

Socio-Political History Of Alcohol Use In Mizoram: A Rapid Review

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Introduction

Due to the paucity of recorded documentation, the Mizo's beginnings are shrouded in mystery. The majority of the previous history is classified as an oral tradition (Lalrammawia. K, 2017). Folklore and myth are important instruments for writing about Mizo history and most of the work on the Mizo community and many other regions of North-East India history lacked theoretical and empirical clarity (Malsawmdawngliana, 2015).

Mizoram is a hilly region that became the Indian Union's 23rd state on February 20, 1987, and is located in the southernmost part of North-East India. Over the previous century, both the land and the people have changed dramatically. The Mizo social identity has grown vague, and a few historical, political, empirical, and critical perspectives might help us better comprehend Mizoram's socio-political development.

Alcohol was the most important and necessary aspect of life in the Mizo community. All religious and social ceremonies, festivals, and sacrifices required it (Chuathuama, 1995). Alcohol has been deemed socially undesirable and a moral and ethical transgression in the eyes

of God since colonization, following the advent of Western missionaries (Lalrinmawia. K, 2002).

As a result, churches in Mizoram have attempted to outlaw alcohol in society, sparking a never-ending controversy among Mizos. The fundamental point of contention is whether or not it is permissible to prohibit the consumption of alcohol. The mainline churches want to outlaw it, but others argue that it shouldn't be (Tribal Research Institute, 1983).

Despite the churches' great attempts to prohibit alcohol, alcohol consumption and misuse remain, harming Mizo society's socio-economic and religious life in general, and youths in particular (Lalbiakhluna, 2018). In Mizoram, the use of alcohol and associated violence is becoming more common, with far-reaching consequences for individuals, families, and society as a whole (Lalrinawma. V.S, 2005, p. 312). The alcohol problem is a worldwide issue that has resulted in a large number of deaths (Lalbiakhluna, 2018).

Research works on alcohol in the Mizo context are scarce. "Zu (Alcohol) in Mizo Society: Past and Present," published by the Directorate of Education, Tribal Research

Institute, Mizoram, in 1983, is the result of some research but lacks substantial analysis. It is written from a sociological point of view, providing information on anti-alcohol campaigns in various groups until the late 1970s, and highlighting that drinking has been a social issue since the British colonial regime (Lalrinmawia. K, 2002). Another prominent figure, a Church leader named Chuauthuama, published a book in 1995 called "Zu Hi Thil A Ni: Mizo Nuna Zu Dinmun Chik Taka Thlirna" (translation: "Alcohol is a Substance: A Critical Study of the Place of Alcohol in Mizo Society") that detailed the social analysis of Mizo alcoholism.

Even in pre-Christian or pre-colonial Mizo culture, Chuauthuama argues for a complete prohibition. While the first work praises pre-Christian Mizos for their drinking habits, the latter depicts the drinking effect, which Chuauthuama firmly condemns. These competing viewpoints highlight the mixed nature of Mizos' attitudes about alcohol, which distinguishes the drinking culture as unique and varied.

Methods

Given the limited search technique and dearth of written information on the socio-political history of alcohol consumption in Mizoram, this study constitutes a fast evaluation of the literature, which was appropriate for the subject area. To better grasp the topic, the researcher does a quick review in evaluating a variety of sources of knowledge, including grey literature and personal anecdotes from the ethnic-minority community.

Hence, a rapid review is carried out to synthesize evidence on alcohol usage in Mizoram spanning the pre-colonial to post-colonial periods in terms of changes in socio-political factors. This research is part of a larger study - a doctoral thesis - to better understand the cultural shift and current state of alcohol consumption in Mizoram.

Project Aim: To explore and identify the socio-political history of alcohol use in Mizoram.

Search Strategy: This rapid review focuses on understanding alcohol use among Mizos from a socio-political history perspective. However, given the lack of literature on this topic, this paper also covers understandings and explorations from grey literature, newspaper clippings, books, and unpublished doctoral thesis. Furthermore, to get an account of the socio-political historiography of alcohol use, the following keywords were first submitted to research databases: drinking culture, Mizoram history, alcohol use, socio-political changes in Mizoram, and Mizoram alcohol prohibition. After these keywords were submitted, the results were further refined by specifically confirming the keywords - Mizoram alcohol use, history of Mizoram, Mizoram Liquor Prohibition Act. The keywords were explored using the following research database - PubMed, Google scholar, United Theological College (UTC) Library, and articles published in Mizo and English between the year 2010 to 2021. Furthermore, grey literature was identified with the help of the UTC librarian from their doctoral thesis repository. The entire search strategy yielded 32 articles mentioning Mizoram history and alcohol use related articles and 21 articles were further scrutinized for rapid review.

Results:

Social change in Mizoram-

According to folklore (Tribal Research Institute, 1983), Chawnsela and Chawipoha, uncovered Zu by accident, and it is difficult to trace Zu's (alcohol) roots and identify when it started to take the center stage in Mizo society. These two discovered a whitish object in the bush that they mistook for a python egg. As a result, they took the item home and placed it in a jar with some cooked rice. They wrapped the vessel carefully and left it alone. When they

opened the jar a few days later to view what they assumed was an egg, they discovered that the cooked rice had fermented instead of hatching. As a result, they found a way of fermenting alcohol by accident. Despite this, there is no evidence to back up this claim, and there is no mention of a date to determine when this incident occurred.

The current history of when and how Zu became a part of the Mizo people is uncertain. Alcohol, on the other hand, was already a prominent part of the primary festival, 'Chapchar Kut,' which is considered to have started around 800-950 A.D. Since alcohol has been a part of Mizo society since at least 950 A.D., this could lead us to a date no later than 950 A.D (Lalrinmawia. K, 2002).

In terms of drinking occasions, it is widely assumed that the pre-Christian Mizos' had a different type of alcohol called 'Zupui' (Dokhuma. J, 1992, p.177-183), which was only consumed on two occasions. The first was for festivals, while the second was for a sacrificial cause. There were two main types of sacrifices performed by the entire village to appease the gods and obtain blessings: 'Kawngpui siam' and 'Fano Dawi.' The second type was a feast organized by an individual for the entire village community to gain the title of 'Thangchhuah'. It was widely believed that couples who achieved 'Thangchhuah' status would be granted a spot in the next world 'Pialral' (paradise). Hunting celebrations, marriage ceremonies, rites in memory of the dead, murdering domestic animals for a feast without religious sanction, hunting down a wild hog, and having guests are all examples of other occasions (Lalrinmawia. K, 2002).

Everyone who opposed drinking agreed that the Mizos only drank on special occasions, according to this account. Challiana (1991, p.7) and Chuauthuama (1995), both of whom spoke adversely about alcohol and its consumption by viewing it from biblical and sociological viewpoints, agreed that the Mizos only drank on special occasions. There is

no reason to dispute this opinion because there is no evidence to the contrary.

Two prominent 20th-century writers, James Dokhuma (1992) and M. Lalmanzuala, assert that the Mizos were not seriously "stepped in drinking." Another viewpoint asserts that, while drinking alcohol does not restrict adults, they did not consume it for recreational or social purposes because it was utilized for auspicious and religious purposes (Tribal Research Institute, 1983, p.42). Bachelors and young men rarely drank in the presence of older men, according to this idea and there was a policy of enforcing penalties for persons who consume excessive amounts of alcohol. As a result, being a "drunkard" was a huge embarrassment, and the entire town would consider such a person unworthy. Even if an older adult becomes inebriated, he will state that he is inebriated and unfit to speak. The Mizos had a high level of morals, and as a close-knit community, others' ideas and viewpoints were highly regarded. The author goes on to say that there have never been any disputes in the community as a result of consuming alcohol.

On the contrary, two contradicting statements claim that the Mizos were frequent drinkers, which the other refutes. These two competing viewpoints lead to a historical issue: the question of what happened. Before the arrival of Christianity and the colonists, each of the Mizo villages was a sovereign independent state. Even during the British administration, the chief and elders oversaw the local governance. In such a system, such issues might differ from village to village. While one town may have had a higher proportion of drinkers, the next town may not. Another option was that among the entire community, there were a few heavy drinkers.

In contrast, the majority of the population indulged in drinking only on special occasions. In such a circumstance, alcohol's negative effects could spread from one person to another. Such findings appear to have

impacted the decision-making of both missionaries and early Christian leaders. Although Chuauthuama (1995) who strongly opposed alcohol consumption, admitted that young adults only drank alcohol on special occasions.

The preceding debate led us to assume that the Mizos were moderate drinkers who kept their drinking under control and only drank on rare occasions. J. Shakespeare, a British administrator in Mizoram from 1897 to 1905, wrote in his letter that the 'Padres' had convinced Lushais to give drinking alcohol. It was the most beautiful thing that had ever happened to him, and it seemed to be a miracle. He also stated that, while he did not agree with all of the modifications made, the Lushais were not drunkards in his day and would only go for an occasional bust, which he did not consider to be a problem (Lalrinmawia. K, 2002).

As a community-based society, the general attitude of the community has frequently become decisive in numerous areas, resulting in a negative attitude toward heavy drinking. Simultaneously, the mere presence of a "negative image" of alcohol and its intake might also suggest the presence of heavy drinkers.

