

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND RELIGION: THE CONTRIBUTION OF CHURCH IN MIZORAM

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Abstract

This article discusses the concept of social capital and the role of religion, mainly Church, in producing what is known as Religious Social Capital in Mizoram. Drawing from various scholars, it attempts to define the concept of social capital by touching upon different dimensions associated with it. The multiple ways through which different religion related aspects help, shape and generate the stock of society's social capital have been identified. It concludes that religious congregation is one major site for the generation of social capital in Mizo society.

Keywords: social capital, religion, church, Christianity, Mizoram.

Introduction

Academic discussions of social capital show an increasing interest in the role of religion¹ and faith-based associations as an agent of its formation. There is a growing corpus of literature about the strategic role that religious organisations such as churches are playing in fostering and producing social capital leading to social cohesion and cooperation, inclusion, networks, shared norms of reciprocity, associational life, civic engagement, political activity etc.² In this light, this paper aims to find out the manner and extent to which church can be considered as an

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important builder of social capital in the present Mizo society. Focusing on the institutional aspects and membership, it is hypothesized that churches in Mizoram have been occupying the central place in the lives of the Mizos. They are providing common places and opportunity for people to meet, creating social networks of friends and neighbours, facilitating involvement and participation in voluntary associations concerned with the health and wealth of the community, enabling the members to develop a diverse range of civic skills like leadership skills, negotiation and bargaining tactics that are instrumental in active involvement in the political affairs of one's society etc. One can say that Mizo society is very much 'churched society'³ where there is overwhelming presence of the church in the lives of the people. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine the possible contribution of religion to the creation of social capital.

This paper is structured as follows. The next few sections deal with the theoretical framework of the concept of social capital as well as religious social capital, and the different dimensions of religion that are assumed to be instrumental for social capital formation. Then, the context of Mizoram and the role of the church is discussed. And lastly conclusion is drawn.

Theory of Social Capital

The concept of social capital has achieved a remarkable acceptance among the academicians and scholars, especially in Sociology, Economics and Political Science, in the last three decades. The concept has been used widely and differently depending upon the field of study and context.⁴ The multi-dimensional nature of this kind of capital results in a number of different definitions attached to the concept. Some scholars have viewed social capital as social networks, while others conceived

of it as an aggregate behavioural informal norm. Some others identified it with features of social organisation such as trust, and there are those who combined all of these to characterise social capital.⁵ Therefore, there is still no common understanding and definition of social capital. This makes social capital an elusive concept, despite its widely empirical usages and quantitative applications. However, there are some common threads that bind together all these diverse formulations and manifestations. Generally speaking, the concept of social capital can be defined as the existence of certain sets of formal/informal values, norms, social networks, understanding, rules, expectations, organisations and associations, shared among members of a group that permits cooperation and coordination, through which they achieve economic efficiency, material resources, and the overall well-being of the community (Putnam 1993,1995,2000; Coleman 1988,1988; Bourdieu 1986; Fukuyama 1997,2000,2001,2002; Serageldin and Grootaert 2000; Ostrom, 2000; Uphoff 2000, et al.).

At the heart of the concept of social capital, lies the importance of social and cultural factors for socio-economic development, societal wellbeing and optimal institutional performances. Social and cultural components refer to shared norms of reciprocity, trust among each other, networks of civic interaction etc., through which people cooperate to accomplish common ends. Thus, the efficacy of social capital hinges upon the volume and density of social connectedness and civic engagements. Networks of civic engagement foster the norms of reciprocity and social trust. It also facilitates coordination and communication, thus allowing collective problems to be solved and broadening the agents' sense of self from I to We, thereby enhancing their taste for collective goods. For this reason, communities infused with a dense stock of social capital have better prospects and life is somehow easier (Putnam 1995, p.2).

Norms, networks of civic engagement and social connectedness also powerfully shape the performance of representative government. Society with the norms of cooperation and working together in large organisations is more likely to develop strong institutions and the rule of law. Some scholars even argue that social capital is an essential ingredient for the efficient functioning of modern economies and *sine quo non* of stable liberal democracy. Social capital is what allows individual to come together and organise themselves, to defend their interests and collective needs. It directly affects the ability of people to organise for certain economic ends, and is crucial for the consolidation of democracy (Putnam 1993. p. 2; Fukuyama 2001. p.1).

Modern theories of social capital were first formulated by Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman. Later, other scholars, especially Robert Putnam expanded the concept. According to Bourdieu (1986) 'social capital is the aggregate of actual and potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition...which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a 'credentials' which entitles them to credit'(Bourdieu 1986. p. 9). For him, the volume of one's social capital is determined by the size of the networks of connections one can effectively mobilize, and the volume of the earlier possessed capital including economic, cultural and symbolic. Bourdieu argues that group membership and a network of connections are not an end in itself. Rather he regarded the profits, which flow from those memberships and networks through multiplier effects and useful relationship, as the main reason why people engage and maintain links among themselves. Bourdieu further argues that the profit is not necessarily in the form of economic capital, but it can be reduced to economic profit. And the agents' capacity for accessing the profit and controlling capital, are unequally distributed. This

unequal distribution of capacity and access is directly responsible for social reproduction and social space (Tzanakis 2013. p. 3)

According to Coleman (1988), social capital is explained by its effects and purposes. For him, it consists of some aspect of social structures- relations among individual- and facilitates certain actions of actors within the structure. 'Social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors' (Coleman 1988, p. 98). The value of these structures of relations is that it becomes resources for the actors which they can use to achieve their goals. The concept of social capital constitutes and identifies this resource. The social structure precedes the actors who can use embedded social capital as a resource. And it is the social structure that constitutes and produces the useful social capital resources for the individuals. This very dimension differentiated social capital from other capital such as human and physical capital.

Coleman identifies three mechanisms that generated social capital, which are embedded in the social relations. First, it is obligations and expected reciprocity among people in the social structure. This obligation can be conceived as a credit slip held by one person for performance by another person. It greatly depends on the trustworthiness of the social structure that the obligation will be repaid, and the actual extent of obligation held. Individual in the social structure that exhibits high levels of obligations owns considerable social capital on which they can draw. Second is the information channel in the social structure. Information is costly to acquire, but by using social relations that one finds oneself participating, the flow of information is costless. For instance, a person who is not interested in reading newspaper, but interested in being informed about the current affairs, can save time of reading a newspaper by depending upon

friends who pay attention to such thing. Thus the social relation can provide information that facilitate action. And lastly, norms and effective sanctions constitute a powerful but a fragile form of social capital. One important form of norm is the norm that one should prioritize the interest of the collectivities over self-interest. This kind of norm reinforced by social support, honour, status and other rewards, is the social capital that builds young nation, strengthens families, and facilitates the development social movements through a small group of people. In general, it leads to public good (Coleman 1988, p. 105)

The most extensive and elaborate formulation of social capital is found in Putnam's work. With profound empirical data and onerous studies, Putnam made an attempt to add quantitative dimension to the concept. For Putnam, the core idea behind social capital is that social networks and contacts have value and effects upon the productivity of individual and groups. According to him, 'social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam 1995, p. 2). Through the connection among individuals, social networks, norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness arise. In practice, level of cooperative behaviour is equated with social capital. Social networks and community engagement involve a mutual obligation and foster sturdy norm of reciprocity- that I will do things for you with the confidence that someone will do something for me when I need. A community infused with the norms of reciprocity is more efficient than society without it. For him, trust is also an important component of social capital because it lubricates social cooperation. Without trust, cooperation and transaction are costly and nearly impossible. That means the higher the level of trust within a community the greater the chance of cooperation. Cooperation also in turns

nurtures trust. It is like a vicious cycle of endless loop. In the modern setting, according to Putnam, social trust can arise from two interrelated means- the norms of reciprocity and network of civil engagement. And these forms of social capital are like moral resources, they multiply when they are in use, and diminish if not in use (Putnam, Leonardi and Nonetti 1994, p. 169).

As can be seen, social capital concept lends itself to a variety of definitions and dimensions. However, taking a cue from Norman Uphoff (2003), one can discern the main important dimensions of social capital while accommodating different elements and definitions, by dividing into two aspects: cognitive and structural. Cognitive dimensions derive from mental process and resulting ideas that constitute the norms of reciprocity and social trust. Trust can be further divided into generalised trust and trust in the public institutions like police, church, government, media, welfare system, judiciary, parliament, civil service etc. (Oorschot, Arts & Gelissen 2006, p. 154). Structural dimension is associated with social organisations and a variety of networks that include, informal social networks like interpersonal relationship between friends, relatives, family, neighbours, and formal social networks such as membership and participation in voluntary associations and religious activities, and civic engagement. Thus, social capital mainly consists of these three components: norms, trust and networks (Uphoff 2000, p. 218; Halman & Luijkx 2006, p. 70; Radnitz, Wheatley & Zürcher 2009, p. 8).

Social Capital and Religion: Understanding Religious Social Capital

Society's stock of social capital can come from multiple sources, including both individual level factors such as, age, level of education, gender, financial and marital status, and country

level factors like, country's wealth, income inequality, governance quality, shared history. However, the contribution of religion is one of the less explored topics among the sources of social capital. It was Tocqueville, who first recognised the religious life as an important contributor to civil society and associational life. For him, associational life is essential for well-being of democracy and protection of individual liberty. Religious associational life, though not explicitly political in nature, have important political consequences in promoting civic education, fostering civic skills and bridging social cleavages. After witnessing the vibrant religious life among the Americans, he actually argued that religion should be regarded as the first of its political institutions (Smidt 1999. p. 177).

Putnam also highlights the fact that religious congregations has played a significant role in the creation of social capital. In the context of America, he asserted that church-related groups and organisations provide the most common form of associational life. He further argued that religious affiliation is the most popular associational membership among Americans and America continues to be very much 'churched society' (Putnam 1995, p. 4). How the involvement with religion affects society's social capital can be many ways. Churches provide a crucial social network and a faith community for the members which itself is an important repository of social capital. Beyond conventional worship and church attendance, religious institutions also run diverse range of social activities. Churches also inculcate civic skills, civic norms, community interest and civic recruitment, that enable the religiously active people to give a speech, run meetings, manage disagreements and other activities. They are also likely to get involved in secular and political organisations. Regular churchgoers are much more likely than others to visit friends, to attend social meetings, and to belong to diverse groups

and associations. Membership in religious groups is also closely associated with other forms of civic engagement like, voting, talking to neighbours, attending public meetings, signing petitions, contesting for political position, contributing articles for a local newspaper, delivering a public speech, and so on. Religious involvement also encourages volunteering, social service and philanthropy. Although there is no proof that churchgoing as such produces generosity or altruism, religious adherents driven by divine faith, are more likely than other non-religious people to volunteer and contribute their time and money for others, even beyond their own congregations. In sum, religion is a crucial generator of social capital (Putnam 2000, p. 67-71). Thus, religious social capital can be defined as a social resource such as trust, shared values, cooperation that individual and group enjoy and acquire through social connection and participation within the religious community, norms and beliefs. Simply, it is social capital forged through religion (Maselko, Huhges & Cheney 2011, p. 3).

Religion is an ambiguous term when one considers its relationship with social capital. Mostly, it refers to formal church membership and measures of church attendance. In this regard, Coleman (2003) rightly asks whether the congregations are the only mechanism through which religion generates social capital. He argues that religion also contributes by providing communitarian vision and civic skills (Coleman 2003, p. 35). The following are different elements of religion that are related to the society's stock of social capital.

