already taken the initiative to free their slaves. The valuable contributions of these natives are often overlooked or

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\textsuperscript{67} Letter from The Hon’ble Mr. B.C. Allen, I.C.S., Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to The Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign and Political Department, No. 5028 P., June 23, 1915, Shillong (Mizoram State Archive, Aizawl, Mizoram).

\textsuperscript{68} Letter from The Hon’ble Mr. B.C. Allen, I.C.S., Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to The Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign and Political Department, No. 5954 P., October 24, 1914, Shillong (Mizoram State Archive, Aizawl, Mizoram).


\textsuperscript{70} Dr. Faser Letter to India Office, April 22, 1914, Hawthorn, Sidney Parade, Dublin. Assam Secretariat Proceeding, Political Department, Political-A, August 1915 (Mizoram State Archive, Aizawl, Mizoram).

\textsuperscript{71} Lloyd, \textit{History of the Church}, 156.

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inadequately recognized within colonial and mission archives. Regrettably, these perspectives continue to be internalized and perpetuated, even in later and contemporary studies.\textsuperscript{73} Two chiefs became Christians during the first revival of 1906 and felt compelled to free their \textit{bawi}. They believed that even Christ himself had freed them from their sinful bondage. During 1908 and 1909, Chief Hrangvunga of Bunghmun village freed all his 120 \textit{bawi},\textsuperscript{74} and Chief Khawvelthanga\textsuperscript{75} in 1910\textsuperscript{76} freed four of his slaves. The news of their actions spread throughout Mizoram and inspired other \textit{bawi} to yearn for freedom. Two sisters, Challianmawi and Challianngovi, who were slaves of Chief Lalrothianga of Parvatui Village, even ran away in search of freedom.\textsuperscript{77} The gradual demise of the \textit{Bawi} system in Mizo society can be attributed to the impact of the revival movement, notably in its role in abolishing slavery.\textsuperscript{78} The spread of Christianity through the revival movement played a pivotal role in bringing about the abolition of slavery. One of the Mizo songs written by a Mizo named Thanga beautifully articulates the emancipation of \textit{bawi} (slaves).\textsuperscript{79} The song expresses joy and praises God for his liberating power. It acknowledges God as the living and almighty, the friend of women, slaves, destitute, and sinners, the Father, King, and God of orphans and the poor. The first stanza reads:\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{73} Zorinthara, “Silence in Historical Studies”: 137–153.

\textsuperscript{74} R. Lalmalsawma, “Raja Hrangvunga (1887–1943),” in \textit{Mizo Lalte Chanchin} (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute Art & Culture Department, 2012), 348 (\textit{History of the Mizo Chiefs}). Hereafter cited as Lalmalsawma, \textit{Raja Hrangvunga}.


\textsuperscript{76} There is a discrepancy concerning the year. Some posit that it was in 1913, while for others it was 1910. See. R. Lalmalsawma, \textit{Raja Hrangvunga}, 349; Lalthangfala Sailo, “Khawvelthanga Sailo,” in \textit{Mizo Lalte Chanchin} (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute Art & Culture Department, 2012), 163 (\textit{History of the Mizo Chiefs}).

\textsuperscript{77} B. Lalthangliana, \textit{Khawvelthanga}, 268.


\textsuperscript{79} Sangkhuma, \textit{Missionary-Te Hnuhma}, 126 (\textit{The Legacy of the Missionaries}).

\textsuperscript{80} The song translation into English is mine.
O Lord, most high, we truly praise You.
You are the living and almighty God,
The friend of women, slaves (bawi), destitute, and sinners,
The Father, King, and God of orphans and the poor.

The second stanza highlights that God hears prayers, grants the petitions of his people, and pays attention to their groaning and weeping:

You are the God who answers prayers.
You are the granter of your people’s petitions.
You listen to the groaning and weeping of your children.
You stand on truth and never turn a blind eye to those who do good.

The song further calls for both the rich and the poor, as well as those who oppose God, to take notice and ask what they must do to be saved. And in the fourth stanza, it celebrates the liberation of nations from darkness and the release of slaves, urging everyone to rejoice:

Let every nation that is set free from darkness,
and every released slave (bawi) be glad.
Let the highest God be glorified.
May peace prevail on earth for those whom He is pleased with.
Let them sing Hosanna, Hosanna.

The final stanza of the song proclaims the liberation of slaves as the coming of God’s kingdom on earth. It seeks to exalt God’s name among all people and prays for his kingdom to continue to manifest itself:

May your name be exalted among all people.
May your kingdom continue to come.
May the people on earth do your will
as it is done in heaven. Amen.

In this way, the song captures the profound connection between the liberation of slaves and the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth, expressing a vision of harmony, exaltation, and divine will. Following the abolition of slavery, a prevalent custom emerged among certain Mizos, specifically those who were once enslaved, wherein they started naming
In the past, Mizoram was often struck by famine, which devastated the land and resulted in the deaths of thousands of people by starvation. One notable famine in the region was known as the mautam or bamboo famine. It occurred cyclically because of certain species of bamboo flowering, seeding, and subsequently dying down in the Mizo Hills. This phenomenon caused a notable and sudden surge in jungle rat populations that devoured all the standing crops in the jhums (shifting cultivation fields), ultimately leading to famine. Lack of proper food and its poor quality also contributed to the people’s health issues. Adding to the difficulties, herds of monkeys, also affected by the food shortage, consumed all the maize. This unfortunate situation further exacerbated the already dire circumstances. Further, all crops were destroyed across the Mizoram, stretching from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (present-day Bangladesh) to the Chill Hills of Myanmar.

Despite the ethos of sharing embedded in the Mizo primal religious consciousness, the magnitude of the famine rendered their old adage, “sem sem dam dam ei bil thi thi” (“share with one another; otherwise, if one consumes or eats alone, one will not prosper but perish”), seemingly futile. The devastating famine tested the resilience of the Mizo people and challenged the efficacy of their traditional values in mitigating such a catastrophic event. In the past, prior to the revival, when famine struck, a distressing pattern emerged where people would block the entrances of their villages and ambush fellow community members who sought food from neighboring villages. This troubling behavior revealed a stark
reality: the culture of sharing, which had been deeply valued within the community, appeared to falter in the face of severe hunger and deprivation. The devastating impact of famine shattered the traditional bonds of cooperation and exposed the desperate struggle for survival experienced by the affected population. But such was no longer the case when the bamboo famine struck Mizoram in 1911 and 1912. While the revival movement within the church subsided, the flame of Christian love for neighbor persisted. One local pastor conveyed a powerful message to the missionaries, saying: 85

During the great famine of nearly fifty years ago this village was spared the most ravages of the rats, and had abundant grain, while most of the country was starving....Then, being afraid of famishing people who flocked to the village becoming too numerous, they blocked the paths, they even killed those who persisted in getting through. Now, because of the light of Christ’s love, they want to help all who come to them, and the destitute and maimed are being fed without any payment.

The tendencies to isolate and protect their resources out of fear were replaced by a compassionate response driven by the love of Christ. This transformative shift in perspective extended beyond religious boundaries, as the Mizos did not distinguish between Christians and non-Christians when extending their support. The spread of Christianity through the revival movement deeply enriched, revitalized, and elevated the Mizo primal consciousness of sharing and the act of self-sacrifice (tlawmngaihna). A Christian named Thankunga exemplified such spirit of selflessness during the bamboo famine. He purchased rice from Chawngkunga using the only money he had, and instead of keeping it for himself, he distributed it among the needy.86 The church also was actively engaged in assisting the marginalized and downtrodden members of society since 1911.87 Christians displayed brotherliness and generosity toward non-Christians who were

85 Glover, Set on a Hill, 27.
87 Mizoram Presbyterian Church, Presbytery Minutes, Aizawl Presbytery, April 13, 1911, Resolution no 5 (JM Lloyd Library and Archive, Aizawl, Mizoram).
starving, thus showcasing the inclusive nature of their spirituality. Through their faith-based networks and communal solidarity, the Mizos organized relief efforts, pooling resources and ensuring the equitable distribution of aid. The emphasis on love, compassion, and selflessness acted as a catalyst for collective action, enabling the community to navigate through the trials of famine with resilience and determination.

**Conclusion**

In the contemporary context of the Mizo community in Northeast India, globalization, privatization, and consumer cultures have contributed to widening economic disparities among different social groups. Spirituality and socio-justice have become detached due to several factors, reflecting a growing divide between the sacred and the secular—a divide absent in their primal religion. Disembodied spirituality and an emphasis on the otherworldly are gradually gaining momentum in Mizo mainstream Christianity. Against this backdrop, it is pertinent to reevaluate the meaning of spirituality, drawing insights from past revival movements that have nurtured and reinforced the traditional ethos. Through our analysis, we find that the Mizo revival movement stands as a powerful testament to the transformative potential of blending elements of primal religious and cultural traditions with the Christian faith. The inculturation of local and primal religious cultural elements into Christianity serves as a profound act of resistance and liberation, breaking free from the cultural hegemony imposed by Western-centric Christianity. It establishes a transformative third space in which ancestral traditions and beliefs find a harmonious integration, fostering a sense of liberation from imposed cultural norms. Within the Mizo community, the spread of Christianity through the revival movements fostered a culture of compassion, unity, and social justice. It empowered individuals to challenge oppressive systems, liberate marginalized groups, and address social and economic inequalities.

Notably, their response to famine, characterized by the act of sharing limited food resources, exemplified their commitment to justice and solidarity. Besides, the famine relief effort also served to bolster and revitalize the primal concept of sharing deeply embedded in their traditional culture. In this way, the famine relief efforts can be seen as

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88 Kyle, Lorrain of the Lushais, 33–34.
a powerful manifestation of the interconnectedness between Christian spirituality, social justice, and the enduring cultural values of the Mizo people. The influence of the revival movement through Christianity brought about profound transformations in the Mizo community’s approach to oppressive systems such as the *bawi* system. This opposition to the *bawi* system stemmed from their understanding of Christ’s teachings and their belief in the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. Thus, while their concept of Christian spirituality centers on a vertical relationship with God, it also manifests in horizontal effects on their fellow human beings. Overall, the Mizo Christian revival movements have played a pivotal role in shaping attitudes, behaviors, and social justice endeavors in Northeast India. It builds upon the existing primal consciousness of sharing and self-sacrifice, amplifying their significance within the Christian framework. Consequently, the revival movements that forge a third-space spirituality without polarizing the vertical or horizontal dimensions serve as a transformative paradigm for social change.

**About author**
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