CHRISTIANITY AND THE MIZO SOCIETY

Michelle Zothanzuali
Dr. Zainab Farhat
Dept. of Political Science
Lovely Professional University

Abstract

The people of Mizoram have their separate culture and traditions. Mizos came under the influence of the British Missionaries during Colonialism, where they were converted to Christians. It was the English missionaries who introduced education in this region. This study will show how Christianity has impacted the social life and culture of the Mizo society which rather has a positive outcome for the people of Mizoram. One of the most outrageous fallouts of the missionaries can be seen on the number of literacy rates where Mizoram stands as the 3rd most literate state in the country. The aim of this study will be on how Christianity influenced the Mizo society and how it dealt with changes over time.

Keywords: Christianity, Mizo, Society, Education, Mizoram, Missionaries.

INTRODUCTION

Mizoram is one of the State which is situated in the North-eastern part of India, inhabited by Mizos, who were believed to have originated from Burma and were a part of the great Mongoloid wave migrating from China. To date, the origin of this tribe is of mystery, due to the lack of written records. Although different interpretations have been made by many scholars. Mizoram was under the Government of Assam until 1972 when it was announced as Union territory and soon became the 23rd State in 1987 after the agreement signed between the Mizo National Front and the Indian Government in 1986. The arrival of Christianity brought stimulation not only on people’s impression and thoughts but also of knowledge, political view, social, educational including western culture and these are some of the mechanisms which will dominate and bring about a whole new set of revolution to the life of the people. The spread of Christianity increased to a large extent where almost everyone started to embrace this religion. Before the Missionaries, Mizos were indulged in the practice of frequent sacrifices to evil spirits as a pawn to recover from their illnesses and adversities. Nevertheless, Mizos also believed in the existence of a supreme being whom they termed as ‘Khuanu’, they believed him to be the keeper of all living beings. However, Christianity has brought an imminent change in society, especially under the belief of healing and health. Two pioneer missionaries introduced the method of writing in the form of Roman script. Mizoram then became one of the most literate states in the country with a percentage of 91.33%. The Mizos were wholly transformed into a better and sophisticated community, they began to desert such practices of sacrifices, fights, and battles amongst tribes with the intervention of the Welsh Missionaries.
Mizoram belongs to the seven sisters of the North-Eastern region. Before the British Missionaries, Mizos live under the constant fear of evil spirits and were filled with superstitions. Education and the introduction of Christianity act as an agent in bringing their superstitions to an end. It gives them freedom and saves them from their problems and struggles. People then started to become aware of their hygiene and sanitation which they were ignorant about before the coming of the Britishers. The chiefs known by the people as ‘Lal’ during the early days were leaders, no one dared to go against their commands. They were the means and ends in society. Ever since the early times, Mizos were cultivators practicing jhum, also known as slash and burn. Most of the young adults and parents were indulged in this field. In the year 1890, Welsh missionaries started to preach the Gospel of God in this exotic land, where most people started to follow their path and were thus converted to Christians. From this time forth, religion began to play a very significant role in Mizo society.

With the commencement of learning, missionaries began translating Bibles and other prominent books. They believed that religion along with the establishment of education will fully transform the lives and perspectives of the people. Music, painting and all other forms of art began to flourish. They have a strong belief that true conversions is the only way to transform men into a decent being which in turn will affect the attitude, habits, behaviors, and morals. Christianity ushered the people of Mizoram into becoming a rather intellectual and sophisticated community, awakening them from their uncivilized way of living.

The spread of Christianity was exceptionally swift where its first impact can be seen on the local customs and conventions. With the coming of the British, one of the most important features which highlights the Mizo society ‘Zawlbuk’ starts deteriorating. Zawlbuk may be defined as the most important institution where young men of the community who have attained the age of 15 years gathered where they learned all forms of arts, crafts, physical training, and moral education until they married, it is also termed as ‘Bachelors quarter’ but no women or children were allowed to enter this place. It is mostly situated in the center of the village. However, with the declining power of the Chiefs, Zawlbuk became an obstacle in the operation of Christianity. To improve their indigenous way of living, people started to adopt modern ways of living and slowly neglecting Zawlbuk institutions resulting in its abolition. Thus with time passage of time, Zawlbuk became an institution of history.

CONCLUSIONS:

In the above statements, we illustrate how Christianity has largely impacted the traditions and cultures of Mizo people. It has a very philosophical influence on society as a whole where Christianity transformed them from their primitive ways of living to a whole new level of civilization. Their barbaric ways of fighting between tribes were also demolished which was inhumane and uncivilized. The slave system is known as ‘Bawi’ was also present during those times but is now eradicated. Thus the introduction of education played a very prominent role. Currently, the literacy rate of Mizoram has gone up to 91.33% ranking as the third most literate state in the whole country. Thus, today in this modern Mizo culture, Church plays a significant role, it is believed to be second in line in running the administration of the state after the Government.
REFERENCES:


