

‘MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN’: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY IN MIZORAM

THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE AWARD OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
SOCIOLOGY

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This is to certify that the data embodied in this study entitled **‘Men who have sex with Men’: An Ethnographic study in Mizoram**’ is based on my original research. It is carried out under the supervision of Professor Pushpesh Kumar, Department of Sociology for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology from University of Hyderabad. It is an original work of mine and to the best of my knowledge no part of this study has been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma at any University. My thesis can be deposited in shodhganga/INFLIBNET.

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A. Published (or accepted for publication) in the following publications:

1. 2016. Transcending Boundaries: Alternative Sexuality and Church Response, *Senhri Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*. 1(2)pp. 1-13. e-ISSN: 2582-6840, P-ISSN: 245-3757
DOI: 10.36110/sjms
2. 2021. Gender Socialisation and Gender non-conformity in Mizo Society. *Senhri Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 6(1)pp. 76-83. DOI [10.36110/sjms.2021.06.01.008](https://doi.org/10.36110/sjms.2021.06.01.008)
3. 2016. Enforcing gender conformity, is it against child rights? In Laldinsanga, C. & Lallawmawmi, P.B. (Eds.) *Child Rights and Child Protection: Issues and Challenges*, Lengchhawn Offset. ISBN 978-93-85263-36-1
4. 2021. Positioning non-normative gender and sexual subjects in Mizo society. In Ralte, L & Bawitlung, V. (Eds.). *Gender Sensitization in Contemporary Mizo Society*. pp.38-54. Samaritan Printer. ISBN: 978-81-950141-3-2.
5. Alternative Sexuality and Civil Society in Mizoram, In Sitlhou, H. (Ed.) *Identity and Marginality in North East India: Challenges for Social Science Research*. Orient Blackswan (forthcoming)

B. Presented in the following conferences:

1. 2016. Transcending Boundaries: Alternative Sexuality and Church Response, Young Social Scientist Meet 2016. OKD Institute of Social Change and Development Guwahati. December, 15 and 16
2. 2016. Between Legality and Illegality: Trans subjects and Religious Vigilantism in Mizoram. International Conference on Religion and Law: Colonial and Post-Colonial Encounters. Jamia Millia Islamia.
3. 2017. Alternative Sexuality and civil society: A case study of Mizoram, Tribes of North East India: Exploring Identities, Culture, Politics and Philosophy. Department of Philosophy, Janki Devi Memorial College, Delhi University

Further, the student has passed the following courses towards fulfilment of coursework requirements for PhD.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Words cannot express my gratitude to my supervisor Professor Pushpesh Kumar for walking with me in this journey of Ph.D. motivating and guiding me through every steps. It has been an enlightening experience to be exposed to sexuality literature through books, articles, seminar, discussion, workshops and lectures as well as getting to meet renowned scholars working on sexuality in person with the initiative of my supervisor. Together we participated multiple times in Queer movements and experiences the plight of the sexually marginalised communities who are subjected to discrimination making it a privilege to finally witness legal changes in society. I could not ignore to pen down the empathy shown towards me by my supervisor despite testing his patience numerous times and for his understanding throughout, I will be forever indebted.

This endeavour would not be possible without the support I get from my Doctoral Committee members Professor Aparna Rayaprol and Dr. Hoineilhing Sitlhou. I am grateful for their inciteful comments and suggestions. I am thankful to the faculty members of the Department of Sociology for their feedback, comments and their willingness to help whenever I approached them. I thank the non-teaching staff of the Department of Sociology for their continuous support.

I am grateful to the library staff of University of Hyderabad, EFLU, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi School of Economics, Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, Mizoram University and Tribal Research Institute for allowing me to collect study materials and archives to help me in my study.

I am truly appreciative of the MSM community of Mizoram and staffs at the Targeted Intervention Centre who welcomed me in their midst with open arms, for sharing their stories and sparing their valuable times with me for the purpose of my research. I thank the respondents

from YMA, MHIP, church leaders, historians, police, taxi drivers, etc. for willingly sharing their thoughts. I am grateful to the LGBTQ community of Hyderabad for lending support in my research and allowing me to participate in their programmes.

I thank and praise God for his guidance throughout. I am sincerely grateful to my family members-mom, dad, my brothers, my husband and son, my in laws and extended families for their prayer and support. I am grateful to all my friends and colleagues for their motivation and encouragements. I particularly wish to mention and thank Dr. R. Lalhruailiana, Dr. Sikha Das, Dr. Devi Prasad and Dr. Daniel Bandi who were my fellow research mates for their help and support in my research.

I acknowledge the financial assistance of University Grants Commission (UGC) for providing financial assistance through JRF and SRF.

Lastly, I am remembering two of my informants who passed away before seeing the culmination of this research. You will always be in my heart.

Lalhmingmawii

Glossary

<i>Chawnpui Home</i>	: a rehabilitation centre
<i>Hmeichhia</i>	: Female
<i>Khuanu</i>	: Goddess
<i>Mawngkawhur</i>	: a man who has anal intercourse with other men
<i>Mawnghur</i>	: another term for a man who has anal intercourse with other men
MHIP	: Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl, an association of Mizo women
MUP	: Mizoram Upa Pawl, an association of the elderly Mizos
MZP	: Mizo Zirlai Pawl, an association of students
<i>Mipa</i>	: Male
<i>Mipat-mipatna</i>	: male to male sex
<i>Mitthi khua</i>	: village of the dead
MSM	: men who have sex with men
<i>Naktuk</i>	: Tomorrow
<i>Puan</i>	: hand or machine woven cloth wrapped around the waist, a costume for Mizo women
<i>Pathian</i>	: God
<i>Patil</i>	: masculine woman
<i>Pawla</i>	: watchman of dead village
<i>Pherh</i>	: effeminate man
<i>Pialral</i>	: paradise
Synod Social Front	: A department under the Presbyterian church of Mizoram that deal with social issues
SRS	: Supply Reduction Service, a voluntary organisation under YMA
TI	: Targeted Intervention
<i>Tlawmngaihna</i>	: selfless service for others
<i>Tuai</i>	: an effeminate man
<i>Vai</i>	: non-Mizo, mainland Indians.
YMA	: Young Mizo Association

Zawlbuk : bachelor's dormitory in traditional Mizo culture

Zoram Drivers Ramthim Board: An organisation that funded the Targeted Intervention of
MSM

I

INTRODUCTION

This ethnography is about ‘men who have sex with men’ (MSM) in Mizoram, a state located in the northeast region of India. The historical underpinnings of the emergence of the term ‘men who have sex with men’ began with the HIV epidemic. At the turn of the late twentieth century, the world had witnessed the spread of an epidemic which has been later known as acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). In 1980, in San Francisco, California, a gay sex worker Ken Horne was diagnosed with AIDS. Subsequently, five cases were reported among young homosexual men living in Los Angeles, California. By then, this new disease was inherently linked with homosexuality and was termed "gay-related immune deficiency" (GRID), causing stigma and homophobia. HIV, therefore, happens to be a story that started to find its presence in the bodies of gay and bisexuals (Ayala & Spieldenner, 2021). This association of AIDS with homosexuality has hindered interventions (Altman et al., 2012). It fuelled prejudice against men who have sex with men who are noted as the significant critical population of HIV/AIDS. In the late 1980s, the term men who have sex with men was used to denote sexual behaviour that can impact one's health. Health practitioners and other advocates in the arena of HIV initially used men who have sex with men (MSM henceforth)¹ to shed the complexities surrounding the socio-cultural and political aspects of sexual orientation and identities to enable them to focus on health risks based on what people do and not who they are. The acronym MSM has surfaced and was adopted initially as a behavioural term, often substituting terms such as homosexual and gay (Boellstorff, 2011). It is a behavioural categorisation in its initial intention and was meant to be inclusive and less stigmatising. With the acknowledgement of sexual practices as fluid, MSM emerged as a category encompassing

¹ The acronym MSM was introduced in 1994

multiple identities and sexual orientations to tackle the risks of HIV/AIDS for men who have sex with men. As global health programs expand worldwide, the classification and the term MSM have been adopted in almost all societies with global health projects (Liu, 2020).

MSM is an ambiguous term. The endless possibilities of MSM can be observed as it can include groups of men who identify themselves as gay or heterosexual, transgender, bisexuals, men who practice same-sex with other men for economic gain, men who have sex with both men and females, those who identify themselves as questioning, and the list goes on. It problematises the belief in the existence of binary sexual orientations, highlighting the possibility of an individual having more than one sexual partner in his life (Loue (2008). UNAIDS Report (2006) on 'Men Who Have Sex with Men' in Asia and the Pacific asserts that men who have sex with men are not a uniform group or an isolated social minority with a single sexual preference; they come from all social classes. Many men who have sex with men have also had sex with women. MSM, thus, covers a large variety of settings and contexts in which male-to-male sex takes place. The reason is that the words 'men' and 'sex' are interpreted differently in diverse cultures and societies and by the involved individuals. They range from men who mention conventional masculine identities and do not identify as homosexual or gay, or even bisexual, to transgender men.

Scholars working in the field of HIV/AIDS, complementing the concern of health practitioners, have shown that MSM are high-risk groups for HIV/AIDS. In 2019 among 1.7 people newly affected with HIV, one-third were MSM and clients of female workers (Mbita et al., 2022; Hessou et al., 2019). As compared to the general population, it has been observed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) that globally, men who have sex with men have a higher risk of acquiring HIV, amounting to 26 times.

The Indian context

MSM in India are among the key populations bearing the burden of HIV disease² (Isac et al., 2022). Prior to 1986, HIV/AIDS was not diagnosed as a significant concern for India as those infected were mainly foreigners who came to India for a short period. When AIDS cases were first recorded in 1986³, 10 out of 102 female sex workers were tested positive. Some of the governmental and private health authorities were initially in denial as AIDS was considered as a problem of the West. Subsequently, though, National AIDS Control Committee, a Central AIDS cell, National AIDS Control Programme and National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) were established after the cases were identified. By 1992 when the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare set up NACO to develop and monitor programmes to fight against AIDS, the WHO's South East Asia Regional Office (SEARO) estimated the number of HIV-infected people in India to be a million people. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, the heterosexual transmission was the significant risk factor identified by investigators. In the northeastern region of Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland, intravenous drug users were identified as the high-risk group because most of the transmission of HIV occurs through the injection of drugs (Tripathy, 2004).

The "time of AIDS in India", as Verma et al. (2008) have called it, coincides with the opening of India's economy and its adoption of structural adjustment programmes. India's structural change in economic measures opened up international funding possibilities. The National Aids Control Organisation (NACO), under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, was established in 1992. NACO collaborated with International funders, including World Bank, the WHO, USAID, Ford Foundation, Francois Xavier Bagnoud (FXB), International HIV/AIDS Alliance and many more to manage HIV/AIDS programmes. When multinational NGOs

² The prevalence of HIV infection rate among MSM is 2.69% while it is 0.28% among general population as per report from HIV Sentinel Surveillance Technical Brief, India 2016-2017.

³ The first case of HIV/AIDS in India was found in Chennai among sex workers. High risks group includes intravenous drug users, sex workers, person with multiple sexual partners. Blood transfusion has also been a matter of concern as it can pose as a risk to contract HIV.

entered India, they collaborated with indigenous organisations and acted as agencies providing financial and technical support. Millions of dollars received from funding agencies combat HIV/AIDS in India. A significant part of NGOs' programmes constitutes prevention services among MSM. The period from 1994 to 2005 saw the most significant number of multinational NGOs entering India. The year between 1994-2004 witnessed the most significant number of Gay-Lesbian-AIDS-NGOs registered in India (Tripathy, 2004; Kole, 2007; Verma et al., 2008). It has been documented that most interventions among the MSM population are initiated by NGOs (Thomas et al., 2011). Because of India's booming population, Safren et al., (2021) believed that India probably could be among the countries with one of the largest concentrations of MSM population. Therefore, global intervention is necessary to reduce the burden of HIV/AIDS to eliminate the disease.

The growing tendency to check AIDS/HIV among the MSM population has occurred recently. National statistics collected in the 1990s show that transmission of AIDS mainly through heterosexuals, for which awareness and prevention programmes were focused on the heterosexual population. Transmission from the same sex was neglected from HIV programs because of the statistics coupled with homosexuality being a crime in India, placing MSM as a marginalised and invisible population. Nevertheless, they are in a high-risk group that requires sudden intervention. In Indian culture, men are expected to get married. Though the MSM may have other sexual partners, they have to fulfil their duties to procreate. It makes it mandatory to have sexual relationships not only with their partners but with their spouses too once they enter into marriage (Chakrapani et al., 2002), making them a bridge in the spread of HIV/AIDS (Beena et al., 2011). The MSM identity in India is fluid. Those grouped under MSM can be self-identified gay men, *kothis* who are the receptive partners in sexual relationships and who often show effeminate characters, *panthis*-the insertive partners in the same sex, double

deckers-those who can insert and be receptive. Due to these varied identities and practices, it could not be a fixed category (Beena et al., 2011).

Stigma and Discrimination.

Research evaluating the challenges among the MSM population to curb the epidemic identified a higher prevalence of HIV among the MSM population than the general population. The issue being prevention programmes are hindered by discrimination, invisibility, homophobia, stigma, sexual abuse, violence, harassment, trouble in disclosing one's sexual practices, pressure to enter into marriages and procreate, and other social and legal intolerance (Thomas et al., 2011; Patel, 2012; Safren et al., 2021; Isac et al., 2022). There are pieces of evidence in Indian culture that showed sexual relationships other than heterosexual relationships⁴ (Patel, 2012). When Jeremy Seabrook researched MSM in India, he acknowledged that in slums, engaging in same-sex is considered as '*maaza, masti* or fun' that, for them, needs no rationalising or explanation (Seabrook, 1998). Khan (2001) too recognised the role of friendship and sexual play in the entire purview of same-sex sexual relationships in India. Despite same-sex sexual relationships being recognised in Indian traditions and often adopted as 'fun', British colonialism had changed the entire discourse. Until 2018, it was a criminalised offence under a law adopted in 1860 when India was under British rule. A draconian law, Section 377⁵ of the Indian Penal Code, was adopted that criminalised any form of unnatural sex, which includes

⁴ Images on Hindu temple walls especially those that are constructed during twelfth and fourteenth century prove the existence of same sex intercourse in ancient India. Furthermore, in Indian epics and chronicles there are occasional references to same sex intercourse. Indian mythology is full of instances where people (read Gods) change gender at will, often for sexual purposes, to satisfy another person, political reasons or even ego directed reasons. Vatsayana's Kamasutra which is perhaps the world's most famous work on erotics is non-judgmental about varieties of sexual practices except when it involves violence.

⁵ Unnatural offences.—Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with 1[imprisonment for life], or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine. Explanation.—Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section.

same-sex sexuality. The colonial influence was further enhanced by the expectation to procreate that arises from community attitudes on family and marriage.

Safren et al. (2021) have identified multiple challenges encountered by MSM in India which include harassment from police, family, community, and health care providers, internalised homophobia, stigma, disclosing one's sexual identities, pressure to get married and procreate, HIV infection, monetary problems, sexual abuse among many. Fear of stigmatisation acted as a barrier to accessing health care among the MSM population, making them more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS (Beena, 2011; Setia et al., 2006). Disclosing their identity to their family and peer group can affect their social and familial relationships as coming out of the closet can entail discrimination, prejudice, abuse and rejection. It resulted in depression and suicidal tendencies among MSM. In such a situation, a non-disclosure is often an option (Soohinda et al., 2018).

Section 377 as a rallying point

When we speak about same-sex sexuality and its stigma in the Indian context, one cannot ignore the role of Section 377 Indian Penal Code's attribution. Initiatives urging the government to repeal this law started in November 1991. This year, AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA) released a report which is *Less Than Gay*. Following this report, demonstrations were held in New Delhi. Also, a petition was submitted to Parliament's Petition Committee. In April 1994, another petition was filed in the Delhi High Court wherein Section 377 was challenged. The action was in response to the Tihar jail authorities' refusal to supply condoms to inmates despite the known prevalence of homosexual practice among prisoners and their consequent risk of exposure to HIV (Balasubrahmanyam, 1996, p. 257). It came up for hearing in 2001 but was dismissed. An attempt to repeal was made again by the Naz Foundation Trust based in Delhi, which joined up with the Lawyers Collective. It was dismissed again; however,

the Supreme Court ordered the Delhi High Court to hear the case. During this time number of NGOs had joined the cause of the Naz Foundation, which eventually resulted in the July 2009 judgment delivered by the Delhi High Court that Section 377 must be read down to exclude consensual adult sex. The petition against Section 377 encouraged isolated and reticent groups to come out into the open and advocate for their rights. The History of sexual rights advocacy helped increase the activism around Section 377 and has allowed LGBT groups to become more visible and outspoken in India.

The Supreme Court in 2013 overturned the judgement of the Delhi High Court because it is Parliament which has to decide on homosexuality decriminalisation, dismissing the reading down of Section 377 after four years. Review petitions and curative petitions were filed following the Supreme Court's decision. A silver lining against a decade of struggle continued in 2014 with the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) case judgement which recognised transgender people as the third gender. The fact that it is a judgement that legally recognised the existence of identities beyond the binary male and female is a progressive development in the real struggle. However, the goal is yet to be achieved. With the Puttuswamy v. Union of India judgement delivered in 2017 right to privacy, the right to have an intimate relationship with one's choice was legalised. On 6th September 2018, the Supreme Court declared Section 377 unconstitutional. It recognised the marginalisation, oppression and prejudice of sexual and gender minorities and declared that their rights are well protected under the constitution. CJI Dipak Misra stated, "Criminalising carnal intercourse is irrational, arbitrary and manifestly unconstitutional", while Justice Malhotra commented, "History owes an apology to these people and their families. Homosexuality is part of human sexuality. They have the right to dignity and are free of discrimination. Consensual sexual acts of adults are allowed for [the] LGBT community" (Seth, n.d.). Legally, Section 377 could no longer be used to criminalise homosexuality.

The struggle against Section 377: Critical concerns

The struggle against Section 377 and LGBT movement over the years is shrouded with criticism. Tellis (2011) criticised the role of NGOs in these movements for creating “newer identity categories” to receive funds and the irony that such funding comes only to those NGOs based in urban areas neglecting rural contexts. Tellis further observed the rally against Section 377 as elitist, urban-centric involving strict identity categories that failed to include women in the entire schema (pp. 145, 149). Tellis (2012) further criticises the elitist nature of the campaign and the judgment so widely celebrated by the media and the ‘queer movement’. He highlighted the absence of the marginalised group in the decade-long campaign and also the fact that the co-petitioners include state organisations instead of the key organisations involved in the struggle or other marginalised groups who are discriminated against similarly. This brings us further to the issue of class division in the sexual minority groups in India brought about by the intervention of NGOs. He further problematised the very reason why legitimacy is sought through the law and the transformation of the movement to legalising consensual sex, moving away from the initial aim is its function in barring the fight against HIV/AIDS (p. 151). Moreover, he observed the movement failing to bring out diversities because the stakeholders in the struggle portray it as a homogenous entity dismissing various diverse subjects that are affected by it (p. 154). On this issue, Kole (2007:2) contends that India has a diverse, complex and elaborate spectrum of same-sex sexual cultures in which sexual minorities have always performed their identities in various ways, in various social spaces and without the political rhetoric of the West. The Western project of liberating the sexually repressed communities of the East attempts to contain this dynamic and diverse sexual culture by baptising traditional sexual minorities to evolve into a globalised, universal and totalising LGBT identity category.

Similar to what Ashley Tellis observed, John & Nair (1999) mentioned the extension of sexual movements in India from discriminatory legislation to the desire to amend the Special Marriages Act to recognise same-sex marriage (p. 6), pointing out how it deviated from the initial agenda.

On account of NGOs intervention in creating newer identities, Menon articulated the possibility of expanding what we understood as natural to accommodate more sexual identities (cited in *ibid*). Radhakrishnan (2019) propounded the hierarchy in "queer communities" along with exclusions based on gender, class, caste and religion, problematising attempts to construct the LGBT community as one unit. Stating the importance of recognising diversities among sexual and gender minority subjects to highlight unequal access to rights and privileges, she wrote that many struggles are left in the shadows because of exclusion, thereby further remarking how a single law can be short of encompassing varied queer experiences because it protects the rights of upper caste men. She also pointed out laws beyond Section 377 that continue hindering emancipation for sexual and gender minority subjects.

Increasing visibility of sexual minorities in India has implications in media, films, and other platforms. As Misra (2009) opines, gay storylines carved their niche in popular Bollywood movies. Films like *Fire*, *Student of the Year*, *Dostana*, *Dishoom*, *Baadhai Do*, *Aligarh*, *Kapoor and Sons*, and many others, have been produced where some depicted gayness in a comical way. At the same time, a more respectful portrayal exists simultaneously (Eishita, 2022). A film with a gay storyline like 'I Am', a narrative about queerness, was awarded National Award as the best Hindi Film (Bakshi & Sen, 2012). Queer film festivals are held, and the media have given more interest in LGBT issues causing public debate and discussion. The politics of representation of sexual minorities is twofold in Bombay cinema.

On the one hand, it depicted homosociality traditionally inbuilt in Indian culture, while other films simultaneously represented the vilification of gays (ibid). We see changes in films and gay pride parades around metro cities and towns. There is a heightened visibility of sexual minorities in popular culture (Misra, 2009, p. 23)

Sexual minorities have become more visible due to the struggle against oppression through LGBTQ movements, intervention of national and international NGOs in the HIV/AIDS sphere, coverage in media, social media content, discussion in an academic forum, legal change, and others. Though the legal battle against the criminalisation of same-sex sexuality is won and celebrated, discrimination cannot be erased just because of these legal actions. Stigmatisation and discrimination continue in the everyday lives of those who traverse what society considers normative sexuality and gender.

Sexual minorities in the northeast: An undisclosed subject

Amidst the growing literature on sexual minorities, mainstream society, unfortunately, is silent about the experience of minorities in the northeast region of India. There has been a growing representation in media, LGBTQ movements and academic forums, but it is only a drop of water in the ocean compared to mainstream society. With the NGOs presence, there has been positive support and growing awareness. However, the fear of stigma and discrimination prevents sexual and gender minorities from being open about their orientation and identities (Yengkhom, 2019). Among the northeastern states⁶, Manipur is known to have a traditional institution that legitimises transvestites by providing them with a religious role. They are called *maibas* (traditional priests) or *maibis* (traditional priestesses). Also, Manipuri society has *shumang lilas*, a traditional theatre play where men enact the role of females and are called *nupishabis* (Manjuri, 2022). At the same time, the traditional acceptance of female enactment

⁶ Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya are the three northeastern states which have predominantly higher Christian populations.

by men and religious roles assigned to some form of transvestites, does not bar a homophobic atmosphere in Manipur. A director of a recently released gay movie, "Oneness", the first of its kind in Manipur, which is based on the alleged honour killing of a Manipuri gay in 2013, exuberated that In Manipuri society, homosexuality is not understandable. Another northeast State, Assam, has witnessed Queer Pride Parade in Guwahati since 2014.

Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, was reported as having a community-based organisation (CBO) named Samakami that has provided legal aid and health services to the LGBT community since 2007 (Rahman, 2017). Sexual minorities in Mizoram who are registered as MSM under NGOs working in HIV/AIDS have been provided health services and shelter during the day since 2007. Nevertheless, their interventions are limited. Until 2019 there were no associations of the LGBTQ community in Mizoram. However, in 2019 Lonestar society was formed but could not function without the assistance of NGOs, as Mizoram sexual minorities are marginalised under the rubrics of Christianity. Having a same-sex relationship is taboo. It is against the teachings of Christianity, and the Church resist such behaviours. Christianity influences the affairs of Mizo society as it is the dominant religion in Mizoram. The Church in Mizoram is not only a moral and patriarchal force but actively intervenes in community life and plays an enabling role during various crises and hence draws enormous legitimacy from the Mizos. In this situation, society follows the dictates of the Church and the organisations associated with the Church. Contradicting the Church and its moral values seems almost impossible, especially on issues around same-sex sexuality, as sexuality is legitimised only amid men and women united in marriage. This makes Mizo society exceptional making it difficult for non-conforming genders and sexualities to negotiate their everyday life even after post-377 and post-NALSA times.

In this context, this thesis aims to contribute to the growing works on sexual minorities by exploring the unexplored MSM in Mizoram, a context and subjects rarely represented. The

intervention of NGOs in HIV/AIDS awareness and elimination programmes has visibilised behaviours in the closet in Mizoram. The legal actions over the years have also drawn attention to them as it is against the norm of Mizo Christian practices.

Research Objectives

1. Mapping the sexual History of Mizoram to configure the erotic practices to situate same-sex love in the overall traditional moral order and changes brought about by colonial modernity and Christianity.
2. To assess men-men erotic practices closer to the arrival of AIDS/HIV NGOs in Mizoram and after the NGOisation with a specific focus on sexual agency. The focus of the study would be on change in the existing moral order, if any.
3. To document the everyday struggle and negotiation of space by MSM in a hetero-normative world and the diversity within the group. The intra-group networks and conflict will also be an integral part of the study.

Problematising MSM

While this study uses the acronym MSM, the trouble surrounding its use can never be ignored. Boellstorff (2011) said, "No scholar has yet written a definitive history of MSM" (p. 291). Like homosexuality, it was a scientific and bureaucratic coinage created to signify behaviour without identity for HIV/AIDS surveillance. The behavioural category of Men who have sex with men has been used in HIV literature since the 1990s. While the acronym MSM was coined in 1994. Epidemiologists have adopted this term to avoid complex cultural connotations surrounding identities based on sexuality which has nothing to do with their studies on diseases. Therefore, emphasis is placed not on the identity aspects but rather on the behaviour that places a person at risk of contracting HIV. Since its inception, it has moved beyond HIV literature and is now established in health programming and research dealing with sexual minorities (Young &

Meyer, 2005). UNDP (2011) defined 'men who have sex with men' and the corresponding acronym 'MSM' as "all men who engage in homosexual behaviour, regardless of gender identity, motivation for engaging in sex, or identification with any particular 'community'" (p.1). Capturing the complex diversity UNAIDS (2007) reported, "men who have sex with men are not a uniform group or an isolated social minority with a single sexual preference. They come from all social classes. They range from men who maintain conventional masculine identities and do not identify themselves as homosexual or gay or even bisexual, to transgenders-men who do not accept their gender and identify as women, like India's hijras⁷, Indonesia's *waria* and Thailand's katoey" (p.7). Chakrapani (et al., 2002) adopted this term to denote, "all those men who have sex with other men regardless of their sexual identity". They further asserted that a man who has sex with other men may still identify himself as heterosexual, or he may not want to have any specific form of sexual identity (p.6).

In the Indian context, MSM is used to accommodate a variety of sexual identities. Gayatri Reddy (2006:262) while defining the *hijras*⁸ as the third sex of India discusses how hijras, *kothis*⁹ Alternatively, other men who have sex with men differentiate from each other even though they could all come under the MSM category. As India is one of the countries affected enormously by HIV/AIDS, the term MSM has been used as an umbrella term to incorporate multiple sexual differences among men within diverse cultures to fight against HIV/AIDS. Depending on the sexual role they play during intercourse, MSM is further divided into different categories. If they are receptive partners and behave effeminately, they are called *kothi*¹⁰. However, they may even be the penetrator as well, but usually, they do not have sexual

⁷ hijras are neither male nor female, intersex or transgender people

⁸ Another definition of hijra is a traditional community of men who have undergone castration referred to as nirvana-or at least aspire to that state

⁹ Men who act or identify in some way as women, who repeatedly enact a desire to be penetrated by a real man(the so-called panthi) and who are sometimes sex workers

¹⁰ Some works refer to kothi as koti too.

intercourse with others who identify themselves as kothi. Those categorised under kothis are generally less educated and belong to lower socioeconomic status. They may even be sex workers. The receptive partners are often considered inferior to the penetrator. The insertive partners or the penetrators who act more masculine are called panthi or *giriya*. The term itself is given to them by their kothi partners. They adopt traditional masculine roles in relationships. Double-decker or *dhopratha* are men who can be either receptive or insertive during sexual intercourse.

While the behavioural focus on MSM may be helpful in several contexts, many scholars have problematised this category. "It undermines the self-determined sexual identity of members of sexual minority groups", according to Young and Meyer (2005:1144). People caged inside the MSM category for HIV/AIDS prevention are often not passive recipients of this subject. (Liu, 2020) captured how her interviewees identified the gap between their identity and the MSM subject in the context of China. The interviewees rejected MSM discourse and subjectivity and felt sceptical about being associated with a high-risk population. Having sex with men alone does not account for being a high-risk group but having multiple sexual partners can be. However, the categorisation of MSM failed to demarcate this variation; Though the sexual act is given more emphasis in this MSM categorisation, sexual acts are often equated with sexual identities; therefore, those who are categorised as MSM are often labelled as homosexuals, which overlooked differences that exist among MSM in terms of sexual practices, choice of partners, sexual drives, etc. The lack of sensitivity in this area outlined the insufficient attention paid to variations. Also, the primary purpose of adopting MSM is to fight against HIV/AIDS.

Nevertheless, HIV prevention activities targeted at MSM in non-western contexts are modelled after the West, which often fails to capture the cultural and social diversities in the non-western context (Asthana & Oostvogels, 2001). Boellstorff (2011) noted three transformations that the MSM category had undergone. In its original conception, gay men were excluded, but it was

reversed by 2000 when gay men were included in the definitions. As men are taken as a stable referent, transgender people are consistently excluded. However, many people still consider transgender people as male.

MSM category included transgenders around 2007. However, many male-to-female transgender people do not identify themselves as men, which led to the use of MSM and transgender people (MSM/TG) more commonly. Like LGBTQ, there might be an unending addition of categories to an expanding list. Lawrence Cohen (2005) was puzzled by the popularised usage of the term *kothi-panthi*. He proclaimed that while doing fieldwork in Varanasi, no one had uttered the words *kothi* or *panthi* until the mid-1990s. He believed that while some may have fit in the category, others he met would fit neither in the binarism nor the term gay. The use of MSM communities and MSM activists by some public health activists also denoted the transformation of MSM from a behavioural category to an identity it was coined to avoid. (Khan and Kahn, 2006) raised the potential risk that could enumerate the use of MSM as a behaviour-oriented term as it could "mask the sexual identity of men who engage in same-sex behaviour, potentially impairing long-term goals of self-actualisation and social justice" (p. 766).

It could be a critical venture to use MSM despite knowing all the circumstances of identities undermined under this umbrella term. However, without ignoring its limitations, this study continues to use the acronym as a substitute for it due to an absence of terms which can accommodate varying behaviours and identities.

Chapter Schema

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. In the introduction, the emergence of the term 'men who have sex with men', MSM, is explored through its relation with the global fight against HIV/AIDS. The evolution of the term from behavioural category to identity formation is

highlighted. As AIDS was initially known as gay-related immunodeficiency, the stigma surrounding male-to-male sexuality is traced. With the fight against HIV/AIDS taking a global venture, the opening of India to national and multinational NGOs and corporations in the 1990s to fund the AIDS project and the creation of newer identities are discussed, notwithstanding the problem that has thrived among sexual minorities to fit in these multiple identity categories. The very creation of identities is, therefore, problematised. Moving on to the need for this research, the silence of mainstream society on sexual minorities in the northeast region of India is expressed, which calls for a reason to document narratives of sexual minorities from this part of India.

The second chapter is on Research Methodology. The ethnographic work is cited by stating the field sites, the research process where informants are met at various scenarios, the methods of data collection, research participants, a reflexive note of the researcher and the theoretical framework that informed this study constitutes this chapter.

In the third chapter, 'Historicising heteronormativity in Mizo society', the position of alternative sexuality in Mizo tradition and its transitions in contemporary times is analysed. Same-sex sexuality is not alien to any society, no matter if it is accepted or taboo. This is why even if History is silent about it in societies where it is taboo, some information can point towards its existence. Through oral History, interviews, media content and existing literature, attempts are made to unearth rare evidence of alternative sexuality in Mizo society.

The fourth chapter is "The context of MSM life". In this, I have dwelled upon who the Mizo MSM are. I have discussed their relationships, orientation and sexual preferences, including how they meet their partners. When I started my fieldwork, the repetitive chorus was the impossibility of establishing a solid community of MSM. They quarrel among themselves, gossip, and spread awful lies resulting in the further deterioration of their relationship. They

are one day allies and enemies in subsequent days. They fight over sexual partners, money and friends. However, they could be best friends at other times. They are picky with whom they hang out. Division existed. Amidst this, the presence of NGOs and their workers seems to be a significant binding factor as it provides space for freedom, counselling, and opportunities to meet other MSM. I have also documented their problems, such as substance abuse and their perceptions of AIDS. Some informants mentioned the hopes they have for the future, which is included in this chapter.

Living with stigma and marginality: Conflict between alternative sexuality and Christianity constitutes the fifth chapter. I have taken up religious aspects by looking at the position of same-sex sexuality in the purview of the Mizo Christian church. I highlighted the stigma attached to same-sex sexual behaviour and the transcendence of what is considered a normative gender. Ways in which religious stigma is negotiated by MSM in their everyday lives form the core part of this chapter.

Moral Policing, Violence and Public Opinions of Homoerotic Subjects forms the sixth chapter. MSM are victims of multiple forms of oppression as the traditional values in Mizo society expect a man to be brave. Any signs of femininity are discouraged and mocked. Adding to this is the influence of Christianity, which lays out stringent rules of conduct regarding sexuality and behaviour. Failure to conform leads to stigma. In this chapter narratives on violence, stigma and discrimination are documented to critically engage upon the overarching subjugation in the name of morality.

The seventh chapter delineates one of sociology's most critical institutions, the family. It is entitled, 'Desires in Conflict: Challenging heteronormativity in family'. The Mizo family follows a patriarchal structure where the father controls the entire family. Narratives on family focused on the MSM being secretive about their orientation to their family and, more so, to

their father. Even if the family knows their sexual orientation, the father and the brothers usually punish them for their acts. They tell stories about their family, their background, their brokenness, the migration to cities for some informants to escape their families' retribution and attempts made by their family to change them and to get married. They lamented how they endured the punishment of their parents during their childhood and negotiated to be accepted as they were. This often resulted in the parents giving up and being withdrawn or nonchalant. Otherwise, it also turns out the other way where the MSM leave home to chase freedom from the shackles of family.

The final chapter draws conclusion of the thesis and delineates scopes for future research.

II

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Mizoram is a state located in the northeast region of India sharing international borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar and national borders with Manipur, Tripura and Assam. This State of India is inhabited mainly by the Mizos, enlisted as scheduled tribes under the Indian Constitution. Census 2011 recorded the population of Mizoram as more than ten lakhs, with a Christian population constituting 87.16 % of the population. The dominance of Christianity in Mizoram has an enormous impact on the issue of same-sex sexuality as the church¹¹ in Mizoram governs the ethical behaviour of its members, restricting sex outside of marriage as immoral, which includes same-sex conduct. Most Mizo Christians are affiliated with a church, so the church is given legitimate power in this State. Church doctrines and beliefs are embedded in Mizo society as the church functions not only as a religious institution but also as a social institution, engages in social developments, and addresses social problems (Bijukumar, 2019). Since this is the case, those engaging in same-sex are bound to lead a challenging life amidst the strong influence of the church on moral behaviour and norms in Mizo society.

The Hindustan Times report featured Mizoram as the highest HIV/AIDS prevalent state in India. The rate is ten times high than the national average. 2.3% of its total population is infected with HIV/AIDS, of which 65% is sexual transmission, and 32% is through sharing needles for drug injections (Khojol, 2022). In the 1990s, AIDS was transmitted mainly by drug users sharing needles (Kanagaraj, n.d.), but the scenario has changed over the years, as seen in the latest report.

¹¹ Church is referred in this context as an institution encompassing the whole aspects of its organisations and functions.

In Mizoram, programmes of HIV/AIDS-related services are controlled and monitored by the Mizoram State AIDS Control Society, which has its office in Aizawl. There are 34 Targeted Interventions under this society, out of which only one TI is exclusively dedicated to MSM. This TI is located at Dawrpui west locality in Aizawl, at the heart of Aizawl city.

Aizawl is located in the northern part of Mizoram. It is the main centre of governance and business as all the principal offices, legislative assembly, raj bhavan, markets, and offices of NGOs, churches, and political parties function mainly from here. The lone airport connecting Mizoram from the rest of the world is 31 km away. Aizawl is also a centre of education as universities, colleges and good schools are located. Therefore, it is densely populated compared to the other areas of the State, resulting in continuous traffic congestion throughout the day, especially in the central city areas. The TI in Aizawl acted as my main field site from where I got to meet MSM not only from Aizawl but who came from other towns and villages of Mizoram.

The intervention of NGOs to address HIV/AIDS in Mizoram

The term MSM surfaced in Mizoram when the Mizoram State AIDS Control Society decided to establish Targeted Intervention Centre(TI) for MSM. Francois-Xavier Bagnoud, an International NGO, funded this programme for more than ten years. Francois Xavier Bagnoud was started in 1986 by Albina du Boisrouvray with a vision of giving a chance for everyone not only to survive but to thrive. Its mission is to provide support and tools to people living in extreme poverty so they will be self-sufficient and provide a better future for their children. Their domains of intervention include families living in poverty, women and children who are vulnerable, disabled people and , people living with HIV/AIDS and internally displaced persons.

In India, it has taken up a name as FXB India Suraksha. Since 1991 it has developed programmes that provide awareness to prevent HIV/AIDS. The project in Mizoram comes under Care and Support projects related to HIV/AIDS. It attempts to improve the quality of life and survival rate of the people affected by HIV/AIDS through community mobilisation and targeted interventions.

From the day the Mizoram office was established in Aizawl that is from 2007 onwards, for a very long time, the TI office was named FXB until the funding stopped and was later taken over by local funders Zoram Drivers Ramthim Board (ZDRB)¹².

Fieldwork at FXB Mizoram: The Beginning

The study of Men who have sex with men (MSM) in Mizoram for this research started in March 2013 when I initiated a pilot study to write a research synopsis. After the acceptance of my research proposal on September 2013, the actual fieldwork was conducted briefly in December 2013 and more rigorously from July 2014 to September 2014, December 2014, May 2015 to July 2015 and December 2015. After which occasional visits along with phone conversations, WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook chat were the subsequent mode of gathering information from 2016 till 2019¹³. The fieldwork was conducted mainly in Targeted Intervention Centre but sometimes, depending on the informant, restaurants, roadside pavements, streets, hospitals, beauty parlours, and private homes were the other spaces where I used to conduct interviews. I will use pseudonyms to refer to my informants to abide by the ethical norm.

It was the year 2013 in March when I reached Aizawl to conduct a pilot study. Though I am a resident of this place, pursuing higher education elsewhere keeps me from my city, primarily

¹² Zoram Drivers Ramthim Board (ZDRB) was set up in 1957 providing services for the welfare of Mizo community. It took interests in supporting HIV/AIDS prevention, awareness and care of PLHIV when AIDS became a problem for Mizoram and continue to support till today.

¹³ The lengthy period of finalising this research resulted from being detached from regular research work due to pursuance of employment.

for eleven months every year. Therefore, familiarity with places and people has deteriorated over the years due to limited contact. Moreover, venturing into an area of research where I had no clue of whom I should approach, where I should start, and what I should expect engrained a feeling of fear deep inside, the whole concept of what I used to read in research methodology, of being an insider-outsider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) surfaced. I am an insider for being a Mizo who can speak the language, yet I am an alien in the world of MSM. With those thoughts in mind, I spend my first night at home worrying about the future. The next day, I scanned the newspaper clips of the local newspapers my mother had collected for me thinking it might be of help in my research. I came across a newspaper report about Men who have sex with men (MSM). The source of that information is given as Synod Social Front, an office run by the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram.¹⁴ I visited the office, which is half a kilometre from where I stay, to gain more information. I was received by the head of the office, who informed me that the research is no longer carried forward due to a change of officials¹⁵ but he would be willing to give me the documents of their research and the phone number of their researcher¹⁶ who can help me? He further stated that I must not release the content of the information and should maintain secrecy. As a pseudonym is required to hide the identities of my informants, I will henceforth refer to the Synod Social Front researcher as JK in this thesis. I will continue to do so when I refer to other research informants. I contacted the researcher by phone and travelled 8 kilometres by taxi to visit him the following day. Even though I was born in this city, I only visited a few places, so I got off the taxi in the central area of the locality and walked, asking around to find JK's house. It was a sunny summer day, and the path where I walked was a steep slope. Suddenly a black bike stopped near me, and the rider called, "Are

¹⁴ Presbyterian Church of Mizoram is the leading church in Mizoram, having largest members compared to other denominations.

¹⁵ Heads of office are often shuffled for administrative efficiency.

¹⁶ This person not only acted as a researcher, but the church employed him as a counsellor for MSM

you the one who contacted me?" I asked if it was him. He confirmed my query and said that his house was far, so he told me to climb on the pillion, and we rode to his house.

He parked his house near a one-storey building, and as we entered, he introduced me to his mother, who was in the house. His mother greeted me warmly and teased if I was his girlfriend. Denying it vigorously, we both took a seat at the dining table. He fetched his laptop from his room and allowed me to scan the reports he wrote about his research. His mother made a cup of tea and placed it on the table as we discussed about MSM. JK offered to take me to the Targeted Intervention Centre, located in the heart of the city in the primary market area of Aizawl. I willingly agreed even though deep inside, there was an aura of scared feeling again. While he dressed up in his room, I transferred the content of his report to my pen drive and bidding goodbye to his mother, we left the house and rode towards FXB-TI Centre, which became the place I frequented in the course of my research.

Unravelling the closet

Located in the main market area of Aizawl, there is a building owned by a renowned doctor. FXB-Targeted Intervention Centre occupied two storeys of that building. It functions as a drop-in centre and an office. We climbed through flights of stairs and entered a dimly lit space filled with people, all men who were busy communicating with each other while holding different articles. Two of them were holding a rainbow curtain and attempting to put it up. The room has a couch, TV, multiple office tables and chairs. They greeted JK and told him they were busy cleaning and decorating as they would be visited by the authorities of FXB from outside Mizoram. A guy about 5'9 in height, wearing a black t-shirt and jeans with a feminine voice, said we should make ourselves comfortable inside his office, and he will join us shortly. We both went towards a cubicle. On his table, there were stacks of papers piled up. I sat on the chair, picked up a flyer from the table and read it aimlessly while JK went out again, mingling

and joking with the rest of the crowd. I could overhear them asking JK if I was his girlfriend. Ten minutes may have passed when the guy with the black t-shirt and JK walked in. I was appropriately introduced to him by JK. The guy I came to know as Z informed me that I would have to speak to their superiors to get permission. They took me to the adjacent room, which was cleaner and well-maintained.

There I met KT, who told me to write a formal letter stating the purpose of my visit. He added that he thinks there will be no problem as they often hosted social work students from Mizoram University in the past. Thanking him I said I will return with the required letter. Upon submitting the required letter, my fieldwork started among the MSM the next day. After building rapport with them through the Targeted Intervention centre, I acted as their tail, following them wherever I could. I participated in their parties, observed their card games, ran errands, shopped with them and even followed them to the suburbs, where they drank. Conversations happening on such occasions have become my primary sources of information.

Approaching people to learn about their intimate sexual behaviour and other related issues is a sensitive study area. The secrecy about it made it quite challenging to find research informants willing to open up. It requires building rapport with the MSM, but it takes a long time to gain their trust to culminate in sharing their story. Sometimes the NGO workers scolded me for being too hesitant to approach strangers. In the initial phase of my fieldwork, my attempt to interview E, an MSM introduced to me by one of the NGO social workers, was rejected sternly. This made me realise that an abrupt attempt to interview them without building rapport first would never work. In order to make myself familiar with them, I tried quite hard to fit into their environment. I observed the music they liked, the things they wanted to talk about, the games they were interested in, their choices in cosmetics, their food habits and others. I came to realise that the younger MSM who are much younger than me are more open to talking about their sexuality, their love lives, their family problems, etc., as compared to those who are my age

and older. Being at the Targeted Intervention Centre every weekday continuously helped break the ice among us. I could finally get people willing to let me interview them and confide in me about their various problems and secrets. If consent, I conducted face to face interview, which usually takes 30 minutes to over an hour. I always carry a small notebook, voice recorder and phone. However, I used my voice recorder only twice as the informants usually feared the idea of being recorded while interviewing. Observation, interview, storytelling, discussions and informal conversations are the main methods used to gather data.

FXB-Mizoram Targeted Intervention Centre is where I meet research informants and interview them. While doing my fieldwork, the TI was visited by a group of Doctors, nurses, NGO workers and medical students. This was on August 29, 2014. Fortunately, this has been an important day to learn more about the place I frequented for research. I sat at the back on the day of the meeting, listening to their conversations and taking notes. Before this meeting, though I had been a daily visitor, I still needed to be told the history as clearly as they narrated on this particular day.

Before the visitors came, I was already in the office with MSM, who dropped in that day, chit-chatting. Suddenly Z appeared in the doorway. He urgently said that the visitors had almost reached the place, telling us to hide the playing cards and tidy the office. So, we cleaned the office as fast as we could. The moment we finished; they had arrived already.

We made them sit in a circle, which is how the couches are arranged. We pulled out more plastic chairs as the seating space did not suffice. The interaction started. The visitors asked the staff all sorts of questions, including if they have such and such medicines, their condom distribution mechanisms, the history of FXB and their works, the story of their clients and the services they offer. The staff answered those queries as best as possible in the absence of the Project Manager, who was out of the station. Through the information I gathered that day from

the meeting and the occasional conversations we had at the FXB-TI office during my fieldwork, I was enlightened on the workings of the NGO that catered to the MSM population in Mizoram.

Secondary functions of FXB

FXB in the initial years of its inception, funding was enormous, so they could organise hotspots frequently. By hotspot, they meant picnics, events or parties organised by the office where they invite MSM and give them awareness on HIV/AIDS simultaneously while giving them entertainment. Organising such programmes attract people, so they used to have many visitors. Currently, funding has shrunk, making it only possible to organise hotspots if they have sponsors.

Registration/De-registration and labelling

I had often helped out in arranging the registration pile of sheets. It has information on the names of the MSM, the type in which they are classified and the address and contact numbers. Outreach workers would outreach by visiting MSM and asking them if they would like to be registered. Their names will be included if they are willing to be registered only.

It is impossible to register all men who have sex with men. The TI programme cannot give services to each one of them. Some do not want to avail of services because they are closeted. NACO had dropped panthi as it is believed unnecessary to extend their services if kothis are protected. Mr V, the deputy project manager of the FXB-MSM project, said that in Mizoram, there is no Transgender (TG), so they registered cross-dressers as TG.

There is a possibility of being a strike out from the registry. Mr V had mentioned that if the registered MSM get married and have a wife, they mostly delete them from the registry. If the clients admit they are no longer involved in the same sex, they are deleted. In one of the meetings that we had, one of the peer educators, pointing to the person who sat next to me, said that MF, who was once an MSM, is now deleted from the registry because he is no longer

involved in same-sex sexual intercourse. He told us that MF was an MSM once, a double-decker, to be exact. Since he says he has stopped having sex with men, they strike his name off the roll. The others who were present were laughing, and at that point, MF smiled but whispered in my ear, "He has given me a bad image". The reason why married men are dropped from the client list is basically that they no longer want to avail services. Outreach workers must visit their clients, but if they visit married men, it reveals their identity to their wives, which is like an 'outing'¹⁷, so it is not feasible.

Clients who are often de-registered include individuals who are HIV-positive MSM. During my fieldwork in 2014, there were 17 HIV-positive clients. The term "ever positive"¹⁸ indicates that they are already positive while they register them as clients. Their dropping out is the anxiety and fear of being recognised as positive by others. By others, they meant the other MSM, as they wanted to be hidden.

My involvement in registration and de-registration informed me of another way in which an MSM is de-registered. That is when they die. The deceased clients are taken off the registry. During my fieldwork, there have been a few MSM who died. I was mainly close to two of them as they were my informants with whom I had shared beautiful memories.

In March 2016, when I visited FXB, I was informed that the number of clients has now decreased to 445, out of which 17 people are living with HIV/AIDS. I was told that death is the main reason for the decline in number. In typology, the transgender dominated the PLHIV status, that is, people living with HIV. Among the Mizos, cross-dressers are registered as transgender. I asked one of the workers, "Do you really think the numbers you entered are correct, do you believe there are as many as 445 in Aizawl?" He shoved his head and told me

¹⁷ Revealing their identity and sexual orientation

¹⁸ Term commonly use in AIDS-NGO

that they have to register fake individuals to achieve the target. If not, funds will stop coming. He added that he had discussed it with the project director on excluding all the fake ones from their list.

Meanwhile, Z, working on Microsoft Excel, had a different opinion. Adding to my query, he said that there are many whom they have yet to contact and are out of reach. He clarified that it is not possible to add such individuals abruptly. Minimising the screen, he turned towards me and said:

We have seen so many things because of media, such as Facebook, WhatsApp and the internet. Speaking the truth, *tuai* were stigmatised earlier, but things are changing...so many people call themselves gay. I know a lot of them. However, the crux of the problem is that of bisexuals. We do not know their orientation if they do not come out and tell us. They have wives but have sex with a male even though females are their first choice. They are with a male in a state of drunkenness or to satisfy their sex drive. Including that there will be plenty who are not registered (Z, personal communication, March 29, 2016)

Reluctance to be visible when MSM lead a heterosexual lifestyle is portrayed through this communication.

Sample selection

As I am researching a group I have never been a part of, my informants are met through snowball sampling. Initially, the Targeted Intervention workers introduced me to their clients and took me into their outreach programmes. They said I would be fortunate if I could get to interview thirty MSM. As we continued to build rapport through frequent meetings, the network gradually expanded and finally, at the end of my research, the total number of MSM informants could be counted as thirty-two. Amongst these thirty-two, I have been in contact regularly with some even after completing my fieldwork, and they have been a great help while writing my thesis.

Age	13 to 45 years
Identity	Fluid -registered as male in official documents and census, categorised as MSM and its subcategories in NGO sphere, some are labelled as tuai or pherh
Religion	Christianity
Appearance	It depends from person to person-masculine, cross dresser, effeminate...
Employment	Social workers, beauticians, daily wage labourers, students, tailors, sex workers, unemployed
Education	Graduate, college students, school drop-out, uneducated

Table 1. A brief overview of MSM informants

In addition, my other informants for my research include Pastors, church elders, and church youth leaders from different denominations. I also interacted with leaders of NGOs, such as the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP). Police, social workers, government servants, shop keepers and students I have reached out to provide me with vital information in understanding institutionalised stigmatisation of MSM and public perceptions of sex between men.

Data collection procedure and analysis

Engaging in an ethnographic study, whenever I went for fieldwork, I spent the entire day among the MSM at TI, listening to their conversations, taking part when they played carrom board and cards, running errands with them, following them to the hospitals, parties, parlours, markets and sometimes in their homes and places where they buy and drink alcohol. I have adopted the semi-structured interview method, observation and group discussion to gather information. I

made a list of questions for an interview depending on our conversations with my informants. My questions were altered or expanded. The primary focus of the interview mainly rests on the resistance MSM faced from their family, the struggles they encounter because of their sexual choice, their sexual and dating lives, their partake in Christianity and same-sex sexuality, their livelihood and their hopes for the future. They were asked to narrate their childhood memories to locate their orientation. I conducted a one-on-one interview with most of my MSM informants. However, there were a few whom I interviewed in the presence of their friends, who introduced me to them. Not all interviews could be held under closed doors, even though the topic of my study is sensitive. Closed-door interviews could be held at the Targeted Intervention Centre because the social workers would spare me their room for my interview whenever I found an informant willing to participate in my study. Another space where I could conduct the private interview is when I visited my informants in their homes while other family members were away. This mainly happened during the day. Besides these places, public spaces such as restaurants and streets are where I could have a chance to interview my informants. I took down memos except when we were out on the streets. The recording was only allowed by my informants for two. Jotting down memos otherwise was consented to by the rest. When I got home, I recorded the conversations using memos and whatever I could recall. This has been a difficult task as, by the time I got home, there used to be several words I could not replicate exactly as told, which draws limitations in my data collection.

The second method which I adopted to gather data is group discussion. These group discussions are not focus group discussions. Whenever we had time to spare at the Targeted Intervention Centre, the MSM who dropped in and the social workers used to gather around, play cards or carrom board while talking about different topics. Our informal conversations have been an essential source of information for me. Many times, I used to bring up subjects that I would like to dwell upon for the purpose of my research and those were willingly discussed without

much hesitation. The questions relating to homosexuality being a Biblical and church taboo received fewer comments than personal relationships and violence.

The interviews I conducted with pastors, church leaders, NGO leaders, police, etc., the non-MSM research participants were held in their offices and their homes. These subjects are the agencies of social control in Mizo society. Their perspectives contributed immensely to understanding the stigma attached to same-sex sexual behaviour.

As most of my informants do not allow audio and video recording, I relied on memos while doing observations and interviews among my informants. Those memos were later transcribed and expanded. The data analysis procedure is carried out through coding and finding key themes from those transcriptions, which are further analysed.

Theoretical Framework:

Queer theory has informed us of the existing institutional regulations. Through the queer lens, we could examine how certain sexualities, their forms and expressions are stigmatised over others. Queer theory problematises oppression justified through hegemonic norms. It questions socially established norms and conventional understanding of sexuality and gender. It challenges sexuality as biologically determined, thereby negotiating institutionalised ideology that advocates sexuality as determined through biological beings. In this regard, Butler (1992) remarked on how identities are attained through behavioural norms. Seidman (1994) asserted that the meaning and forms given to sexuality vary historically, and it is diversified according to social groups. Dwelling on the purview of a queer theory, he further stated how identities are multiple and the possibilities of an infinite number of ways in which "identity components" such as race, nationality, sexual orientation, class, gender, age, and ableness can intersect. Queer theory also looks at how institutional practices and discourses produce sexual knowledge, how they organise social life, and how it represses differences. Rubin (1993)

highlighted how various institutions have worked together to create a "hierarchical system of sexual value" where certain sexual expressions are regarded as more valuable than others. These informed us of the institutionalised heteronormativity that is practised through Mizo Christianity and culture. Queer theory contested rigid identity categories, thereby considering identities as fluid. This framework is also used to problematise the categorisation of MSM identity, where individuals are strictly placed in a particular category based on their sexual practices without considering other factors. A person cannot be defined solely based on his sex or object choice. As Stein and Plummer (1994) had said, "Queer theory helps us in looking at how identities are constituted in the cultural practices of everyday life" (p. 138). Vallochi (2005) had asserted that combining ethnography and sociologically informed queer concepts could capture the "complexity of human agency, the instability of identity and the importance of institutional and discursive power". When identities are taken as given, inequalities are constructed through categorisation as categorisation becomes a problem for those who do not fit neatly within that norm, thereby failing to capture the complexities of being.

Kole (2007) wrote that though homosexuality has been practised even in traditional societies, "sexual identity has never become an agenda of political struggle in any of these societies until recently (para 3). In the global south, with the onset of neo-liberal capitalism, there has been an intervention from the West to liberalise the sexual minorities who are still "sexually repressed" as a form of developing such traditional societies. In this attempt, the diverse sexual culture and identities of these societies are replaced with western identity categories (ibid) thereby putting away the indigenous terms. Identity, as opined by Joseph (1996), deals with belongingness, the commonality you have with some people but contrasting you from others (p.2228). With historical changes, the need to express oneself through dominant modes to be heard and listened to arises. It has become important for minority groups to express themselves using the dominant modes. However, incompatibility and the discrepancy could exist in the

process with the dominant modes (ibid); thereby, sexual identification in the western notions adopted in non-western societies find incongruency to a large extent. In *The Gay Archipelago*, Tom Boellstroff argues the existence of indigenous terms like ‘cewek’, ‘cowok’, ‘waria’, ‘banci’ etc. and also how social categories like ‘gay’ and ‘lesbi’ come into being and how they transform ostensibly Western concepts of homosexuality and how they are taken up and lived in the Indonesian context. From Don Kulick’s book (1998) we find that *Travestis* are homosexuals-males who ardently desire men and fashion and perfect themselves as objects of desire for those men. In the Philippines, in ancient Dahomeyan and Yoruba culture, among the Hausa of present day-Nigeria, indigenous Mexican people and in Thailand, the transgender people are known as *kathoey*. In contrast, in India, they are known as *hijra* or *ali*. (Sherry, 2005). Due to globalisation, the overarching discourse around sexual minorities in the South Asian region remains dominated by NGOs and donor agencies are talking exclusively in the language of international standards and universal human rights. This has ended up as a drive toward homogeneity, and with the linking to global sexual rights movements, there has been a significant loss of local articulation of identities. Boyce (2013) notes that recent research in male-to-male sexuality in India (and elsewhere) has been closely tied to locally based community-centred HIV prevention interventions run by and for men who have sex with men. These are often carried out under the guidance of external consultants and funded by international agencies. There is a tendency to assert the presence of indigenous non-gay male-to-male sexualities characterised by receptive and non-receptive roles in anal sex. This is nominally identified in indigenous terminology as *Kothi/koti* or *panthi*, respectively.

Lawrence Cohen (2005) was puzzled by the popularised usage of the term Kothi-panthi. He proclaimed that while doing fieldwork in Varanasi, the last time anyone uttered the words kothi or panthi was in the mid-1990s. He believed that while some may have fit in the category, others he met would fit neither in the binarism nor the term gay. In Varanasi, he observes, "The

binary is that of Number Sixes or *jankha* (effeminate)". In addition to this, he discusses an interesting issue, i.e., the rivalry between Shivananda Khan and Ashok Row Kavi over the authenticity and historicity of the identities of gay and kothi.

He writes, "One network cast kothi and panthi as the dominant non elite forms of South Asian male desire for another male, framed these as embodying gendered as opposed to sexual norms and utilised a systematic kothi-panthi model as the core of any future interpellation of MSMs for preventive health. Gay men within these terms were an elite minority with different needs not rooted in local communities, and AIDS intervention targeting the majority of MSMs were to lie elsewhere". The other network located multiple subtypes of kothis within a complex grid of identification and practices that included gay men and refused gender as the dominant structuring axis defining men's desire for sex with men. The elite other is that of the foreign NGOs (i.e., the British-born Khan) that can discover authentic Indian culture and impose it on the natives and imagine a universe where sexuality and gender are analytically distinct. Through the networks of NFI, its affiliates and their funder, the kothi-panthi framework became important in AIDS prevention research and intervention with MSMs throughout South Asia and the diaspora, as well as an, accepted and recognisable feature of Indian culture. Kothi-Panthi has been identified as the best practice disease prevention by UNAIDS and other global funding brokerages. Mohan (2013) asserted that due to the dominance of NGOs in India that served the LGBT community, many new English identities and words had been adopted. The limitations in encompassing varied sexual and gender identities in indigenous languages have resulted in politicising these identities. Also, adopting English names as an identity creates divisiveness in terms of class. He further stated the simplicity of understanding these English terminologies, which makes it easier to be adapted as an identity (pp. 29-30). In Mizoram, like all the other Indian States, the drive to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS has brought in NGOs who fixated on the category of MSM along with terms like gay, kothi-panthi, double-decker,

etc., ignoring indigenous terms of identification. This critical viewpoint does not mean that I am suggesting using indigenous terminology in Mizo society as they are derogatory. Nevertheless, the fixation on NGOised identities has led to classifying my informants as kothi, panthi, double-decker and transgender in the NGO sphere. I am explicitly underlining the NGO sphere here as I have not come across my informants identifying in these terms beyond. However, the term MSM is adopted by local media when they report same-sex sexuality between men. I have asked one of the double-deckers, a social worker, to explain the MSM categories as per his understanding. He said:

These categories are based on their sexual behaviour, and we classify them as such. Kothis are those who solely submit their butt for penetration in sex. Panthi is the ones who penetrate when they have sex with men. They cannot be the ones to be penetrated. Double-deckers are those who could play both the roles of penetrator and penetrated depending on their partners. Transgender people are not under the MSM category, as MSM is a behavioural category. Transgender is related to gender; they are not classified based on their sexual behaviour. It refers to those who behave according to how they claim themselves. For example, there could be someone whom we think of as male but who thinks of himself as female and act like one (J, personal communication, April 25, 2020)

Furthermore, I gave him the names of all the informants I have met so far and asked him to classify them as kothi, panthi, double-decker and transgender. Based on his classification, the informants I have come across consist of eleven kothis, three panthis, five double-deckers, and eight transgender people. He could not identify a few of my informants as I have met them through other MSM, but considering the people who introduced me, he thinks of them as panthi.

The MSM I interviewed are not homogenous; their family backgrounds are different, they belong to different regions of Mizoram, and their sexual choices vary from person to person. The daily life challenges they encounter are not common. The challenges encountering an

MSM who migrated to Aizawl city from southern Mizoram and did not have a family to support him are undoubtedly different from an MSM living with his family in Aizawl city. On the other hand, in terms of freedom, the latter will have to conform to multiple family norms. In another scenario, an MSM who works in an NGO as an outreach worker would not have to fear living in hunger the next day compared to an MSM sex worker whose sole income depends on the number of clients he had the previous night. Though they are all recognised as MSM in the NGOised sphere, the problem of identity politics plays a role here. Crenshaw (1991) said, "identity politics...conflates of ignores intragroup differences"(p. 1242) while advocating the role played by other factors beyond being a woman, such as race and class in experiences of violence by women. The intersectionality framework is adopted in this study to illustrate how subordinations intersect in the life of MSM as they have to endure the effects of multiple subordination. One example I can illustrate here is the story of E. Hailing from a small village in the northern part of Mizoram. He migrated to the city to have better opportunities and free himself from the shackles of his family, who could not accept his orientation. Engaging in sex work, he has to work at night looking for clients. One night he was wrongly accused of stealing. He was put in a lock-up facility overnight and beaten. His sexual orientation, his outfit choice, the smell of alcohol coming from him, and his involvement in sex work put him in a vulnerable position. Even though he tried hard to tell the police that he did not steal anything, the policemen said, "Tuai like you does not have any hesitation in telling a lie", thereby stereotyping the identity tuai. No matter how much he tried to explain that, he was not guilty. In the eyes of those policemen, his looks alone confirmed his guilt. He was bailed out the next day by an NGO worker Z. This reminded of what Crenshaw (1991) wrote on how black women are "judged by who they are, not by what they do" (p. 1280). The bailer, Z and NGO worker himself is an MSM. Yet his appearance resembles a straight male, and his job at the NGO give him power that is not accessible to E. Here we see the intersectionality of identity along with

class positions in determining a person's access to power. Framing of categories finds permeation by other categories. It is fluid, changing and with changes in power it is evolving. (Cho et al., 2013. pp.795). The intersectionality approach, therefore, helped me in focussing on the differences in experiences among MSM.

Mizo MSM are facing cultural and religious oppression because they subverted what is considered as normative gender and sexuality. Sociological understanding of deviant behaviour clearly places same-sex sexuality as deviancy in the context of Mizo society. Akers (1973) listed signs which show that a behaviour is socially defined as deviant. The signs include public stigmatisation, gossip, ridicule, loss of status and the existence of public or private organisations that aim to deal with those who are considered deviant. Deviant behaviour will see people's expression of disapproval in public though it may not be so in private. Aggleton (1987) also asserted deviant behaviour as behaviours that contradict the norms existing in the society, community or group where it occurs though norms that govern a person's behaviour vary from society to society. Culturally, Mizo society upheld heteronormativity. Heterosexual relationships are celebrated through folksongs and folklore. Stories and songs lamented on the love between men and women but not man and man or woman and woman. Roles and responsibilities in society and family are divided on the basis of one's gender. Heteronormativity is reinforced through everyday practices. On religious grounds, heteronormativity is advocated through the institution of marriage whereby churches around Mizoram recognise and perform the sanctity of marriage only between men and women. Biblical connotations on the condemnation of same-sex sexuality are appraised. Meanwhile, alternative sexuality is marginalised and sanctioned.

For a Sociologist observing deviant behaviour in a society, one crucial element which co-occurs is stigma. This particular term has gained its popularity in Sociology from the work of Erving Goffman (1963), i.e., *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Erving

Goffman defined stigma as an expectation of a discrediting judgment of oneself by others in a particular context. Borrowing and expanding Goffman's definition of stigma number of scholars are trying to define it through their studies of different kinds of stigma in various societies. Scholars like Bos, Pryor, Reeder and Stutterheim (2013) emphasised the occurrence of stigma in social interactions. They do not consider stigma to reside in the person but rather in the social context because what is stigmatising in one social context might not be so in another situation. They have classified stigma as public, self and structural. Structural stigma legitimises and perpetuates a stigmatised status by society's institutions and ideological systems. The concept of stigma is used in this research to understand stigmatisation faced by MSM from the purview of Mizo Christianity and culture. Institutional homophobia in Mizo society is visible through the narratives of MSM and by looking at Christian ideology which is practised and followed by the churches and other organisations in Mizoram.

Another framework used to understand the everyday negotiation of oppression and subjugation by MSM is agency theory. Agency, as explained by Parker and Dales (2014), is the "capacity to negotiate with power in whatever form-as complicity, compromise, deviance or resistance-and with whatever motivation-whether it be intentional, unintentional, voluntary or involuntary, self-expression, self-interest or group interest" While agency could lead to empowerment it could also be endangering which is found in the context of Sumi Madhok and Rai's (2012) work on *Sathins* of north-west India who are development workers. The MSM who are involved in HIV/AIDS control programmes as outreach workers and peer educators are aware of their rights and the oppressive context which engulfs them culturally and religiously. They are enlightened to spread awareness of rights to others. They are aware of the sexual liberation happening elsewhere and challenged heteronormativity to a certain extent. They participated in conferences and seminars representing the Mizo MSM community among the larger audience of other parts of India. At the same time, there is a limit for them to exert

their agency, especially in the structure of religion, particularly Mizo Christianity and Mizo culture, which subordinated and inhibited their sexuality. These are vulnerable sites where their sexuality is constrained, their orientations are subdued and stigmatised, and their voices unheard.

Those who do not abide by heteronormative ideals in society that advocate compulsory heterosexuality are met with violence and sanctions. Doug (2015) emphasised on the violence encountered by those who are perceived as LGBT; at the same time, he recognised the role played by class, race and gender in one's encounter of violence. Solely concentrating on homophobia alone as the source of violence would obscure other factors involved in perpetuating violence. He recognised the effect of social positions on a person's experiences of violence. Though his research is based in the United States, his point of analysis that "individuals encounter different experiences depending on their social positions" (p.4) holds even in societies beyond the US. Doug's conception of violence could be applied to the issue of sexual violence experienced by my informants, especially the MSM sex workers. The violence they faced is implicated not solely in homophobia but also their class position and their sex work. Doug (2012) adopted an intersectionality framework to examine violence encountered by LGBT at the same time and their evaluation of the violence they faced. Adopting the same framework, this study uses an intersectional lens to analyse violence among Mizo MSM. The homogenised portrayal of violence among MSM informants is impossible because the site of violence varies, and each has different experiences of violence. While some violence happened in the family, others encountered it on the streets, some with their sexual partners and so on. Violence encountered by MSM is not solely institutional. Violence occurs in the sphere of same-sex sexual relationships. Violence among sexual partners is often overlooked as violence is often recognised in the sphere of political, legal and religious arenas. Addressing violence among sexual partners is feared to negatively impact the community

(Rolle et al., 2018). The concept often addressed as Intimate partner violence (IPV) could cover "physical, sexual and/or psychological violence in the context of intimate partnership" (Wang et al., 2020, p.1). Therefore, approaching violence through intersectionality will help explain the multiple spheres in which violence occurs and how the MSM evaluates such violence.

Literature focussing on sexually marginalised communities such as the life of travesties in Brazil (Kulick, 2009), hijras in India (Nanda, 1999; Reddy, 2010; Revathi, 2014), queer and transgender studies (Rao & Sarma, 2009; Gopinath, 2005; Feinberg, 1996), men who have sex with men, sexual minorities living with HIV/AIDS in India and beyond have informed this study by enlightening the various struggles and challenges faced by sexual minorities in different contexts enabling thereby to locate the lived experiences of MSM in Mizoram amidst oppression. Black Women's relationships with one another, as portrayed in Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1991), is adopted to understand how safe spaces to build communities are curved out of informal relationships such as friendships and family interactions and how formal organisational ties have nurtured communities.

Governmentality is used in the context where the church governs the sexuality of its followers by adhering to compulsory heterosexuality that is to be consummated in marriage for the purpose of procreation. It is used here in Foucauldian notion to look at how the church regulates the sexuality of the individual through adopting several punitive and restrictive measures to ensure that sexuality is used for procreation between husband and wife and to maintain the sanctity of sexual relations in accordance with Biblical teachings. Governmentality denotes an attempt to shape human behaviour and conduct through calculated means. (Li, 2007). It sets conditions and shapes desires and aspirations so people will do things out of their selfish motives (Scott1995:202 c.f. *ibid*). For Foucault, governing people does not entail forcing 'people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes

through which the self is constructed or modified by himself' (Foucault 1993, p.203-4 c.f. Lemke,2002).

National news had written about the disapproval of religious stakeholders when Delhi High Court read down section 377 in 2009. When courts of law have started to pass laws decriminalising consensual same-sex sexuality and when there has been intervention from NGOs on same sex sexuality the Mizo church seems to give attention to same-sex sexuality by engaging in stricter norms and started to supervise it more. Duggan (2003), when making an argument on the goal of neoliberalism, has propagated the boundaries of class and race, ethnicity, gender, sexual and religious institutions as being the 'channels through which money, political power, cultural resources, and social organisation flow' (xiv). Rightly so, adherence to the church and being accountable by conforming to the norms laid out by the church has a considerable impact on one's social status and role in Mizo society.

Self-reflexivity

The role played by fieldwork in changing a researcher's perspectives is acknowledged by Palaganas et al. (2017) as they opined that the research process affected the researcher and, in turn, changed the research process too. Reflexivity is a continuous process of introspection. It entails examining the effects of a researcher's background, location and assumption in the research process. Being raised in a Christian household, attending Sunday schools since childhood where we were taught ideologies, values and faith enshrined in Christian beliefs, it was initially challenging to shed the biases of being brought up in a heteronormative context while doing research. My continuous engagement with literature on sexuality and gender and my fieldwork among the MSM community developed a sense of critical thinking. They troubled the pre-conceived beliefs and values that were instilled in me. Recently, while I was discussing sexual minority subjects with my friends, one of my friends, who is very much

involved in church activities, accused me of being an advocate and supporter of alternative gender and sexuality. This labelling made me reflect on my research journey and how it has transformed my understanding of sexualities and gender by being more open to the existence and possibilities of diversity in behaviour and practises and acknowledging multiple shifting characters of sexual identities. It helped me realise how identities are constructed through practices and how my perspectives have been governed and colonised by cultural and religious regulations before I ventured into the field.

Henslin (1972) mentioned that the problem in researching deviancy could imply an assumption that the researcher must have some level of involvement with that deviancy. He gave a researcher doing research on homosexuality where others tend to attribute that person as homosexual as an example. Rightly so, in the course of my research, my sexuality is often questioned not only by the outsiders who are aware of my research but also my informants. I have come across informants who straightforwardly asked me about my sexual orientation. Though I did not hesitate to answer their queries outrightly, it came as a surprise sometimes to be in a position of scrutiny while doing research. It clearly exposed the mutual level of observation and interests we hold for each other-me, studying them continuously and they studying me back. The process of giving and receiving plays a part here.

Elsie Clews Parsons, an anthropologist, had observed in her research that if she had been a male, the scenario of her research could be different. Likewise, while doing research, my position as that of a straight female occasionally needs to be revised in the field. Specific safety measures need to be taken into account, which limited me in accompanying my informants in their venture at night. Therefore, I could not participate, observe and record my informants' activities after sunset except through their narratives.

The stigma that is attached to gender and sexual nonconformity in Mizo society has posed a challenge while doing field work. The MSM mostly hide their sexual practices behind the curtain, therefore gaining their trust to make them narrate their stories especially the intimate ones with ease took me a long time. Days of being present in the environment, attempting to build rapport through small talk, being cautious not to vibe out any form that can lead to distrust and misconceptions through the kind of outfit I choose, the topics of conversations I dwell upon, avoiding intent observations which can be uncomfortable for them, being there when they need my help etc. positively affected my relationships with my informants and paved the way for gathering data. As my research progressed, the bond that I have been building over the years had become so deep that some of my informants were hesitant at a certain point to share information as we have been so close, limiting my access to information. One of my informants remarked, "You've known me too well now I am scared to share certain things". The close affinity had somehow made it difficult to ask specific sensitive questions, making me introspect on my position as a researcher and the distance I ought to keep. Also, for a few, the bond eventually entails an economic relationship whereby I became the one they turn to when they have a financial shortage.

The lengthy period of engagement in this study has its significance. I have witnessed the changing scenario of the sexual environment in Mizoram. In the initial stage of my research, silence had befallen me upon addressing alternative sexualities and gender. During these times, the MSM community relied on AIDS/HIV NGOs to negotiate the stigma and discrimination they faced in society and family. They rarely speak out for themselves. Quite the contrary, when my research was culminating towards the endpoint, there has been a society established for the LGBTQ community called the 'Lonestar Society'. I have been assigned as an adviser along with some others. This is an unusual step, as I have often heard of the trouble in pulling people of diverse identities and sexualities together under one organisation. The Lonestar

Society have been organising events and webinars on sexual awareness where marginalised sexual minorities speak about their life experiences and challenges. Pride Month was celebrated through organising competitions such as a make-up contest with a rainbow theme in 2021. The society participated in the All India Conclave for Queer Mobilization 2021, thus exerting its presence without hiding behind the curtain. Interviews of sexually marginalised subjects could be seen in the media though it is heavily scrutinised. Having been able to witness and be a part of certain forms of the liberation of sexual subjects though being minor in characteristics as compared to sexual liberation elsewhere, gives one a sense of pride. Interestingly, while their visibility is heightened, on the other side, resistance to such behaviours and subjects simultaneously existed in Mizo society.

Lastly, I wish to highlight being an insider-outsider in the field. My ethnicity of being a Mizo and my ability to speak and understand the language, and my continuous presence in their environment for a long time have made me an insider. Meanwhile, my gender and my sexual orientation have alienated me from the MSM. Till today while I am writing this, I wonder if this research would have been different if a handsome male had taken it up. Would he be able to unearth more than what I have documented? However, I wish not to dwell on it longer because I am optimistic that the empathy I have shown throughout my research has earned their trust, and a lot has been shared with me, which I deeply value.

III

HISTORICISING HETERONORMATIVITY IN MIZO SOCIETY

Introduction

Heteronormativity is a term that arises out of queer theory. Michael Warner coined the term in 1991. It denotes heterosexuality as normal social behaviour, thereby devaluing all other sexual orientations. It recognises gender in terms of binarism, that of male and female, and views sexuality in procreative terms. It hierarchises gender and oppresses those who do not fit the norm (Robinson, 2016; Ferrari, Imperato & Mancini, 2021). It is embedded in the entire social institutions in a powerful and exclusionary way causing marginalisation of those who deviate from it. This chapter explores heteronormative tradition in Mizo society, practised and learned through different social institutions.

Mizoram: A brief political history

Mizoram as a State was established in 1987 though its pre-state historical account could be traced far beyond it. The people and the dialect spoken hold the same connotation- Mizo. It is believed that the Mizos were a part of the tribals who migrated southwards from China to the plains of Burma (Myanmar) due to the policy of Chinese Emperor Shih Huang Ti (246-210 BC), who advocated centralised administration at the expense of abolishing hereditary rulers. They moved from the plains of Myanmar to Kabaw Valley and then to Chin Hills. As they reached Chin Hills, it had become impossible to form large towns, so they segregated and lived in small villages mainly based on clans, each autonomous having their chiefs who ruled over them. From the Chin Hills, some of the tribes moved to present-day Mizoram (Lalzarzoa, 2014). The area was named Lushai Hills by the British. When the British colonised Lushai

Hills in 1891, the North Lushai district was attached to Assam, while the southern Lushai Hills district was a part of Bengal. These two districts were amalgamated in 1898 to be under Assam. Later, in 1954, the Lushai Hills were changed to Mizo Hills under the Act of Parliament. Purkayastha (2019) expressed that the use of the umbrella term Mizo to represent scattered villagers in the Lushai Hills area is due to the effort of the British rulers. This area then acquired the status of Union Territory in 1972 with the new name Mizoram thereby ceasing to be a part of Assam. As mentioned earlier, it became the twenty-fourth state in India in 1987, with Aizawl as its capital. In the 2011 Census, the population of Mizoram is recorded as 10,91,014. The sex ratio is 976 females per thousand males, which is much higher than the national ratio.

Exploring heteronormativity in the traditional Mizo belief system:

Traditional Mizo belief system reflects demarcation along the lines of gender and sexuality, which will be addressed in this section. Mizos, before the advent of Christianity, believed in the existence of a Supreme Being- Pathian to whom they offer sacrifices. They also believed in celestial beings, which are known to be actively in contact with human beings, benevolent and malevolent spirits. The Supreme being is considered the maker of human destiny. Couples who are married are believed to be ordained by Pathian to marry, and they are called *Pathian samsuih*, which means Pathian had joined together their hair. Pathian is referred to in masculine form, while the mother of nature, which they referred to as *Khuanu*, is a goddess, the wife of Pathian and is referred to in the feminine form. In traditional Mizo beliefs, even the Gods exist in binary forms of male and female and not in between (Lawmsanga, 2010)

Mizos were firm believers of superstitions and bad omens. The early Mizo religion had a lot of spiritual elements in them. Beliefs in good and evil spirits, needing appeasement, guarded the lives of Mizos (Zairema, 2009). Sickness is believed to be caused by evil spirits, which must be appeased through sacrifices to the evil spirit. Ordinary people could not dare to construct

house windows out of fear of evil omens. Members of a family travelling east and west on the same day are feared to cause accidents and therefore avoided at any cause (Lalremruata, 2019). Mizos believed in the existence of life after death. They assume that the spirit would go to *pialral* (paradise) or *mitthi khua* (village of the dead), depending on their life's achievement. Pialral is a happy place where all the good things can be enjoyed, whereas mitthi khua is gloomy. Those entitled to enter pialral are virgins, people who perform *thangchhuah* sacrifice in their lifetime and infants who died when they were just born (Lawmsanga, 2010).

In traditional Mizo practice, bachelors having a sexual relationship with an unmarried woman has a religious advantage. A popular belief is that when they die, the dead soul has to pass through the gate of mitthi khua. On that gate stood Pawla (a WatchGuard of mitthi khua). If a bachelor died a virgin without having sexual intercourse with a woman, Pawla would hit him with his pellet (Sangkhuma, 1995. p. 52; Shakespear, 1912). The injury from it will be sore without healing for three years; after that, it will take another three years to heal completely (Sangkhuma, 1995). There is a folksong describing this-

“Di nei lo Pawlan a sai an ti

Fam mah la min sai bil tawh hlei lawng e;

Ka nemrang puan tial ka di zawnna (Challiana, 1978. p. 41 c.f. Sangkhuma, 1995)

Out of fear, bachelors intended to have a sexual relationships with women. On the contrary, a woman's virginity is highly praised and having a sexual relationship before marriage could be defaming. Not only that, the virgin could go to Pialral, a destination they crave. On this note, women, on the other hand, attempt never to have a sexual relationship before marriage. In traditional Mizo society, we see a divergent agenda for unmarried men and women. If read on queer lines, this belief can be regarded as heteronormative because every man is considered heterosexual. Those who deviate from it, meaning those who do not feel any sexual attraction for women, have to endure the pain of being hit by Pawla at the time of their death which is

fearsome. At the same time, this concept of mandatory sexual relationship goal for bachelors has been questioned by Mizo historian Lalthangliana (1998), who opined that it is a wrong interpretation that does not refer to a sexual relationship. Instead, it points to those who do not bother about religion and fail to participate in community religious ceremonies(p. 186). However, popular belief lies in the former interpretation.

Understanding the heteronormative tradition of Mizo society through an analysis of their social life

Traditionally the Mizos who lived in scattered villages had the freedom to avail natural resources, which is in the jurisdiction of their village chief, by paying taxes to him. Plots of land were divided among the villagers who cultivated those lands for consumption. Except for the Chief's family and the village blacksmith, everyone was engaged in agriculture. However, the Mizo society is not a homogenous entity. The position of men always accounts for respect in the context of family and society among the Mizos. Lineage is traced through the male line, and the property belongs to the father, the head of the household. It is only possible to see women in the power position if they are wives or daughters of chiefs. Women are not involved in administrative decision-making. Their role centred around the house was looking after the family and assisting their husband in the jhum site. Men, on the other hand, provided for the family by cultivating crops for their family, hunting animals, and administering the family affairs.

Gender socialisation in traditional Mizo society:

Mizo historical writings, folktales and myths have recognised gender as binary as male and female and sexuality as heterosexuality, thus upholding heteronormativity. This reminded me of what Seidman (1994) wrote when he accused classical sociologists of being silent on sexuality because of their privilege in terms of their sexual, social position and gender. Entirely

in tune with it, Mizo history maintains silence over same-sex sexuality and alternative gender as the writers and composers hold privileges due to their sexual and gender positions in Mizo society. Mizo folktales and folksongs lamented the love between male and female but never the love between male and male or female and female for that matter. Feminist anthropologists like Margaret Mead have acclaimed how the understanding of masculinity and femininity differs across cultures. Qualities that are assumed as masculine or feminine vary from society to society, and it is mainly child-rearing practices that have created sex-specific qualities (Menon, 2012). With this background, the next section will examine how children are socialised and nurtured in Mizo society to fit into the heteronormative tradition.

Gendered Socialisation in Mizo society

Mizo, since time immemorial, have followed a patriarchal system. The head of the family is the father, and lineage is traced through him. Ultimogeniture is followed though there could be some exceptions. A typical Mizo family comprises of father and mother who are married and living with their children. In the traditional system, a wife never addresses her husband by name. Husband and wife do not lovingly speak to each other, not because they do not have tenderness towards each other. The superstitious belief is that the spirits will be jealous of displaying tenderness which could lead to '*nupa tangthen*' (divorce). So, addressing each other in harsh tones is considered to be a moral way.

Sacred rights performed at childbirth: the marking of gender.

Mizo found jubilation in procreation, especially if they have a son. They desire bravery in a man, so they bless a boy to torch the house of enemies or to be a brave huntsman that can kill elephants. They let a boy carry a bamboo torch to signify the former desire. For a daughter, they desire her to be beautiful, which can fetch a wholesome bride price, so they bless her as a

'fetcher of Mithun'. They distribute liquor when she is born. The birth of a baby is followed by numerous sacred religious performances (Lalthangliana, 1998, p. 16, Lianthanga, 2000)

Naming a child

Before Christianity, a child could not bear whatever name the parent wished. There is stratification even in naming. Sons and daughters of chiefs and those belonging to the upper echelons of society have specific names that signify their social position. The ordinary people and the poor can only have names that will not be used by the former ones, for which there is a saying, '*Lal hming sak dal lo*'. Under the influence of Christianity, the whole demarcation is shattered.

There is a separate letter that distinguishes males and females. If a name ends with the letter 'i' it is a female. When a name ends with 'a' it is a male. Therefore, males and females are clearly distinctive in their names (Lalthangliana, 1998, p. 17)

Gendered Space

In traditional Mizo society, specific spaces are off-limits for males or females. For example, Zawlbuk is never a place for women; they are not allowed to enter. Blacksmiths' workshop is also where the male folks took their tools for repair. Taking their tools for repair is considered a men's job; therefore, if women are seen in such places, they will be given an advantage by letting her mend her tools first, even if the men are queued. Women coming to those places means there are no men in the family. Likewise, fetching water from the village well is considered a women's job. If male members of villages go there to fetch water, they will be made to fetch it first.

Gender Socialisation

In terms of socialisation L.B. Thanga(1978) mentioned that "...[F]rom childhood there was a division of labour between a man and woman. A boy did not touch what was considered to be the job of a girl" (c.f. Lalrinawma, 2005, p.32). When he turned ten years old, he reared his family's cattle. He fulfilled his social obligations to serve the adult male members at the Zawlbuk by collecting twigs and wood to be burned at the Zawlbuk, a bachelor's dormitory where all the unmarried men used to sleep at night. Only the village chief's son was exempted. From Zawlbuk, the boys were disciplined and cultured by receiving guidance from the adult males of the villages. They learned obedience and bravery and were taught to look after women and children. Even if the elders scold them while training unless severe blood is shed, his parents cannot complain. With age, he will soon have to look after his family jhum and protect the village from enemies, wild animals and other unwanted intruders. Therefore, the older males ensure that the boys receive proper training and guidance for the welfare and safety of their village. Lamenting being in pain is considered a sign of weakness, so they are taught to endure pain by saying that "They are not in pain", even if they are (Lianthanga, 2000, p.17). Moreover, if they were seen to show any signs of weakness and fear, it was made a mockery out of it when the others called out, "*Pawnfen fen tir ru*," which means make them wear a skirt which reduced them to be equivalent to women.

On the other hand, a women's role is also gendered. Women's roles are taking care of the household, weaving clothes for the family, fetching water from the village well and taking care of children. If the family has sufficient and good quality woven clothing, women are praised for it. so, it is the main competition to provide enough clothing for the family. Males and female in traditional Mizo society know their assigned roles and stick to them without much interference in each other's tasks (*ibid*). Beauty in women is an essential asset as it can fetch a reasonable bride price, and they could get suitable suitors. Girls in the Mizo family can help

their family since they are young, so there is a saying that '*fa tir atan chuan hmeichhia a tha*', it is best to have a daughter as first born (Lalthangliana, 1998).

Bachelors in the family are less useful than females in household activities though they are essential contributors to society and work in jhum cultivation. Nevertheless, they are treated with respect in the family. The newly woven clothes are reserved for them. Their sisters will only wear it when it gets old. If a family possess only one '*thi hna*' (a necklace), it will be worn by the son and not the daughter (Lalthangliana, 1998)

Moral administration in society is in the hands of young married men and older unmarried men. There are various ways to impose sanctions on those not following social rules. For boys, they could be made to collect firewood. The other forms of punishment are admonition and, finally, opposition. If they are opposed, they will not help them in sickness and health, and no one is allowed to befriend them. Social sanction in this form is feared; therefore, attempts are made at all costs to appease them. (H.L.C. A, 1995)

Looking at the socialisation pattern of children in traditional Mizo society, there is an interplay of what Butler called the 'heterosexual matrix'. The binary world is enforced upon leaving no room for deviations. The elderly males I have interviewed for my research have informed me of the rigid division of labour based on gender during their younger days and how *tuai* were stigmatised and looked at differently in society. Heteronormative practices have been enshrined in Mizo culture since traditional times. The marginalised sections of society who traverse heteronormative norms or 'unintelligible gender practises' are therefore invisibilised in the overall historical discourse making accurate reconstruction of their history difficult.

Understanding Mizo terms for alternative sexuality and gender

The Mizos have their terms to signify those who traverse gender and sexuality. *Tuai* or *tuaipheng* refers to males who dress like women, think like women and possess feminine skills

to perform what is traditionally considered a women's role, such as weaving and household chores. Tuai are effeminate males. A historian Lianthanga (2000), mentioned that these people are usually sodomites, and some claim themselves as prophets. At the same time, J. H Lorraine's dictionary explained tuai or tuaipheng as men practicing sodomy, masquerading and working like a woman.

According to J.H. Lorraine's dictionary, *Patil* is a woman behaving and dressing like a man, a kind of sex pervert. They are women who show signs of masculinity. Mawngkawhur, or *mawnghur* as it is sometimes written, are sodomites who practice sodomy. It is used to refer to men who have anal sexual intercourse.

In the contemporary Mizo language, a new word has surfaced which was not there traditionally, that is, *pherh*. It has been explained to me by one of my informants as those who show deeply effeminate characters among *tuai*. These terms are found derogatory, so my informants hardly use it as their self-identity, which is quite understandable because who would want to identify oneself as *mawngkawhur*? If we translate it and separate it from word to word, *mawng* means anus or butt, *kaw* is derived from *kua*, which refers to the hole, and *hur* means pervert. Similarly, if we segmented the word *patil*, *pa* could be translated as macho or masculine, and *til* is for penis.

Positioning non-normative gender and sexuality in Mizo society

Limited historical records posed a problem in understanding the position held by those who traverse sexuality and gender. Nevertheless, few writings and oral histories signify the social positions of such subjects, which were explored and documented. The first occurrence of *tuai* in Mizo history dates back to the 1750s when the Mizos resided in present-day Myanmar. In the 1780s, in a village called Saihmar, a chief could be identified as *tuai*. The Chief by the name of Lalkangloa smoked *tuibur*, which is a traditional Mizo women's smoked pipe. He was

known to be tuai and Saihmar village was mocked by their neighbouring village because they have tuai as a Chief who smokes tuibur just like a woman. They mocked , "*Kan Lal chu Lalkanglo, Saihmar kawtchhuah burtui chu luang nawi e*". However, the villagers of Saihmar defended their Chief through a song, "*Bur tui chu luang na se, Lechim, Haulul, Vanpui chu lal he hu*", defending their Chief as far more potent than the Chiefs of other villages who mocked him (Hrangthiauva, 2011, p.70). Also, an oral history I gathered spoke of a Chief's son Puallenga who smokes tuibur and wears traditional *puan*¹⁹ Just like the female folks. His voice is feminine. Nevertheless, he is known to be a brave warrior during warfare and hunting expeditions, though he never wanted the blood of the animals to stain his clothes. These stories indicate that as long as one fulfils their gendered duty by exerting their masculinity at a time of need, even if they have feminine traits, it protects them from stigmatisation from others.²⁰.

Though there are certain exemptions, as mentioned above, the stigmatisation could be seen from the differences in the burial practice. When tuai are buried, their bodies are laid in a prone position which means that their front is made to press on the ground. A normal burial position is a supine position where the body is laid with its back on the ground. This practice, however, is not continued today.

A myth circles a famous and one of the oldest Mizo folktale characters, Tuaisiala. This particular folktale is interpreted queerly by an author Kiangte (n.d.) who believed that Tuaisiala is tuai though a straight reading of the folktale did not mention it. However, the folktale talks about the brotherly love between two orphan siblings who landed a fortune and ended up being rich, a parallel. However, the not popularised version establishes Tuaisiala as

¹⁹ It is a traditional costume of the Mizo, a woven piece of cloth which Mizo women use as attire. It is wrapped around the waist like a skirt, extending to the ankle.

²⁰ Personal interview with C. Chhuanvawra on 22nd May 2015 at his residence, Tuikhuahtlang, Aizawl, Mizoram.

a male hustler whom his elder brother deserts because of his orientation. Upon discussion of this version with Mizo literature scholars, they further highlighted that if we decode the name itself, it could be confirmed as Tuai if pronounced differently, could refer to tuai and *Sial* in Mizo though it means Mithun²¹, it is also used to mean a female in folksongs. Queer readings of folktales, therefore, could unearth specific hidden meanings embedded in folktales which otherwise are kept at bay.

The other instances we could gather of the alternative sexuality and gender are through colonial writings, which are dealt with in the next section.

Colonial Regulations on alternative gender and sexual practices:

In the colonial era, evidence of the practice of sodomy could be found through the writings of the then Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, N.E. Parry (1924-1928). He mentioned that for the Superintendent to deal with sodomites, sodomy cases have to be reported to the Superintendent. The traditional sanction is the *pathicus* or his father being bestowed the right to kill the sodomite or to have his nose and ears slit open. It is further noted that a Mithun can be shot by the father for the villagers to have a feast. This Mithun can be owned by anybody. Parry though commented on the rarity of sodomy in this hill.

During the British rule in 1909, Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, H.W.G. Cole, issued a statute (Order No. 3 of 1909. 10) criminalising homosexuality and cross-dressing. The rule forbids *tuai* who are sexually male to stop wearing women's clothes. They are to behave like men, they have to pay revenue and perform porter works. Chiefs of the villages have to report if anyone seems as deviating from their assigned sex. They have to report all cases of unnatural offences failing which they will be punished.

²¹ Mithun plays a significant role in Mizo tradition. It is used as bride price, to settle disputes, in festivities and rituals. Owning Mithun denotes prosperity.

These orders may have been to carry forward the famous or infamous law introduced during the British colonisation of India, section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalised carnal intercourse against the order of nature.

The shift from indigenous beliefs to Christianity

Before the advent of Christianity, as discussed before, the Mizos believed in supernatural beings that held power and dictated human existence and life after death. Christian missionaries used this dual conception of the world after death to compare Christianity with indigenous religious beliefs where they say pialral would be reached through following Jesus (Shakespeare, 1912). The new religion they introduced was in tune with what they had known before, so Christianity seemed familiar to them. Missionaries used education as a tool to proselytise. The missionaries included portions from the Bible in the curriculum and Mizo cultural studies, thus spreading Christian teachings to the Mizo youth through education. Though there were government schools before the advent of mission schools, the mission schools, once they were established, produced better results. A government school was soon closed and amalgamated with mission schools. Missionaries developed scripts for the Mizos using Roman scripts, and they formed curriculums to be taught in schools. (Lalzarliana, 2018). The entire Mizos were converted to Christianity within a few periods despite the initial resistance and oppression. Along with it, the moral values embedded in Christian teachings have started to shape the culture and society of the Mizos. The heteronormative traditions of the Mizos has also been reinforced through Christian teachings.

IV

THE CONTEXT OF MSM LIFE

Introduction

MSM are often researched in public health discourse in the context of their relation with HIV/AIDS. Not ignoring the issue of HIV/AIDS, this chapter will be focussing beyond that such as the daily lived experiences of MSM through exploring their relationships, livelihood, challenges, alcohol and drugs dependency, their sexual experiences, etc.

In the introduction, we had problematised the use of MSM as an identity introduced through NGO intervention to homogenised men who have sex with men without an acknowledgement of varying indigenous identities²². Likewise, in the context of Mizoram, MSM is a given identity which interfaced only with the onset of NGOs working on HIV/AIDS programmes. This is clearly visible when there is a need to enlighten those who are not in the field of HIV/AIDS on what MSM stands for, along with the inbuilt categorisation. One of my informants commented, “MSM intih chuan tuman a awmzia an hre chuang loa a nuam” (when I identify as MSM, nobody knows what it means, so it feels all right). In India and neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, MSM are classified as kothi, panthi, double-decker and transgender (panthi was dropped later)²³. In Mizoram, a non-Hindi speaking belt where English is a second language, terms like kothi and panthi are non-native, unfamiliar identities that are challenging to relate to.

Nevertheless, abiding by the rules and regulations of NGOs, all registered have to be labelled according to the guidelines without reflecting upon how they wish to identify and define

²² Tuai and patil are indigenous categories but there is a derogatory connotations.

²³ It is believed that if the kothi, double decker and TG persons are well protected, they would not transmit HIV to their panthi partners.

themselves. Therefore, in the vicinity of FXB, whoever registered was labelled by the social workers depending on their sexual preference and their appearance. My informants, who are effeminate in their speech and manners but do not cross-dress, are clubbed as kothi. Those who cross-dress and act like a woman who often has long hair are categorised as transgender. The sexual partners are rightly registered as panthi; finally, those who could do both are the double-deckers. As these labels are not used by my informants as their identity and are functionless beyond HIV/AIDS intervention programmes, it does not pose a problem for them. One of my informants, Z, who is working in the TI, commented,

MSM is used only by people who know about this drop-in centre. Tuai refers to others as so, and so is tuai. Nobody would want to say 'I am tuai' because of how it has been used. They will say they are gay. However, there are so many classifications of gay that it is challenging to clarify. Those persons who we never thought would be gay are gay. They have wives but do not hesitate to have sex with us. I do not know if it is due to their being drunk or the drive to experience it. Those macho men who entered into fights when we were teenagers have become our partners.

Moreover, gay would not want to have a relationship with their fellow gay who is feminine. They wanted to have partners who are more masculine compared to them, and they could find one. So, to sum it up, same-sex is rampant. It is not easy to work because so many are in the closet. The ones who are visible are only a few in number. Had we registered the closeted ones, there would be a need to test their blood. It is not very easy. (Z, personal communication, August 27, 2014)

When I asked another effeminate informant about identity, I received an answer: "Hmeichhia ang hian ka awm tawp mai a ni, " meaning I act like a woman. The universal identities such as gay and indigenous identity tuai are more commonly used for labelling others and identifying oneself. One day as I was sitting at the TI, one of the peer educators at the TI came with a questionnaire and distributed it among those who were present except me since I am not MSM. This questionnaire was from a student of Master of Social work at Mizoram University. On the box of gender, all of them ticked the 'M' (male) box. Another incident was when I went to the District Office with an NGO labelled Double decker informant and a kothi informant to get Electoral Voting Identity Card. In that identity, too, they are listed as males and not third gender. These instances projected the fluidity of identity as no singular sexual or gender identity could encompass what and who they are. Svennson & Frost (2021), through their research, acknowledged the growing tendency among emerging adults to adopt fluid identities because the construction of gender and sexual identities in binary is limited. There is a need to work on the complexities of identities, particularly for sexual minorities, as a dichotomous conceptualisation of gender and sexual orientation could not capture inherent differences in people. At this rate, identity and social identity are bound to co-exist simultaneously as there is a disconnection between self-identification and social perceptions. Also, the range of scale offered presently to identify oneself needs to be narrower to accommodate multiple identities (Galupa et al., 2014).

MSM and their livelihood activities:

It has been acknowledged that the marginalisation and stigma of MSM have affected their livelihood opportunities by limiting their options rendering them to sex work and the use of drugs. Many livelihood choices stem from one's lack of choice or limited opportunities. (Scheibe et al. 2014; Coyle & Boyce, 2015). Social contexts and experiences of gender and sexuality largely shape a person's livelihood opportunities, according to Coyle & Boyce (2015).

Also, social stigma experienced by sexual minorities in their family and school environment may lead to an early exit from school, which will pose a barrier to accessing well-paid jobs. On the other hand, escaping a heteronormative environment and earning solely for oneself can lead to economic independence on the ground of not needing to support the natal family. At some level, belonging to a sexual minority group can create doors to work with NGOs and community-based organisations for sexual minorities, which otherwise may be closed for heteronormative subjects (Coyle & Boyce, 2015).

The MSM I have come across are mostly economically unstable. Those of them who work are holding jobs that pay less. The jobs they do include salesman, beautician, servers in restaurants, sex work-regular and occasional, tailors, daily wage labours, and NGO workers, to name most of it. Their earnings, when spent on buying alcohol and drugs, make them financially tight most of the time though they find it difficult to quit even in a worse economic situation. The majority are wholly dependent on either one or both of these substances. Few would take advantage of me by borrowing Rs. 10 to Rs. 1500 promising to pay me back though they never did. The lesser amount was mainly borrowed to pay for their bets in a card game, while the enormous sum was for family matters such as repairing the fridge and TV and clearing their debts. When payday comes, those who get monthly wages gather at the office, summon their friends, and go to Rangvamual to drink alcohol. Once, two of my informants did not follow the rest of the crowd. I asked them the reason. One of my informants, J, said, "When we have money we need not go out and buy; we order it, and it comes directly to our doorsteps. We just have to pay for the service". For people like him, whatever they earn is spent before the next pay comes.

On the other hand, others have families to support. Even on payday, those individuals barely spent money, not even for a full plate of noodles for lunch. Every rupee counts when poverty strikes hard. With this background, the livelihood engagements of MSM are discussed in detail as follows.

NGO based employment

The sources of livelihood varied among the MSM included in this study. The MSM I encountered in the initial stage of my research is those working in community-based NGOs for sexual minorities as peer educators and counsellors. So, this group has a stable income though they often need to receive their monthly salary when there is a funding problem. Sometimes they need more time to get their salary for three or four months, during which they have to rely on borrowed money or look for alternate sources of income. In those times, some took leave from the office and worked as manual labour or ventured out to sell goods they procured from wholesale outlets, while some sold secondhand clothes. Among those working in the NGO sector, many are engaging in secondary sources of livelihood as the salary is insufficient to cater to their daily requirements as the city's cost of living is high.

Beauticians

A couple of MSM I have come across are trained beauticians working in beauty parlours. They are skilled in make-up, they can do hairdressing and threading of eyebrows, manicure and pedicure. Those working in this sector do not hesitate to cross-dress as parlours offer them a space of liberation. When beauticians drop in at the TI Centre, they are flogged by other drop-ins for make-up and threading sessions, turning the space into a makeshift beauty parlour.

Over the years, we have seen parlours in metro cities such as Delhi, where transgender people run through funding received from business sectors (Chadha, 2022). Aizawl has witnessed a similar venture wherein Lonestar Unisex Beauty Salon was opened in October 2022. This salon is run by Lonestar, an LGBT community, along with support from the Association for India's Development (AID) and Parivar. The presence of subjects who transgress what is considered normative in beauty parlours signified how the market economy has endorsed a queer space by exhibiting transgressed bodies as products (Ingebreetsen, 1999; Kuriakose & Alex, 2017) which

can be read in line with what is now known as pink capitalism or rainbow capitalism. At the same time, the irony felt by those engaging in these beauty parlours is the stigma they continue to encounter beyond the space of the beauty parlour, where they are still not tolerated by the public.

Commercial Sex workers

Sex work encompasses a variety of sexual services performed in exchange for money. Studies have identified forces that drive subjects to sex work, including financial problems, homelessness, violence and power, family breakdown, low education, etc. (Balfour & Allen, 2014, Azhar et al. 2020). Sex workers are 12 times more prone to be infected with HIV/AIDS than the general population, according to the GAP Report 2014. Likewise, MSM who are engaging in commercial sex work are also globally reported as prone to HIV infection (Baral et al. 2014; Oldenburg, et al. 2015). In my research, I had an opportunity to interview only five sex workers who are engaging in sex work as their main source of livelihood. The TIC registered eleven MSM workers, but I could not meet the rest. Those whom I have met are the ones who regularly avail of the services offered by TIC. "Their clients are mostly non Mizo truck drivers," says V, who works at the TIC. He continued, " If they are lucky they could earn Rs 6000 a night. They would dine with truck drivers sharing whatever food the truck drivers brought along with them. Sometimes the sex workers buy alcohol for them to lure them into sex. Their main clients also include men who are widowers or divorcees". He further added that commercial sex workers are sometimes picked up and caught by duties of the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and Joint Action Committee (JAC) and claimed that such sex workers lead a normal life for three days but always go back to sex work eventually.

It was March 2016, I was sitting with three of the MSM I am closest too when they introduced me to ZRP. He is about 5'10 in height with a fair complexion, dressed in pants and a shirt. The

other three told me how his life had changed after being reborn in Christ. He was a cross-dresser and a sex worker. "You hadn't met him or what, those days when they were disgusting, dirty and smelly?" they asked me. Admitting to it ZRP told us that they were drinking most of the time and they hardly took baths during those times. He was comfortable answering my queries in the presence of the other three MSM, so we continued out of his consent.

He studied class XII in 2008, the same year when he started drinking. He had never had a relationship with a man or woman prior to that. J jokingly called him a eunuch. He hangs out with bad companions since he started drinking. In the following year he enrolled to train beauty course in a parlour which exposed him to MSM who cross dress. He immediately imitates their styles. He admits that he had the orientation all along even during childhood which he attempted to hide vigorously by acting macho. "I was ashamed", he said. Listening to it Z teased, "We will buy you a vagina".

We laughed out loud, and when the laughter died, he continued how his life began to circle around parlour and alcohol. He couldn't remember when he was exposed to the world of sex workers. He used to stay at his friend E's house, and he remembered hanging out with the sex workers at night on the lawn of Millenium Centre (a shopping mall in Aizawl) regularly without knowing that they were sex workers. However, the latter befriended him and his friends. They bought them drinks and took them along in their sex work. While he narrated his story, he had been flipping sheets of documents without actually paying attention to what he was flipping. As for us we've huddled closer and listen to it intently.

"Sometimes", he continued "when males show interest in me especially when they are drunk...." He let the words hang though I could understand that those were the moments when he had sex with them. I asked him the kinds of outfits he used to wear during those days. Before he could answer, Z puts his hand at the end of his thigh just before the private part and said,

This much length of cropped jeans. I have multiple photos of him in my laptop. They were smelly as if they had crawled out from a pig sty. Their smell could be picked up all over the place. He used to come carrying old clothes which were of women. He was magnificent. Now it is like seeing heaven in him.

Moreover, he was obedient as compared to the others; we can scold him to change his character. Family background has a lot to do with it as well. He understood our scolding and rebuke. (Z, personal communication March 16, 2016).

J added,

It shows that they are 'educate'. Not to discriminate, those who are uneducated, since childhood, those whom we assume may not even know how to read and write are difficult to handle. They are relatively 'blind'. Though we claim the change in Z as God's handiwork, they were educated to understand how the world revolves, how society works and the norms in society and religion. Others need to understand the working of society and religion (J personal communication, March 16, 2016).

K interjected that when asked people like G how far they go to school, they say they studied upto Class II and stuff. Within the internal environment, there is much stigmatisation regarding the level of one's education whereby the uneducated or those who completed only a few levels in school are considered to behave in disdainfully as opposed to the educated MSM.

Steering our conversation back to Z, I asked him where he went to school to which Z immediately answered Mamawii girls. Though it is not true, we get the joke so we laughed again. Mamawii girls used to be an all-girls school which stirred up the laughter. Z told me the school where he went and I continued asking him who his clients were for sex work. Initially, he was not a sex worker, he said he "commissioned" for the others meaning he solicited clients

on behalf of the sex workers for about three years. From 2010 onwards till March 2015 he was in the streets doing sex work, only to go home time and again to take care of his health.

The other sex workers that I met such as F, G, J, and L have feminine nicknames and are called by those names at the TIC. They are not permanent residence of Aizawl. They are from villages and towns far from Aizawl city. L has been raised by her grandmother, G has a stepmother, J's mother passed away and F shrugged off when asked about her family. They all came to Aizawl to look for jobs but due to peer pressures and financial problems they landed into sex work. J is the most daring amongst all, as commented by one of her friends who said she often travels to neighbouring states to do sex work hitchhiking along the way but fortunately somehow she mysteriously came back surviving all the obstacles and tortures she encountered on the way and back.

Mode of Sex Work

My informants have willingly shared the nature of their work, the clients they have, the payment, the place where they meet and other information relating to their sex work. Mostly they venture out when the sky gets dark, usually 5:30 to 6 p.m. in Aizawl. Certain spots in Aizawl such as Vanapa Hall, Zodin square and Millenium Centre area are located at the heart of the city where they solicit clients. "Most of the time we are soliciting in groups" said G. They find lesbians as annoying rather than female sex workers because when clients come to talk to them those lesbians used to shout out to their clients, "Tuai anih kha I duh em ni? " (That is tuai do you want him?). They otherwise have good relationships with the other female sex workers as L noted, "Hmeichhia leh hmeichhia ang khan kan inngai a" (we acknowledge each other as woman) denoting how the othering happened in sex work. Lesbians are the other -the opposite sex while they are females that are bound to stick together against the patriarchal opposite.

In terms of payment, they are paid in cash. Their rates vary. Fellatio or blow job is charged Rs. 300 or Rs. 500. One time penetration can be Rs. 1500 while spending nights together can cost Rs. 6000 and beyond. The place of sex work depends on their clients. Hotel rooms, cars, roadside, graveyards and buildings under construction are the common sites while rarely they also asked their friends to host them in their homes. Hotel room bills are paid by their clients. There are times when they find good-looking men to hang out with. Those men are not charged any amount. They instead buy them booze and stay with them at their friend's house.

One of my informants J is not a commercial sex worker but sometimes, when the money offered is irresistible, he used to hang out with clients. They are mostly tourists who visit Aizawl and stay in high-end hotels. "I get paid 10,000 a night", he bragged. Continuing, he said, "But I have to dress really well otherwise I will not be allowed to enter the hotel and also my client would not want it, the other sex workers that you use to see here will not be allowed inside at all cost".

I asked the regular sex workers how they spent their money, to which they replied that money comes and goes. If they earn well, they spend it on food and drugs the next day. It is impossible to have savings, they regard.

Besides NGO based employees, beauticians and commercial sex workers, the other MSM who I have met are salesperson in small shops, newspaper deliverer, tailors, students and unemployed. None of them have earned enough to lead a comfortable life which sweep them in the margins of life.

Drugs and dependency on alcohol:

Quite a frequent scene I have witnessed in my research is MSM drinking alcohol or going out to buy one. Alcohol dependency rate is really high. To confirm to this there are studies documenting the prevalence of alcohol consumption and drug abuse among MSM (McCarthy-

Caplan, Janz & Swartz, 2014; Bourne & Weatherburn, 2017; Kumar et al. 2020) My observation relating to this has been confirmed through the statement made by the office staff of FXB when he reported that only few countable numbers are not drinking. Alcohol gives purpose for people to hang out, break the ice and culture relationships and friendship. As Bourne & Weather, 2017 noted, alcohol and drugs help MSM in coping with problems they face, it enhances their pleasure and create a sense of belongingness.

Relationships are built through drinking together. When individuals declare that they are denouncing drinking and sexual activities with men, the others lure them back using alcohol as bait. When you stop drinking in the world of my informants, you are missing out on important social gatherings where common grounds are met which will eventually reel you out of their loop. In a world intertwined with stigma and discrimination, the MSM try to find happiness, making them forget their state of being. When they are high, they escape from the world which dreads them making them more carefree at least while the alcohol kicks.

While this is the case, alcohol and drug abuse have implicated arguments as it acts as catalyst destroying relationships when MSM argue in a drunken state. I was also told how drinking precedes sexual relations as many sexual activities happen when they are drunk.

MSM sex workers are happier dealing with drunk clients, especially when they want to pass off as female sex workers. An incident narrated to me by JM proves my point here. Once, she was with a man whom she said would be of her father's age. He was drunk when JM grabbed the opportunity. He thought JM was a female sex worker. So, she took him to her friend's house in X²⁴ locality where they were having sex. "He tried to touch my breast, but I gently brushed away his hand teasing him that he is so horny" she said. They spent the night together. "He was

²⁴ X denotes the name of a locality in Aizawl. The real name of the locality could not be disclosed for ethical purpose.

kind to me so I don't want to rob him of his money" she expressed indicating the principle she stood by. In the morning, she woke him up before sunrise. She asked him to check his wallet to see if all his money was intact. Only after his confirmation that she left him before he realises that he was sleeping with a guy all along.

As for drugs, unlike alcohol it has hardly been consumed or injected in my presence. I know some of them are dealing with it through the whispers exchanged among them. I've met an MSM who dealt with drugs while I was with J one day. This was in 2016, when KK walks in. I've met him before and mentally realised how much he has changed over the years. He used to be quite handsome before but now he looks weak and stressed. J went over to him, checked his arm and ended up reprimanding him to stop injecting in the same spot repeatedly . He asked him what he was going to do. KK replied that he is selling drugs. J attempted to look at his pills but he retaliates. "I won't take it I promise," J said. Slowly KK handed the drugs over to him. They inaudibly whispered something relating to drugs. When he gives back the pills, I said to him with a joking tone, "KK can I have a look? I will not steal it", and as he replied our conversation goes on

KK : I trust you [he handed me the pills]. It is AP

Me : How much will you take for this?

KK: Rs 150

Me: How much do they usually take at a time, do we have to consume all of these?

[J and KK laugh]

KK: [In a more tender tone] No, not all, you will get high even if you swallow one pill when you're not used to it.

Me: So if I eat all of these, I'll overdose.

J: This is fake.

KK: It is not fake at all

J: These days fake heroin is sold numerously. They sell flour as heroin.

KK: When people are dealing with drugs, it has to be done in a hurry, they had no time to realise that the heroin they bought is flour because the dealer is dealing in a hurry and so is the buyer.

Me: Wow that's serious. It would be dangerous, won't it be if they inject flour instead of heroin in their system?

J and KK: No they don't inject it. Heroin and no. 4 have to be mixed with water before injecting. When they mix it with water, heroin and no. 4 dissolve but not flour. The flour will never immerse in the water it will form a lump. Everyone will know.

KK: I'm going

Me: Sell everything alright [he went out smiling]

(KK, personal communication, March 18, 2016)

When I look back that day I know my moral compass did not exactly point north. I know he'll sell it to somebody who will pop the pills get high and what will happen next? But I also know how badly he needed the money coming from a family with a deceased mother. His father and brothers are all addicts. He is responsible for his own survival. Alcohol comes in discourse time and again in our conversations but not drugs. So that conversation has been something different that I never encountered again, even in other circumstances.

While doing fieldwork I happen to witness an informant injecting drugs. It was L who led me to the toilet where she was going to fixate herself. I had told her before that I wanted to watch and videotape it. So, we both stood in a foul smell dirty toilet at the TIC in front of the wash basin. She took out her instruments-syringe, needle, a small glass container and heroin carefully one by one, and placed it on the flat surface of the basin. She immersed heroin in the glass container and filled it with water. When satisfied with the mixture, she pumped it out using a syringe and injected it into her system through the vein in her arm. With the process completed swiftly, she cleaned up the area with a cotton pad. It was one of the most thrilling experiences I have ever had. When we got out of the bathroom, others were eyeing us with suspicion, but I did not utter a word, and neither did she. I quietly asked her how long it would last. She said she would inject it again in the afternoon before it gets dark. I was scolded by the other MSM later in her absence.

In my observation, alcohol consumption is more common among Mizo MSM. I have come across only three MSM who neither consume alcohol nor use drugs. Meanwhile, only a few of the informants I have met are using drugs. Prohibition of alcohol and drugs in the state of Mizoram has not stopped the MSM from using it.

MSM and AIDS:

MSM and AIDS have ample amount of research worldwide. Yet, in my research I could interview only three people living with HIV/AIDS. E, M and RT who is in a live-in relationship with a non-mizo partner in Delhi. AIDS has always been stigma-related, putting the infected person in a state of discrimination and alienation from society and family. When E tested positive, he did not want to disclose it to his friends and even family members. M was in a stage of denial for a long time until she was forced to be in the hospital. RT hide from his partner that he is a PLHIV.

The stigma attached to AIDS and an attempt to hide it from other people has been highlighted through the following experience that I had with one of my informants.

In 2014, J asked me to accompany him at the ART Centre at Aizawl Civil Hospital. When he reached, I had a feeling that people sitting on the corridors were looking at me with an inquiring eye. We took a seat at the bench in the waiting room. The people sitting nearby were having conversations audibly. Initially, I did not pay much attention to what they were saying until one of the women said, "It is imperative to have a blood test before marriage because most of us are positive because of our husbands". I was awakened from my thought and listened intensely. She added, "Once we get infected we are so helpless there is nothing we can do about it". The one sitting beside her asserted that people have been doing the testing these days. They shared to each other how much they benefitted from attending group discussions while one remarked that they have not tested their baby's blood yet and she is worried. Their conversation had faded so I couldn't hear it anymore. J gave me the ART card, I kept it safe in my bag while waiting for the client.

J asked me to hand him over the card alleging that the client will not like the fact that I was accompanying J and he would be extremely angry if he further learned that I was handling the card myself. The client arrived soon after I returned the card. He wore a black shirt and pants and flipflop. He had a bag pack and badminton racquet protruding from the bag. He is very thin. He came and sat with J. I can't hear what they were saying. Minutes later I could observe him checking out his card. He was told to get his blood tested again before taking treatment and also go for X-ray. They've mentioned some more things that need to be taken care of which I could no longer decipher. At that moment one of my classmates in school suddenly appeared on the door wearing a doctor's coat. "What are you doing here?" he asked me in disbelief. "I am with a friend" I replied. He was in a hurry so he took a sample in a test tube and disappeared. He must have thought I was there to avail services. It makes me quite uncomfortable.

It was raining that day, so we were holding umbrella and walking towards the blood test centre when E got a phone call. He picked it up and I could hear when he said, "I am accompanying a friend of mine". When he hung up the phone he told us that the person who called was enquiring why he saw him exiting the ART Centre. So J and I advised him to keep telling that he is there only for his friends if he sees anyone who knows him. The stigma attached to HIV/AIDS is clearly visible.

We've got his blood tested. When he came out, J asked him if it hurt and jokingly added that it would be nothing for him because he had been injecting needles far bigger than the ones they used to take the blood out. Instantly I read that he is addicted to drugs. E came to me with a cotton pad which has a drop of his blood. He joked and said, "Do you have any new injury? Let me paste this in that point". I joked back, stretching my arms out to brush over the cotton but he retreated. He came over and in a more serious tone he said, "If I could ever be born again I swear I will not lead this kind of life". A deep sense of pity flows through me so I assured him that medical progress has made it possible for PLHIV to live for a long time. If he undergoes treatment properly there is nothing to worry about. J too assured and advised him to eat healthy.

As we were walking in the corridor of the blood test centre, he saw a nurse from his locality. It was too late to hide so he went inside to talk to her for a while. When he came out he asked J if other patients also get their blood tested from there. J assured him that it is mandatory for other patients to get their blood tests too. Hearing that makes him more relaxed.

The following day, we were supposed to go for an X-ray. I was requested to take him to the hospital for it. He was late again so I waited for him for a while. When he arrived we both went to search for the X-ray section. On our way, I observe that people are staring at him. Whenever we saw people he knew he always pointed at me and told them he was there to keep me

company. Since he wanted to hide everything I did not mind playing along. So, while we were waiting for his turn to X-ray I stood in the line for him. We almost reached his turn when his phone rang. It was S who called. I could hear E's reply only. I assume from the way he spoke S probably have asked him his whereabouts because he replied,

I am at the hospital to get an X-ray of my leg...the one I injured because of an accident that happened a long time back...don't you remember? I met an accident and plastered it for a while...yes, wait for me it won't be long I am with Mami (my nickname) . I'm hanging up the phone it's going to be my turn.

On our way back he told me not to say a word to S and the others. I get that he wants it to be a secret. We stopped in a restaurant as I was so hungry. I took the opportunity to inquire on he got infected. He briefly narrated the story. "We went to a party" he started,

I was with my friends, D and his friends were also there at the party. He came over to where I was and invited me to ride home with him in his bike if I had no other plan. We were a bit troubled about that earlier with my friends because some of us do not have a ride home. When I told my friends they complained for ditching them as soon as I found a man for myself. In my defence I retorted and asked back how do they expect us to go back home when we don't have enough ride to fit us all. It was like doing a favour for them so that they all will have a ride home. So I went home in his bike. We still have alcohol with us. He said we can drink it at World Bank Road. He took me that way. When he invited me to have sex with him, I insisted on using a condom which he doesn't want initially. But finally he said, "Yes" but he doesn't want me to put it for him. He excused himself and moved a bit farther away. We were so drunk I did not even bother to check if he had really put it on or not. We had sex then. The next time I saw that guy was at RV. I observe that he's becoming very thin. When I tell my friends they informed me that he is positive. Later I heard the news of his death. Last year I got my blood tested. I've tested positive obviously. I should have been more careful.(E personal communication, August 21, 2014)

The process involved to avail HIV treatment seems a daunting task. I have been accompanying E for three days for several tests. In the third day financial problems have come in the way. As always he met several people to whom we made excuses such as blood sugar as the reason for his check-up. At the hospital his blood sample was tested again for infections I don't know about anymore. We were supposed to test his blood for Hepatitis C. However, the hospital does not have a test kit for Hepatitis. When we report it to the ART centre, he was advised to take the test from the private laboratory. Such laboratories are located near the hospital anyway so we decided to get the test done.

I've been a healthy person fortunately all my life. This made me blind to procedures and prices involved in healthcare. I did not have a clue how costly things are in private firms. When we asked the price for a Hepatitis C test, we were told that we will have to pay Rs 700. I did not have that much amount of money in my purse neither was E. "Let's go we will figure it out" I assured him. On our way back we had an intense conversation

Me: I think it is best to tell your parents. Their love knows no bounds. If you hesitate to tell your father, at least inform your mother.

E: If I tell my mother, it means my father will know automatically. It is better this way let them know when they know.

Me: That cannot be. Later when you start the treatment, it will be imperative to take good care of your health. I can tell them for you if you want.

E: No, telling them is unimaginable. Anyway I am not going to test anything anymore. It is costly, and moreover we are all programmed to die someday. I'll just stay this way and embrace whatever comes in my way.

Me: AIDS patients too have long lives if they regularly take treatments and care for their body, you can't give up now.

[We silently walk for a while, lost in thoughts I guess, maybe not him but at least I was]

E: What about the money? I think I would have to find ways to acquire money in a way I most dread.

Me: We will tell J about it he'll know how to deal with it. I'm sure they have such cases before. There will be a way.

[When we reach the TI, I told J]

J: That is not compulsory, we will find a way.

Me: Yes E if there is a problem I will lend you the money.

E: Alright I will be able to pay you back later when my parents give me money to buy clothes.

(E, personal communication, August 22, 2014)

Hereafter, I hardly see E and neither did the other MSM and social workers. Some say that he ran away from home.

Acceptance and support received from others can really uplift a person's experience with HIV which can be seen through the life of M. M is an informant who has been receiving treatment because of HIV. In July 2015, I visited her in a florist shop where she works as a salesperson. A common acquaintance, a Pastor introduced her to me through phone call the day before we met when I visited a Home where they treat drug addicts and PLHIV. She had given consent to G Home where she was treated for HIV to give me her address prior to our meeting. Sitting in front of a person who has gone through a lot in life has a feeling that will always be remembered. We chat for hours and hours, interrupted occasionally by customers who came to buy flowers. We lose track of time. She shared how she got the virus and her life post HIV.

I used to live in Guwahati. We go out for drinks and you know that maybe where I get the virus. Otherwise it could also be Mizoram I'm really not sure exactly where I get it from. It was around 2000, quite a long time back. The thing I don't even remember where I contracted from yet it entered inside me. I wanted to die when I tested positive but now I can be at peace with it.

I inquired how she found out and she said,

I found out when FXB organised a party...no it was the day prior to the party instead. A woman took my blood sample. The result came out. I could not accept it as I feel fine physical; I was in denial for a long time. She kept calling me. I shouted back at her. I don't want to think about it, I'm tired. I don't have HIV. I feared my employers would find out. Time passed by when the virus took over my body. I started to feel the symptoms. I got extremely sick. I went to Civil Hospital to see a doctor. That woman who took my sample was working there. When she saw she pulled me separately telling the doctor that she will take care of me and report it back to him. She gave me counselling where she said, "We've been trying to reach you. We've called asking you to approach us several times. When you don't come I send people to contact you yet you continue to remain in denial". My heart sinks. The moment others are addressing it, it shows the reality of it all. It hurts deep inside I couldn't find myself as a normal human being anymore. I don't know what to do. I cried over and over. My elder sibling was waiting outside. When I walked out, he asked me the diagnosis. Brother I am not a normal human being anymore I expressed painfully. "What exactly is the problem?" he asked. I couldn't speak out I continue to sob even on our bus ride home.

"Did you avail the treatment then?", I asked,

I had signed an agreement of willingness at the hospital to be taken care of at a Home meant for people like us. They told me that if I don't show up, they will send an ambulance to pick me. I feel helpless, everything is so dark. I wish there could be other ways to escape hospitalisation. But if I don't go they will pick me up which will be an embarrassment. When we reached home we had a serious conversation with my family members. Initially they find it hard to accept but luckily in the end they accept the situation. My family and I were undergoing thorough counselling when I were admitted that made us finally at peace with my situation. Prior to these I wanted to die, I uttered swearing words. I can't fathom how it affected me. When I was discharged, I went back to my normal life. My employers understand my situation therefore they accepted me as I am. I don't go out much. My life circles around my job. Had I been evil minded I would go out and have partners just like everyone else. But no, I don't want that. (M, personal communication, July 9, 2015)

Not everyone is like M who renounced sexual pleasures because of being positive. RT, a guy I met in 2019 had tested positive which he believed was transmitted to him in Delhi the same year. Accepting it as a consequence bound to happen because of the way he leads his life he confessed how he drinks, partied and fails to use condom during intercourse. He said he has reaped what he had sown. He had a live-in relationship with his partner. I asked him if his partner knows about his condition. "No he doesn't. I wouldn't dare to tell him. I used condom though" he replied.

Institutional stigma has silenced those who are living with AIDS out of fear of rejection and harassment. It contributed to depression, low self-esteem and marginalisation (Thomas et.al. 2011) This non-disclosure of one's status is a potential risk for the spread of AIDS which is not only proved through studies but could be discerned from the interviews I had with E and

RT. Reversibly, feelings of compassion and understanding received by M from her employers and friends have empowered her to negotiate with the challenges she encountered as PLHIV in her everyday life, guiding her actions to stop the spread of AIDS to others.

Relationship among MSM:

Don Kulick(1998) had written about fragile ties between travesties characterized by suspicion and distrust (41p.). Similar environment could be observed among the MSM in Mizoram. For the purpose of my research I need to be closer to certain people as I want to get informants with their help. But as this happens, the others will consider me as a team player for the opponent for which I dare not seek their help though they are quite friendly in face value. When opportunity arises, chances will be taken to gossip about the other which makes me careful even more. By the end of my field work I realise that MSM can freely hang out with the others, but the ties are so fragile that it could snap when given a little nudge. Jealousy creeps in easily. They could be one time friends and next day enemy. I was warned about this delicate relationship since the beginning when I was at the DIC from Z.

It was the month of August 2014, rain pours heavily that day. I was stuck in traffic making me reach the DIC quite late. As I was climbing the stairs to the DIC I saw K came rushing down the flights of stairs, “I have to go to...I’ll be right back, I brought the needle” he urgently mentioned and rushed past me. When I reach L was watching TV, Z was also present. I took K’s table. Z and K continue their conversation. J came out from the other room and scolded me, “I know it is placement but you should stick to office timing...” he said. I did not respond. By this time K had returned, appeared at the door, came over and tossed the bag which I promised to repair for him yesterday. As I was stitching the others were continuing the conversation. Z called me out drawing my attention; I was not following their conversation all those time as I was deeply concentrating on my stitching. He expressed,

Look Mami[referring to me by my nickname] we all gossip about each other. If I open my mouth and spit out every gossip we won't be able to stay together. Before I work in...K had spread lies saying that "Tanhril Joint Action Committee had captured Z and my friend while they were in the middle of having sex". It was reported back to me by R. (Z, personal communication, August 29, 2014)

At this point K was denying Z's accusation saying that it's unbelievable and he never uttered those words. Z was somehow catalysed so he continued,

I asked him who told you that, you have to tell me right away. It is a matter of dignity, I could have a bad name, I'm going to file FIR. At that point he said he heard it from K and showed me the phone message exchanged between them. J is also jealous of me, he used to shout in front of Millenium Centre and at Bawngkawn saying, "Z is mawngkawhur from H²⁵ locality"

I intervened and asked J if he was drunk that time. "I was drunk" he clarified. Z went on ranting so our conversation went,

Z: He was accusing me of trying to snatch away his partner

J: Do you remember, I told you the other day.

Me: You mean that guy from B village?

J: Yes that one

Z: It's all J's fault. J invited him for a date and J failed to turn up. He did not have money so he came along with me to RV

²⁵ In this case H is a locality pseudonym which cannot be disclosed for ethical reasons.

J: He called me that time he told me you guys were not together. Yes I know you went out when I called to buy meat, he was right you were not together and he stood outside, spoke to me in high tone. The reason how I know all these is that he himself told me later.

Z: I did not invite them to follow me. You did not pick up the phone. He has no money, that is why he followed me. I even paid for the drinks of 6 people once, they were arguing and they all went away. Coming back to the previous case, J asked for forgiveness. He was literally crying.

We tuai are just like this, we argue, we gossip about each other, we hang out again, that's how our mind works, we tend to be jealous easily.

Me: You all are acting just like girls.

Z, J and K: Exactly.

Z: I for one do not want to speak about it. Being the eldest, I think I should bear all their tantrums, so I looked at them and tried to understand them.

(personal communication with Z, J and K, August 29, 2014)

All this while, Z was shaving in front of the full-length mirror, K was lying on the couch, J was moving around here and there, L was watching TV without uttering a word, and I was sitting on the chair behind the table.

Their accusations did not last long as Z quickly said "Shall we start again" asking J to pick up the playing cards. The others said, "Let's" and hearing their voice V emerged from the other

room. L said, "If you're not going to include me in the game I'm not giving out the playing card. J who was looking for the card did not see it anyhow. Z gave money to J who went out to buy playing card. When he returned they gathered around and play *dospati*. All is well again. At that point, F entered, we sat together and watched the others playing. In a while, I volunteered to pick up lunch taking F along, we both went to get lunch.

Another day Z was enlightening me on his trip to Manipur. "I was representing MSM of Mizoram" he explained. He said he acted masculine even the way he dressed.

I became so popular among the Nupis, they offered me alcohol, they sat around me while some of them requested me to drink their alcohol instead. They have good association and are united. In Manipur, it is their custom to have children to continue the lineage. Therefore tuai are forced to get married. However, when Nupe surfaced, they talk about human rights and helped those who were forced to get married. (Z, personal communication. September 2, 2014)

I interjected and asked, "Can't you do the same in Mizoram?" to which he replied, "It is impossible. If Mizo tuai for example K and E stay together, they won't last even two nights".

As Z had mentioned, I often see people who I thought are friends who turn up ditching each other in varied circumstances. I always thought S and E were friends. But when I accompanied E to the ART centre he told me to hide from S that he is HIV positive. Once S was waiting for E at the DIC with his female friend when the true colours of their friendship was revealed to me. They have been waiting for a long time, E could not turn up. S asked me if I could call him for me. I wonder why MSM have the habit of using my phone to call their friends. I called him anyway, telling him that S and others were waiting for him. I asked him where he is. He said he was at T and he would take time to come. "I'm handing over the phone to S", I told him. When they hung up S was so angry, "We were waiting for him for a long time. Whatever! he

should be happy for allowing him to be friends with us". "What's the matter?" I probed. "It is embarrassing to have him as company in our locality" said the woman who was with S. S added, "He has the habit of stealing things, therefore which our locality Joint Action Committee used to chase him. When he doesn't have money he searched for dogs on the streets. In our locality it is not allowed to let dogs out without the owners accompanying them. If they are found, the owner will have to bail it out for Rs. 1000. Rs 500 will go to the one who capture it and the other Rs 500 will be for local council fund".

"I thought E came from a respectable family", I said.

S replied, "Yes, his parents are also good. His father is a bit strict. His brothers are drug abusers though". Turning to his friend, he asked her, "Let's not go anywhere today". The female friend too agreed telling us that she is a bit tired. To my surprise S asked her friend if she is willing to go to T to meet with E. She does not protest.

Life during my fieldwork is not always filled with arguments among MSM there are good days when everyone is friendly with each other. When work keeps us busy, no one has time to gossip so it usually ended well. One of those days was when the outreach workers were preparing outreach report. I was helping out too but ended up watching a fashion show on the TV with F. The others were busy though. One tuai who I never saw before who they referred to as VV came in. F was welcoming him enthusiastically. He was wearing T shirt, tight pants and floral converse. The others commented on his shoes and said, "Dear, look at your converse it is blossoming". He replied, "I know I am in full bloom". He sat with us. He seems to know almost every Mizo model that walked the ramp. V and C were also coming, I asked C about her grandmother's health condition. She said, "She is still the same, no progress. I have to go to bath my other grandmother who is at C locality. I wish for her to die soon, it is hectic for me. She doesn't want anyone else to bath her. I have multiple furniture to take along with me as

well” she complained and then rushed out in a hurry. I spoke briefly to V she was sitting at the backside so I was not aware when she left.

A tall, dark handsome guy appeared; they told me his name is R. He is a friend of the senior ones. I think he is panthi. He was sitting with Z. He didn't talk much. They always protect their partners I don't know why. I never get the chance to speak to them, especially for research purpose. Except for a word here and there which is mandatory for conversation they are protected in their arms.

The tuai jokes

There are uncountable jokes reflecting the lives of tuai which I have heard from my informants. Though they are quite difficult to translate to capture the humour I want to mention it anyway as it shows their position in the society.

The first joke I heard is “Their son was too effeminate that when they bought gun for him he bathed it instead”. This captured the norm behind girls playing with their barbies and dolls and bathing them which is imitated through bathing a gun by the effeminate son.

The second joke is, “ His parents bought GI Joe and he ended up stitching clothes for that toy”. Similar to the previous one, GI Joe is a toy for boys but stitching clothes for it relatable to girls stitching clothes and dressing their barbies and dolls which is an effeminate act.

The third joke is, “They bought ballboot, he took out all the spikes and replace it with heels”. In this joke ballboot is related to boys who play football. Removing the spikes and replacing with heels signified that the person prefers to be with heels rather than playing football.

One of them jokingly added,

We are born only once and we turn out to be mawngkawhur. Our mothers gave birth to us in excruciating pain, the nurses will say, “You have a boy” but as we

grow up it turns out we can't be masculine at all. Anyway we are saying a lot of joke on tuai and we are joking about ourselves haha

The laughter goes on.

Around 2.30pm, J and K excuse themselves to go to RV to drink alcohol. "We'll go for outreach work" they joked also mentioning that they've never been to RV after pay day that month. It was already mid-month, an amazing progress for them to not visit RV that long in my opinion. J said, "Money drains fast so we decided not to invite each other" he further clarified and they both left.

I stayed a bit longer watching them playing cards when a crossdresser nick named as V came over. She moved directly to Z who pay her money that he owed and she left again quickly. I never see her again.

A popular show aired by local cable channel while I was in my field is Pro-fight It is a local boxing tournament produced by LPS local cable channel. J told us that one of his sexual partners had participated in the pro-fight. KT responded, "He was good right he was almost in the final I think". J said, "Yeah he secured the ...position. K interrupted, "One of my sexual partners was also a participant, but he was knocked out at the first round".

Lovers, sexual relations and Jealousy

When close friends are together, love stories, sexual encounters and partners are topics which creep up in conversation. I remember one of the days when we huddled closer together. That day there were no strangers or outsiders so they freely narrated their stories. KT²⁶ who would be in his late 40s started,

²⁶ While I was doing fieldwork KT had died of stroke.

I was working at an NGO with K once upon a time, we had fun, we follow each other a lot, and money was in abundance. One day K and a guy came over to my room, I have two beds, I was reading books and lay down on the other bed. K and that guy climbed on the empty bed and started kissing. They took off their clothes. I suddenly got up telling them to lock the door behind them and I walked out. (K was giggling). We hang out with each other a lot; there were times when we borrowed partners from each other.

He continues to narrate their rendezvous that happened the previous night:

I was hanging out with a group of guys who were a bit young. Among them was a male model who was featured in music videos and all. I did not know that he was popular. The guys I hang out with thought I was stupid not to know him. I on the other hand think of them as stupid for the lame reason why they find me stupid. We continue to hang out nevertheless. We drink and chat along. The model said, "I do not stigmatised tuai, I don't talk badly of them or mock them but I can't have relationship with tuai". I was a bit drunk so I stood up and went to the bathroom to wash my face. Another friend came in to use the toilet. Later that model came in too and touched my penis. We kiss and make out, and as I tilted, we made a loud noise. Others thought we were fighting. On our way home I rode along with him. He took my hand and placed it in his penis. The position we were in was uncomfortable, so I proposed to stop somewhere to have sex. However his friends were guarding him I suppose because when we try to stop they halted too and when we ride faster they quickly catch up on us so we can't do what we want. I told him that we will see each other again and we exchanged our phone numbers. (KT, personal communication, August 24, 2014)

That day they were telling me many tales about people I have never met. In the middle of our conversation, KT asked K, "K are you scared of that guy S when he died, you too had a sexual relationship so...?" K replied, "No I am not scared, it was a long time ago". He then gave his opinion, "I wish guys who are not tuai who are not effeminate who we could never have guessed from their appearance would choose not to be gay". Addressing me he said, "You have a lot even in your locality who act exactly like normal men". I asked them their names but it

turns out I know only few from the names he mentioned and there is no way I would interview them especially if they are in the closet. It will be so awkward being from the same locality.

K and J who went to X locality that day shared another incidence. J did most of the talking while K intervened at some point,

We took a Taxi and paid Rs 40 each. On our way home we rode back in a Taxi with a driver who is kind of old but very horny. While driving he was caressing the backside of my body. We drank the alcohol that he stocked. We dropped K first. He gave him Rs. 30. I took him to a graveyard near my locality where we continue to drink all his alcohol. He did not ask me for Taxi fare. By the time he is sober he would be regretting a lot. It means we were charting the Taxi almost for free from RV till my locality [which is about 13 kilometres] for free. [They both laughed continuously] I feel pity for him that's why I gave him Rs. 30. Why did he follow tuai anyway? (K and J, personal communication, August 24, 2014)

I had asked Z how they determine a guy who wants to hang out with them sexually. Just like every time when I raised this question to others Z has no explanation. "It's readable, I don't know how to explain, I don't risk anyone. I just know" he replied. He continued telling me about his neighbour who had a crush on him. This neighbour of his is a widower. Z had no idea that he would want to engage in same sex though he often queried how it is done and so forth. Z thinks he is handsome and he likes him too, but he asserted that he never force anybody to have sexual relationship with him. He explained,

I have friends who know my orientation because I tell them. I make it clear to them that they should never be afraid of me hitting on them without their consent. My neighbour too had come to my house and visited me for about 3 years. Throughout those years nothing happened. However he came to my house and we did it after I shifted from the neighbourhood where he lives. He was drunk. After that night, whenever we meet there is nothing going on. I heard he is married for the second time. (Z, personal communication, August 24, 2014)

He goes on telling me his sexual relationship

I had a sexual relationship with three brothers. The wife of one of the brothers knows about my relationship so he doesn't want to speak to me anymore. When his husband is around she acts normal, but in his absence we never talk. The house which I am renting at the moment is not in good condition. The floors juggle during sexual intercourse so we have to do it on the concrete part of the floor. I used to host a sleep over of guys. We drink and we sleep parallel to each other, covering the entire floor [he showed me the photograph]. I like it when there is no reciprocation from the ones I have feelings for. If someone likes me instantly where is the fun in it? I'd rather if they don't want me I have high regards for such kind of men. Once there was a guy who I have deep feelings for. He didn't want me. I disgust him; he said he would kill me. But now we are friends but we don't have a sexual relationship. He came to learn that I never force anyone. (Z, personal communication, August 24, 2014)

Intimate relationships are shared without hesitation in a closed circle. It signifies a bond a person share with the others as sexual relationships are

Virtual chat to offline dating:

My informants are making good use of social media to find partners. However, the display pictures do not always display the real looks of the person. Mistakes are made, but they are expert in evading the person when circumstances arise. At the DIC one day, I was sitting with a stranger who told me that he likes to hang out with MSM and he is not MSM himself. We were sitting in a room which is quite dark because the electric supply was cut off that day. The inability to work has left my daily acquaintances to venture out to pursue their own agenda. The stranger was telling me how much he appreciates K because in their locality he is the one who knows how to befriend people that makes him have lot of friends to hang out. With only

a few of us left there was nothing much to do so the remaining people joined us in our conversation. Taking over what we were saying K relieved the night when he was with a guy he met from Facebook.

I chat with him on Facebook and we decided to meet. I went to the designated place. He was wearing a hoody jacket with a hood. When he removed the hood he is so ugly I just said to him right in his face, "You are so ugly". I messaged E [another MSM who was also listening along with us] telling her to call me. She called instantly. I rejected the call and pretended to be talking to my parents. When I hang up the phone I explained to him that my parents are ordering me to go home so I had to go urgently. I ran away from him at the fastest speed possible. (K, personal communication, March 7, 2016)

Hearing that story all of us laughed. I had also been a part of such an encounter once when F was meeting a guy he gets acquainted through Facebook. They set up a blind date. On the specified day F received a call from that guy who said he was waiting for him near the Aizawl Civil Hospital gate. It is not far from where we are, only a walking distance. Fearing to go alone F nagged me to accompany him. I finally caved in. When we entered the gate of Aizawl Civil Hospital we walked a few steps more and stopped. We turn around. It is an uphill so we have a good view of the entire area. F took out his phone and dialled the number. Meanwhile we scan the area to check for the person. Our situation seems as if I am somehow cast in a detective movie. When he picked up the call F pretends as if we are still on our way. F asked him the colour of the clothes he is wearing. We are now looking for a guy in a blue T-Shirt. Well there he is, we spot him sitting 3 feet away from the gate that we passed. He is short that's all I could see. "He is ugly, let's run away" F urged. So we both rushed towards the steps which lead us to another road that will take us back to where we came from. We were almost there when F stopped. "I feel pity for him, he came all the way. I think I should go back," he said. "It's your decision if you want, go and meet him, I'll see you later", I said, dismissing him as I walk towards the DIC.

When I reach back, the others asked me where F is, I simply told them that he has a date and he will be back soon. Within a short while they both returned. Without coming in, they were sitting on the stairs while the others take turns to check out the person he is with peeping from the door. As for me, I went out and F introduced me to him. For hours and hours they were sitting and chatting. Finally F came in alone, "So?" I asked. "He is sweet but I told him he is not my type and I will arrange for him to meet someone else". The others were also commenting on his looks. Some complained about his height while others commented on his looks.

F and I, we easily get along with each other. The others however have warned me that he used to steal things. KK said that he once came to his house. As KK was seeing him off he said that he forgets something and went back on his own to the house. "I think he took my money Rs 1000 because it was lost. I later called him at the office and confronted him. He did not deny, he keeps quiet. Later when I was sick he came over and gave me Rs 500. Maybe he regretted what he had done". Z also said that he suspected him as the thief who took his charger the other day because the trace ended it with him. As for me he hasn't stolen anything from me so I'm not too concerned, but when we keep on hearing such gossip it tends to make me have a second thought on the person. Anyhow this is a common situation because everyone is in one way or the other a gossip topic for the rest. Nobody is spared from it.

Another story I heard was in the month of September 2014. I was down with measles for a week so I could not continue my field work. When I get healthier and returned J welcomes me back telling me that he too has returned after a week and also he attended gospel camping and he travelled. Meanwhile Z pitched in:

Z: A guy you used to contact had reached out to me on Facebook asking me if I know you. He knows where you are working. He said you owe him money and failed to pay him back till now. I promise him that I will inform you about it.

J: Oh that guy. Long-time back, I updated my status on Facebook mentioning that I do not have money so I will end up having sex for money. He inboxes me and said, “You need not do sex work, I will give you my number, come to my house and spend my money”. So I went to his house, he was not that good looking. He lives in a rented house and he may not be financially well-off either. He gave me Rs. 500. We did not do anything sexual. I continue to contact him couple of times, we even met near our office but later on I unfriend him. (Z & J, personal communication, September 19, 2014)

“By the way how was your travel?” I asked. He was visiting one village which is actually K’s natal village about 75 kilometres away from Aizawl. Looking at K he said, “K it is your village right? I knew it! I think you may know him [the reason why he travelled all the way]” and he started to describe in detail the location of the house where he went. “I haven’t visited for a long time. I would barely know anyone by now”. K replied. “Well the girls are not that good looking”, J joked and he continued to address my question.

I have not met him in real life. We often chat on Facebook. So one day I abruptly decided to visit him. When I didn’t go home that night my parents called. I told them that I am travelling. I went by Sumo. I have never been to this village before so I told him to receive me at the Sumo station. He was waiting for me. He is masculine, younger than me. Since it was the first time it was a bit awkward for both of us. We were lost in words. We reached their house and judging from their house I assume they would be well-off if measured in terms of village economy. Their house is nice and comfy. They have a bike also. His father is working in another town. He lives with his mother and elder sister. He introduced me to them. I gave the cloth fabric I bought for her mother.

They have already heated the water for me to take bath when we reach so I took bath and relax. Her mother shows great hospitality. She was the one taking up most of our conversations. As for me and my guy we haven’t break the ice yet so we speak very less. We had food and at night I think his mother saw the alcohol I got for him because she said to us, “Why don’t you guys go and drink that side, but do it secretly

so that others will not know”. I couldn’t tell if she is good to me and open because of the cloth I bought for her or her own inherent nature. As we drink we slowly cool off each other. His parents were willing to give up their bed for me to sleep. But rather than sleeping with everyone else in the same room we decided to bunk on their living room on the floor. We arranged mattress for us to sleep. We did not have sex that night.

The next morning we rode around in his bike He introduced me to his friends. We hang out and drink together. What I find a bit strange is that his mother trusts me just like that. Even while we were out with his friends, I was the one she called to check on us rather than him. That day we had sex. While I was in their village, I hooked up with one of his friends as well. Sometimes when we hang out we did not take the bike because the petrol pump is a far away from the village so it is inconvenient. We hiked most of the time. We even visited the nearby villages while I was there. His parents were so nice to me that I did not feel like coming back. But my parents wanted me to go to gospel camping so I eventually have to come home.(J, personal communication, September 19, 2014)

Asking about their relationship status and their partners are the easiest topic always. They never hesitate to tell me. We could freely interact on such topics without any constrain. We talk about their type, the kind they are looking for in a male. They show me photos of their sexual partners and their crush including the photo of their partner’s penis. It is a topic where I find them not creating boundary. One day J has to pick up something from his house. He invited me to accompany him. Despite it being a sunny day and his house a bit far, I wanted to go, so I followed him. We were walking past the busy market area, so we did not have much chance to talk. As we reach the less crowded area I asked him about his personal life. We had a chance to chat about many things-

Rather than cross-dresser I prefer males who wear male attire but have a bit of effeminate mindset. I don’t use sex much with my partners. I prefer having it with someone else with whom I am not in a relationship. I understand when married men

have affairs. Even I have situations where I do not feel like sleeping with my partners.

My relationship hardly lasts long, but I always have someone to chat with. Once I had sort of a distant relationship with a son of Sikkim MLA. He used to send me money. He wanted to have a live-in relationship with me at Kolkata. He sent me a flight ticket but then my Boss was slightly apprehensive on how the whole thing played out. She asked me to tell him to send a return ticket as well. When I requested him, he said if he sends return ticket he feared that I would bluff him and return back without even meeting him. He further stated that he will pick me up at the airport and we will book the ticket right away. But then my Boss was still concerned so I dropped the whole thing.

I also had a relationship with a guy from Chandigarh who I met in Delhi at a transgender summit. We are no longer together now. Last night I was out with out of my partner. We went to have a drink at RV. We were drinking till 12 at midnight. However, two of his friends keep on following us everywhere we go. We did not have a chance.

While I was in college I had a crush on one of our Students Union leaders. He is straight and well mannered. Those days my friends know my orientation. I do not want to befriend those who do not know it anyway. Working in an NGO has changed my whole perspective. It has a supportive environment so I am more open.

Since the area where we were is a place I hardly go to, he keeps on explaining to me the name of the locality and landmarks. He then told me what happened the previous night when he was hanging out with a guy who has a car.

Initially I was with his cousin, but I prefer him rather. I like him a lot. His cousin knows about it and he gets jealous. I travelled to their village to meet him, I stayed in their house but his cousin did not allow us to sleep together. He is very caring. When he drives he'll keep on asking "Are you alright, do you have motion sickness, are you comfortable?" (J personal communication, July 17, 2015)

"I have that kind of friend too you know, the caring type. If you want I will introduce him to you," I interrupted. "Well, I don't look for caring alone" he replied. We have almost reached their locality when a woman called him from a balcony of a house. They were conversing for

a while. I waited. When it was over he turned to me and said that she knew him from childhood and she still adores him as a child.

"Last night" he said continuing our conversation, "We were drinking at the cemetery in my locality. There were duties. It was dark. They told us to go home. We were noisy by the way. One of the guys on duty shouted, 'Is that J, is he also there?'"

On our way we pass by EM's house which is not far from J's as we reached his house in a short while. His mother was at the house. She is a homemaker and treated me with utmost hospitality. He packed the things needed, he changed his pants and we headed back. On our way, I asked him if there are homeless homoerotic subjects in Mizoram. He told me the story of one of such kind who he sheltered. He said,

We met and he stayed with us. We were together for about three months. He has the problem of substance abuse and when he drinks, it turned him into an evil person. I was tired of it so I broke off our relationship and moved on to others. He still stays with us though for a while. When I travel around I bought things for him. My parents take good care of him too until one day when he created a scene in our house in a drunken stage. We fought physically. He left. He was then caught stealing, did his time in jail and all...(J, personal communication, July 17, 2015)

Prior to my research, I have often seen my lesbian friends dating but never have a close encounter with male and male in a relationship or hear them talk romantics. It has always been an experience worthy to remember to see and hear people having the impossible desire, a desire with no future.

I still remember it was in 2014 in the month of August. It was after pay day so when I reach the DIC we were discussing what they bought with their salary. Some said laptop charger, keyboard, belt, gas stove, cloth rack, centre table and so on. Others used almost all their salary for other forms of pleasure. As we huddle together J took out his phone, dialled a number to call a guy who is in a village outside the city. He switched it to loudspeaker mode for us to

listen. “I’m going to pull his legs”, he announced. We hear the sound of hello from the other end and the conversation started:

J: What are you doing?

O: It is raining so there’s nothing to do, I’m lying down in my bed.

J: I’m sleeping too, come and sleep with me would you?

O: Hehe Hehe

J: If I come and visit you will there be a place to stay such as a guest house?

O: Yes there is, but the location is a bit far, it’s up in the mountain.

J: So if I come and visit will you be able to come and sleep over at the guest house?

O: There’s no reason for me not to.

J: You don’t seem like you’ll be good in bed. Do you have a large size?

O: You’ll see

J: Do you drink?

O: Sometimes

J: If so, when I come I’ll bring the booze

O: Yes, bring it

J: Do you have CD? [condom]

O: No I don’t. But we can take it for free at Peniel

J: What is peniel?

O:[I can’t hear what he said]

J: But the kind they would be distributing in such places would not be a good quality. Let’s use condom which have flavours.

O: It’s up to you.

J: Alright then. I'll bring the condom. I would have to bring something to grease it too.

O: [In a confusing tone] What for?

J: Well, there is no natural fluid, so we need to grease it. I'll bring lubes along ok?

O : Sure. [J, personal communication, August 13, 2014)

J hung up the phone and looked at me with a huge grin. The others do not seem to care much, I was wondering it maybe because they are used to it.

One day, I was chatting with H about the common acquaintances they have. Meanwhile Z was complaining about the wives of the males who end up shouting at them on the phone. The situation he was talking about is when they are out partying with married men. Their wives have the habit of calling Z and the others when they cannot reach their husbands' phone. He complained, "Why should they be angry with us? If they want, let them go out and shout at their husbands. C'mon girlfriend, come and sleep, rest on the couch" he said and tossed the pillow to me. We were listening to pop music played by H. I was drifting to sleep when I heard footsteps. I looked up it was M and C. M was smiling at Z who was in his deep sleep. "Bang him up" I said. He touched him slightly in his head with the thing he had been holding in his hand. With a jerk he woke up surprised and happy to see M. "Awi!!!! It's been so long, where have you been?" Z exclaimed. I could tell from their conversations that they are close to one another. "Do you still like me M?" Z inquired. "Yes I do" replied M. They were discussing good looking women around Aizawl. M was telling Z about a widow from Z's locality who he used to date. He asked him about her character. Their conversation goes

Z: She's a three times widow do you know that? She is beautiful but I don't want her for you. Moreover you'll end up dead. All her husbands are dead. But it is up to you.

M: I don't want her that much but she always invited me to visit her

Z: You know we were partying the other night...

M: Why don't you have a wife like a normal person? It is possible for you.

Z: Yeah

[Z was taking out his phone showed a photo to M]

Me: Gosh! This guy has so many chasers why don't you give some to M [we all laughed]

[It was M's turn to show photos, they both smiled and showed it to me]

M: Look at this girlfriend, it's C

[They showed me the photo of C naked and bending, C knows what they showed me he was smiling]

Me: Look at your butt, it's...

[The discussion has shifted to penis]

Z: Show us your penis. The other day I was playing with one guy urging him to show us his penis. He really did it.

M: I shaved it, it's clean. Going back to marriage, for me, I don't care much about their past life. If they are loyal to me after marriage I don't mind. I don't necessarily want a virgin. Even I am not a virgin. [Looking at me] should I take you home? [Z & M, personal communication, March 14, 2016]

Our conversation circles around such things that day. C and M decided to leave. Z and I stayed back. I was sweeping the floor Z said he is hungry. I gave him chocolate and asked,

Me: Were you in love for real?

Z: No way...but he is fond of me. I dare to scold him on all things too.

[The chocolate I gave him doesn't suffice his hunger so he went down to buy some snacks. We both were hogging it]

Me: I have a wedding to attend, I am leaving alright? (Z, personal communication, March 14, 2016)

The following week I had a chance to interview two young lovers S and Sam. S reached first, he was cursing because he dropped his spectacle and the arms broke. “I came here three times this year and every time my spectacle broke” he complained. “Shall we go to the other room” I suggest. After rounds of several questions I asked him about his love life and our interaction goes on-

S: I used to have a relationship with females before. In a total that would be around 8 relationships. Male [he was thinking] so many, I couldn't remember how many they are. This year I have four, one of which will be coming here.

Me: Do you have a type in male?

S: I like men who are tall but I have partners who are not too tall. They do not have to be necessarily tall.

Me: So you've mentioned that you have relationship with females. Does it mean that you prefer to be with males?

S: There's no such thing as choosing one over the other. Even now if there is a beautiful woman, I would still like her.

Me: Do you have sex with your partners?

S: Yes I do have sex...but among the four I mentioned I only had it with one.

Me: Does that mean you prefer to have a relationship where you talk to each other and all?

S: Yes I think

Me: Are you also open to foreigners and *Vai*?

S: I don't chat with Vai but I have about four foreigners that I get in touch with through Facebook. One is Brazilian. He is very handsome. I once had a relationship with Naga while I was in Dimapur.

Me: What took you to Dimapur?

S: I am in Class XII. I go to school there. Right now I came back for vacation. My father wanted me to go back to Nagaland but see I am still here. I am not willing to go back.

Me: What about your future?

S: As a male, it is our duty to get married and have a wife. I will get married.

Me: Where do you go with your partners, you know for a date?

S: My younger brother and my father usually go out at night. So it is convenient to hang out at my place.

[While I was interviewing S someone was calling out his name in the other room asking if he had dropped by. The others were telling him where he is].

Me: Is that your partner, should we go out?

[We went out. A thin guy wearing a red shirt, black jeans and adidas sneakers with his hair spiked up was standing in the other room.]

S: Are you drunk?

Others: Hey! Interview this guy as well

[He was willing so we entered the other room again. I was joking to S if he would like to ask the questions instead as we've just finished. He was trying to do it, but it

became too awkward and funny for them. So I took it over and among several questions I probed on his relationship too]

Me: You're in a relationship with S, do you only date males?

Sam: No, I like females too, I like both

Me: What about the future?

Sam: I will get married, have a wife. I don't want to be an age-old tuai like K

[Hey that's too loud]

Me: But then S is here, if you both get married it means that you will have to leave each other. Aren't you going to be heartbroken?

Sam: We love each other very much. We want the best for each other. If he finds a girl to marry, fine, I won't say anything, I will be happy for him. I think he will feel the same way for me too.

[S was nodding his head]

Me: [Touched by what he said] otherwise you can both get married grow old together and sunbathe when you are old [knowing that it is an impossible dream, we all laugh out loud]

Sam: On a serious note, we are living in Mizoram, it is impossible in our State. Therefore we have to get married (to a woman)

S: That is the reason why I chat with non Mizos

Me: Do you wish to be abroad?

S: Yes

Sam: Give me your phone. This is the reason why I have to check his phone all the time...[scrolling the screen] He must have deleted everything already.

Me: How did you meet?

Sam: It was way back. We are together, we broke up, we reconcile again right S? Oh! the first time we were together [gazing briefly at S] do you remember? I was supposed to meet a friend Christina and all. I was looking for them in the dark at night. While I was looking for them I saw S. The way he walks and dress I thought he would know Christina. I just asked him, that's how we started to know each other

S: You have a good memory. It was long time ago

Me: So when you want to make out do you go out somewhere or in your house?

Sam: I don't feel like going elsewhere

S: We don't go out much

Sam: We go to S house

S: My younger brother and my father are usually not at home most nights.

Sam: The other night we were caught by his younger brother. He came in suddenly. We were sitting close together. "You were kissing right?" he asked

S: My younger brother never says anything. Wait! I'm leaving; I've been saying things more than I wanted to.

Sam and Me: It's alright don't go.

Sam: I had a wife [male] once. His name is V. I took him home to a lesbian's house in our locality. We stay there for a long time. People were suspicious though. He left me eventually. (S & Sam, personal communication, August 22, 2014)

In 2019, May, I visited the drop in centre after a long time. Fortunately I saw E, who I haven't seen for about four years. He looks different somehow, more feminine than before. I couldn't recognise him instantly. I speak with him about his life and relationship.

I haven't thought of not having a wife, I think it will be possible for me...I'll get involved. I think I'll be able to...The youngest male I had a relationship with so far is a 14 years old teenage. I don't like males who are fair. I like them dark and manly. He is a daily wage earner. We met through WhatsApp. I did not approach him first. It was in 2016 when he contacted me telling me that his employers could not pay him his salary. He asked to borrow money. I gave him Rs 500. There was no attempt to pay me back. So we were together instead. I eventually waved away his debts too.

There is a lot of fighting over partners or crush. I'll tell you one incident happening in a picnic spot. We were on a picnic. You will know the other person who I fought with. He is K pervert tan. We both have the same crush. He was challenging me so I end up dragging him. I was wearing a white top. It was stained with his blood all over. Our guy crush came and intervened, stopping the fight. K told him to choose between us, I stood silent. Later, K came over asking for my forgiveness.

Right now I'm in a stable relationship. It started in the beginning of the year though we are maintaining a distant relationship. I think so far I had around five actual relationships. One night stand would be more or less 20 individuals. I have many. So the guy I am with right now is very young. I have to care for him all the time. When I give myself a little space in a way like not speaking to him and all he'll complain this and that. He checks my last seen, questioning and trying to detect who I've been chatting with. We have not seen each other live. He invited me to visit him. He said if I have money to travel one way I will be able to stay at his house and he will provide me the return ticket. I don't want it though, for real. (E, personal communication, May 20, 2019)

"I remember you mentioning that you had a crush on J once upon a time?" I probed. Addressing the question he told me how much the homoerotic subjects have fought over him. "We actually thought he is *mipa pangngai* [straight male]".

On that same day when I met E after a long time, I was introduced to a new face. I wish I could have met him earlier as we get along with each other so fast. There was no awkwardness though it was our first meeting. He is educated, well spoken, witty, clever, dresses well and extremely polite. "I need to use a proxy you know to hide your identity. Would you like to choose a name?" I asked. "RD" he replied. "I have a reason I'll tell you".

I identify myself as MSM. I picked up this identity from this office. The moment I realised I was living this life was back when I was in class X. I was having a classmate with whom I started to develop feelings. Prior to it I don't understand the love relationship spark. I had tuai friends who had relationships and all. As for me I don't know what relationship is all about or crush for that matter. There was this guy who had been taunting me since class IX. He was in a pipe band, and so was this handsome guy. He is tall and fair. One day I was supposed to give a disc to that guy who used to taunt me because they were going to perform. The handsome guy was made to stand in front. Even the girls were checking him out too. When I went to give the disc, the handsome guy blocked my way in a teasing manner. I don't know what came over me. It was overwhelming; I could feel my shiver in my spine. I blushed whenever I looked at him. When my friends decided to change our seat, I protested that I wanted to stay where we are because I could see him clearly. When we were leaving the venue I wanted to know where he is from-his locality. At night I was thinking of him in bed-his character, his motions everything played out in my mind. I know I tried to find ways to meet him before classes. I realised that I like him a lot. I struggled; I've changed because of him. I took tuition in an attempt to meet him. Ironically though, my grades dropped.

From that time onwards, I realise that I have this life. I never knew this before I met him in such circumstance. After that incident, I was troubled and confused. The way I found out my feeling was definitely unintentional. (RD, personal communication, May 20, 2019)

"Was he aware of your feelings?" I asked

Oh yes! I went to a teashop he was there. He requested me to pay for him. I told him that if he does not pay me back I will be falling in love with him. I wrote him love letters. I

go to the men's room in an intention to meet him there. He was mad. (RD, personal communication, May 20, 2019)

“Did he hate you?” I questioned

Well not that much. When he came to know that I have a crush on him, maybe he told his classmates because they use to tease him and he blushed often. I traced his phone number and I messaged him. I don't think there will be a special spark as such anymore. It is impossible. I was thinking and dreaming about him all the time. I was madly in love with him. From that time onwards I have affection towards men more. I saw him again in my locality after a long time. I was angry because he brought out the inhibited feelings all over again. (RD, personal communication, May 20, 2019)

“Can we discuss the other relationships you have?” implying my interest to know more. He continued-

I have a type. I prefer bisexuals. I want tall guys between 15 to 27 years of age. I don't care if my partner has a girlfriend. We are male. But as we lead this life, I don't want him to be with another male. Two-timing our relationship with a male would trigger anger. The question I always ask when I look for a relationship is whether he is gay or bisexual. When it comes to gay, I prefer those who are feminine and who cross-dress. Among the bisexuals, I would like them to be normal who can be with both male and female without any hint of their bisexuality being portrayed in them. In our society there is no room for gay. I like bisexuals because they can pass as normal. I took my current job basically because of my partner. We broke up though.

I've been taken advantage of in relationships too. When I say advantage I mean he was using me to get close to my friend. We had a relationship first. Then he met my friend and he prefers to be with him rather than me. I realised later that reason why he came over to meet me is solely because he was taking it as an opportunity to meet my friend. I was explained the whole thing to me later by my friend. I wanted that guy so much making me miss the whole hidden stuff that was playing out while we were together.

When I came to know that he wanted to have a relationship with my friend I pretend as if I don't know anything for some time. I wanted to catch him red-handed. I fixed up a plan dragging my friend along as bait. So one day when he called I was with my friend. We went for a picnic. He asked him where I am. He told him that I stayed at home and did not turn up for the picnic. He wanted to meet with him that night which is why he called. My friend said that he is not in a mood. Mouthing to him as I could not speak out loud I urged him to meet him because I wanted to make a plan. He doesn't feel like going. He isn't his type anyway. But he said yes for me, they fixed the time. So my plan was that my partner has a bike, so they will meet. I will be watching the whole thing behind the scene and when they return I have a spot where they both would come over and I will surprise them as if my presence was unintentional. Unfortunately the plan failed because he left before I reached the place. I scolded my friend for not delaying him. But he said it's my fault for not reaching the place on time.

Anyway I called him the next day confronting him for hanging out with my friend. He argued that it was only to pick up something from his relatives' place. I was listening to the whole conversation. I did not believe even a word of his defence. After a long time he came over to my locality asking me to give him Rs 30. You have no shame I said but paid it anyway for the last time. When I saw him he was so thin I think he has been doing drugs. I accused him but he denied my accusation.

He's bisexual and doesn't cross dress. It would be quite difficult to know his sexual orientation had I met him at other places. I asked him how he has been hiding his orientation. He replied

I have friends both straight and not. I've been hiding my identity among some while I am open to others. It depends on the kind of circle I hang out with. I have to have an uptight personality among straight men. I have to remain in the closet amongst them. I have two close friends. One of them is also bisexual. We blossom together at the same time. We've been going to the same school that long and we have never spoken about it until that one time when we both end up in a deep conversation and spill it out. We introduce our partners to each other. But when the straight guy, the third person in our group is there we are closeted. You will not be able to identify a bisexual. (RD, personal communication, May 20, 2019)

I asked him how many does he think will be there population wise. "In Facebook if we head count there are around 1000. However there are fake account and people who make two to three accounts," he opines. I inquired about the contents of those groups in Facebook, he smiled and said, "You wouldn't want to know". I pressed him to tell me, he gave in.

They mostly discuss about their personal life, their background story and stuff. They made fake account and expressed how they began to live such lives. They share their experience, their partners and everything. For example, I will tell you one of the stories which I read from it.

This person was mentioning the scene of his secret crush entering their basement floor. He said that he was into drugs so he was assuming that he was going to steal something. Out of fear he followed him and watched. The guy who he saw was with a dog. He gave chocobar to the dog and later he spread it over his butt and made the dog to lick. As he watched he made the dog do him. With the entire scene that guy had started to have the urge. He went over to him. Seeing him, that guy with the dog was so embarrassed that he begged him to forgive him. Lost in words he plainly asked if it hurts. He said it doesn't. He then offered to help him pull out but it got stuck. He did not know what to do. Tears filled up in his eyes as he started to masturbate. That guy looked at him confused. When his penis was enlarging, they both have the wants. He was not aware when the guy pulled out from the dog. He saw the dog hovering. Annoyed by it, he kicked it hard and chased him out. They both end up consummating. (RD, personal communication, May 20, 2019)

Drifting back to his personal life, he told me he had five partners so far. All of them broke up with him making him unwilling to fall in love again. "I end up heartbroken all the time" he

said. Addressing my question on whether he would be marrying someday, he said that he would when he gets older. “I’ll struggle if I need to” he said. “I’ll think about it when I don’t have partners, when I am ready. Right now I am not. I think I will be able to do it. I have female friends who I hold dearly, I tend to miss them when we don’t get to meet. I’ll be able to develop feelings for a girl you know starting from friendship.

Conclusion:

Relationships built upon intimacy and friendship both have harnessed support for the MSM. It is an escape from the stressful life they normally live as those who do not follow the norms of society. I have seen how gossiping, sharing of their love stories and conflict among them in a safe space liberated them from the secret life they have been living behind the veil offering them a place to be who they really are. At the same time, they are aware that they have to either enter into a heterosexual marriage or live a life of a bachelor throughout their life. This limits to their relationships are often acknowledged by them when they think about their future, especially when they have given advice to those who can, to get married.

LIVING WITH STIGMA AND MARGINALITY: CONFLICT BETWEEN ALTERNATIVE SEXUALITY AND MIZO CHRISTIANITY

Introduction

In this chapter I am discussing how individuals' sexuality is governmentalized through Christianity in the context of my field. Studies pertaining to Christianity and same sex sexuality lamented on the denunciation of same sex sexuality by the Bible. Christian traditions are viewed as an attempt to nurture compulsory heterosexuality. Transgressions are controlled through 'strain and stigma instituted within the community and through church sanctions'(Manderson and Aggleton, 2003, 183p, Greenberg and Bystry, 1982, Hillier and Harrison, 2004, Sullivan-Blum, 2006, Anderson, 2011, Valera and Taylor, 2011,Subhi and Geelan, 2012; Chadee et al. 2013). This denunciation is critiqued as an interpretation of the Bible literally without an understanding of the context on which the scripture is written (Boswell, 1980; Woggon, 1981; Greenberg and Bystry, 1982; Yip, 1997). This tug of war existing between religion and sexuality makes homoerotica a controversial issue in churches today, As Olson and Cadge(2002)wrote,

...[i]t is not a stretch to say that no issue is more controversial in the churches today”.

Homosexuality after all means, and represents many different things. It is a prism through which all of the denominations' central questions and issues reflect and refract. For these reasons, participants in debates and discussions about homosexuality realize that much is at stake. Homosexuality is about scripture: How is the Bible to be read, interpreted and understood? It is about creation: How ought the people that God creates behave sexually? Homosexuality is about families and reproduction: Who can be married? Bear children? Adopt children? Raise children? What lessons should those children be taught about sexual behaviour? Homosexuality also raises important questions about who can serve the church and about how those people and the church are to act in the world. (155p)

As such the Bible as we see today²⁷, the holy scriptures of the Christians have several passages in the Old and New Testaments which can be read as condemnation of same sex sexuality. In the Old Testament we could find warnings of not only same sex sexuality but other form of sexualities such as masturbation, cross dressing, anal sex and having sex with animals (Gordon 2008 c.f. Block and Adriaens, 2013). In the opinion of Christian philosophers and theologians of the medieval era, divine law is considered as natural law. Therefore, forms of sexuality that could not result in procreation, including homosexuality are therefore the worst sins (ibid). As Cheshire Calhoun (2000) denotes, in strictly ecclesiastical terms, sodomy is a sin which is only named as the unnamable, and it is considered as the gravest sin against the divine (83p.). The warnings and prohibitions found in The Old and New Testaments along with the opinions and writings of the early Christian philosophers and theologians have become the foundation of ordinances of different churches today towards same sex erotica. As Woggon (1981) opines, "The Holy Scriptures are the firm rock on which all theological commentary and commended behaviour are built (158p)".

In the Old Testament of the Book of Leviticus we see the following

Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is abomination (Leviticus 18:22, KJV)

For whosoever commits any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people. Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance that ye commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am the Lord your God (Leviticus 18:29-30, KJV)

²⁷ The Bible in earlier times did not have the form it takes today. 'Early Christians read and venerated many books now rejected as apocryphal and did not recognize some which are now regarded as authentic. The Bible was not the only or even the principal source of early Christian ethics, and the Biblical passages purportedly relating to homosexuality had little to do with early Christian misgivings on the subject (Boswell, 1980: 92p)

If a man also lies with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them (Leviticus 20:13, KJV)

The Book of Deuteronomy mentioned the abomination of sodomites as

There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel (Deuteronomy 23: 18)

In the New Testament in Paul's Epistles to the Romans we see

For this cause God gave them up into vile affections, for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust toward one another; men with men working toward that unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient (Romans 1:26-28)

Arguments on the sinfulness of homoerotica and the doom of it are often explained by different writers based on punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah seen in the Bible. According to Philo of Alexandria, "unnatural sexual practices combined with extravagant indulgence, led to that city's downfall" (c.f. Knust, 2006). This interpretation of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah has been adopted in the Jewish and Christian tradition. The Jewish and early Christian society were known to have patriarchal structure where homosexual acts were 'seen as degrading the dignity of the male, humiliation of another person and violation of love' (Woggon,1981).

The interpretation of Sodom as being punished because of the homosexual acts comes with writings of Philo which is further supported by early church fathers-Clement of Alexandria, Augustine, John Chrysostom (Crompton, 2003) These theological believes were later converted into a code of law through a Byzantine Emperor Justinian named as the Code of Justinian issued in 534. Emperor Justinian subjected homosexuals for the first time to civil sanctions. The sanction being -punishable by death, including all other forms of adultery. This

law had shaped and influence legal traditions in the Holy Roman Empire, Italy, Spain, Portugal, France and eventually in Calvinist Scotland. It determines the status of homosexuals in Europe through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the eighteenth century (Boswell, 1980; Crompton, 2003) In India similar law that criminalises homosexuality was introduced during the British reign of India in 1860 by Thomas Babbington Macaulay. Therefore it would not be wrong to assume that in India the legal tradition with regard to same sex sexuality had been influenced by the Code of Justinian.

The verses taken from the Bible often linked with the sin and punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah are extracted by the churches today to negotiate that same sex sexuality for a Christian is an abomination, a sin which will not lead them to the Kingdom of God.

Arguing these verses and the story of Sodom as the root cause of Christians intolerance however have not attained support of many scholars on homosexuality and Christianity. Cohen (2005) claimed that in Athens sexual relations between males was considered problematic thereby the conception of its unnaturalness is not something that emerged out of Christian traditions (184) Crompton (2003) argues that when Jesus speaks of Sodom and Gomorrah he is not referring to their sexual sin but their inhospitality (112p). Similarly, Boswell (1980) opined in his work that Sodom is used as a 'symbol of evil' in different accounts in the Bible but there is no single instance where homosexuality is referred specifically (94p) and it was not until the end of the first century AD that the sin of Sodom is interpreted as homosexuality. Early Christian society and the Jewish were very patriarchal which view homosexuality as a degradation of 'the dignity of male, humiliation of another person and violation of love' (158-159p). He further noted that the verses on Leviticus if 'viewed through the lenses of powerful modern taboos on the subject' without being aware of the 'proscriptions' surrounding it would allegedly be possible to use it as denunciations of homosexuality by the Bible. In his work though he had given the contextual relevance or irrelevance of this condemnation which is

different from how it is interpreted today by many churches. As he said, 'Almost no Christian writers appealed to Leviticus as authority against homosexual acts'(104p). He condemned the Christian theologians who rejected vast Levitical precepts but retained and extracts only those to suit their personal prejudice accusing them that it is not the law which makes them hostile to homosexuals as they failed to retain the laws in its wholeness but extracting few instances and retaining few codes only to support their hostility to homosexuality, (105) the fallacy of selective inference underlies his arguments (106). As for Paul's Epistles he argued that 'the point of the passage is not to stigmatize sexual behaviour of any sort but to condemn the Gentiles for their general infidelity' explaining further that heterosexuals involving in homosexual acts are the ones condemned by Paul but he himself further negates this later in the text(pp.108-109). To have a fair analysis on the meaning given in the text of the Scriptures one has to look at the actual context (Woggon, 1981) therefore the modern interpretation of several verses in the Bible as condemnation of homosexuality may not be as valid as we interpret it to be as there is a possibility of reading it out of the context today.

In conservative Christian tradition, sexuality is governmentalized. Sex has to be used only for procreation (Woggon, 1981: 161p) and that too in the sanctity of monogamous marriage. Beyond that, it is "off-limits"(Winner 2005a: 123-4 c.f. Sharma 2008)

There's a reason why I dedicated a few paragraphs to wrestle with extracts from the Bible, the writings of early church fathers and subsequently the widespread legislation against homosexuality in the world. The Mizos the case in point are influenced to a large extent by these usurps of the Bible and the opinions of the church fathers since their conversion to Christianity through the Wales Missionaries during the time of the British rule of India. The State of Mizoram has become predominantly Christian State with 87.16% Christians as per Census 2011.

To understand the role played by Christianity and the church in governmentalizing sexuality of the Mizos as a whole and same sex sexuality furthermore I will briefly trace the history of Christianity in Mizoram in the next section.

From animism to Christianity

The British reign of India had opened doors for Christian missionaries to enter India and proselytize. Missionaries had penetrated Mizoram in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Two Missionaries from the Arthington Aborigines Mission J.H. Lorrain and Rev F.W. Savidge were the first to come in the year 1894 (Hrangkhuma, 2016). Since the Arthington Mission was to spread the gospel of Christ globally as fast as possible before the second coming of Christ, these Missionaries did not stay for long. In 1897 they were replaced by D.E. Jones from the Welsh Presbyterians (Hrangkhuma, 2016). Henceforth numerous missionaries have preached the gospel to the tribals of the then Lushai Hills ultimately converting them to Christianity. The missionaries not only established churches and preach the gospel, languages were reduced to written form by developing alphabets based on Roman scripts. Prior to this there was no formal system of education, information was passed orally. The first formal school started at Aizawl in November 1893. In addition, the missionaries were engaged in setting up hospitals and willingly rendered social services. All these contributed to the rapid spread of Christianity (Sangkima, 1992)

J.H. Lorrain (Pu Buanga as he was known among the Mizos) who came back to Mizoram in 1903 and left in the year 1932 on his way to England wrote,

Going home to England perhaps never to return to these beautiful hills where so many happy years of our lives have been spent. When first arrived in Aijal in 1894 as one of the Pioneer Missionaries to the Lushai tribe there was not a single Christian anywhere. The Gospel message, however, as fitted the needs of the people that today there are in the northern hills 43,972 Christians, here in the southern 12,123 a total

of over 56,000 or above one half of the entire population. These figures exclude the Lakher Christians in Sherkor Circle who do not speak the Lushai language. (c.f. Sangkima 1992: 84p)

The Mizo Christians are not only growing in number but the denominations have expanded and increased rapidly. The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, the Baptist Church of Mizoram, The Roman Catholic church of Mizoram, the Salvation Army, The United Pentecostal Church, the Seventh Day Adventist are the most prominent ones. It is assumed that there are as many as 82 different denominations in Mizoram today. The Mizos according to Pachuau(2014) understand their identity to be inextricably linked to their Christianity. I would like to further argue by borrowing from Abrahams (1996) that ‘identities are moulded through community involvement’ (c.f. Sharma, 2008) in the context of the Mizos.

Church and Mizo Society

Pachuau had rendered the predominance of Christians in Mizoram through the presence of churches in any given locality and how 'the week is divided into a set of daily church activities'. As she rightly pointed out, the church programme starts at 6 am in the morning when few people gathered at the church for a morning prayer conducted by an assigned church member. This usually lasted less than half an hour. During the day on weekdays, there is no particular church service unless it is the time of Conferences. I am particularly familiar with the time tables of The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram but it is more or less the same for the others I was told. Nevertheless, the given time table of church attendance for the Mizos is illustrated in table format as follows:-

Day	Time	Church Service
Monday to Sunday	6 am	Prayer Meeting
Monday	7 pm during summer	Service for the church youths

	6.30 pm during winter	
Tuesday	7 pm during summer 6.30 pm during winter	Service for the women members
Wednesday	7 pm during summer 6.30 pm during winter	Open Service for the whole church members
Thursday		Usually utilised for organising important meetings by the various Committees of the Church
Friday	7 pm during summer 6.30 pm during winter	Church service for the non Mizo members
Saturday	7 pm during summer 6.30 pm during winter	Open Service for the whole church members
Sunday	10 am 1.00 pm 7 pm during summer 6.30 pm during winter	Sunday School Sermon Sermon

Table 2: Church timing

As illustrated in this table, church activities and congregation filled up the entire week. It is a common understanding that if a person is very much involved with the church, he or she will have very less time to spare for other things especially at night as the whole week is full of church activities. The church is thus the centre for social interaction. It renders status to a person as the respectability of a person is often measured in the society through his or her position and involvement in the church.

Role of church in life cycles

The church plays a huge role in the life cycle of an individual. In several denominations, a baby is baptized ceremonially in the presence of the congregation by the church Pastor. At the age of 4, he will then be registered in Sunday School. Every Sunday throughout his life, if he attended Sunday school, he will be socialised towards Christian beliefs and ethics from the church. The topic dealt with in Sunday School ranges from characters in the Bible, early Christian missionaries, the life of the early church fathers, good conducts, the history of early Mizo Christianity, and the church rules, etc.

At the age of 14, there will be a ceremony in the church where individuals at the age of 14 who were trained on the church ethical norms will be inducted to the church. Henceforth in the Presbyterian church these individuals once inducted are liable to take sacraments and are eligible to cast their votes at the time of election of church leaders and they can have a say when the congregation is consulted on certain occasions.

Marriages are sanctified in the church. For a Mizo Christian even if he is not a regular church attendee marriage outside the church is unthinkable. By marriage outside the church I hereby exclude marriages happening in the church halls which will be explained later in this chapter. Marriage ceremonies are valued just as normal church services. The entire congregations are invited usually besides the relatives and friends. Therefore it is a usual scene in a Mizo wedding to see thousands of guests attending marriage services in the church.

The church continues to play an important role at the time of death. The church bell will toll to commemorate the deceased. The funeral proceedings and burial ceremony will be handled by the church through its Pastors or ordained elders. The funeral service is thereby a combination of family, social and church activity as the three plays a huge role in ensuring the smooth functioning of the ceremony.

In Mizo society we see that the role of the church is inseparable from an individual's life throughout-from the time of birth till death.

Observance of Sunday as a day of worship

Observance of Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments of Christians. Sabbath for the Seventh Day Adventist Church falls on Saturday while the rest of the denominations in Mizoram observed it on Sunday. The Biblical tradition as given in Exodus is literally followed by the Mizos. It reads

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. (Exodus 20:8-11)

If one travels to Mizoram on Sunday a remarkable thing he will see is that most of the shops and offices in the streets are closed. As you've driven through the streets you will witness thousands dressed in their Sunday best heading towards the church they are affiliated to. The streets are relatively quiet as compared to other days with less traffic. Sounds of church music will echo, church bells will toll from every direction marking the time of the church service. Unless one experienced it, the reality of the halting of daily business is hard to capture just through words.

Biblical order and the Christian tradition imparted through the missionaries have been taken into consideration when one decided not to work on Sundays. It was stricter in the earlier times among the Mizo Christians as non-observance can lead to expulsion from church membership. I was told that there was also a taboo on starting a journey on Sunday. This tradition even though it has been observed till today, the deviancy from it is not as stringent as it used to be.

But how the majority of the Mizos spend their Sundays tells how serious many are in observing the Christian traditions even while they are moving towards a modernised society.

Church as a Gendered Space

The heteronormative tradition of the church recognises an existence of only two genders-male and female. This is clearly seen in the structural arrangement and through numerous dealings of the church. Churches in every part of Mizoram have demarcated seating areas specifically on the basis of gender. Males and females are restricted to sit together inside the church unless they are married or are family. When I was very young I overheard by cousin telling her friends that their group of friends consisting of male and female were sitting together in the church in one bench and how they were scolded by one of the prominent women member of the church after the church service.

To support this argument I once had a conversation with Vanneihluanga, on gay and men who have sex with men. He is an influential writer, orator and an owner of the largest local cable channel Zonet who once aired an interview of four Mizo tuai. This interview was critically assessed by many viewers saying that it promotes tuai and adds to their growth. In this conversation that we had, he mentioned how the church is gendered binarily giving an inquisitive example-

Where will tuai sit in the church? We don't have separate seating area for them, it's just male and female seats. The moment a tuai enters a church he's going to face the problem of seating arrangement. The church has no space for them it recognises only male and female (Vanneihluanga, personal communication, August 18, 2016)

The church heteronormativity is upheld in multiple ways including appropriation of church attires.

Gendered dress code in church

An abomination we see on cross dressing in the Book of Leviticus is

The woman shall now wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God (Leviticus 22:5, KJV)

This verse seems to be the basis of laying down gendered appropriate dress code one has to wear in the church. A woman will never be seen wearing trousers inside the church although it is the most worn outfit elsewhere in the streets, at home and in the work place. Similarly men will never be seen wearing skirts or 'puan' for that matter. This verse even though it may be practised in perfection other verses on dress codes that we see in the New Testaments are not abided to.

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; (I Timothy 2:9)

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a quiet and meek spirit which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (KJV I Peter 3:1-5)

The conduct highlighted in these Bible verses is not abided by women as much as the previous one as most of them are adorned with their best dress and ornaments on Sunday, especially those who are well off. Expensive designer blouse and *puan* has become the trending Sunday dress especially in the city of Aizawl.

Adherence to church norm: Narratives of MSM

As an individual is barred from cross dressing in churches, I asked my cross dresser informants about their Sunday attire:

I don't cross dress in the church, I don't wear puan, I wear trousers everytime. But my friend from my locality, Jagger, cross dressed in the church and he sits with the women. He is involved in church youth activities no one says anything to him (V, personal communication, July 17, 2015)

I wear trousers in the church (J, personal communication, March 18, 2016)

Puan is an attire worn by women along with a blouse in the church while men wear blazers or shirts and trousers. V and J's adherence to church norm in dress code while they cross dress elsewhere signified the respect they have for the church and an institutionalised pattern of doing things which they fear to breach.

In tune with their narratives M stated:

When I go to church in my locality I sit with the men folks, I wear my hair long no one scolded me or say anything about it. I wear trousers and shirts. Sometimes I wear heels with that too. When we have joint services with other localities, as in the form of conferences, I sit with the women. I don't wear make-up, I just go like this. If I behave this way in other denominations which are larger than our own, I wouldn't be welcomed. In USA they even allow to have same sex sexual relationship but not here in Mizoram. (M, personal communication, July 17, 2015)

M belongs to a denomination which has fewer followers. In her narrative, she compares her church with other churches and assume that her behaviour will not be tolerated in other churches with strict regulations and larger congregation. She stated the advantage of belonging to a smaller church where people show more solidarity as they know each other well. Contrasting the position of Mizoram with USA shows her knowledge of what is happening beyond Mizoram with a sense of longingness which could not be achieved in her state.

Another informant relates her decision to abide by the dress code with her beliefs as she remarked:

I cross dress everywhere else but not in the church. In the church I wear trousers and pants. The church hours are not long and we are there to worship God so I prefer not to cross dress (CD, personal communication, March 17, 2016)

My informants even though they cross dress on the streets, they are mostly governed by the normative dress code of the church. They are well aware that being different and transgressing the church norm could be a risk that will bring bad name not only to them but to the whole family. People know each other well, especially in small localities, not only the church norms but gossip can act as a powerful tool for social control which they want to evade. One lesbian with whom I had a personal conversation in a gay party told me how she dreamt of the day when she could wear what she wants in the church. Looking at the decorum of churches in Mizoram, this is an impossible dream as of now.

Sexual governmentality

The church reinforces heteronormativity by governing sexuality of its followers by strictly professing accepted forms of sexuality. It lay out rules to be adhered to by its members. It sanctions those who fail to comply through excommunication or imposing regulation for a given period of time. The churches in various denominations of Mizoram propagate a heterosexual marital confined sexuality. This has been institutionalized through sanctioning sexual activities outside this. This sanction governs sexual conduct of the church members to a large extent. The marriage of a man and a woman who have not consummated before could be held in the church. It is the most celebrated marriage among the Mizo Christians as abstaining from sexual intercourse prior to marriage is highly praised. It is understood that marriages have to be between people of the opposite sex therefore homosexual marriage is out of the question.

In the tradition of the Presbyterian church of Mizoram, if a man or a woman is found or reported to have sex before marriage he or she will be sanctioned for six months. During this time, they will not be allowed to take sacrament nor will their services be rendered by the church. They will be relieved from all their positions in the church during these six months as the act is unholy and should be sanctioned. The name of the individual is usually read out on Wednesday night at the church service at the gathering of the congregation. It will be announced that sanctions are imposed with grace and the church is eagerly waiting for the person to repent and renounce his or her sin. A prayer will be offered solely for the person lead by the church elder asking for God's mercy and forgiveness and for repentance.

If they wanted to be integrated back to the church, upon the time when six months is approaching, application in letter have to be send to the highest governing body of the local church. This body consisted of Pastors and elected elders from the church. Upon careful discussion, the committee will then decide if they are willing to accept the application. When they are accepted, on Wednesday night church service, the individual will be asked to join the church in Wednesday night congregation. The Chairman of the church service will ask him to publicly state his willingness and the reason why he wanted to be a full-fledged member of the church again. After hearing the plea, the Chairman will then ask the congregation to raise their right hand if they allow the applicant to be a full-fledged member again. The chairman will then announce their willingness to accept him back which in many churches is sealed with a handshake and a prayer thanking God for his mercy and grace.

If a couple have sex before marriage and if they or their family reported in the church, there are several sanctions imposed on them for their wedding. These restrictions varied upon different denominations. In Salvation Army, the bride is not allowed to wear the Salvation Army Uniform on her wedding day. In Salvation Army, the tradition is to wear the uniform and not the white gown as practised in other churches. In Presbyterian church, wedding will

not be solemnised in the church but in the church hall, the door of the main church will remain closed the whole time while the church hall will be open for the marriage ceremony. Though it varies from Pastors to Pastors of different localities, hymns are usually not sung during the wedding ceremony. In Mizoram, the tradition is to have a wedding during the day around 1–2 pm in the afternoon. There are some churches who do not allow weddings to be held during the day if the couples are sanctioned for their sexual behaviour. For those people the wedding has to take place early morning around 7 am.

Engaging in sexual intercourse before marriage is considered as defilement of the sanctity of marriage. As Douglas(1996) had said, ‘sacred things and places are to be protected from defilement’. Therefore, the church is utilising its various resources to educate the youth to refrain from sex before marriage. On the other hand, a heterosexual virgin couple’s marriage is highly valued and honoured in the church. In both cases of marriage an important verse read out commonly is from the Gospel of Mark (10:9) where it is written, “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”. This is interpreted to mean that the couples have made their promises to God to be husband and wife in sickness and in health till death, marriage must last for a lifetime, and divorce is out of the question. The church issued legitimacy or remarriage license to divorces only on occasions which it found valid.

The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram in its Doctrine has several guidelines on sex. The church directed its members to abstain from fornication, adultery and sexual misbehaviour or anything that can lead to it. They should denounce any outfit that can lead one to sinfulness. The church members must not get married in a ceremony unsanctified by the church. Such marriages must not be witnessed and celebrated by the church members as it is inappropriate. The members of the church must utter pure words and must guard their tongue not to speak of erotic and dirty words.

Such is the extent of governance on heterosexual relationships and sexuality. It is unimaginable to think of the restrictions that would have centred towards same sex sexuality.

In her book 'Purity and Danger', Douglas (1996) wrote,

If the social structure were weakly organised, then men and women might still hope to follow their own fancies in choosing and discarding sexual partners, with no grievous consequences for society at large. But if the primitive social structure is strictly articulated, it is almost bound to impinge heavily on the relation between men and women. Then we find pollution ideas enlisted to bind men and women to their allotted roles.

Sex is likely to be pollution-free in a society where sexual roles are enforced directly. In such a case anyone who threatened to deviate would be promptly punished with physical force (141-2pp)

Mizo society has a strongly organised social structure because of the vigilant and active participation of the church and the community members. Deviation from restrictive norms entails stigma and sanctions. Adherents to normative sexuality therefore counts as being an accountable individual but failing to do so tends to have severe consequences.

Position of different Christian denominations on same sex sexuality

Mizoram is a state with a predominantly Christian population, different denominations have come up since the Wales Missionaries came in the 19th Century. As same sex sexuality has come to be a relevant topic worldwide, several denominations have decided to announce their standpoints which will be discussed one by one.

The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram

In 2009 when the Delhi High Court read down section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, the churches in Mizoram reacted strongly opposing the verdict. The church standpoint is that, "Legalising homosexuality is directly against the ethics of Christianity and the Bible", Letters

were sent to Veerapa Moily who was the Law Minister that time to uphold Section 377 stating that it safeguarded Indian society from unnatural and anti-social behaviour. In this letter they mentioned how God's creation of humans into binary sexes is the natural order. Anything that goes against it is feared to produce a negative impact on the morality of the society.

The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram organised mass prayers to pray that section 377 would not be scrapped. Following through, delegates of Synod, a congregation of selected church elders, Pastors and renowned members of the church felt that the church in its creed is too lenient on homosexuality. Moving further the Synod Executive Committee of the Presbyterian Church which is a representative body of the entire Presbyterian Church of Mizoram decided to excommunicate its gay and lesbian members from being a full-fledged member if they are found living together as husbands and wives. This ex communication will last as long as they live together. The Synod Executive Committee justified this creed and resolve that sex according to Christian teachings and by the will of God has to be between a man and a woman after marriage. According to the SEC minutes, "It is against nature and God's will that people of the same sex should indulge in sexual intercourse before or after marriage"²⁸.

In another move the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram cut ties with the Presbyterian Church of USA after the latter decided to ordinate gays as priests²⁹. The Presbyterian Church of the USA has ordained homosexuals as ministers. Same sex marriage too is officiated openly. Commenting on the need to cut the ties, the church pastors opine,

The Presbyterian Church (USA) openly ordains homosexual ministers and officiates same-sex weddings. We are in disagreements over such decisions that have serious

²⁸ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/Mizoram-Presbyterian-church-snaps-US-ties-over-gay-stand/articleshow/14042660.cms>

²⁹ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/guwahati/Mizoram-Presbyterian-church-snaps-US-ties-over-gay-stand/articleshow/14042660.cms>

practical ramifications. We hence have decided to end our partnership with them"-Rev. Malsawmtluanga, member SEC

We, the members of Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, cannot accept ordination of homosexual people as pastors and regard homosexuality as against the teachings of Bible and Christianity"-D.P. Biakkhuma, church elder and Secretary, SEC

"Except for the Presbyterian Church of USA, joining liberal concepts of other denominations in the West, agreeing to ordain gay priests, we maintained a cordial relationship"-Rev H. Remthanga, Former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram (Synod)

The Presbyterian Church of USA and the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram had tied for partnership in 1999. As the Presbyterian Church of USA liberalised its creed the more conservative Presbyterian Church of Mizoram could no longer associate it with their counterparts in the United States thereby cutting their ties in 2012.

Prior to all these, the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram had made a move to study the life of MSM in Mizoram as they have heard the prevalence of people engaging in same sex activities. The Synod Social Front Executive Committee 29:8 of 27.10.2008 decided and delegated its office to conduct research to find out the reality of it. A researcher is employed to carry out extensive study through observation, questionnaire and interview. The findings of this research though it has been shared to me for my further understanding of the field, I am not allowed to share it therefore it will not be cited or used in any part of my research. This extensive study had been put to an end with the shift of executives, but the output of the research had been discussed in seminars and conferences organised by the church for the youths occasionally.

Attempts to honour heterosexual relationship and sex between married couple continue to be a venture for the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram. The Synod Social Front Committee is aware of the illegitimate use of sex outside marriage in Mizo society. It also had taken into account

the prevalence of same sex sexuality and the move towards marriage with the same sex. Though the situation may have called for it, it wanted to clarify that spreading awareness on the use of condom in the church for prevention of HIV/AIDS is not to be done as it is against the church norm. Synod Social Front Committee finds the need to profess and propagate the church stance on sex. It proposed to the higher body-the Synod Executive Committee to issue a policy statement. SEC accepted the proposal and moved the bill to Synod with proper guidelines. In 2011, the Synod Legislative body accepted the proposal and directed it back to SEC for further editing for immediate use (Synod Gen. 51). SEC 238:22 assigned individuals to edit the draft proposal which was later passed for circulation. The content of this circular is as listed below:-

Abiding by God's words written in the Bible we accept the following with regard to sex

1. In the beginning God created human beings as male and female. And the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. So he created a woman. Only man and woman should enter into marriage. (Gen1:28, 2:18)
2. Sex must be used only by a man and woman in the sanctity of marriage (I Korinth 7:2; Heb 13:4)
3. Same-sex sexuality and sex outside marriage is a defilement of God's intended nature in human beings. (Rom 1:26-27)

The Presbyterian Church of Mizoram stands firm in its doctrine on sexuality. Any form of sexual activities outside marriage is denounced. Its intolerance is shown by the sanctions it imposed on those who disobey the norms laid down by the church. It thereby governmentalized the sexuality of the church members and all those who adhere to it.

The Seventh Day Adventist

The tradition of Seventh Day Adventist church unlike other denominations in Mizoram is their observance of Sabbath on Saturday. They have worship service on Saturday which makes them free on Sunday. Due to this reason several shops that are open on Sunday belongs to the members of Seventh Day Adventist Church. They are known for obliging the Bible's teachings on food not to be consumed deferring thus with followers of other denominations.

In 2018 when I was attending Consultation Meeting on Transgender organised by Social Work Department, Mizoram, I met Seventh Day Pastor who was one of the few clergies who turned up for the meeting. Clergies of other denominations bailed out for some reasons. I asked him what the position of their church is on same sex relationship and sexuality. He pulled out six pages of guidelines from his file and showed it to me telling me that I can keep it. The paper he gave me consists of guidelines and restrictions on marriage, ordination, same sex unions, homosexuality, transgender phenomena and Biblical principles. The difference in their guidelines is that it is not developed by the local church but it has been framed by the global church leadership.

The 2014 guidelines adopted by the church leadership on sexuality reads,

It is inconsistent with the Church's understanding of scriptural teaching to admit into or maintain in membership persons practicing sexual behaviours incompatible with biblical teachings. Neither is it acceptable for Adventist pastors or churches to provide wedding services or facilities for same sex couples. We reaffirm without hesitation, our long standing position as expressed in the Church's Fundamental Beliefs: 'Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. The celebration of same-sex marriages is forbidden by the church.

Homosexuality is a manifestation of the disturbance and brokenness in human inclinations and relations caused by the entrance of sin into the world. We do not condone singling out any group for scorn and derision, let alone abuse. Still, God's words that transcend time and culture does not permit a homosexual lifestyle.

In 2014, the church's Biblical Research Institute had released a statement on corrective surgical treatment and sex change. It stated that:

Those born with ambiguous genitalia may well benefit from corrective surgical treatment.[For those] whose anatomical gender identity is clearly male or female but who identify with the opposite gender of their biological sex...in Scripture, our gender identity is, to a significant extent, determined by our birth sex with God being the author of gender identity. [Sex change surgery is sometimes] motivated by a sophisticated desire for homosexual activity...should individuals seek to use sex-change surgery as a way of circumventing biblical principles addressing human sexuality and the proper way to satisfy such desires, they would be acting against God's revealed will.

The Seventh Day Adventist Church recognised the existence of transgenders and their struggle. It encouraged transgenders to follow biblical principles when they are distressed. It strongly pronounce that "alternative sexual lifestyles are sinful distortions of God's gift of sexuality' and also, "the Bible clearly and consistently identifies any sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage as sin". With these standpoints at the backdrop, the Seventh Day Adventist firmly established that, "As long as transgender people are committed to ordering their lives according to the biblical teachings on sexuality and marriage they can be members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church". Stressing further the teachings of the Bible to love one another, it opined how everyone is created in the image of God therefore it is imperative for individuals to treat each other with dignity and respect.

These guidelines though it is framed by the global church leaders it has significantly guided the local church in its position on same sexuality.

United Pentecostal Church-North East India

Some of the informants I have come across have mentioned their denomination as UPC. UPC-NE has a differing theology as compared to other larger denominations in that they believed in oneness rather than trinity. As my informants have professed their denomination as UPC and one of them actually mentioned how she wears her hair long, sat with women in the church I thought it would be interesting to inquire their position.

I made an appointment through a friend to meet one of their renowned Pastors who had travelled globally on meetings and seminars representing their church. We met at their Headquarters located in Mualpui, Aizawl. He was in a meeting when I reached and I waited for some time. As the meeting gets over, he came out and greeted me apologising for the meeting that took place longer than it is supposed to be. He led me to a lobby and we sat there. After introducing myself furthermore I inquired if their church has any resolution on same sex sexuality and the position of their church. He told me about the resolution they passed in 2014 which denounced same-sex marriage. I asked if he has a copy for me to take a look, but he told me that he doesn't have but will email me as soon as he gets home. "I'll be thrilled if you can email it to me" I answered. I feel no aura of authority from his side as we talked. Our conversation continued to the lives of tuai in the city as he listened to some of the stories I shared from my research. He stressed that their church does not discriminate anyone solely because of their differing orientation but the practise of same sex sexuality and marriage for that instance is not supported. Thanking him for the time he spent to answer my queries I stand to leave. He repeated that he would email me what I require and we motioned towards the main door. I thanked him again as I leave.

Promptly I received an email at 4: 07 PM that afternoon. He addressed me in my nickname and the email reads, “I am sending the position of UPC-NEI on LGBT/ same sex marriage. I’m hoping you have received it”. I opened the attached image which read,

UPC NE India, Executive Board meeting resolution number 7, dated January 29-30, 2014 on LGBT/Same sex marriage resolved that Same sex marriage which is opposed to God’s intended purpose of creating marriage is against the teachings of the Bible. Therefore the church in no way whatsoever can accept marriages of such kind. Those individuals must not be given positions and responsibilities in the church.

A Baptist Pastor who I spoke to at the Baptist Headquarters Aizawl in agreement with the other denominations responded that they do not support same sex sexuality and marriage. He is aware of HIV/AIDS awareness spread in the church but not specifically on same sex sexuality. Similarly the Salvation Army in alignment with the other churches based their arguments on the Bible thus denouncing same sex sexuality and marriage though they seem to remain more silent and neutral in their stance comparatively.

Individuals who I have met in the course of my research are from different denominations even though none of them claimed to be regular church attendees. Regularity in attending church services in Mizo society is used by many as a scale to weigh a person's behaviour. Majority of my informants if weighted on that scale will not be the highest scorers definitely. Yet sometimes though rarely when there happened to be conversations at the Drop-in-centre on religious topics such as same sex sexuality and Christianity some of them would be more well versed on the Bible as compared to myself who attended Sunday School and church services more than them.

In 2016 I turned up a bit late than my usual timing in a drop-in-centre for MSM I frequented for my research. I was scolded by my key informant as I entered the door, telling me to be more punctual. I was treated more as an intern here as they are used to having Master of Social work

students as interns in their office. The head of the office was not there giving us more space to talk without feeling watchful so we were huddling in a circle pulling our chairs together around one of the office tables. The day was slow and work was less giving us ample time for conversation. Joey one of my informant mentioned the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram, Wednesday night church service topic³⁰ last night. He said it was about God's creation of human beings into male and female. I was interested in hearing what it was about so I did go to Wednesday church service to listen and I mentioned that too. "You attended the church service last night?" he questioned me again, to clarify. I told him I did. Participating in our conversation another informant Z, the senior most among them in his early 40s pointed out his thoughts, "Exactly we said God created human beings as male and female but under the umbrella term male there are tuai and gay and other categories..." J without letting him finish interrupted, "We have seen in the Bible how God created eunuchs, eunuchs since the time they are in the mother's womb, eunuchs because of God, all are God's creation. One person I know even said that if we believe everything to be God's creation why you consider alternative sexuality as something not created by God". I expressed, "Even our Pastor mentioned that eunuch thing, eunuch from the womb sort of thing last night". J as I speak was shifting his position from one edge of the table to the opposite corner. I queried, "How is it possible that you have so much knowledge of the Bible?" The others sitting around me answering to my queries enlightened me on his past life-the times he spent following Christian Evangelists preaching the gospel as core team member. "I did preach the gospel once as real Evangelists do in one village" he confided. Others pulling his legs joked, "It's just that he cannot follow

³⁰ Every Wednesday night the church service of the Presbyterian church of Mizoram dedicated the church service programme to study common topics. Topics range from environmental awareness, health care, good conduct, substance abuse, solidarity, family guidance, other religions, social media, online shopping, music, pornography, societal progress, community life, poverty, etc. The church has made proper write ups on these topics which will be read out by an individual assigned followed by discussion for the members of the congregation.

what he preached". Adding to the joke I too told him that he is just like what the Bible says about those who know the gospel but could not follow.

Interpreting Bible verses in her terms I recall a sex worker, one of my informants opinion when she stressed:

We don't see gay or lesbian in the Bible, we see sodomites. When we are actively engaged in sodomy, we are sinners, but if we don't, we will go to heaven because we do not do anything wrong. It's how God created us.

Same sex desire and the practical fulfilment of the desire have been demarcated by another informant who said, "When we don't fulfill our desire through sex, in the eyes of God we are justified, we are not sinners".

These informants are not the only ones who rely on scriptures and onto generic argument to negotiate their sexuality as natural and God's given. Research evidences have suggested how individuals reduced the naturalness of their sexuality. Some attributed that God created all forms of sexuality (Gross 2008, Yip 1997). It is an involuntary condition. Justifying their sexuality as God's intended creation made sexuality acceptable and unchangeable though they stressed on sexual expression to be guarded within a Christian moral framework. The moral framework mentioned does vary depending on individuals (Yip 1997) Attributing sexual inclinations as inborn rather than lifestyle choice reduces the chances of stigma and discrimination and unproblematised the whole debate by holding God as responsible for their state of being. As Z once told me, "Had it been a choice, who would readily give in voluntarily to be stigmatised and discriminated our whole life?"

Sexuality and lifestyle have created a huge barrier between individuals and the church which my informants are not ready to bridge amidst all the church's reduction of same sex sexuality as sin. Most of them prior to their engagement in same sex sexuality attended church services. The closeted ones still do, some, actively participate as they can pass through society without

awakening the suspicion of heterosexuals. Those involved in sex work and are indulging in drugs and alcohol do not. Their faith in God nevertheless is not shattered by their sexuality or their lifestyle. An informant JM deliberated:

I attended church regularly before I do sex work. I actively participated in church activities and obliged to responsibilities endowed upon me. Those days, I was a soloist and I also perform dances in church programmes. I volunteered to cater feasts on Christmas days. But now I see myself as a nuisance to society. People say bad things about gay while there are some who are supportive; it's always two opposing poles. I don't see myself as sinful just because I am gay but I consider my sex work as sin. If there is no one to guide my way or help me, I need to feed myself and buy clothes. From where will I get money to buy? I'll end up without food to eat. When we are downtrodden, no matter how sinful we are, the only refuge we have is God. I have so many things to be worried and I worry easily. On times like that I just pray to God. I think God helped me. (JM, personal communication, June 1, 2015)

L a sex worker who I met similarly shared:

I don't go to church anymore. Before I go out for sex work I pray asking for God's blessing in my sex work-to bless me to earn more, to protect me from moral police who are vigilant sometimes. I pray that God will shelter me from all harm. There can be a flop in our business too you know so I pray for that not to happen. (L, personal communication, 17 August, 2014)

Social hostility affects individual's self-conception in negative ways. Individuals internalised such hostility and stigma and see their reflections through others thus perceiving their life as sinful and burdensome (Berliner 1987). In the case of my informants their self-perception of being sinners who do not abide by the teachings of their religion added by the stigma they are feeling have driven them away. The faith they have on the other hand is kept alive which is indicated by the prayers they offer to God. On this account Yip (1997) noted that under an institutionalized Church which is not accepting sexual and gender minorities these subjects physically and psychologically refrain from participating in the church. Despite this, they

attempt to negotiate the breach between their sexual and religious identities. These attempts do not have a positive impact on everybody but there are subjects who developed and managed to deal with being gay Christians evading the stigma attached to it through having a positive self-image (p.113).

Hiding or revealing one's orientation, the dilemma of it

When individuals are compartmentalizing their life and do not publicize their sexual orientation or sexual activities, it remains hidden. Among my informants such kinds could be classified into two categories-those that blend in the society and church by leading a good Christian life abstaining from any substance abuse at least publicly. Secondly, there are those whose sexual orientation and activities are towards the same sex but who also are alcoholics and drug abusers. The first categories hardly draw suspicions from the church, while the second categories through their actions alone put themselves far away from the church.

The former ones those that can pass as heterosexuals are actively involved in church activities. They attended church regularly. As their sexuality is hidden they do not face stigma or rebuke from the church or from society. As two of my informants acclaimed

As long as we consider ourselves as Christians we are never going to accept it (same sex sexuality). I think people can't tolerate the expression of femininity in males. There are a lot of men who we think are straight but who prefer to have sex with tuai. They are closeted, their actions are hidden; therefore no one stigmatised them.

There are masculine men I know of, who are actively involved in the church youth fellowship but have same sex relationship secretly. It makes me wonder if it is same sex sexuality that we hate or just the males who are feminine. We know only what is visible, 'just like iceberg the tip only is visible'. There are so many things hidden beneath the veil.

Those who belong to the second category constitutes the majority of my informants. They are well informed of the gospel, what the Bible says and the proceedings of different churches.

They are often sent to gospel camping by their family who believe that they might repent and change their lifestyle. The change in their lifestyle doesn't last long; they go back to their own life out of peer pressure.

The challenges that intertwine with one's orientation and religious expectations are summarised by Z when he explained the biological changes and emotions that accordingly makes him non-normative. He expressed,

When we were kids we don't know how to weigh right from wrong. We freely play with girls. As we grow older to "adolescents" our voice changed and we started growing pubic hair. That was the time when we understood attraction occurring between individuals and it changed everything. Though we acted this way [having same sex intercourse and relationship] deep inside we fear God. No matter how we lead our lives there's no composure except in God. Unless it comes from God it is hard to abstain just by attempting it from one's own conviction. (Z personal communication, March 14, 2016)

Being Christian who heard the teachings of right and wrong, moral and immoral since childhood, the longingness to refuge in God seems to be a common aspect shared by every individual. No matter how they lead their life, there is a clear indication that each of them continues to possess some kind of fellowship with God. They have not renounced their religious beliefs though they may hesitate to go to church because of their behaviour and ways of life.

The continuous attendance at gospel camping and retreat, the prayers offered before doing sex work for guidance and blessings, the lamentations exclaiming there is no one other than God who could bring them peace of mind expressed how much they are longing for fellowship with God. While others are labelling them as sinners who are transcending and subverting the natural purpose of creation, disgusting and immoral, they tried to reconnect with God away from the piercing scrutiny of the church members and society in their own way.

Attempt to bring about inclusivity in Biblical text to justify one's orientation is a strategy adopted by many MSM. This could be clearly seen from the way J asserted that we've seen the creation of eunuchs in the Bible from the mother's womb. This doesn't mean that he calls himself a eunuch but the point he is trying to highlight is that there are individuals outside the binaries of male and female even in the Bible. Eunuchs who are God's creation just like males and females.

A thought provoking question posed by MSM to individuals who think that God created only male and female is that "Does God makes mistakes?" The argument of MSM is that if we religiously believe that God is the maker of everything in the universe there is no way that their existence is a mistake. In that case, their existence as human beings having attraction towards one's own gender could never be a mistake made by God.

Another argument that draws a line between same sex sexual practise and orientation is found in the response from the informants. This has been a common stance for many who are either straight or not. For them, sodomy is a sin but having attraction to the same gender and acting feminine if not reduced to sexual intercourse does not make them a sinner to be abominated. This straight population find it easy to accept this argument. Cross-dressing has also been found unnecessary by many MSM I have interviewed.

Conclusion

Church holds power over the people. Acceptance in community springs from acceptance in church and sociality is strongly related to church. This observation is quite relevant to the context of Mizoram where the church is a powerful institution of social control and sociality. Solidarity is built through participation in the church. Rules and regulations laid out by the church influence the society and controls the everyday existence of its followers. Deviating from that structure resulted in alienation which could be seen through the lived experiences of

MSM. Their attempt to shed their identity to attain legitimacy in and around the church depicts the power it holds over them. Negotiating Biblical scripture to validate their state of being by interpreting it to accommodate their existence and practices show their longingness to be included in the sanctity of the church. The church maintaining its heteronormative position on the other hand act as a hindrance in accommodating multiple forms of identities and sexual orientation.

VI

MORAL POLICING, VIOLENCE AND PUBLIC OPINIONS OF HOMOEROTIC SUBJECTS

Introduction

To say that the social world is heteronormative is to say that the social world is structured on the presumption that it is both natural and normal for persons to be heterosexual.

- Calhoun (2000:94)

A popular sociological concept we have seen over the years is 'Us' and 'Them'. This division of individuals, society and community have created barriers in terms of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, gender leading to violence, stigma, discrimination and oppression, thereby marginalising and alienating people who are different from us. Such marginalisation has deeply affected those individuals who express alternative gender and sexuality worldwide. Don Kulick had marvellously depicted travesties of Brazil as 'target of verbal harassment and/or physical violence from anyone who feels provoked by their presence'. The nature of abuse and harassment includes verbal abuse, throwing objects, bashing and shooting yet the perpetrators are never apprehended. Even if they are punished, it takes the form of light punishments. Law and order is not in place as policemen are part and parcel of brutal abuse (Kulick, 2012). Kulick's work is just one of numerous lamentations on lives which are marginalised. Individuals whose lives do not subscribe to binary gender/sex systems have been subjected to discrimination and stigma in societies upholding heteronormativity. Butler (2004) remarked, norms define what is intelligible and "provide coercive criteria for normal 'men' and 'women'". If we defy these norms, "it is unclear if we are still living" (c.f. Davis 2012). For Butler norms are regulatory and are like laws that mandate compliance.

Every culture has stringent norms that demarcate men and women. Hegemonic understanding of human body requires the human body to be unambiguously male or female. When bodies do not fit in these categories, they are designated as disordered or diseased requiring intervention from medical experts. Otherwise it will be reduced to abnormality or illegal bodily act (Menon 2012:71). Rather than looking at such subjects as "vital contributing members of our societies" (Feignberg c.f. Susan Stryker, 2013) they are pathologized, excluded and policed to conform to the heterosexual norms. They are socially abandoned and made to live at the margins of society. Havelock Ellis and Magnus Hirschfeld viewed that sexual instincts do not change much, but social reactions to such expressions of instincts have changed (c.f. Block and Adriaens, 2013). As Butler (1999) argues, the institution of compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as binary relation where masculine and feminine terms are differentiated. The differentiation is accomplished through the practise of heterosexual desire (24p). Such entrenched heterosexist notions have resulted in the emergence of narratives of individuals with homoerotic desires whose lives have been encrusted with tales of violence and abuse.

In 17th and 18th century, Europe death sentence could be awarded to people engaging in 'sexual deviancy'. (Block and Adriaens, 2013). As Raj Rao and Dibyajyoti Sarma (2009) observes, "homophobia permeates all layers of society". They asserted gay bashing as a universal phenomenon. In the context of India Section 377 has protected gay bashers from their actions as they are seen as individuals who "wish to cleanse society". Hoodlums and police are involved deeply in gay bashing to extort money and valuables from homosexuals who on the other hand give in to their demands out of fear of law, exposure and humiliation (xxvii). Narrative of Shitole clearly depicts the extent of violence one has to endure from people who seek sexual favour who rather turn out to be hoodlums demanding money instead. Moreover, if one even gives in to sexual demands, there can be other challenges involved such as

contracting HIV/AIDS or being 'blackmailed and outed' to their families. He goes to the extent of asserting that “Even death is preferable to being held ransom on account of one’s sexual inclinations” (83p.)

In the autobiography of Revathi, a transgender, we see how rowdies violently torture transgenders' bodies and their settlements for sex and money. She lamented on hijras enslaved by men:

who stole their hard earned money and spent it all, leaving the hijras with scarred faces, bruised by knives...who had to put up with capricious demands of clients who paid them a mere fifteen or fifty rupees and who used them as they wished, brutally...those who were carried away by the police for no fault of their own, who were beaten with whips and lathis and stamped upon by police boots, had electric current run through their bodies, who could only leave after paying the police a hefty bribe. (133p)

Bodies are tortured, trained and marked to carry out tasks, perform ceremonies and emit signs (Foucault 1977 c.f. Thomas and Ahmed, 2004)

Don Kulick on travesties wrote on how violence is always present in the life of travesties. Staring or passing comment on their looks and body, men eyeing them with lustful gaze, abusive remarks, hostility and physical violence are a part of their everyday life. Exposure to attract clients during the night at the road makes them vulnerable, an easy target for policemen and passers-by including gangs. The saddest part is that such crimes are never apprehended or if it does punishments are light (Kulick 1998, 31-36pp). Violence induced on travesties and marginalised sexual subjects are horrendous. It is unimaginable, yet it exists in reality.

In this chapter I will be discussing violence faced by people who practise alternative forms of sexuality in Mizoram where heterosexuality is considered as the only legitimate form of sexuality.

Personal and institutionalised violence

Narratives of my informants who I've met during my field work in Mizoram have informed me of multiple marginalisations faced by them. The perpetrators of such violence ranged from sexual partners to powerful agencies leaving the homoerotic subjects in a state of passivity as same sex sexuality is stigmatised and scorned upon. What one needs to keep in mind while discussing violence in the context of Mizoram is that MSM who can pass as male are not much subjected to harassment unless it is from their sexual partners. This allegation is backed up narratives. There are also studies indicating that disclosure of sexual identity is directly proportional to homosexuality related stigma (Doll et.al., 1996, Allen et.al., 1999 c.f. Ha et.al., 2013.). Moreover, the public space is owned and controlled by heterosexuals. It is a privileged domain of male and female who are cisgenders. It is a sphere where individuals have to conform to heterosexual activities and conduct. Those with different orientations are not challenged and scorned upon if they can pass as heterosexuals while they are in this public space. In order to uphold the validity of such space and public identity, the others including homoerotic subjects have to be stigmatised, discriminated and controlled. Heterosexual activities and conduct is appraised in public space. We see them depicting their love for each other by holding hands, kissing, hugging, having babies, raising children, establishing families and so on. If homoerotic subjects do the same thing, it has ample number of negative consequences in the form of criticism, scrutiny and homophobic violence discrimination, etc. (see Calhoun, 2000 chapter 4)

It was the initial phase of my research, when one day I was hunting Mizo history books which have contents on homoerotic subjects around the city. In one of the places that I went when I inquired the kind of books I was looking for, one of the women sitting nearby, who maybe in her late 40s said,

I am so fed up of these people, they roam around in the streets at night. They come and sit on the street near my house and laugh loudly I couldn't even sleep. Once I opened my window and pour out cold water over them. They didn't come back.

I have not started my field research yet when I heard this incident from that woman.

Violence and harassment I have documented over the years basically lies on anecdotes. The perpetrators can be classified as sexual partners, family members, clients for sex workers and moral police, general public in the form of eve teasing, comments and jokes.

The stigma of same sex sexual relationship has made it difficult for homoerotic subjects to go out on a date or courtship in order to get to know who their partners really are. So as to fulfill their sexual necessity many a times they risk being with people who are barely known to them for instant gratification. A risky process involving in same sex sexual relationships is that very often, sexual partners do not have a chance to know each other well. This has culminated in a higher chance of getting involved in violence with one's sexual partners.

Once while hanging out with an MSM in his early 40s, I asked them how they identify people who are not straight who would want to be with other men. KH replied, "We just know there's no way to explain". Commenting further K observed, "J and KH are very good at this they never make mistakes. Some people don't know how to read the vibes so those kinds ended up getting beaten and bruised".

He continues to tell me a story of such encounter

Once there was this incident where tuai has been beaten up. In a crying voice, he called R (who is a tall, dark, lean, handsome guy who I used to see often with the narrator) and others who immediately went to save him. R gave a flying kick somehow similar to how we see it in movies. That tuai should have been more careful. It is unacceptable to touch someone inappropriately when you are not sure about their orientation. Men are not the same. It is dangerous. Even then while others were busy saving him, he bent with another guy at the side [the term bent is used as flirting in this case] for which I scolded him. I

told him that while others are getting beaten, you bent a guy at the side to which he replied, "That guy is so handsome I couldn't resist him". (K personal communication, August 19, 2015)

We have seen in one of the interviews from the book 'Whistling in the Dark' how Pasha narrated about his friend Francis who faced hostility from a straight co-worker Shiva when he professes his love for him (118p.) Such kinds of unreciprocated love have been experienced by homoerotic subjects. I have seen some straight men that play along fine by letting them be themselves while the other homophobic individuals turn it into abuse. Duggan (2003) expressed how legislations and penalty to repress "prostitution, homosexuality and pornography" have been introduced to restrict "child and adolescent sexuality" (p.72). These "sexual crusaders" as Duggan referred do not understand the position of being an outcast, an unpure being, an illegitimate subject who thrive longingly towards the day when the darkness of their existence will be lifted.

Violence surrounding Commercial sex workers

Kulick (1998) had critiqued prostitution studies that define prostitutes completely in terms of their sex work without adhering to the personal lives of the sex workers. He brought out the magnitude of lives beyond their sex work which is mostly ignored by people who study prostitution (see chapter 3). Similarly Kaye (2008) asserted that studies on male prostitution seldom focus on poverty and violence faced by male prostitutes. West and de Villiers (1993) identified three types of prostitutes - 'runaway youths who turn to prostitution as a last resort', young men who enter prostitution as a choice to explore their sexual identity and thirdly, delinquents who lack morality and often threaten their clients and rob them. However, such classifications and representations though it is found in street life are contented by Kaye as portrayals that 'highlights certain facts while underplaying others'. For instance, he finds that narratives on male street prostitution failed to address the reason why youths are forced to leave

their home and also their choice of living in the streets (ibid). He argued 'prostitution' as a means to evade abusive relationship with family which can be traded through independence despite the hardships which offered a solution for problems. Keeping these in my mind I tried to probe the personal lives of MSM sex workers through questioning them on their family and what lead them to sex work. However, it all culminated back to the point of sex work.

Regulation of sexual behaviour has been a threat to those who put their lives at risk day in and day out to earn money from sex work. When I was doing fieldwork basing myself at FXB, I have seen MSM sex workers who came in when the office gets open to rest for the day. There are a couple of beds laid out though they are not the most comfortable kinds. The sheets are old, yet they seem to not mind lying down. They usually drop in when the office is open, use the bathrooms and then they sleep not bothered by the sound of people buzzing inside the office. If the drop in rate is high and the bed does not suffice I see them resting on the wooden couch kept at the corners of the office space. The office workers also continue their works without minding that people are sleeping. The lack of proper funds to rent separate space for such individuals made both parties tolerate each other.

There are sex workers who sleep for the whole day to be woken up only when the office is about to be closed for the day. Otherwise, I've seen others who join our conversations and lunch hours. My chances to interview them lie in such opportunities when they choose to sit with us and chat. My key informants are a great help in this as they often notched them to get interviewed in exchange for free lunch or cigarettes etc., to be sponsored by me and so on. Of course, I am not initiating such a bargain in the first place, but I understand that in their situations it is feasible to use such tactics to which they would eventually comply as they are financially uptight. Personally, I feel bad to steal their precious time to sleep for my own venture which is why I was hesitant to approach them most of the time. But I was admonished by my key informant who criticised me for being introvert telling me that I will never get my

things done if I behave that way. An anecdote of JM when she recounted her life as a sex worker displays the hardships they endure.

It was the month of May, 2015. I was sitting at FXB in one of the office rooms playing my phone as I overheard a loud conversation at the other side of the wall. Peeping in I saw an individual with shoulder length hair wearing a green printed kurta and tight pants. The hem of the pants stops at the end of her calf. She was wearing thick mascara in her eyes. I approached them. Crossing her leg and leaning on to J she was comfortably sitting on the couch. Upon seeing me J turned towards her and suggested, "Tell her about how your hair was chopped off". I queried, "They cut your hair! Who did that?" Giving me a short glance, she touched the tip of her hair pull it close to her face and said, "They certainly did. It has grown longer now look at this how it has become unsymmetrical". I reached out and touched her hair to prove her point. She continues to utter some cursing words. J suggested to her, "Why don't you guys go inside that cubicle and talk further?" She consented and we walked inside the room.

She was 22 years old when we met. She dropped out from school after failing X standard. She later trained as a beautician for which she holds a certificate. She came to FXB in around 2010 or 2011 when her friend told her about the services they offered. She did not mention how long she has been engaged with sex work, but she opines that "Sex work has a charm which vines a person", and she does sex work because she likes it. Even when she has other sources of income, she couldn't stop.

Expressing the scenario of sex work she mentions the existence of a particular spot which lies at the heart of the city. As they pace around in such spot, probable customers would call out and say, "Leng ila" (let's hang out). If they could strike a deal, they follow them. In her experience female sex workers and tuai have maintained good relationships in their work place. If a person is already approached by someone they do not interfere in an attempt to steal the

clients. The problem lies with lesbians who she finds are filled with "jealousy" as they often remarked to the clients, "That person is tuai do not take her". "They make things complicated", she complained. Meanwhile, stressing on the good relationship between them and other female sex workers she asserted that there is a sense of sisterhood between the female sex workers and tuai sex workers which makes them respect each other in their line of work.

I asked her about the kind of customers who seek their services and the rate they charge for it.

She replied,

We have all sorts of customers. There are some who prefer tuai. Bachelors who look straight but who feared being exposed are also a part of our clients. Married men and divorcees as well as old men also seek our services.

Our rates are not the same. For blowjob alone I charge Rs 300/-. It depends upon the amount of money they have. Sometimes we asked for their wallet to check the money they possess. Depending on that it goes from Rs 500/-, Rs. 1000/- till Rs. 3000/-. Now I don't engage myself with sex work much. Before, I used to go out every night. While I trained for beautician I go out once a week. But now, I "wait" for my friends who give me Rs. 200/- for my service. (JM, personal communication, May 4, 2015)

"Are there any incidents where you were assaulted with violence?" I asked. She narrated the following cases.

Once I was solicited by a truck driver at R, which lies in the suburb of the city. I climbed on to his truck. He's a non Mizo. After having sex he did not want to pay me. We could not communicate verbally because he couldn't speak Mizo and English language and I couldn't speak Hindi. Then I took his wallet. Seeing that, he pulled out a long knife and tried to harm me. I don't know how to open the door of the truck to escape. So I just returned his wallet. But he has left a cut in my hands anyway. [Showing me her hand] Now the scar is not visible anymore, it was there for a long time. (JM, personal communication, May 4, 2015)

Perpetrators of violence are not solely the clients who seek sexual pleasures. It also comes from those who the sex workers solicited for a one night stand. JM explained how she faced violence unexpectedly from an individual she hailed.

On certain nights when business goes well we liked to seek for bachelors to hang out with. One night I had Rs 10,000/- and there came one guy riding in a bike. He looks descent and we chat. He told me his locality and we rode to R together. We had a drink, but he did not want to drink much. I think he saw my money when I took it out. He invited me to stay with him for the night. I refused and told him that it would be inappropriate and embarrassing for me to just sleepover. "I'm staying alone" he further clarified. I therefore agreed to sleepover. When we reach a locality NG which is about 2km distance from his locality, he started to assault me. He tears off the clothes I wear. I was too drunk to retaliate and fight back. I somehow managed to run away and hide. I passed off at the spot where I hide. The next day I woke up at the break of dawn. My clothes are torn, my whole body hurts and I am dirty, I stood up and with great difficulty I dragged myself towards the bus terminal seeking for help to take me home. The place where I hide is not far from the bus terminal. It was Sunday morning; I approached one of the bus conductors, begging him to allow me a free ride after explaining the situation I got myself into. He must have been very shocked. I rode the bus and stopped at my friend's place. I took a bath, washed my clothes and stayed in her place for a week... (JM, personal communication, May 4, 2015)

Hanging out with attractive male without any demand for money is not limited only to the MSM sex workers. In Brazil travesties have a term for it. They name them *vicio* which refers to such attractive males who they have sex with for free without even using a condom for protection (Kulick 1998, p.29.).

Over a year has passed since JM narrated her story, when one day as I was hanging out with MSM at the TI Centre a friend of JM talked about their venture at Silchar which is in Assam. JM invited him and one other friend to Silchar. She lures them with a promise of good money from sex work. They hesitated at first, but she was convincing enough, so they finally agreed and followed her without much money to sustain their travel. Somehow they managed to reach

Silchar with the majority of the expenses bore by JM who leads the team with the other two blindly following her moves. On their way home while JM was soliciting clients separately, an attempt was made by some gangs to rape the other two due to which they ran to agricultural lands for their safety. Without taking the main road, they walk in the cultivation sites and somehow reach a village where they knock people's home for food and accommodation. After much struggle they managed to reach Aizawl hitchhiking all the way without money. Their little adventure has now become a survival story which is narrated with laughter.

Sometimes the violence they faced are provoked by them as well. One of my informants was beaten black and blue because of attempting to steal a guy's wallet. There is a case where an informant was harassed and beaten by his lover's family. My informant and his boyfriend had been seeing each other for quite a while. One day as he was walking pass his boyfriend's house, his partner's elder brother came out and started hitting him. He rebuked, "Mipa I ni lawm ni? Mipa angin khawsa ta che (You are a male isn't it? Live like a man.)

Verbal abuse and eve teasing is a common scene encountered by MSM who visibly cross dress. This happens not only in the streets but on social media as well. Some of them considered it as given which they have to endure since they transgress what is considered normal by the society. As G denotes:

When it comes to discrimination or eve teasing, I think we deserve it and I understand if people looked at us strangely. Sometimes on Sundays while people are walking to attend church services we are there dressed in unique clothes with high hemming. No wonder we draw attention from people. Verbally we face eve teasing but it usually takes the form of jokes and mocking. (G, personal communication, June 3, 2015)

Similar opinion is held by L who opines, "Normal teasing is understandable because I know we are this way. So I usually end up responding to those eve teasers as normally as possible. Do you get what I am saying?"

They have been socialised intently since childhood on the idea that homosexuality and cross dressing or alternative gender orientation is a non-normative human behaviour. This led them to accept the negative reaction of the people keeping the blame to themselves. Nevertheless, extreme forms of verbal abuse and discriminatory remarks are not well taken. This can be perceived from their narratives. L reflected upon such circumstances when she declared,

On the streets we find it uncomfortable when people tease us vulgarly, I can't even express what they used to say, it really pissed us off. I am not the only victim here they do it to others too whenever they see people like us, you know, uttering those abusive vulgar words. They think that it is a must to tease us that way. Mostly males are the bully. As for females they tease and mock us only when they want to prove something to the guys they are with. (L, personal communication, June 1, 2015)

As for M, she sees no point in retaliating. She ignored all sorts of eve-teasing. This has been a regular non reaction from most of my informants who I've seen being taunted on the streets because of how they express themselves through their body language, their make-up and attire.

One day as I was walking with my informant to run his errands we pass through a busy street in the heart of Aizawl. A small boy wearing school uniform stare at him and call him 'Tuai'. I stare back at the boy who turns his head to look at us passing by maybe somehow expecting a reaction from my informant. No retaliation comes out either in verbal or physical form from my informant. He acted as if he doesn't hear. Seeing that, I just let it pass, our conversation continues without any interruption. We never address that incident till today. It shocked me a little because I thought my informant was not giving out signs to label him easily as 'tuai'. 'How can that little boy identify him instantly?' is still the question that looms large in my mind as I recall that particular scene. Then and now I believe the informant I walked with that day will be able to pass easily as a heterosexual male. That boy must have been a good judge of character.

Varying from the above incident, one time I was walking with three MSM who are in their early 20s. Those three were wearing clothes which have a touch of femininity. Not only that they put on make-up. One of them even snatched my hand bag and carries it confidently. He was walking in such a manner that I find him almost hopping. People were staring, but they don't seem to care. As we reach a junction where I was supposed to take a separate route, I was given back my bag. I wave them goodbye. In the midst of traffic, I could hear S encouraging his friends to hold their head high and walk. I could see him strutting off. Laughter from his friends follows through. I smile at his carefree attitude and took my route to the hospital.

Police harassment

In the Indian context, police harassment of people who are engaged in sex work is common. Similar narratives but not as violent as we see in numerous anecdotes could be found from my informants. H when asked if she ever had an encounter with a police in an illegitimate way recalled an incident that happen at night-

A drunken police approached me at Zodin bridge. He asked me if I want to be fucked once or being locked up. He came close and attempt to lift my skirt and said, 'Let me look at your vagina'. I told him to take me to the lock up and threaten him that I will expose what he did to me. He walked away. (H, personal communication, March 14, 2016)

Tuai are also victims of accusation of crimes they do not commit. JM stated how she was picked among the people who are accused of stealing. She opines,

I think they stigmatised me because I am tuai. Police are considering me as a person with loose behaviour. While they took my statement, they hesitate to believe what I said. They accused tuai as bigmouth and liars. I was treated by them as a liar too. That day when they picked me I was supposed to write an examination of my beauty training course. I was heartbroken. I rattled the bars of the lock up continuously. When I was released, I lied to my teachers at the training course telling them that I was down with fever. Fortunately, they allowed me to sit for a special examination.

In another instant I was picked up again as one of the suspects in a crime. FXB Staff Z came to the Police Station claiming me as their client and giving them the alibi which acquits me. (JM, personal communication, March 14, 2016)

An informant Z had mentioned how they were captured by Police in “khawm case³¹”. They were taken to court where they were made to dance and sing for their acquittal. “We don’t mind singing and dancing as compared to being locked up in jail”, he reasoned.

He was also picked up and taken to custody with two other MSM because of being too drunk in the street. In their drunken state, they give out their female nick names to the police except for one. The next day at the court hearing, they read out female names while those who were presented in the court are males. He recalled how they have commented on the weirdness of their names in the court to which he replied, "That's how people call us".

While I was doing field work, the Supreme Court has not yet declared consensual sex as legitimate. However section 377 is not a hurdle in the lives of the MSM and the Police as much as it does in other states of India. My visits to Police stations in Aizawl looking for cases on section 377 found no result. My informants are usually charged for robbery or drinking. The MSM who were arrested had not even once mentioned them being charged under section 377. Despite this I decided to talk to the Police anyway.

Searching for section 377 cases at the CID branch:

Entering the midst of Police always feels intimidating, whatever the situation may be. That day when I went to check cases on section 377, I felt the same. Climbing the stairs of a huge building in the middle of Aizawl, I entered a room and mumbled what I want to the first person I've seen at the CID section. Over hearing the mentioned name, one of the police in his late 40s I assume looked up and directed me to approach him in a swift gesture. After asking and

³¹ It refers to incidents where police randomly picked up people in the streets who they believe are suspects.

checking my students' identity card he made me sit in one of the chairs. While I raised my question I was certain that he knows exactly what I've been speaking. "What is the timeline you want to see, is five years enough, if it is we have to check it from the First Information Report?" he said. I told him that I have heard about the police digitalising cases. He informed me that digitalisation has been done only for the past one year. I did not want to trouble them immensely by making them go through hundreds of FIR, so I picked the digitalised year. He called out a name. A lady with a short hair came over to whom he diligently give instructions. "You can follow her she will find it for you", he said patiently.

Leading me to a corner with rows of desktop computers, we sit and she typed section 377, nothing pops out. She typed some other keywords again but nothing happened. A man sitting beside us explained that it may be because if it is related to child molestation, it will be entered under POCSO and not section 377. There are children who complained of being molested by adults he further clarified. I asked them about a murder that happened a year ago which I and many others suspected as a crime of passion. Initially they were perplexed but when I stressed on the facts some more one the guys said that it will come under murder case. One of the police said, "We do not record any case under section 377 may be because it is associated with other misdemeanour which is more prominent. Therefore the person would have been booked under the case which is more prominent". I understand his point.

As I stood to return to Mr J, I was spotted by my brother's friend who headed the branch. Surprised to see me he asked the reason for my visit. Answering him I stressed that we have looked at the data and there is nothing. He came over towards the computer, the lady gave him her seat. He typed section 377, nothing came as before. He then entered keywords such as offence on so and so, still, nothing. The next thing he did is out of my expertise when he clicked this and that moving from page to page. Finally he said, "There is a registered case". Having

no time to explain it further, he handed me over to Mr J, who he directed to explain the case to me and entered back in his room where visitors are waiting.

Mr J enumerated that there was a case in 2000 registered under section 377. A boy from Myanmar who works in a small restaurant near Cinema Hall in Aizawl was the culprit. This was the time when pornographic films were shown at the cinema hall. The boy was performing bestiality with a pig. He was found and caught. The semen was taken from the pig as evidence. His case was registered under section 377 offence. I asked him how long that boy was kept in jail. "For a short while" was the answer he gave.

Confirming a story I have heard from MSM he narrated a relationship between two government servants-an officer and his driver whose lives ended in tragedy. They were in a relationship and they used to stay together in a farm house. One day the driver wanted to end their relationship. The officer did not allow so they end up shooting each other and died. However this case as was explained earlier was not registered under section 377 as the murder is more obvious. So it was registered as a murder case. He added that if I wished to look for further details about it I would have to dig it out from the high court. "They may not allow you to do so unless you approach a very powerful person who will allow you access", he warned.

On the issue of MSM on the streets who are taken into custody at the lock-up, he enunciated that unless a registered case prevails there will be no record of it. He stressed upon how Mizo straight males find homosexuals filthy. Some comments he wanted me to put it off-record. However, when I asked him about his position on police and moral police cleaning the streets of Aizawl by capturing male sex workers, he positioned a unique perspective. In his opinion it is good because it makes them abstain from sex with other men even for two or three days. He believed though that real change in behaviour can only come from being born again in Christ.

I assume he understands how difficult it is to change the orientation of a person no matter how severely they are punished.

Young Mizo Association and Moral Policing:

In Mizoram, there is a strong and powerful civil society called Young Mizo Association. It is a non-political, voluntary association established on 15th June 1935 with the initiatives of the Welsh Missionaries. Majority of the Mizos are members of this association which therefore create a sense of belongingness and ownership in this association. It has three mottos.

- Good use/proper utilization of leisure time
- Reverence for a good Christian life
- Striving towards a holistic development of the Mizo society

To fulfill these mottos, it has been working diligently till today. It continues to instill 'Tlawmngaihna' in the people. When natural calamities strike, YMA members gathered in hundreds to help the people who are affected by such calamities risking their own life for those in need of help. When death occurs in a family, the YMA members make it their task to prepare the house of the deceased to sustain the mourners who came to pay tributes. They take care of refreshments to be served to the gathering, they comfort the family of the deceased by being with them day and night for three consecutive days counting from the day the person passed away. They assist in funeral services by taking responsibility in digging the grave and escorting the corpse till the final funeral ritual is carried out. They plant trees and conduct 'hnatlang' mass community service to keep the locality clean and beautiful. They take it as their tasks the welfare, security and cleanliness of the localities. They spread awareness to uphold Mizo culture and Christian ways of life.

The main function and the reason why YMA gain much power in the State of Mizoram is because they help the poor and the needy. Such is the kind of voluntary services they offer therefore, their services in one way or the other is needed by everyone at some point in their life thus making them powerful, popular and influential in the Mizo community. In the opinion of my key informant, “Everyone is scared of YMA, even the State government”. Its excellent services rendered awards both from the Government of India and the State government of Mizoram³² which include an award bestowed by the Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for helping the prevention of alcoholism and substance abuse.

Since 2005, Y.M.A. has established an anti-narcotics team known as Supply Reduction Service (SRS). This has been functioning till 2013 and was reformed in April 2015. When interviewed the SRS team reported on how they conduct raids occasionally in the city starting from evening around 5p.m. mostly till 2 a.m. in the morning. Since Mizoram shared international border with Myanmar, it acts as a gateway for smugglers who import and export narcotics. The SRS took it as their task to eradicate such illegal trades. Besides patrolling the city, these SRS used to follow up the reports on these smuggling, and they have been confiscating drugs from these smugglers many a times. They mentioned how the raids help reduce the amount of drug flows in the city. On the other hand, the work of the SRS has been criticized by its victims. This includes the trans-subjects who come from the lower class background involved in the prostitution racket to earn their living. The kind of vigilantism that the SRS are involved in could be what Burrows (1976) termed as 'morally sanctimonious vigilance': that which attempted to curb the evils of liquor, gambling and prostitution³³. In this case, it would however include an attempt to curb drug curtails and normless activities as well.

³² <http://centralyma.org.in/>, <http://mizoram.nic.in/more/yma.htm>
<http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/behind-mizorams-recent-drug-busts-a-remarkable-community-effort/>

³³ Cited in Johnston, Led. 1996. ‘What is Vigilantism?, *British Journal of Criminology*, Oxford University Press, 36(2):220-236pp.

Such expeditions have brought them in contact with my informants giving rise to the following encounter narratives.

JM recalled:

I was walking near Excise Office at night when they caught me and they say among themselves, “They do not want you all (tuai) at home. Let’s cut her hair so that she will never go out again”. We dislike cutting our hair because it takes a long time for a hair to grow. They hit me. One of them pulled my hair and said, “Let’s cut it” and they did. They released me the next morning. (JM personal communication, March 14, 2016)

Similarly G shared:

They cut our hair and abused us physically. Sometimes they took us to Police who in turn takes us to court which acquits us or send us to jail depending on whether we have money to pay the fine or not. (G, personal communication June 12, 2015)

L was almost too excited to share her story when asked. She was narrating as if she has poured out all her anguish and pain. She speaks really fast and I could sense the tone of irritation in her voice:

I was an inmate at Chawnpui home, where the YMA took me. How they put me there is so unfair do you know?

My friend is a beautician, I work in the same trade too before, you know? I did not work for a long time though. So my girlfriend and the others were having a get together at Westend. She invited me to visit her at home. It was around 5 or 6 pm, it was early and it was not dark yet. Not now I told her. But when it gets darker I called her and tell her that I changed my mind and I will visit her. She told me where she is so I went there. I took a Taxi and stood. I called her to pick me up, specifying that I am standing at the Taxi stand. Out of nowhere the YMA pops out you know? "What are you doing?" they inquired. I was not drunk, I did not smoke nor chew paan you know? They asked me again "What are you doing, what are you doing here, are you searching for drugs, answer us?" they

pressed and took me to custody. I did tell them the reason why I was standing there and that I was waiting for my friend, but they still caught me.

Later, I called my girlfriend telling her the situation. I am in T custody come and pick me up I said to her. When they came they asked them, "Are you her friends?" and they are also taken in you know? "You must all be sent to Chawnpui Home" they suggested. None of us committed a crime you know? We are not frequently visiting their locality. Neither have we possessed alcohols nor are we drunk. They hit us hard. "We should send her to Chawnpui home" they mentioned again. They hit me thirteen times in my thigh and in my hands. "We detest these kinds" they mocked. I was then sent to Chawnpui home which is a place to serve God. (L, personal communication, June 1, 2015)

She continued with a story of a recent occurrence where she was caught again for the second time. The vigilantes here are no longer local area authorities but the Central Young Mizo Association as she asserts.

They caught me again recently. I'll tell you how. We roam on the streets at night we know that. Central YMA hardly sees us do you understand? It means we were out that long. They don't see us and we haven't heard of their vigilantism yet. We were at City Park hanging out. I was with a friend a female friend. As we exit someone directed us "Come along" Why? I asked. They just said again, "Come along". They put us in their vehicle. We couldn't comprehend what was happening. We were totally lost. They took us to a hall and they beat us turn by turn. "I haven't hit you yet" they said as they take turns. My mother is Pachuau and my father is non-Mizo. "I am Pachuau too, as a Pachuau male I am going to hit you" someone said and I receive a blow. "For being a non Mizo, for being a criminal" they accused me as they strike me hard with a blow. More than ten people hit me that day. My hands are swollen. As for my friend she could not walk properly. Their pipe is too large. (L, personal communication, June 1, 2015)

In June, 2015 I visited the TI Centre. One of the staff informed me of people who are dropping in that day. On the corner of the office there is a queen size bed, as I approached I could see one woman sitting on the side of the bed with her feet on the floor. The other one was sleeping with her back facing the wall. The light was not switched on so the room was dark. I asked if

she is willing to be interviewed. She gives me her consent. She shifts her position and we started chatting.

In her initial statement, she claimed that she was caught by a T³⁴ locality YMA along with her friends while they were drinking alcohol at the basement of Vanapa Hall. They were sent to Chawnpui Home. No sort of violence was laid upon them. However as we speak longer and dealt with different topics, her statement changes. She narrated her encounter with YMA in a whole different way:

YMA caught me twice and beat me. It was so painful. The location where they beat me is T. I could not control my tears, lying on my front I was sobbing uncontrollably. They do not understand the situation I am in.

They picked me up near Vanapa Hall entrance. We were sitting inside a Taxi with two men and my female friend. They did not do anything to the Taxi driver and the man sitting next to me. It was I and my female friend who they are interested in catching. I for one stayed at healing home for a long time. I haven't had a chance to step out. Last year I was there for ten months. I completed my time and came out. It would be around two to three days after I served my time at Chawnpui home when I was caught by Police patrol for violating the laws on alcohol consumption. I was convicted and they send me to District Jail where I served for a month (she laughs). I was caught by SRS the night when I walked out of jail. "We've been seeing you a lot" they say. God knows how that is not true, you know? I have no chance to stay outside at all. They bashed me and they sent me home. From that day onwards I never thought of going out again. I was emotionally hurt terribly. But I do not have a proper place to stay, there's nobody I could turn to in Aizawl. I don't have anyone who truly loves me. As long as we are capable of working, people will value us for our labour. What will happen when we cannot work anymore? Once when I was a child there was a wedding in our neighbourhood, my friends and I were fighting. That time my mother slapped me, reprimanding me for giving a bad name to our locality. That was the only time when I get hit by another person. I was emotionally hurt when the YMA beat me up. I vowed to myself never to work the streets again.

³⁴ Pseudonym is used to hide the real name of this locality

Being outside is not a good thing. First of all we feel uncomfortable. To add that we have to endure the bashing of YMA, SRS, Police, etc. I don't want to be in that position anymore. (H, personal communication, June 15, 2015)

After she was picked by the YMA she stayed with a family. However circumstances and her own illness drove her to leave that house.

The harassment faced by the sex workers who are the clients of FXB have reached the ears of the staffs of FXB. FXB staff recently organized a meeting with the YMA and the Police Department at the Regency Hotel to protest against the brutality of the SRS towards the MSM. He explained saying that SRS has reformed and since then they took their clients who are just walking on the streets at night into custody. "They beat them up and cut their hair. Let them catch them if they are found stealing or doing illegal things but why did they catch them when they are just walking?" he reasoned. Then he exclaimed, "It is not right". He continued, "I think it was the Superintendent of Police who assured us that they will look into the matter". I asked him the reaction from the YMA to which he replied, "They were silent". Another staff examined, "They can take them into custody if they are possessing drugs. They are doing their job. But capturing them because of other things is hard to understand". Z however rebuked the others for exaggerating when he told them, "You've been saying that YMA took many into custody when in reality they must have taken only around 5 individuals"

The other side speaks

I've been waiting for a chance to interview the YMA President but unfortunately we couldn't find a day which is convenient for both of us. We therefore talked on the phone. He said that they do not have a particular project dealing with gays but when they are involved in drugs and prostitution, that's when the SRS gets involved. He said I would be able to get more information from the SRS unit of the Central YMA and advised me to visit their office.

As advised I went to Central YMA Office, I entered and when they asked me what I want I made some introduction and told them that I was there because I want to know their works relating to tuai and those tuai who are into prostitution. Two SRS members were the ones who mainly answer my questions. As the name suggests, I was told that the main purpose of SRS is to eradicate No. 4 (heroin) from Mizoram (Since Mizoram and Myanmar shared international border it acts as an important gateway for smugglers who import and export narcotics). They mentioned that they occasionally conduct a raid in the city. In those days they start from 5p.m and mostly finished it up by 2a.m. They also stated that mothers and fathers could sleep peacefully because of them patrolling in the streets. However, the mistakes they make are often more prominent than their good deeds. For example they patrolled till late at night and they caught someone who is abusing drugs or sell drugs on the streets, if they do not answer them properly when questioned it triggers them to use some physical force like slapping and poking to get out the information. One of them told me, "If you go to Zodin bridge (the significance of this bridge was mentioned earlier) you will find the difference. Prior to SRS reformation i.e. April 2015 it buzzes with drug dealers, prostitutes, and all those who are engaged in illegal activities, but now who won't find them anymore". There are times when they are accused of taking money from the wallet of those they have taken into custody but they asserted that they always make them count their money in front of them and when the questioning gets over they always return it back to them. One guy asserts, "When their children get caught many parents don't like it hence the false charge".

When I questioned them about 'tuai' saying that they complained about physical abuse when the YMA took them into custody, they answered:

As mentioned our main purpose is to get rid of drugs from the streets and sometimes during our raid we come across those tuai who are into prostitution. We are not concerned much about their prostitution but these people are into drugs, for these drug abusers the

main reason why they are into prostitution is because they want the money to buy drugs, since heroine is quite expensive. When they are into prostitution they could even earn Rs. 8500/- per night. We took them to our office, find out their bio-data, give them counseling and release them or sometimes send them to Police. (personal communication with YMA leaders, August, 2015)

This defense of the YMA could be true for instance, a former sex worker Z once narrated how some people have left drugs near their seat while they were waiting for customers. When the YMA patrol of the locality they were sitting found it, they were accused of possession of drugs and were taken in where they endure their bash. They were shortly released though.

If the YMA catches individuals for the second time, they were put in remand homes, and it is the workers at these homes who used to cut their hair. Denying the violence they were accused of, one of them said, "Tuai usually answered each and every question willingly so we don't use physical force much. If they are not willing to answer even a little shove when reported is turned into physical abuse so that is the problem."

Asserting that they've been sending them over to the police I was told that when they send them to Police the government does not have proper law and since it is an extra burden for the government to provide food at Thana they are often released after spending a day in Police custody³⁵.

Those who do not have a place to stay often sleep in buildings which are under construction. The SRS at some point of time even asked the owners of some buildings to secure the place so that it won't be a haven for drug abusers and prostitutes. They narrated the incident where one of tuai (that I have already interviewed) created a scene at the market place in a drunken state.

³⁵ In agreement with this while I was at a friend's place to console because of the death of his mother who is a Magistrate, I heard one Magistrate while illustrating about the kind heartedness of the deceased magistrate mentioned that if tuai who does not have money for bail is brought to court, she made them sing once and release them accepting that performance in exchange for bail money.

Even though he cross-dressed, he still has the strength of a male so people couldn't stop him for quite a while. Now the MSM prostitutes who they often captured are sent to homes, and as per the report they got from the staff there, they are quite happy.

When asked about why they took only the prostitutes and not the taxi driver or their customers they argued that they also took taxi drivers sometimes because they used to take these prostitutes to customers. There are Taxi drivers who prefer to be in service at night because it is much more beneficial. One of the guy exclaimed, "There are so many people who makes the city dirty".

From them I came to know some important information that I haven't heard before. They mentioned that amongst those who are into prostitution most of them are from the southern part of Mizoram who come to the city and involve in such activities. They hardly come across people from the northern region or the western region or the original city dwellers. These people both male and female come from their village for education and to collect goods for sale, taking the chance to be out at night.

I probed about same sex sexual activities inside the jail to see if they have anything to tell me. One of the guy narrated the story of his acquaintance who started to have sexual relationships with male while he was in jail saying that many instances as such happens in Jail and that person too even after being released prefers to have sexual relationships with male rather than female. One interesting thing I was told is that in the 1990s males in jail used to put small pieces of broken glass in their penis. These glasses were put only after making them solid round and blunt. They call this 'makauh'. Originally makauh is a name of a particular breed of cock. So they say that after putting this makauh in their penis the sexual intercourse becomes more blissful for the penetrated and they could never get enough of it. From them I also came to know that the prostitutes classify themselves in three categories-streets, home and mobile.

Home prostitutes put themselves at a higher pedestal than mobile and streets while mobile prostitutes looked down upon the street prostitutes.

The next project that the YMA is planning to undertake is that in the month of August they will be organizing a Camp for those who are into bad habits like drug abuse, alcoholic, prostitutes, etc.

Is Mizo Women's Association homophobic?

On 15th September 2015, it was reported in the local newspaper that the Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP) executive committee in their meeting declared that there are many *tuai* (gays) and *patil* (lesbians) in Mizoram. They are concerned that this would have a negative effect on the society and the religion/church. In this regard they passed an agreement to consult other non-governmental organisations to discuss the matter.

Following the executive meeting's decision, on 22nd December the MHIP called a meeting with other NGOs which was attended by the office bearers of Young Mizo Association (Y.M.A.), Mizo Upa Pawl (Mizo Elders Association)³⁶, Mizo Zirlai Pawl (Mizo Students Association) and Mizo Students Union (MSU). They proclaimed that *tuai* and *patil* (lesbians) are becoming bold and audacious in the city therefore they agreed on showing them who they really are.

The office occupies two floors. The first floor holds a room where the President and the General Secretary have their office while the second floor is for the staffs. I entered the first floor and a couple of women four to be exact in their 60s I assume with floral shawls dressed in formals were sitting and having a lively discussion. The room is furnished with frames and office tables and chairs. Out of four the three women were sitting on the left side corner surrounding one

³⁶ The criteria for membership is that a member should be above 50 years of age.
<https://mizoarchive.wordpress.com/2015/09/24/mhip-gen-hqrs-committee-room-ah-ngo-joint-meeting-neih-a-ni/>

table. On the left side behind the table with a designation tag that says General Secretary sits the fourth one. I therefore decided to talk to her. I introduced myself briefly telling her that I am a research scholar. She directed me to their main staff upstairs. The staff members were having lunch but I ask them anyway about the MHIP's views on tuai and patil which was published in newspaper in 2015. They said that press release was made, but I should ask the Office Bearers since they are the ones dealing with it and continue to say that they are having a meeting right now. I said I will go downstairs and wait. I took a quick glance over the meeting area, fortunately the General Secretary saw me so I stepped inside and elaborate on my research telling her the reason I wish to meet them. When she learned what I want she asked me to speak to the President of MHIP sitting on the other chair who was busy on the phone. She gestured me to sit in one of the empty chairs on the other side of her desk.

As I sat there waiting for her to finish the others were continuing their discussions. After a short while the President looked at me and asked what I wanted to know. I said,

In 2015 there was a report on the newspaper saying that tuai and patil are increasing in number and we need to find ways to stop it. I want to know what catalysed that Press Release and what are the various steps taken by MHIP so far?

The President corrected me saying that it is not Press Release³⁷. She said that they were invited by Doordarshan with other NGOs to have a discussion on that topic:

We went there and we may have said those but there is no progress or measures taken after that. There are so many things that need to be done we are so busy we will not be able to follow that up during our tenure. Maybe after the election of the MHIP the new office bearers would do something. Right now our schedule is full. (Personal communication with MHIP leaders, March 2016)

³⁷ The office staffs are using the word Press Release and that is why I mentioned it,

I asked her what her personal take is on tuai. She said she pities them and that their house is always full of people from different background (her husband is Minister) which includes tuai as well, but she never allows him to wear skirts or anything feminine. She said it is also a product of how we raise our children. "One person I know has sons and no daughters. In their family the least masculine one the thinnest son was raised as female. That is not the way to raise our children". The others who were listening to our conversation show their support by nodding their head and saying it's true. We were interrupted by two men I assume they are called for as they were saying something about group photograph and since they were all dressing up so nicely. Round of introductions was done feeling a bit out of place since I was told by the office staff about the meeting I stood up indicating that I wish to leave. The President said, "Come again we can have discussion we can work together, anyway this is your house too" I smile politely thanking them and leave.

My informant had once shared his opinion on how many people have personal understanding of things which is differing from their own stance in public. This is the exact situation which I feel is occurring in the case of MHIP- the differences of opinions in private and public.

Verbal Abuse

Some forms of harassment may not be physical; there are other forms which can bleed a person to the core, like words uttered and shared. I am reminded of the story shared by two of my informants K and J while they were travelling.

They came back from Vairengte (located at the border of Aizawl and Assam) to Aizawl in a tourist vehicle TATA SUMO which is popularly used as a tourist vehicle in Mizoram. This vehicle is equipped with a built convenient for rough terrain like Mizoram. It can seat around 8/9 passengers which means the passengers are sitting really close together. My informants were sitting at the back seat. Those who were sitting upfront were having conversations on tuai.

They reported a male passenger as saying, "I would advice to flock them all at Lammual and beat them black and blue" At this point, K and J were already exchanging eye contact. A female passenger had a different opinion, "These are one form of being a retard". K whispered to J, "We are retards note that".

Media as a source of harassment

Depiction and discussion on alternative gender and sexuality have been featured prominently in mass media worldwide. Serials, movies, interviews, lectures, documentaries, books and articles, etc. relating to such subjects have gained prominence in entertainment industries, academics, politics and social life. There has been increasing visibility of such subjects. Researchers have lamented how strongly media can influence the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of the people (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011, Gonta et.al. 2017). Larsen et. al (1980) cited Fishbein and Ajzen in asserting that a person's beliefs determine his attitudes which in turn contributes towards his reactions to others. Culture and religious background are also important factors in determining a person's attitudes (Churchill 1967, Ross 1975 c.f. Larsen et.al. 1980). At the same time, there is the possibility of people with the same religion and culture to have different attitudes towards alternative gender and sexuality. While some managed to have positive and accepting attitudes there are the opposites who find them as a threat or treat them with negativity.

In January 2020, a video titled, 'Mizoramah Mipat Mipatna a Hluar Chho Zel' (Male-Male Sexuality is increasing in Mizoram) was posted on Youtube. In this video the show host, a prominent woman among the Mizos because of her media background had interviewed homoerotic subjects, counsellor and hospital staffs in Aizawl, Mizoram. Within no time the comment section was flooded with thousands of comments. Some of them were commenting in support of homoerotic subjects while the others were arguing that sexuality and desire to be

with people of the same sex is against the will of God. Bible verses were quoted to support such claims. The comment section has also become a platform for gender variants to come out and share their lived experiences and to defend their sexuality and desires.

In the last few years in Mizoram, there has been a shift in Alternative gender and sexuality has been placed in the table openly for discussion in a society which was once closeted to anything considered non normative. Zonet Cable TV, a local cable channel had once aired an interview with three tuai couple of years back. This show has been commented by many as promoting tuai. Another local cable channel LPS has been showing men dressed in drags hosting a comedic TV show. Moreover, local shops have started to use men in drags in their advertisements. These contents showcased in media have pointed towards the heightening visibility of alternative gender and sexual subjects over time. As has been asserted by scholars, social norms, institutions, social categories, etc. are responsible in constructing masculinity regarded as acceptable by the society, therefore which the ideal masculinity suiting a society has seen reconstruction time and again throughout history (Berg and Longhurst, 2003; Hopkins and Noble, 2009, c.f. Gorman Murray and Hopkins, 2014). Nevertheless, if certain behaviour crosses the threshold of what is considered normative masculinity by the society, stigma is always attached to it. In this section e five videos posted on youtube will be evaluated to analyse the perceptions of Mizo viewers on alternative gender and same sex sexuality.

The interest on this particular topic to be penned down came up due to the event happening in February 2020 when thousands of youth belonging to the Presbyterian Church of Mizoram flocked to Serchhip for a religious conference. In this conference a young girl from a remote village recited a poem composed by Lalnunpuia Hrahse titled 'Thalaite Hnena Thurawn' which can be translated as Advice to the Youths. One of the line in this poem which says, "Siam loh dan anga awm chu 'tuai' anga awmna" (Not living up to how one is created is like living a life of tuai) has hurt the sentiments of tuai and their supporters. As the programme was aired by the

local cable TVs and posted on youtube, it has a lot of viewers. This content and the other videos to be discussed later leads to an overarching virtual debate on gender and sexuality as being a choice or biologically determined, which has long been the cause of antagonism towards people transgressing 'normative' gender and sexuality. Most societies believed homosexuality as a choice for which it has incurred criminalisation and criticism (Mitchell & Fries, 2016). In this case, the consideration of *tuai* being a choice in popular perception seems to be the reason behind the stigma and ridicule attached to it which is observable from the comment section of the video.

Six years ago a local cable channel LPS aired an interview with a gay after he claimed to be born again in Christ. It was posted on youtube which has around seventeen thousand viewers till date and 57 comments. Similar to this, two years back a video where a Mizo singer who was supposedly *tuai* spoke on his testimony and was uploaded which has 113K views with 352 comments. Most of it is filled with positive comments applauding his change of character. In 2020, we see a more homoerotic content when Mali Show posted a content on 'Mizo ramah Mipat Mipatna a hluar chho zel' where she interviewed social workers, counsellors, hospital workers and those practising same sex sexualities. Till the end of October, this video posted on youtube in Mali's channel has 1,81,442 viewers with 2,115 comments. Then there is a video of the recitation at Mizoram Presbyterian Church KTP (Youths) Conference and another video on youtube analysing the reaction of *tuai* community on the poem recited at the aforementioned programme. These five videos are chosen because they are often used as reference point whenever these issues come up in dialogue.

Ignoring other determinants such as fast growth in information technology and easy accessibility, when we compare the videos uploaded six years ago, two years ago and in the year 2020, we see an increasing interest in alternative forms of sexuality and gender among the general public. There could be different reasons behind people's interest on this issue. Media

and the relevance of the subject in present society could play an important role. Same-sex sexuality has become a big issue politically, socially and religiously. In India same sex sexuality between consenting adults is no longer criminalised under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code as per the Supreme Court's Verdict. This has created reactions among the NGOs and churches in Mizoram in opposition to same sex sexualities. While the churches and NGOs in Mizoram are against same sex sexualities, the contents of the videos and the comments thereof signify the division of the Mizo population in opposing poles-those who support homoerotic subjects and those who oppose them.

Conclusion

In Mizoram, Christianity strongly influenced morality where cisgenders and heterosexuals are seen as the pure whereas same sex sexuality and transgression of one's gender is denounced, a polluted way of being, that have to be integrated back to the norm lest they will pollute the others. Agencies of power in the name of morality attempt to uphold heteronormativity by adopting stringent measures to check and control those who deviate. In the process, those who are not conforming are abjected. Their actions are regulated at the cause of inflicting pain in their body and mind without realising the struggles they face. Their inability to assert themselves and carved their space in a heteronormative world have pushed such subjects into the margins of life.

VII

DESIRES IN CONFLICT: CHALLENGING HETERONORMATIVITY IN FAMILY

Introduction

Families are everywhere but they are different. Foucault (1998) had designated “family as an agency of control and a point of sexual saturation”. In History of Sexuality he explained how in bourgeois or aristocratic family sexuality finds it imperative to control sexuality which later was passed on to the working classes in the form of birth control, upholding “conventional” family and finally “juridical and medical control of perversions” (120-124pp.)

In sociological discourse family is considered as the most basic social group which is responsible for primary socialization of the young ones. It has often been opined that ‘the institutional value and its influence as a socializing agency are hardly equalled by any other group or institution’ (Gisbert, 2016). Normally it is believed that family consists of man and woman who are tied to marriage and produce offsprings. Heteronormative families are considered as universal and normative. However, this understanding has been changed in due course of time through scholarships on family studies. For instance there has been a paradigm shift in Family Theory Curriculum whereby it has been accounted that Queer theory and intersectionality are used to increasingly broaden, contextualize and complicate the study of families’ This informed us of the existence of families which is not necessarily established through the union of male and female alone. Calhoun (2000) observed that traditional heterosexual family is no longer the natural family form. Speaking in the context of America he said, “Choice increasingly appears to be the principle determining family composition” (150p). The common family pattern has become single parent family. The possibility of having and raising children outside heterosexual marriages has taken a huge role in replacing the

traditional family (ibid). We now not only see LGBTQ parent family but also offsprings who are gender queer. Notion of heteronormative families has been deconstructed.

For this chapter I am not planning to focus on families formed by LGBTQ relationships as they are barely there. As seen in previous chapters, in my field, Christianity and church created boundaries of marriage which is not to be entered by individuals belonging to the same gender. I will rather examine family through narratives of individuals who transgress normative gender socialization and express alternative gender in their family to understand how heteronormativity have restricted gender and sexual differences. There has been an idealised notion of family inherit in our normative understanding of family. Dispossession of such idealised family and lacking a sense of belonging in one's family because of differences in behaviour and sexual orientation tend to cause stress and strain in relationships with family members. D'Emilio (1983) had propounded on the marginality of homoerotic subjects to family institutions through which society reproduces (c.f. Drucker, 2009). Drucker (2009) noted that to meet basic needs 'LGBT people' who are excluded and marginalised in their families have to struggle harder. As Family for many has become a site of contestation as transgressing gendered norms which were imparted since childhood in the family calls for a heavy blow. The homoerotic subjects are denied protected private sphere. Notions of gender are imparted and learned by individuals in their family. Gender socialization is the process through which children learn about the social expectations, attitudes and behaviours, typically associated with a particular gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987 c.f. Mc Guire et.al. 2016). Observation of gender expressions of family members played a huge role in gender learning (ibid). If an individual debunked all these normativities and does not adhere to it, such actions are bound to have definite consequences. The challenges faced by homoerotic subjects in one's family are therefore enormous. According to Cheshire Calhoun (2000), in the cultural imagination "lesbianism" and "homosexuality" posed as threat to family life because of the

transcendence of what is considered non pathological identities and sexuality. Lesbians and gays are deemed unfit to raise children in a proper gendered way. They are looked at as people who “have nothing to do with romance, marriage, family and parenting” as their sexual activities is the focal point which hides the other aspects of their life “...[I]deological representations of lesbians and gay men as outlaws to the family are what make same-sex sexuality so stigmatizing”(18p.)

While alternative sexuality and orientation is considered to be a threat to traditional family, research have shown the possibility of creating new families away from the blood linked (Weston, 1997). Traditional family structure has also taken new shapes once its members no longer conform to the traditional role and behaviour expected of them. Alternative sexuality touched upon the lives of existing families in numerous ways. Depending on the reaction of the family, the existence of sexually alternate individuals leads to chaos and brokenness, oppression and stigma or on the other hand, acceptance and openness.

Judith Butler, in her interview at ‘The New Yorker’ while dwelling on ‘reality’ expressed, “...[I]t reminds me of parents who say, ‘Oh you’re gay....’or ‘Oh you’re trans-well, of course I accept you, but it’s going to be a very hard life’. Instead of saying, ‘This is a new world, and we are going to build it together, and you’re going to have my full support’”. This excerpts clearly bring out the life of homo erotic subjects in the midst of one’s family. Negativity surrounds them even if they have the green card to express their desire. They are warned that life for them will be hard rather than helping them to face life positively.

If one looks at scholarships on homoerotic subjects, there are tales of violence and stigma faced by sexually marginalised individuals from their family. For instance Revathi a hijra who wrote her autobiography lamented on the numerous times she constantly endured beating and bruising from her parents and siblings which are life threatening. She was accused of bringing

bad name to her family, leading her to eventually leave her natal home (Revathi 2010). 'Whistling in the Dark' where 21 queer interviews are documented by the authors have clearly depicted the position of homoerotic subjects in one's family through the reaction of their parents or anticipated reactions. Pawar, a ward boy in his interview mentioned how his mother believed he was possessed by an evil spirit while hiding his sexuality from his father who she feared will beat him up if he knows (34p.) Another interviewee, Waugh's mother went berserk when she came to know about his sexual orientation swearing she never wanted to see him again. Unconventionally however he spoke of his father who was a priest to be more understanding (86p.) Garcia Arroyo believed that parents should not interfere in their children's lives and he find no reason to communicate his orientation to his parents who he suspected would not be able to understand him anyhow (139-140p.). Chandraratne, lead a double life not to tatter his family name. If ever people found out he projected that there will be no marriage proposal, no job for him but being ridiculed by others (191p.) Ankleshwaria claimed his mother to be sympathetic and understanding while his father is just the opposite who would probably 'thrash him black and blue' if he is outed (208p.) There are accounts where the interviewees entered into heterosexual marriage to conform with societal norms while still maintaining same sex relationships with others. An interview of Khire highlighted the possibility of getting support system from a homophobic father (262p.) (Rao and Sarma, 2009). In Serena Nanda's book we see how a hijra Kamaladevi was pulled out of bed and tortured by her father upon hearing her ventures at hijra camp that caused her to leave home for good (59p.). Some hijras are not allowed to stay in their home as it will degrade their family name (89p.) At the same time we see the presence of parents who let their sons be as they like, who have liberties to wear women's attire and play dress up (60, 70p)

Ritual of childbirth and gendered socialisation in traditional Mizo society:

Children played an important part in the social life of the Mizos. When the mother is pregnant sacrifices are performed. When a child is born, utmost care is taken to prevent it from every possible disease. Mizos whose lives were engraved with superstitions performed ceremonies and sacrificed animals for the well-being of the child (Sangkima, 1992; Malsawma, 2002). A male child received more importance. When the mother gives birth to a baby boy, the elders of the village blessed him to be a valiant person who would be an excellent hunter. A baby girl on the other hand is blessed to cost mithun (Sangkima, 1992, Lianthanga, 1998) which was the animal given for bride price during those times. The prettier the girl or if the girl belongs to a higher tribe she will fetch more mithun as bride price.

As they grow older separate gender roles accustomed to their daily lives. For males, brevity is of utmost necessity therefore if a sign of fear is shown they are taunted to wear woman's skirts instead. Women on the other hand have to look after households and helped male folks in the jhum. In the right to inheritance, the fundamental rule is for sons alone to inherit the property.

Like most tribal people, Mizo tribes have been exposed to globalization and modernisation. This has an impact on the traditional gender roles to some extent which has been modified to fit modern social life. In the absence of warfare and hunting expeditions, men no longer have to assert their masculinity through excelling in these areas. Jobs available in the public and private sector as well as entrepreneurship have made lives livable for men with alternative orientations to exist without the need to assert one's masculinity except in the social sphere . Families especially in cities have lesser requirement of sons to do the hard task of clearing the jhum and hunting. Life is becoming easier and independent giving a space for alternative gender and sexuality to emerge. Nevertheless in social sphere it is still harder as non-normative

performances of gender and sexuality attracts stigma and discrimination because of the heteronormative social condition.

Living a closeted life in family

Mizo society still retains its closed knitted tendency whereby families are tied closely to one another. In such circumstances, the status of one's family is elevated or degraded on the basis of the members conduct. Though individuals with alternative gender and sexuality emerged they are subdued by vigilant forces of their family members as it is degrading and tenets against Christianity.

One day I was leisurely hanging out at the MSM drop in centre, day was slow as usual and there was not much to do so we end up chatting with some of my informants. One of the outreach workers of the TI shared the challenges of outreaching when parents are not aware of their son's orientation. "Many are not open to their parents. It is difficult to take initiatives and do our job. We cannot just go and say 'Your son is 'tuai' please raise him in such and such ways". Grasping the opportunity I asked them if tuai we have been seeing are living with their family. I was told that there are tuai belonging to villages who rented houses in the city and also others who left their home because of misunderstanding with their parents.

I probed further the reason for their migration to the city. One of the outreach workers answering my query said that for some it is because of their work and that in villages there is more scrutiny, life is less free, they can't live as they like. They have to wear "normal men's attire" whereas in cities they can wear tight jeans with makeup without caring for other's opinion as their families and villagers could no longer see them. But when they go home they changed back to men's attire. For few Aizawl city is not enough, they moved further to mainland India where they wear hot pants. Even more so, from Delhi and Bhubaneswar they

shifted to Mumbai. "Did you just say C shifted to Mumbai?" one MSM exclaimed. "Yes" he answered, and our conversation was interrupted by people dropping in.

Anecdotes on family relationship

The following day I had a chance to sit with Z to follow up our conversation the previous day. We were discussing how families tackled their alternative oriented children when he expressed his concern.

Parents thought that their sons would be happy if they hung out and befriended normal straight men, but they are not. One person I know was grounded for one and half months in their home. As for me, I prayed to God for three years to cure me from this. He does not answer. Before I even turn three years I preferred to play with girls toys. I grow older, I must be 13 or so when I understand relationship, emotional and sexual attraction. I was confused. I was bashed by my father because he wants me to be like normal men, he thought hitting me would work to make me normal again but it is not so. I know that he hit me not because he doesn't love me. It's what he thinks is best to cure my state of being. A masculine man having a son who is feminine is not easy to live with for my father. When I grow older, I left home and lived in a rented house. I often visited my natal home and my mother used to mention marriage. One day I said to my mother, 'If you ever mention marriage again I will never set my foot in this house again' and she never bring up the subject again. (Z personal communication, August 12, 2015)

He continued narrating the stressful environment one is bound to endure amidst patriarchal heteronormative family set up:

We live in a patriarchal society so a person who is born as a man but *tuai* is scorned upon. In family mothers have higher acceptability tendency than the father. They scolded their *tuai* sons less. For fathers who assert masculinity, it is embarrassing to have feminine sons. I don't blame such fathers who scolded their sons in an attempt to straighten them. But living in such situations has become stressful for children. They do not find freedom in their home. Everything was dictated –It was always do this, don't do that. They looked for happiness outside the home. When forced, they get married or had relationship with women. They attempt to pass as normal masculine men by changing their attire but deep

down they are insecure, they fear exposure of their real being. Eventually even after such attempts to change 'same sex feeling' resurfaced. It will be difficult to understand unless you experience it in your own family. For parents it hurt to see their sons struggling through life. These days parents are cleverer and they do know how to deal with these things because they are educated. 85% of us have mental health problem. If we have an option of rebirth we wouldn't choose this life. But we are happy people we crack jokes and laugh together. Sometimes when I think of people who hide their sexuality and actively involve themselves in church activities I used to wonder if we Mizos stigmatised only tuai or same sex sexuality. There are so many things going on beneath the veil. Just like an iceberg, the tip is only visible. (Z personal communication, August 12, 2015)

The conversation I had with Z illustrates how family or home is normatively constructed thereby alienating the gendered non-conformist. The narratives Z gave me of returning to his home even though they still have differences reminds me of a narrative of ZRP who had a fight with his brother who told him to never come back. But he was left with no choice but to return back from time to time because of the family ties which bind him to visit his blood relatives even though they show no signs of appreciation.

Three years have gone by since I last met Z because he quits his job and relocate elsewhere. One day I stumbled upon him at one of the offices of State Bank of India. He looked well. We exchanged greetings and I asked him about his life. He told me that he moved back to his parents. "Why?" I asked. He mentioned that his father is getting older and he is needed in his family. Even on that day when we met, he was running his father's errands. Since we were in public place in a crowded room we do not have much liberty to talk further so we parted.

Few months after while I was trekking with my family, we stopped by at a small tea shop on the way. To my surprise Z was there. I asked him if he runs the tea shop as it was near his locality. He told me that he is only helping his friends as he is running an errand. We briefly spoke in a hush tone about the other MSM we commonly known and told me about the changing scenario of the life of sexual minorities, how the younger ones have become more

visible. As it is not a space safe to discuss such things for long as other customers are approaching he quickly switch back to being the host for them.

Many of the MSM I met belong to a broken family or a single parent headed household.

JM a 22 years old who identified herself as tuai claimed she had feminine trait since childhood. Her mother had died before we met, she didn't mention when. She has two brothers and two sisters. Her father is still alive. He is deeply saddened by JM's orientation. Though he never punished her physically she endured her father's scolding multiple times. His father used to scold her, "There's no one like you in our descent neither from my side or your mother, why are you like this". Tired of such rebuke she left home and stayed with her friends and her aunt periodically. Addressing my queries, she told me she left home because she does not like it anymore. Her aunt also scolded her sometimes but not as much as her father used to. She stressed that she like being with people who accept her, so she prefers to be with her friends and tuai who she measures as her own kind.

An informant G was only six months when her mother was killed by a robber. Her father re married and settled in the southern part of Mizoram because of his job. She is the youngest of three siblings, all males. Her father had remarried soon after her mother died. Living with her step mother and her half siblings has become uncomfortable for her so she left home and came to Aizawl. Her parents are aware that she behaves like a female but what they don't know is her engagement with sex work. When I met her she was telling me that she will be going home to her natal place for sometime as she is infected with Hepatitis C. She said, "I am preparing to go home because I am very sick. I am diagnosed with Hepatitis C. It now affected my stomach. I thought of going home to rest for a while but I'll come back". Then I asked her if she has maintained good relationship with her parents to which she replied, "FXB loves me the

most. I am on my own. I sustain myself with what I earn. When it gets dark I get to see people who do sex work that's it".

These individuals have feelings of being a 'nowhere man'. The kind who wander on the streets searching for a safe place to stay.

19 years old L is from a broken family. Her parents divorced and both remarried, she is bound to live with her half-sisters and half-brothers had she choose either one of her parents. Therefore when she was young, she lived with her grandmother in Aizawl city. She claimed to have a feminine character since childhood for which she was often reprimanded but never faced physical abuse from her parents. The moment she started earning from sex work she never goes back home.

H is one of the few cross-dressers I met who are accepted by their parents as they are. She has a brother and a sister. Recalling her mother's words that say, "You never like boys' stuff since childhood you played with clothes and barbies". As she grows older, she goes to church wearing women's attire. She evaded places which require her to wear men's clothes such as schools and other places. She laughed and said:

I never attempted to be a boy. When I was a child I did not realise it is wrong. My parents neither scolded me nor supported me. They said that it may be God's plan and as long as I want to be this way, the choice lies in me. (H, personal communication, August 13, 2015)

M is an informant I met when she was at work. She was wearing a floral dress and her hair was very long. Everything about her suits her place of work. We sat in a corner under a bouquet of artificial flowers, and we talked forever, interrupted only by customers who came by to check out pots and flowers. In the course of my research I haven't met anybody who shares things openly in our first meeting without any hesitation except for her. I ask her about her childhood and she reckoned:

I think I was born this way because as far as I can remember I always behave like women. I never hang out with boys as a child, there are no boys in my neighbourhood anyhow. My friends are all girls and we used to play with girly things. I used to secretly take out my mother's *puan* (hand or machine woven cloth women wrapped around as a skirt) and tossed it out on the window which I retrieve later without my mother being aware of it. Even in the church, I wear *puan* mostly. I was scolded constantly and my parents resort to physical punishments to correct my state of being. My brothers broke my humerus (arm bone) many a times while they punish me for acting feminine. (Mizos have traditional pattern of carrying things which is different for both male and female) I always carry things like female never like men. (M personal communication, July 17, 2015)

When Mary was diagnosed as HIV positive, she was in denial for a long period of time. Her family out of little knowledge of the virus were shocked when they heard she was infected. They eventually shunned her. She expressed,

My family did not want to dine with me. They did not want to eat my cooking. This happened while we were all staying together as a joint family. But later my family members were given thorough counselling and I was accepted. (M personal communication, July 17, 2015)

She now lives only with her mother and one of her elder brothers in a rented apartment as her siblings moved out and settled household separately. Her father passed away one year before I interviewed her. Her brother is an alcoholic so he is not very reliable and they are happy if he earns daily wages to at least pay for the apartment rent occasionally. She further added how her niece a little baby has gotten the virus of HIV through her mother, who is her sister in law. She was raised without feeding on her mother's breast milk. She stressed how sorry she felt for her niece. This has changed the whole perspectives of the family making it a silver lining for her. Earlier, she was not allowed to even hold the baby but now they understand how it is transmitted, so things have become better.

Expressing her sadness and grief over her father's death she said:

I felt a huge sense of pain and discomfort when my father passed away. He was sick and we admitted him at the hospital. At the same time I was admitted too to avail treatment because of AIDS. My mother was worried as we have to pay for medical bills of my father. I thought I would die before my father as I am a person living with AIDS but he left us first. Death is not ours to control. It is not in our hands. Even if I wish to die and slash myself with a knife over and over again if it is not my time the wounds caused by my action will not kill me. I'll only end up hurting myself.

It hurts me to think that I cannot be there for my father to care for him while he was in his sick bed. I cannot spend the nights with him at the hospital because I was not well. I often wondered, had my father been cured and alive I would have taken care of him and love him and he will do the same too. People said I don't stigmatise them nor discriminate but whatever they say comes from the top of their Adam's apple. Their actions denoted the opposite of what they are saying because I can see it. (M personal communication, July 17, 2015)

F is one of my close acquaintances who I met in 2014 while I was in my earlier phase of fieldwork. He has been keeping me company whenever I lacked people to be with amidst the crowd of MSM. He is not too feminine he can easily pass off as male if he wanted to. The other MSM I hang out with do not like him because they considered him as mischievous who used to steal their things. One day we were at the TI, it was a busy day as it is the day for ICTC. F got a call from his mother telling him to buy a medicine and deliver it home immediately as it is urgent. He requested me to accompany him home, and I agreed. We both walked for about a kilometre and hail a taxi in which we travelled for another 4 kilometres or so.

On the way he was telling me about his family.

My father died and my mother currently has a partner. They both are living with AIDS. I used to work in a hospital and I was trained, so even before my mother confirmed that she contracted the virus, I knew it from the symptoms. I cried continuously and I pray too. I am born again now I don't drink alcohol anymore but I still follow people around when they wanted a drink.

My mother and I have similarities; we are short tempered for which we cannot stay together. We both convinced ourselves that we are friendlier to each other when we stay apart. Since 'this job' does not pay much, I end up working two jobs. I work in a Press where I have to stay up till 3 A.M. in the morning. Also I follow Revival Speakers sometimes. (F, personal communication, December 16, 2014)

We got down on a road where the houses are scarce as it is suburb area. We crossed the road and climb on stairs that are curved on the soil. One woman wearing an old cloth was working in the small garden at the side of the steps. Seeing her F called her “Nu damdawi kan lo lei” (Mother we’ve bought the medicine). She turned and approached us and she leads us to their house. As we reached their house F introduced me to her as a friend. She acknowledged my presence but remarked on her dirty hands saying that she has to wash before extending a handshake. She washed in the kitchen and came back to shake my hand. By this time we were already stepping inside and I stopped near the entrance. I scanned the room. The entire house would not be bigger than 25/10 square foot in its length and breadth. The kitchen and seating area were open without any partition while the bedroom was partitioned with a plywood and a curtain. There was a man lying in the couch facing the TV. He did not utter a word to us. I assume he is F’s mother’s partner. F’s mother thanked me for accompanying him while he went in the bedroom to change his jacket which was ironed by his mother. As we left I said to his mother that I will visit them again.).

On our way back we discussed the importance of mothers. We joked about our MSM friends who acted funny when they got drunk and laughed till our stomach hurts. F’s house which I visited that day is no longer standing when I returned from Hyderabad to my field. His house is on the way to the airport so everytime when I pass through that place I always looked through the car window to check out but it was never there. Maybe it was torn down for some reason and F has been out of reach till today.

In 2014 in the month of August while I was at the TI office one guy dropped in. He did not want to tell me his name so I don't know his real name. He was just finishing Class XII when we met. I asked about his family

I am the youngest of five siblings, my parents divorced, so I live with my mother. My mother sells vegetables in the market. I had stayed with my father for a while but I prefer to be with my mother. My family don't scold me when they see me wearing makeup till today. I've used my sisters' makeup since I was a child. I've never cross-dressed though.

One day while two of my informants were accusing each other for ruining their relationship with the same guy, I had a chance to talk to a guy who seems to be very friendly as he smiles and talks a lot. Our conversation on family goes this way:

Me: I want to know about your family. I am not going to write your real name anywhere, not even your locality.

S: I am 24 years old. I studied till class XII. I don't do anything at the moment (later on he often came by to sell skin care products). I am staying with my father and my younger brother at locality X (he did tell me his real address though). My father is a government servant and my brother runs a small business.

Me: You don't help your brother in his shop?

S: No, I never helped him I don't really feel like doing it. My father scolded me and beats me up when I was a kid. Now he bought makeup and foundations for me. My younger brother often sees me kissing other guys, but he never speaks out about it. My mother re-married, my half-sister, who she has with another has also married already. My mother and I are particularly close to each other. (S, personal communication, August 12, 2014)

As we talked, we could hear the sound of a voice who calls out checking if S has come? "Shall we go out" I asked and we both joined the rest of the group. As they saw each other S inquired if he had a drink. Others asked me to interview him too, and he responded that unless we two have a time to hook up, he won't comply. I casually said "Fine we will, let's go" I pressed as I invited S to sit with us. These two S and the newcomer have been going out around this time.

"Sit anywhere you like gosh! You're so drunk" I exclaimed. Turning to S, I jokingly asked him if he would rather interview him as he is familiar with the interview questions. "Let me ask him," he said turning towards his partner and they were sitting face to face. Upon looking at each other, no words came out, and it became awkward for both of them. "I can't do this ask him rather", he directed me with a give up tone. Taking it over, we begin from their family history.

I am an only son inheritor of my entire father's property. My other siblings are all females. My mother and father are running a business. As of now I live with my aunt [mother's sister], so S and I are living in the same locality. My aunt is a business woman too. Our house in my locality is already in my name [he bragged which can be sensed from his tone and gesture]. So next question [S and I looked at each other and smile]. (Sam, personal communication, August 12, 2014)

I further asked him about his parents' reaction to his orientation provided they know and if he often visited his parents. He responded

My parents never scold me they pampered me a lot...I don't see my parents often I visited them only when I need money. I have to ask them secretly though as my aunt doesn't allow me to ask them money. (Sam, personal communication, August 12, 2014)

There will be no chance of the parents or aunt knowing the sexual orientation of Sam as he neither cross dress nor give out a vibe that he likes to have relationships with other men.

There are MSM I've met who are in their 40s. Typically these MSM are the masters of their own home as their parents have died or they have established separate households away from their parents. However they usually do not live alone. They have nieces and nephews and other family members to support making them financially uptight sometimes.

Once I took an MSM A to a restaurant. He narrated how he could not live like the other MSM who eat whatever they like and consume alcohol regularly. He told me the need for him to spend money wisely as he wanted his nephew to go to school. When his salary from his lowly

job is not enough to support his household expenses he has to sell 'kuhva' (beetle nuts) which makes him toil hard day and night. When their monthly salary is not credited on time he has to approach the teachers of his nephew's school to allow him to sit through the month and he will think of ways to pay the fee later. But he said his nephew hesitate to go to school when they are incapable of paying the monthly fees which is another problem he has to endure as he wanted to convince him to study and go to school.

Family is rarely a topic that emerges as a discussion point when we sit together. One day I was amid a close circle of MSM who have known each other for a long time. We were watching LPS Pro-fight which is a local boxing tournament aired on TV. One of them mentioned how he had a sexual relationship with one of the contender. The others immediately recognising who he referred to commented on how well he performed in that competition. Another added how he too had a sexual relationship with another contender who was knocked out in the first round. Our conversation goes on towards their sexual relationships and I assume it must have been the absence of outsiders except for me as the reason why one of them shared the story about a boy whom he referred as "My son".

My son likes the people I work with. Once he stole Rs. 30,000 from my elder brother with which he took these people for a treat. (KT, personal communication, December 14, 2014)

Chiming in J said:

I love those days. I used to wait for him at Millennium Centre, I drank as much of grape juice I wanted to and he came and pay everything. His father used to come by sometimes at MC after his office hours so we often end up hiding from him. (J, personal communication, December 14, 2014)

Continuing KT flashed back:

During that time he told one of his male friends to come over to our house He directed him to use a Taxi which he paid for. They both went to the market where he bought

clothes and necklaces for him and sent him home with a taxi again. When we found out about the stolen money he only has Rs 900 left but we cannot scold him. He confessed willingly. Another time he came to me and said, "Dad give me Rs 300. I need to buy boxer". I told him we had bought a lot of it and he answered "We're going for a picnic and I want a boxer without the broad elastic band which is not striped. They are selling it for Rs 300 and you know girls are going to be there". Turns out he never bought that boxer. He took out the car which we don't allow. Since I don't allow him to take out the car I never fill the tank full. He filled the petrol and took these guys for a picnic. He doesn't want to pick up my call, but through his friends' FB [Facebook] status update I saw their photos. So I called the others and told them not to make him drink too much as he has to drive back. They told me he hasn't drunk much. When he came home I talked to him and said I know where he went. He automatically confessed. You know he always confessed whatever he did. It makes it difficult to scold him. (K, personal communication, December 14, 2014)

MSM such as A and KT have families of their own to look after. A huge responsibility of taking care of their family is bestowed upon their shoulder, reflecting their difference from other MSM. On the positive side, being in a power position as head of the household they managed to evade sanctions from family members which is experienced by the others.

E is a cross-dresser who I started to get acquainted with since 2014. He is infected with the HIV virus and he was about to start ART when we met. I do not know his family but I spoke to his father once who seems to be very kind hearted over the phone to seek permission to allow E to come for a meeting (about which I lied). In actuality it was time for him to start ART at the hospital. He couldn't tell his parents about the virus that infected his body. Prior to this while he was sick for a month and when his parents asked him to consult a doctor, he hesitated and was not willing as he was scared that his parents would know about his health status. When we first met we were mostly discussing about his health, how he contracted the virus and his sexual relationships. I got to know more about his family only in 2019. His father is a government servant. His birth mother cheated on his father while A was about one year and

eight months old. His father remarried another woman who he unhesitatingly referred to as his mother who unfortunately died in 2015. His elder brothers are married already and their actual birth mother lived with one of the elder brothers. The rest live together as a big joint family. I asked about his family's reaction to him and he answered:

They accept me in the sense they do not allow me to use heavy make up or wear extremely tight and tapering pants or earrings. I trained beauty course so we were required to master piercing. In the process I pierced my ears too. This acceptance is of recent occurrence, it was around 2015 when my stepmother was still alive. When I was a child I was grounded and beaten as I often creep out at night.

I think my parents are aware of my sexual relationship. We go out and stay out at night. Obviously they wouldn't suspect my partner as female at all. Father gave me warning one day stressing that he had told me so many times not to stay out for the whole night. He emphasised that if he catches me spending the night outside again, I will not be allowed to ever come home again. My brothers beat me up and so does my father. My eldest brother has the habit of calling me as pathetic *tuai* in his drunken state. My sister in law used to stop him. When he is not drunk he is the one who shows utmost hospitality to my friends when they come over. My father used to tell me to not even say a word to him if we meet on the road while I wear make-up and earrings and wear feminine dresses.

Last week in my drunken state I talked back to my father over and over again. He could no longer take it so he slapped me hard across the face. My sister-in-law's intervened and stopped him. We went to the hospital and the doctor said there is a clot of blood inside my ear. We dapped it with warm water. If it worsens, I may have to undergo surgery. (E, personal communication, 16 August, 2019)

The MSM whose home environment is troubled by alcohol abuse is the most intolerable home. Violence arising out of drunkenness has driven out hatred in the family. At the same time the MSM are encountering such violence not solely because of their sexuality but also due to their violation of parents rules as is seen from the narrative of E. Looking at this context, resistance from their family is not only about one's sexuality but other factors are responsible towards it.

I have come across a unique narrative in an interview with C. The first time I saw her I actually thought she was a female. In the morning at DIC, one of the staff called her for me. She was wearing a black top with the hem above her knee and black tights which she accessorises it with a red belt. Her hair was tight in a bun. She was wearing a red peep toe and holds a black bag in her hand. Her make-up was on point. She was using fake eyelash. Her gait is feminine. I was introduced to her and the moment she spoke her voice gave her away.

When we had a chance to be alone, she illustrates her position in her family:

I am the youngest sibling. I have two elder brothers and four elder sisters. They are all very tall I am the bad gene so I am not as tall as my brothers and sisters. When I was 2 years old, my mother died. Henceforth I was raised like a female. Everyone took care of me and loved me. My father never allows my hair to be cut. I was practically raised by my siblings. When I was a child I received Barbie as a Christmas gift. When my family goes to the market they bought skirts and dresses for me till today. I was gifted eye-shadow as a gift and so on.

No one scold me at home. The reason why tuai are scolded at home and are scorned is because they are lazy. They do not want to do the work of a male nor a female. As for me I do both since childhood. If shovelling is needed I helped out my elder brothers. There is only one thing that I cannot do which is hammering nails. Female task such as fetching water, scrubbing floors and everything, I master them. But once when I was about to fetch water, I demanded my brothers' escort because I hesitate to go unaccompanied by a male and they came along. I have my own income therefore I am not rebuked at home. Had I been a lazy person without any income who stays at home doing nothing, I suppose I will be scolded just like any other. (C personal communication, December 18, 2014)

Her father passed away in 2005, her sisters were married, she feels nostalgic when she recalled the goofing family time they had before her father's dead. She is a trained beautician, but she is currently working as a waitress in a tea stall. The support she gets from her family empowers her as she recalled:

I used to do facial for my grandmother and take care of her when she is sick. It makes my grandmother happy and she favoured me. Even when she is sick, she calls me to look after her. She gave me an advice telling me that I should continue to behave and act the same way forever as I have always been. My brothers are also taking my side, they protect me. When people eve-tease me they are willing to tolerate it till the second time. But if it occurs for the third time, they would walk out to reason with whoever eve-teased me. (C personal communication, December 18, 2014)

Once her brother was watching while she puts on make-up and he sigh, “I wish you could have born as female”. C and I often meet each other on Saturdays when she delivers food in the market area. As soon as we part from each other the hawkers sitting nearby used to pass comments such as, “She really looks like a woman” or “Tuai ani maw?” (that person is tuai?), “Hetiang ho hi an buaithlak” (These people are troublesome). But those comments are passed behind her back when she could not hear any longer. Their hostility could be sensed through their facial expressions and their comments.

Conclusion

Familial relationship is situational as can be accounted from the narratives of MSM. It also varies depending upon the families awareness of their sexual orientation. Restrictions imposed on them by family members were stronger when the MSM were younger. Physical and verbal punishments are imposed in attempts to straighten them. Such punishments leave scars which are unforgettable, but their orientation is not something which they can change no matter how hard they are punished. It rather forces them to leave their natal family in search of a place where they are accepted, where they can escape the constant gaze of their family. Nevertheless, when things get hard, they have nowhere else to go except their natal home which lead them back to their roots.

Those who keep their family in the dark on their orientation have to live a life of secret and constant fear of being outed. They adopted different methods to ensure their family will not

find out to the point of lying for their safe escape. They have to lead a life of pretention to protect themselves from their family though they eluded disciplinary measures which will otherwise be inflicted upon them.

Acceptance and toleration from family is seen to have a positive impact as it maintains bond among family members. It gives agencies and empower MSM subjects to be able to negotiate social expectations build on heteronormative tradition in the midst of a strong support from their family. It shelters MSM subjects by offering home as a safe space, a privilege, which many MSM will never experience in their lifetime.

CONCLUSION

The issue of same-sex practices and transgressing gender and sexual norms in a heteronormative structure in Mizoram is examined in this thesis through existing literature, narratives of MSM, leaders of church and NGOs, members of the Mizo community and police. It has been observed that sexuality has been governed in Mizo society since traditional times by restricting the sexuality of women, particularly by upholding virginity as an essential asset. On the contrary, it is legitimate for men to boast about their ability to sleep with women as it entails evading the pain that will be inflicted upon them as they pass through the gate of the dead village upon their deceased. Recognition of gender in binary terms and the socialisation of male and female to abide by the gender norms, which is executed through rigid gender practices, is highlighted. Only a few works of literature have discussed the existence of alternative forms of gender and sexuality in Mizo society; by dedicating only a few paragraphs, otherwise, silence is maintained. From what can be read through these small contributions, it can be seen that the effeminacy of the privileged sections of the society, such as the son of the Chief or the Chief himself, was tolerated if they performed their duties required and expected of them as a male. At the same time, there are punishments in lieu of practising sodomy. It has also been explored how the Mizo burial tradition has practised a different burial system for sodomites, thereby othering them even upon their death.

The onset of British colonialism and Christianity has further restricted alternative gender and sexuality by imposing punitive measures on those who do not conform to the heteronormative pattern. Both formal and informal sanctions for these practices existed. It marginalised subjects who do not fit as 'normal', thus pushing them to the periphery. In Mizoram, social life is governed by church norms. The church influences the actions and conducts of its followers as it gains legitimacy through their adherence. The right or wrongness of an action is measured through rules and regulations laid out by the church. Therefore, same-sex sexuality or any form

of sexuality outside the sanctity of marriage is taboo. Non-conformity to it has to be sanctioned. Drawing heavily from Biblical regulations on sexuality church in Mizoram denounced sexuality outside marriage. To prevent the defilement of the church those who transgress have to be chastised to make way for repentance and integrated back into the church. As the church holds such authority over society, legitimacy gained through Delhi High Court, and later the Supreme Court's declaration of criminalising homosexuality as unconstitutional has been disregarded. It rather evoked more attempts to situate same-sex sexuality as a sin for Christians. Within this context, this thesis emphasises on the stigma, oppression and discrimination that dawned upon the MSM subjects through forces of family, church and society.

An analysis of the rules established by different Christian denominations in Mizoram and their standpoint proclaimed when same-sex sexuality was legitimised in the global arena and even in India highlighted denunciation of same-sex sexuality by the church institution. The church instigated the creation of humans as male and female by God. It enhanced that marriage has to be between heterosexuals who will consummate their love for each other through sexual relationship only after marriage for the purpose of procreation as it is the purpose of creation. Within this system, it is unimaginable to situate those who are neither male nor female or those whose orientation transgresses the normative. They are bound towards eternal condemnation. It is explicit that the church does not create a space for its existence.

The church's conservative standpoint has afflicted the lives of MSM. It has been defined through narratives of MSM on how NGOs that uphold the church's reverence have been monitoring the social life by disciplining those who visibly flout the norm. With the absence of power to negotiate and resist violence and abuse inflicted upon them the MSM subjects have no choice but to endure it in silence. Beneath those silence there lies hidden struggles which they have been wrestling with throughout their lives. Those have been depicted in this thesis through anecdotes.

For some MSM the struggle in public is not the end. In the private sphere, inside what is supposed to be their safe space-their homes, they felt the consequences of their non-conformity. Their right to their own body, to express their sexuality as they desire is oppressed and subjected to punitive measures. The end result we see is leaving home to find a place where they can be who they are. But in the process they continuously face obstacles in multiple forms- financial struggles, homelessness, stigma, sickness etc. For some, these obstacles have left them dying on the streets with no one to claim their deceased body. For others, it pushed them back to the place they escaped from- their natal homes. The price the MSM paid for being different in a heteronormative world is beyond imagination. There are exceptional cases of supportive families. Those families are rare, but they exist.

MSM being a category that surfaced over HIV/AIDS prevention strategies, studies on the MSM population focus primarily on MSM and HIV/AIDS. Though this research departed from such studies, it does not exclude the issue of HIV/AIDS from its gambit. The intervention of NGOs in HIV/AIDS prevention in Mizoram has opened doors for sexual minorities to claim their space in society. It created an opportunity to illuminate their existence. It supports their cause and negotiate the state on their behalf, acting as an agency of empowerment for the MSM. It brings visibility to subjects who are otherwise reduced as deviants and non-conformists. Funds are garnered for their benefits. Opportunities are created for their exposures and mended ways for the solidarity of the community. Thus the role played by funding agencies and NGOs in uplifting the MSM community is remarkable though there are limitations.

While this thesis has been written, there have been numerous attempts on the part of the church to discuss same sex sexuality and alternative gender particularly initiated by church youth fellowships. Social media have trending discussions and debates highlighting opposing positions. The global trend could be felt in Mizoram especially after the legalisation of consensual same sex activities by the Supreme Court of India. In social life, it could be

observed that sexual and gender minorities have started to assert their presence and have become bolder. They have carved their space in advertisements and entertainment. Younger generations have started to hold profound tolerance to those who transgress the norm. Society for the LGBTQ community has thrived actively though discreetly. Taking into account all these progresses, it may not be too far away to see the transformation of Mizo society towards a more tolerant environment for sexual minorities.

Scope for future research

This study prioritised MSM as the main subject of research, and TI in Aizawl city is the centre of this research. Descriptions of the themes in this research are strongly documented from the purview of the MSM and limitedly from the others. It will be reasonable to look into the whole aspect of Christianity, church, family violence and stigma through the voices of the stakeholders in church, family and NGOs with special focus on changes brought through legalisation of consensual same sex acts.

As I was wrapping up this thesis, the LGBTQ community Lonestar Society, the first of its kind in Mizoram which was recently formed have been actively organising awareness and sensitisation programmes through the support of national and multinational funding agencies. Meanwhile, there was a tender advertisement from the Government of Mizoram for the construction of toilet facilities for transgender in Aizawl. This has evoked a negative response as the leaders of YMA approached the Chief Minister not to go through with it. The conflict of interest between government on one hand and the church and its adherers on the other could be an interesting venture for future research. The anonymous voices of the sexually marginalised which are shouted out in social media, could be studied as the growth of resistance.

Positions of alternative sexuality and gender, masculinity and femininity in the overall patriarchal-dominated heteronormative society of Mizoram are understudied in any discipline. Therefore taking up these areas in any form will be a beneficial contribution to the growing sexual and gender literature.

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Appendix -1

Brief profile of key MSM respondents in the study:

C is a cross dresser. Since childhood she has been raised as female. She lives with her family and works in a tea stall. Her siblings protect her from eve teasers and oppressors.

E is a cross-dresser who I started to get acquainted with since 2014. He is infected with the HIV virus and he was about to start ART when we met. He lives with his parents but often run away from home.

EM is an effeminate MSM. She cross-dresses all the time. Her parents punished her and attempted to send her to gospel camping many times with a hope that she may change her orientation. Sometimes she obeyed but could not change permanently. She left home often when she got tired of her home but always returned.

F is 26 years old. His father died and his mother lives with her partner. They are both HIV positive. F works day and night to earn a living.

G is a small town girl. Her mom was killed when she was only six years old. Because of her father's job they migrated to places. She has a stepmother. She is the youngest of three siblings but after her father's remarriage she has step brothers and sisters. She escaped from her home and came to Aizawl when she could no longer tolerate her overbearing step mother.

H is from a remote town. She was feminine since her childhood and her parents raised her as she is. She is the youngest of three siblings. She has an elder brother and sister. Her parents are not working. As she grows older she came to Aizawl and befriended sex workers. Her parents know what she does and they often attempted to call her home but in vain.

J is 30 years old. His father is government servant and his mother is a housewife. He has an elder sister. His parents do not know about his sexual orientation as he sometimes has

girlfriends too. His parents believe that his engagements with MSM community is a part of his job as a social worker.

JM is 22 years old, identified as tuai. She studied till class X but failed in the examination. She gave up education because she did not perform as expected. She is a trained beautician and in her training result she came second with only 6 marks difference with the first rank holder. Her mother passed away. She has two elder brothers and two elder sisters. Her father is disappointed on her sexual orientation and reprimanded her many times. She leaves her home and live elsewhere whenever she gets annoyed with her father's scolding. She would go to her friends' houses or her aunt's. She prefers to live in places where she is accepted.

K is a 40 years old MSM. He is registered as kothi. His sexual preference is solely male. He lives with his family and has a job. As his job is a contractual one with delay in payment of monthly salary, he engaged with other forms of income such as selling clothes.

KT is 45 years and had passed away while I was doing research. He lived with his son though not a biological one. His son was not aware of his identity. He was a social worker.

L hails from a town far away from Aizawl city. She was 19 when we met. Her parents divorced and live in towns far away from each other. She was living with her grandmother and three older siblings when I interviewed her. She never went home to visit neither her mother nor father.

M lives with her family in Aizawl when we met. She has five siblings and is the youngest. Her parents used to take her to doctors when she was young but nothing could cure her effeminacy. She used to live in Guwahati but came back after a year.

RD lives with his family in Aizawl with his parents and siblings. He does not send out any vibe of being an MSM when we met until he told me about his sexual orientation. His parents are not aware of his orientation. He is currently pursuing undergraduate course in college.

S is 24 years old who studied upto Class XII standard. He has a younger brother. Parents are divorced and he live with his father and brother. His father is a government servant and his brother is running a small business. He neither helps his brother nor work. His mother remarried but remains close to S particularly. S's father used to scold him when he was younger but now he buys cosmetics for him. His younger brother sometimes caught him making out with other males but never said anything. His brother and father stay at home therefore he has a private space to date and be with his lovers.

Sam is 21 years old. He is from a business family. Whenever he encountered a hostile home environment he used to run away to live with his aunt who never scolds him. Being the only son he manages to win back the hearts of his parents and always return after a while. He said that he will get married to a woman someday.

Z is 42 years old MSM. He said that he prayed to God to cure him for three years but God did not answer. He left his home to lead an independent life to escape continuous rebuke and punishment from his father. He knows the art of tailoring and he works in non-government sector during the day which makes him sustain himself for a living. During my research period he returned to his parents as they need to be taken care of.

ZRP was 25 years old when we first met. He lives with his mother and brother in Aizawl. His brother is addicted to drugs. He switched between being a good natured son who helps his family to a drunk sex worker living on the streets. While I was writing this thesis he abstains from all these things and has become a spiritual person.

Appendix-2

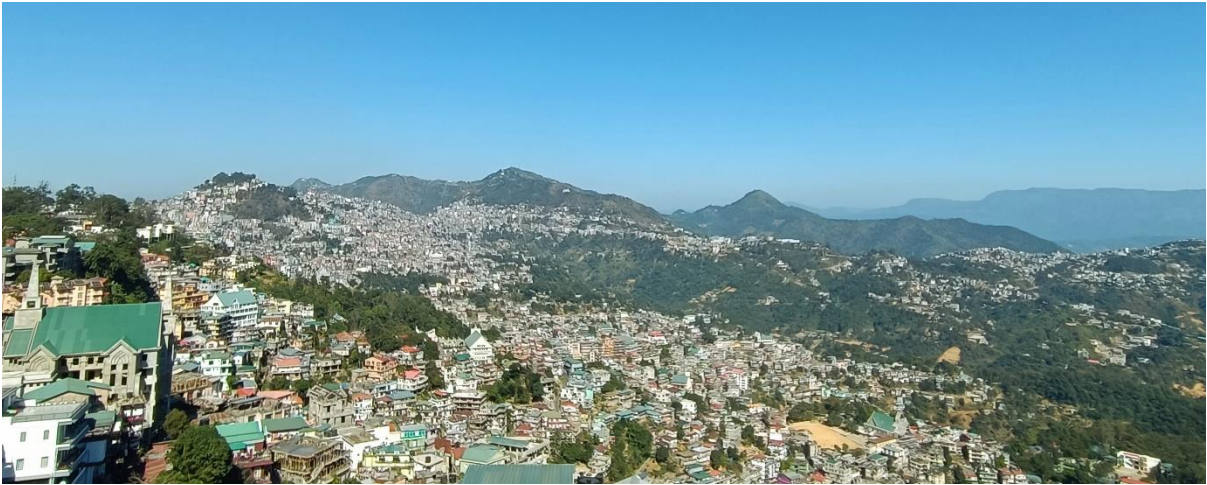


Plate (2.1) A view of Aizawl city shot from the southern region. We can see Church in every locality.

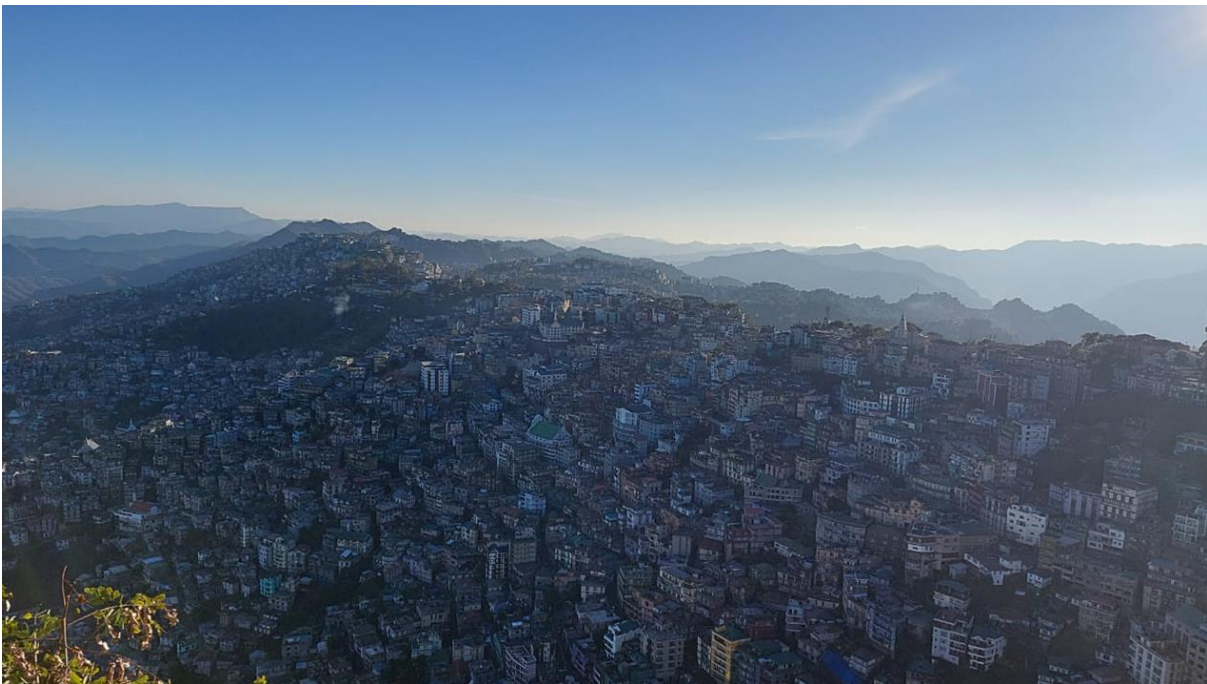


Plate (2.2) Aizawl city captured from the Northern region.



Plate (2.5) Targeted Intervention Centre for MSM. Carrom board is played meanwhile at the backdrop an MSM sex worker is resting for the day.



Plate (2.6) An MSM showing me his bruises inflicted because of moral policing.



Plate (2.7) A sex worker sleeping peacefully at the Targeted Intervention Centre after servicing during the night.



Plate (2.7) A glimpse of Church congregation on Sunday night.



Plate (2.8) Lonestar society programme

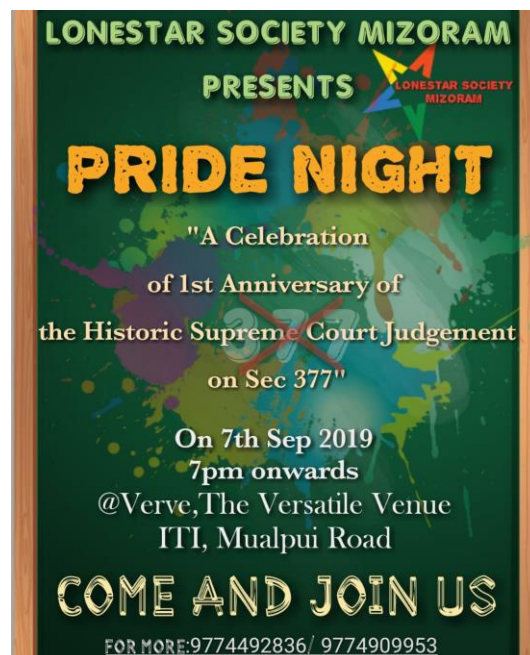


Plate (2.9): Pride night pamphlet displayed on Lonestar Society Instagram page

**LONESTAR SOCIETY
MIZORAM**

**“Virtual Discussion On Issues
and Challenges Of LGBTQ+
community in Mizoram”**

Host
Lalhmingmawii

Co-host

Special Invitees

On Zoom
id: 769 9796 9415
passcode: ev9FTq
Dt 5th Dec 2020, 8:00 PM

**Please
Join
Us**

Plate (2.10) Lonestar Society organised online programme during Covid 19 pandemic.

**LONESTAR SOCIETY
MIZORAM**

**PRIDE MONTH
MAKE UP CONTEST**

THEME : RAINBOW

*1st prize : 1000/-
2nd prize : 700/-
Consolation prize : 100/- for
all participants*

**date of submit drop your image
till 18th June
12pm**

@89 



Plate: (2.11): Competition organised by Lonestar Society

Appendix 3

Documents

 UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD
NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS

Course : Ph.D.
Subject : Sociology

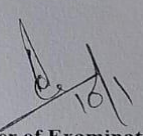
Month & Year: November, 2012
Semester: I

SL.No	Regn.No.	Name of the Student	Course No. SL 801	Course No. SL 802	Course No. SL 803
1	11SKPK03	Pramod Kumar Prajapati	-	PASS	-
2	12SSPH01	Binoy Paswan	PASS	PASS	PASS
3	12SSPH02	Debpriya Ganguly	PASS	PASS	FAIL
4	12SSPH07	Lalhmingmawii	PASS	PASS	PASS

Course No. Title of the Course

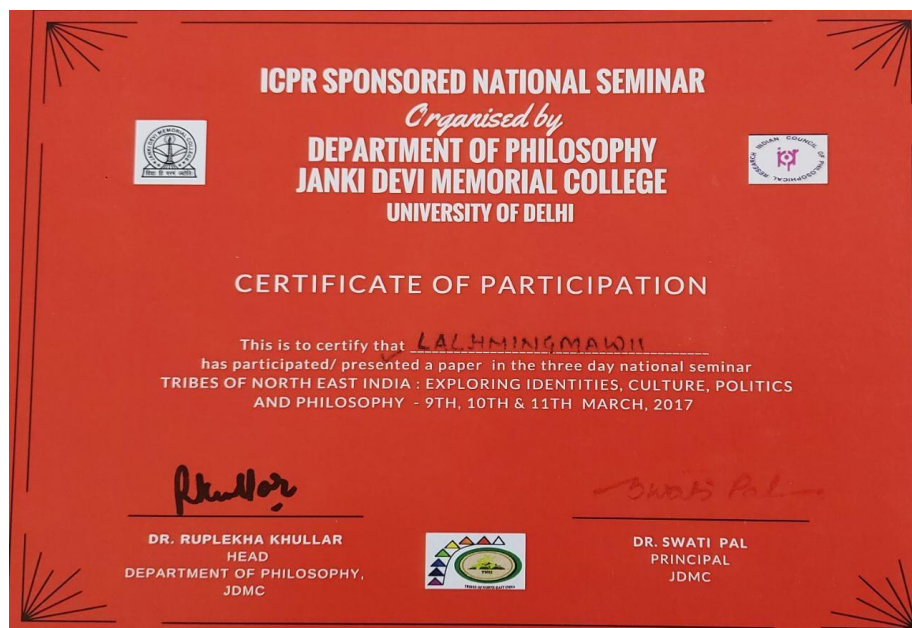
SL 801 Advanced Sociological Theory
SL 802 Research Methodology
SL 803 Dissertation TopicRelated Course

Dated: 28.12.2012


Controller of Examinations

o/c
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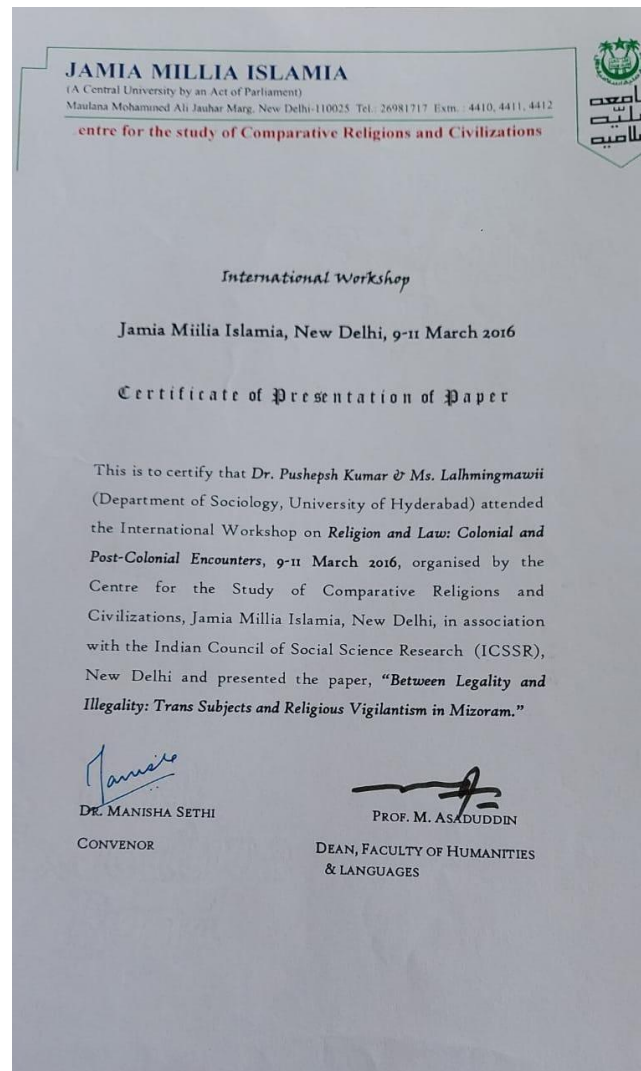
Course Work Result



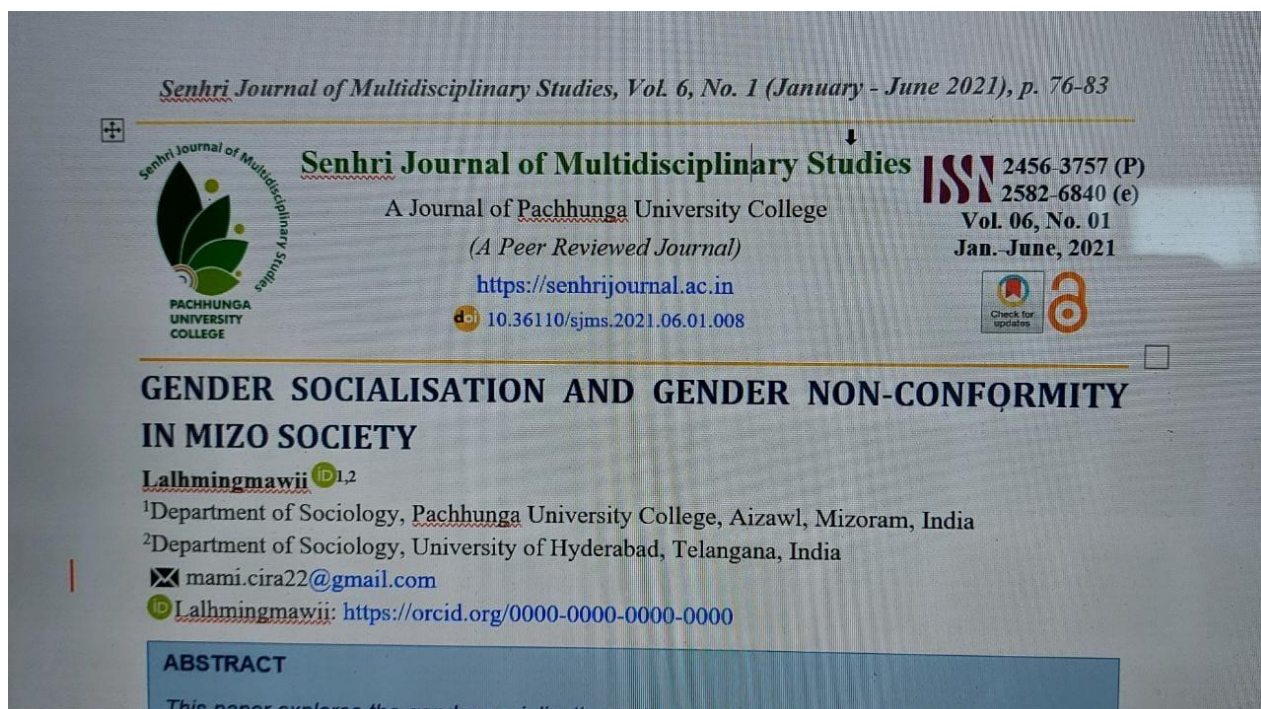
2017. Alternative Sexuality and civil society: A case study of Mizoram, Tribes of North East India: Exploring Identities, Culture, Politics and Philosophy. Department of Philosophy, Janki Devi Memorial College, Delhi University



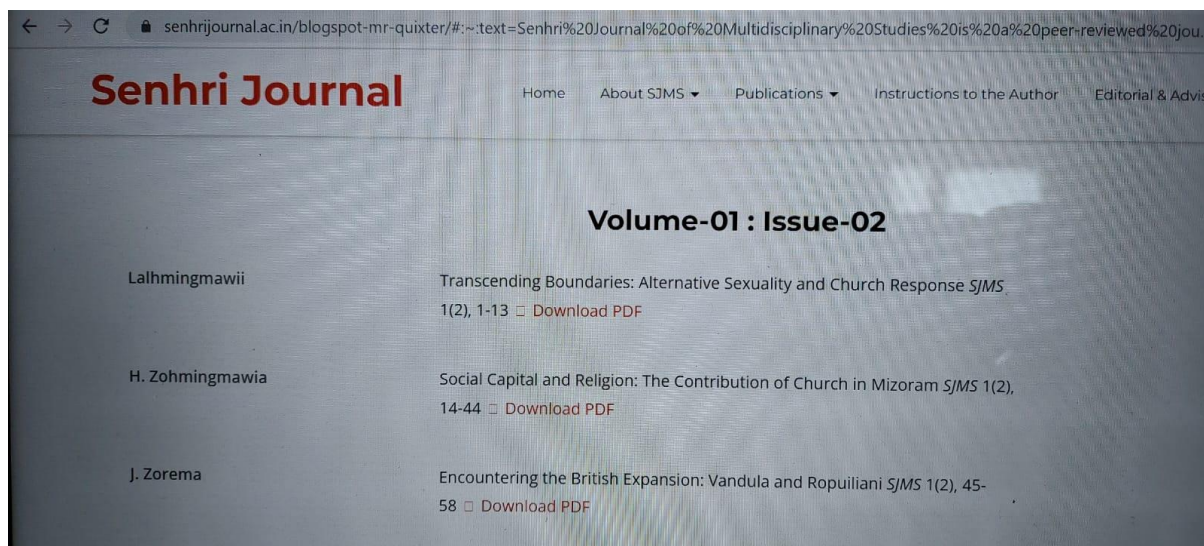
2016. Transcending Boundaries: Alternative Sexuality and Church Response, Young Social Scientist Meet 2016. OKD Institute of Social Change and Development Guwahati. December, 15 and 16



2016. Between Legality and Illegality: Trans subjects and Religious Vigilantism in Mizoram. International Conference on Religion and Law: Colonial and Post-Colonial Encounters. Jamia Millia Islamia.



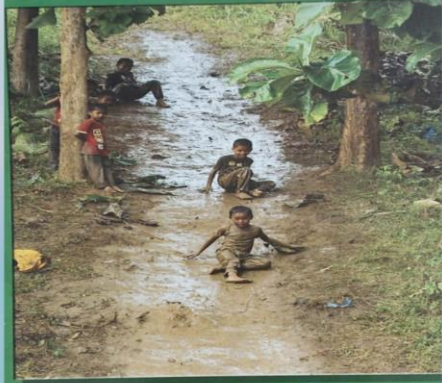
2021. Gender Socialisation and Gender non-conformity in Mizo Society. *Senhri Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* 6(1)pp. 76-83. DOI [10.36110/sjms.2021.06.01.008](https://doi.org/10.36110/sjms.2021.06.01.008)



2016: Transcending Boundaries: Alternative Sexuality and Church Response, *Senhri Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*. 1(2)pp. 1-13. e-ISSN: 2582-6840, P-ISSN: 245-3757
 DOI: [10.36110/sjms](https://doi.org/10.36110/sjms)

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2021. Positioning non-normative gender and sexual subjects in Mizo society. In Ralte, L & Bawitlung, V. (Eds.). *Gender Sensitization in Contemporary Mizo Society*. pp.38-54. Samaritan Printer. ISBN: 978-81-950141-3-2.

CHILD RIGHTS AND CHILD PROTECTION: ISSUES AND CHALLENGE	
	
C. Laldinsanga P.B. Lallawmawmi	
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6. Situational analysis of children in need of care and protection in mizo society: past and present	- Jennifer Lalbiakdik & Prof. Lalkima (Retd.)
7. Situational analysis of children in conflict with law in Mizoram	- Lalthansangi Fanai
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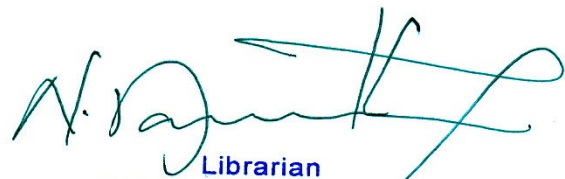
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