The first religion related factor is a broad term called religiosity, encompassing different elements like believing, spirituality and faith, formal belonging to a church, attending services etc. (Kaasa 2013, p. 580). Religious beliefs and teachings urge the followers to observe the ethics of reciprocity and generosity towards others. They are assumed to be associated with honesty, decency, altruism,

humane values, charity, positive attitudes towards others etc. So religiosity is positively related to trust and norms, hence networking and cooperation are easier (Halman & Luijkx 2006, p. 74; Berggren & Bjørnskov 2011, p. 462). Formal membership and attending congregation also help attaining civic skills and expanding social network. Through the gained trust, civic skills, expanded networks, church members are also more likely to join voluntary associations (Lam 2006, p. 178).

The second important factor is what type of religious traditions, cultures and structures foster social capital since different religion may have different attitudes towards social relation and participation (Furseth 2008, p. 156; Kaasa 2013, p. 581). Usually, scholars made a comparison between Protestant and Catholic denominations. Empirical studies found that Protestantism has positive relationship with social capital while a negative relationship has been confirmed with Catholicism (Putnam, Leonardi & Nonetti 1994; Lam 2006 et al.). Catholicism stressed upon a close relationship between church and family, and nurtured hierarchical structures that foster vertical relations of passivity and subordination, such as bishop-priests-laymen relation. This makes Catholic congregations inward-oriented (bonding social capital). Whereas Protestant church are outward-oriented (bridging social capital), favouring horizontal ties between the member and the leaders, thus encouraging participation outside the church and family and a laymen leadership. Therefore, horizontal authority structures are more likely to generate social capital in general (Coleman 2003, p. 37).

The third religion related aspects is religious composition, diversity, and the size of congregations (Kaasa 2013, p. 581). In the religiously homogenous society, the attitudes and values of a dominant religion extend beyond, forcing a member of another religion as well as non-religious to conform to the dominant

norms and values. In the same way, in a society where there are considerable numbers of minority religion, the dominant religion will be weaker (Lam 2006, p. 180).

Religion as a Source of Social Capital

From the insights of the earlier works, it is hypothesized that religion is one crucial generator of stock of social capital. The following are the various possible ways in which religion can build social capital. First, religious associational life fosters social networks and connectivity, as church attendance provides an important mechanism that draws individuals together and forges associational ties. Church life created a dense social networks as the church members develop friendship and companionship by praying and worshipping together. Such networks are a crucial component of social capital as it enables the cooperation among community members to achieve mutual benefits. So it directly implicates mutual obligation and norms of generalised reciprocity. Social interaction among the community also increases the likelihood of trust. The more they connect, the more the trust each other (Putnam 1993, p. 2). Secondly, church involvement also indirectly facilitates civic engagement and participation in various associations by inculcating organisational and civic skills that are necessary for political awareness and understanding. Civic skills like leadership, organising and leading the committee, taking and defending certain positions, negotiating, bargaining, compromising, are learned through the active participation in congregational services. They are instrumental in social activism, participation in secular and religious voluntary organisations and civic involvement (Smidt 1999, p. 178). Besides congregational membership and services, churches also provide various religious based associations within its ambit. Higher level of involvement

within those church based organisations associates with an active interest in public affairs, devotion to public good, political interest, information and participation. Members of such organisations are also likely to belong to other non-religious voluntary associations as well. And thirdly, religion as a body of beliefs, values and norms, can promote a strong sense of generalised reciprocity through the doctrine of the afterlife and ubiquitous higher authority. Norms of reciprocity assume that any good deeds will be rewarded or repaid, though it may not be immediately, by other's action in the future. Such norm of reciprocity can be inferred from Biblical rules like 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you' (Luke 6, p. 31). It is also based on the trustworthiness of a stranger that will in turn lubricate interaction and even cooperation. Religious appeals of altruism and self-sacrifice also motivate volunteers, charitable contribution, philanthropy, collective interest over self-interest etc. Through these, it renders a variety of social, cultural and educational services in the community life (Ugur 2007, p. 154). However, it is not only the faith but also social connectedness associated with religious involvement that is responsible for such kind of activities. It is important to mention here that religious social capital extends its benefits even outside the institutional life of the church and in the secular context. Various church activities tend to have spill over effects of civic life. For instance, who engages in volunteer work within a church context like Sunday school teaching, church soup kitchen, church food festival, also tends to engage in other kind of secular volunteer works. Social capital forged by a religious structure supports not only formal religious volunteering, but also secular volunteering as well (Smidt 1999. p. 179, 2003, p. 12).

Having outlined the concept of social capital and the possible role of religion, especially the church, in its formation,

the following sections go on to describe the setting of Mizo society- the history of church and the features of Mizo Christianity that is supportive of the hypothesis that churches contribute major stocks of social capital in Mizoram.

History of the Church in Mizoram

The combined enterprise of Christian missionaries and Colonial power brings western project of Christianising and civilizing the savages, to the primitive tribal religion and culture. The pre-Christian social structures and traditions had to come to terms with Christianity. So the history of Christianity and church⁶ in Mizoram had been about interaction and negotiation between tradition and Gospel. It led to several processes of substitution of an old custom by Christian pursuits as well as the significant vernacularization of Christianity itself.

During the colonial period, Mizoram was known as the Lushai Hills among other hill districts in the state of Assam. It was under the rule of British India till 1947. In the post-independence era, the region was incorporated into the Indian Union as Lushai Hill District. In 1952, the Lushai Hill District was upgraded to Autonomous District Council under the Sixth scheduled to the Constitution of India. Then it was changed in Mizo Hill District in 1954 by an Act of Parliament, and later acquired the status of the Union Territory in 1972. Then, eventually Mizoram emerged as a full-fledged state of Union of India in February 1987. Before the advent of Christianity the Mizos had a traditional religion of their own, which was full of spirits and gods, ceremonies and sacrifices. However, Christianity, along with subsequent mass conversion brought a significant change which includes both continuities and discontinuities of traditions.

Remarkable evangelisation began in the late nineteenth century with the initiative of a private missionary agency called

the Arthington Aborigines Mission, founded and funded by Robert Arthington Jr. The mission sent two pioneer missionaries to Mizoram, J. Herbert Lorrain and F. W. Savidge who reached Mizoram in 1894. After a hard labour for around three and half years, the Arthington Mission was replaced by the Welsh Mission represented by David Evan Jones and Khasi evangelist Rai Bajur in 1897. The earlier two missionaries of Arthington Mission then moved to the southern part of Mizoram as the Baptist Missionary Society, which was the second mission. These two missions (Welsh and Baptist) were to be the foundation of the two dominant churches in Mizoram namely Presbyterian Church and Baptist Church. And the third mission society called the Independent Lakher Pioneer Mission began to work among the Lakher people in the southern corner of Mizoram since 1907. The church evolved by this mission came to be known as the Independent Church of Maraland. (L. Pachuau 2003, p. 156). Besides these dominant churches, smaller congregations such as Roman Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostal church and Salvation Army, as well as various sects and cults began to establish in Mizoram. It is rather difficult to locate the exact time and place of the first church in Mizoram. Before church as a separate building was constructed, missionary school serves as a place of worship for the earlier Mizo Christians. Such kind of school was started in Aizawl by F. W. Savidge in 1895 (Lloyd 1991, p. 31). Thus, some writers conclude that the missionary school is the first church in Mizoram, which in Mizo language, is called *Biak In*.⁷ However, in the course of time, need arose for a place, solely for the purpose of worship. Soon, the first *Biak In* was built in 1907 at the village of Zokhawsang. Although it was built on the outskirts of the village, it was a symbol of their faith as well as an appreciation of their freedom (Lloyd 1991, p. 110).

Through a series of revival movement, virtually all the Mizos converted into Christianity in the first four decades of the

twentieth century.⁸ In this, the early local converts played strategic role in spreading Christianity and evangelising their own people. Revival movement also succeeded in indigenizing Christianity and bringing about a hybridized form of Mizo faith, thereby engendering what is called 'Mizo Christianity'.⁹ In terms of its practice and spirit, 'Mizo Christianity' is distinct from the western practice of Christian religion. Christianity, for Mizos, is no longer a thing of alien culture, but deeply infused with one's own culture and customs, hence being a Mizo amounts to being a Christian. Christianity goes on to become one fundamental factor of Mizo identity.¹⁰ This distinct form of Mizo Christianity and its practice, inside and outside the church, is significant for the generation of social capital in Mizoram. But, the emphasis here is more on the institutional aspects including membership, attendance and church-induced activities, rather than the spiritual or experiential aspect. Nevertheless, spirituality and faith are as much important as the institutional aspect. The two are rather inseparable. What 'Mizo Christianity' features today is considered below in the form of Christian state and 'Churched' society.

Mizoram Today

A Christian State: Mizoram is predominantly a Christian state. It is one of the three Christian-majority states in India. According to the 2011 Census, Mizoram has a total population of 1,091,014 among whom 87.16 percent professes Christianity. Apart from Christianity, Buddhism is followed by 8.51 percent, Hinduism by 2.75 percent, Islam by 1.35 percent, and Sikhism and Jainism has 0.03 percent each.¹¹ Chakmas, who are predominantly Buddhists, form the majority of the non-Christian population. Other minority communities, who are immigrants from the neighbouring states of India and other countries, such as Bengalis, Nepalese, Assamese, Bihari, Oriyas and Punjabis are also part of non-Christian population.

One should be reminded that the Mizo Christians are not homogeneous, as there are competition among different denominations. Mostly, Presbyterian Church and Baptist Church constitute the majority Christians. However, other denominations such as Roman Catholics, Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostal church, Salvation Army and local affiliated churches, also contest for affiliation and make their presence felt. Although there are denominational differences among the diverse churches across the state, their customs such as didactical Sunday schools, meetings in the church, sermons etc., do not vary much. This resulted in a kind of homogenized Christian practice and experience. It can be argued that all the Mizos in Mizoram follow Christianity or have professed Christianity at least some point in their lives (L. Pachuau 2014, p. 145, 2016, pp. 47-48). While the presence of minority denominations is obvious indicator of heterogeneity, the dominant homogenized and localized Christian practice gives rise to religiously homogeneous society amidst diverse congregations. Protestantism dominates the scene as a Catholic presence in the state is quite minimal. This suggests that horizontal ties and outward-oriented structure of the Protestant church yield suitable condition for the social capital generation.

A 'Churched' Society: Churches or congregations are one of the most important institutions in the functioning of Mizo society. From usual everyday activities to significant rituals in life, such as birth, marriages and death, church has more or less something to do with it. From the most common associational memberships to the rigorous norms, values and moral sanctions, church extends its affiliations. A myriad of social networks, voluntary works, community services, charity, donations, community consolidation, civic response to social issues and problems, solidarity, social trust, are all religion or church-

induced. Moreover, faith and spirituality provide a moral basis for all kinds of public good by reinforcing spiritual ties between individual and common societal issues. It makes sure that church is predominantly present and relevant in all aspects of life. Church also holds a great deal of influence over the lives of the people. Society, in fact, functions in accordance with the values, beliefs, ethics, honors, respect and truth claims produced, sustained, and valorised by the church, beyond what is called 'Christian ethics'. For instance, pastors, local church elders and leaders and members of various church related committees constitute the so called prominent people of the locality. They are accorded much respect and honor than the lay members. Even their families stand higher status than the rest of the community. In turn, they are tasked with the responsibility of taking care of the church and its affairs. A certain kind of propriety and decorum is also expected from them. The church also has powerful moral authority to decide what is good and evil. For example, it convinces the people of the viciousness of alcohol consumption and is able to ensure the total prohibition through legislative acts.¹² Churches, to a great extent, clearly control and redefine society's values, norms and morality (L. Pachau 2014, pp. 146-147).