Role of Church in Implementing Ideological Shift:

The primary debate on Zu took place in Mizoram's largest (mainline) churches. Therefore, we will investigate the discourse on Zu concerning the mainline churches.

The Church has always tended to people's struggles. Substance addiction problems are one of the significant challenges faced by the Church in Mizoram for several decades. Nevertheless, the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram has only one center, the 'Synod Rescue Home,' a De-Addiction and Rehabilitation Centre, established on September 21, 1987, to address this issue today. Mizoram Presbyterian Church is Mizoram's

oldest (Lalchhuanliana. 2007, p.184), and biggest (Statistical Handbook-Mizoram, 2008) denomination in terms of membership. There are currently 14 departments in Mizoram Presbyterian Church. One of the departments is the Synod Social Front. The Social Front's primary work is social work, under which Synod Rescue Home was established in 1987 to tackle substance addiction.

The word 'mainline churches' applies to churches planted before 1910 by the missionaries comprising the Presbyterian Church, the Baptist Church, and the Independent Church of Maraland (ICM), now called the Evangelical Church of Maraland (ECM). These also include the churches that broke away from the missionary-planted churches but still preserve the essential elements of their original constitution, theological doctrines, and administrative frameworks (Lalrinmawia. K, 2002). It is important to note that except for the Roman Catholic Church, the mainline churches in Mizoram hold similar opinions about Zu and are all for Zu's prohibition. The Roman Catholic Church favors temperance over prohibition and does not play a significant role in the debate as a church.

To further understand Zu's discourse, it is crucial to understand the resolutions passed by the mainline churches that sparked debate on faith and traditions.

Churches Resolutions:

Perhaps because of the Church's resolution for Zu's (alcohol) prohibition, various writers claim that Mizo Christians were responsible for banning Zu (Lalmuankima. C, 2013). This opinion needed to be revised. Firstly, in 1904, the Baptist Church meeting at Sethlun arrived at the following resolutions:

"1. Pathian Ni serh a, hna engmah thawh loh tur. (Sunday is to be observed, and no work should be done)

2. Sawma pakhat pek theuh tur. (Everyone must give tithe)

3. Inthawina sa ei loh tur. (Sacrificial meats must not be eaten)

4. Kristian ten Zu in loh tur. (Christians must not drink Zu)

5. Kohhran dinna apiang ah Sunday Sikul din nghal zel tur." (Sunday school must be started wherever a Church is planted.) (Lianchhawna. R, 1987).

The above resolution is the first known Mizo Christian resolution for Zu's prohibition and consumption. Considering that the first two Baptist missionaries, J.H. Lorrain (Pu Buanga; the name given by the Mizos) and F.W. Savidge (also known as 'Sap Upa'), were present when the resolutions were drafted and accepted. Therefore, their presence and opinion are likely to significantly influence the infant church's people's decision-making process (Lalrinmawia. K, 2002).

Secondly, the Presbytery meeting of the 'Presbyterian Church' in April 1910 resolved thus:

"Many people were perturbed over the question of Zu; though they regarded it as bad, yet some people drink it, but this Presbytery meeting resolves: 'not to drink Zu, and teach others also to abstain from it, as it was in the past' (Presbytery Minutes, 1910, p.3).

In this case, it also must be noted that D.E. Jones, a British missionary, was presiding over the Presbytery meeting at that time (Lalhluna. R.K, 2013). Hence, it is a possibility that Jones's voice was a factor in the decision-making for the prohibition of Zu. Although the Mizo Christians were responsible for making the decision to prohibit Zu, there is a possibility that the missionaries taught and inspired them.

The statement quoted by Shakespeare in the previous section indicated this (Lalrammawia. K, 2002). In the very next year, the Presbyterian Church repeated its positions on the subject. On October 6, 1911, the Presbytery meeting again resolved that Christians should not drink Zu as was previously regulated on April 22, 1910 (Thomas. V.V, 2006, p.13).

Mizoram's mainline churches decided to abolish Zu mainly because of the influence of the missionaries. Although the Mizo Christians were in charge of making the decisions, the missionaries were the ones who first proposed the prohibition, and one or more missionaries were always present in the decision-making body.

The extensive use of Zu by the Mizos in their religious practices may be the primary reason for missionaries' negative attitudes against Zu. J.H. Lorrain and F.W. Savidge, missionaries, were also abstainers, and their abstinence may have enabled them to adopt a negative attitude about alcohol, consciously or unconsciously. Nonetheless, some Mizo Christians did not abstain from drinking after the Church's rulings, and numerous people have protested against the Church's stance. However, their assertions appeared to be centered on personal statements at this point. From 1894 through 1966, missionary operations were so vigorous that most Mizo Christians faithfully followed them.

Political changes in Mizoram-

From the early 1960s, the Church was concerned about the way Mizo youths drank Zu in an ad hoc manner. However, since 1966, the highest authority of Mizoram's mainline churches has remained mute on Zu. It would be a mistake to conclude that the Church has chosen to allow drinking. The main action centres were local churches, although the assembly-level congregations and synod levels did not make important resolutions. The local

churches continued to discipline anybody who drank or brewed Zu as sternly as they can.

When the Mizos gained their Legislature in 1972, the first group of legislators under the leadership of Ch. Chunga passed the 1973 Mizoram Act of Excise. On April 17, 1974, the Indian President signed this Act, which prohibits the import and export, transportation and storage, manufacturing, possession, and sale of Zu under Chapters III: 9-11 and IV: 15 (C), (d), and (e) (Mongia, P, 1996). However, the same legislation also allows special licenses to be issued in Mizoram for the manufacture, export, and transportation of Zu. However, the Act was not put into effect until 1984. (Mizoram Excise Commissionerate, 2001, p.1)

The Mizoram Excise Act, which was passed in 1984 (1973), inflamed the Church and society, resulting in conflicts over old and new theories. There is a discussion between two major parties: those who support the government's licensing program for Zu and those who oppose it. The first point of discussion demonstrated that the churches desired an effective prohibition, whilst the other side did not. However, both parties' expectations for success may be different. While those who sought 'no prohibition' meant 'dry' from Zu, the churches would see a reduction in supply as a triumph. The Churches appeared to understand the people's concerns about drinking as a potentially 'evil' entity. Nonetheless, it is not acknowledged since they believe that a clear line should be drawn between 'moderate' and 'excessive' consumption. Furthermore, the Churches stated that "Zu" and "evil" could not be separated, and therefore prohibition must be enacted, as the Central Government desired each state to do (Kristian Tlangau, 1995, p.25). According to one account, in the early 1970s, Mizo youth believed that drinking Zu was a sign of "manliness" and "modernization." Although this concept was not explicitly employed in

arguments against churches, it was well understood by the youths.

Conclusion:

This article examines how socioeconomic variables, cultural norms, and political contexts may influence Mizo attitudes and perspectives on alcohol use. Specific gaps in the literature are undeniably present. The rapid review findings should be interpreted cautiously because distinguishing between and among social and political-level variables is challenging, mainly due to the scarcity of research in this specific area undertaken. Further research on risk and protective factors, prosocial peer affiliations, and synergistic relationships between social and political contexts is warranted. Focusing on risk and protective factors will help inform future alcohol initiation, specifically educating parents and communities on how they might affect alcohol use among adolescents and young adults. Alcohol research should also take a more active role in acknowledging new social conditions within youth culture. More excellent knowledge of the impact of online social networking sites and media on alcohol use is especially essential among adolescent groups and should be investigated further in future studies.

Notably, the British colonial regime in Mizoram remains the crucial agent for the tremendous shifts within the Mizo community. Another prospect that plays a pivotal role in transforming the land and the people was Christian missionaries in the Lushai Hills during 1894. The Christian missionaries brought about a new social order and livelihood and the evangelization of the Mizo society. Christianity became a new culture and a new ethnic identity (Pachauu. L, 2006, p.41-57). The new religion has been tremendously successful in overthrowing traditional culture. By the end of the 20th century, Mizoram became the most populated Christian state in the Indian Union (and the third-highest literacy

rate since the 2011 census). The indigenous population was almost entirely Christian (National Informatics Centre, Mizoram State Centre), with 87.16 percent of states following the same (Census of India, 2011: Mizoram. Paper, 2011). Joy L. Pachuau (2014), in her book, "Being Mizo," postulated that-

“The Mizos think of themselves as professedly Christian. They, having been able to retain their faith within traditional pre-Christian structures as the close-knit, communitarian, and largely egalitarian principles of pre-industrial society, continuing with the help of the Church as well as a voluntary organization like the Young Mizo Association”. (p.16)

The disparities in and influence of alcohol use need to be understood in the cultural context as alcohol consumption varies across gender and race/ethnicity (Sudhinaraset. M et al., 2016) and cultural norms and beliefs are strong predictors of both current drinking and frequent heavy drinking. Although most churches' attitude towards Zu and other cultural elements has been on the opposing end, it is essential to investigate whether to contextualize Christianity regarding Zu in Mizoram. It is also crucial to find out if Mizo Christians who, while practicing their faith, wanted to hold on to the tradition of drinking Zu or prohibition. There should also be an evaluation of the effectiveness of the existing alcohol prohibition law in dealing with alcohol use in Mizoram backed up by statistical data to support causal hypotheses and relationships if any.

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