One of the profound remarks of 'churched' society is the centrality of the church in any given locality. One cannot but notice the enormous church buildings that manifest Christian presence in the state. 'The churches occupy prime locations and command a physical presence, sometimes rather superfluous and imposing, in comparison to the more modest and sometimes very poor neighbourhoods they serve, especially in rural areas'. (L. Pachau 2014, pp. 136). The centrality of the church is also significant in such a way that it replaced the traditional institution of *Zawlbuk* whose functions in the society are critical for society's social capital and whose location is at the centre of the village.

Churches, with its more comprehensive structures and facilities, gradually replaced it in terms of both its functions and location (Vanlalchhuanawma 2007, p. 107). *Zawlbuk*, bachelor dormitory, used to be a hub of all the youths in a village where they sleep at night. It was a place of education and the inculcation of social norms and values, disciplines, civic responsibility, sense of reciprocity, community spirit, and wonderful moral code of 'Tlawmngaihna'¹³. It was also a centre of social network and interaction among the elders and the young lads alike for entertainment, recreational activities, counselling, discussion of various issues and needs of the community etc. All in all, *Zawlbuk* was a crucial social institution where the marginal man was shaped into the responsible adult member of the society (Chatterji 1975, pp. 61-73). Modern Mizo society may no longer require the existence of such kind of institution. But, it sure needs to retain some of the values, norms and moral codes that it enforced and perpetuated. In this situation of social vacuum, churches prove to be plausible institution that caters to social gatherings and imparts norms and values. For instance, traditional code of 'Tlawmngaihna' was redefined and revived in the form of the Christian notion of charity.

Another significant cliché of 'churched' society is church-affiliated life of an individual, from birth to death. 'Church-affiliated life' is meant to emphasize the perennial relevance and guidance of the church in any significant stages of life. 'The lifespan of an individual is also marked calendrically by the Church' (L. Pachuau 2014, p. 143). A child birth is followed by the first ritual of baptizing within a few months. Here the parents took a vow to raise and guide their children in accordance with the will of God and the doctrine of the church. Then after a few years, the church fixes a date for the annual *nau hual* ceremony in which the child is marked and enrolled for the Sunday school.

Usually starting from the age of four till the age of fifteen, the child attends Sunday school. Determined by their age groups, each child completes successive stages from Beginner till the Senior class. Right before the Senior stage, a special class called 'Sacrament classes' are arranged for the youth, which is necessary for them to become a full-fledged member who can participate in the Holy Communion. A separate rite of passage is performed after they had completed such class. After the completion of all these stages, the young members are welcomed into the adult Sunday school where all adult members of men and women are incorporated. The topics for studies in the church are prepared for one year course based on a particular theme and studied accordingly. It includes a diverse range of Bible studies and the history of Christianity. In the other significant events of life, such as marriages and deaths, church also bears relevance. Marriages usually take place in a church. It is the church which sanctifies and legitimizes the union. In the case of elopement, the concept of a wedding in the courthouse is not practiced. Eventually the couple needs to take the permission from the church and the wedding takes place in the Sunday school hall. In the event of death, the church bell rings for multiple times to inform the locality. Then people gather at the house of the deceased to extend condolences and solidarity. Singing and occasional speeches by relatives of the deceased followed. It is also an occasion where all the distant relatives as well as the people in the locality come together and interact. The last funeral is then performed by the pastor or the church elder of the local church. The lifelong affiliation with the church indicates that an individual daily life is extensively determined by the church (L. Pachuau 2014, p. 145).

Through multiple mechanisms such as Sunday school teaching, counselling, sermon, church propagates certain social

values and norms which are necessary for community cooperation and solidarity. It encourages charity, sense of reciprocity, social volunteering, mutual obligation, philanthropy etc. Such values and norms promote cooperative endeavours and collective efforts and are helpful, especially in times of adversities such as an events of death, disaster and natural calamities. In such times, community comes together in unison and provides all kinds of needed aids and services for the victims. Sometimes churches and other religious institutions also directly hand out a diverse range of social services. The beneficiaries are not always the member of the congregations. A brief glance at the periodicals and bulletins of the Presbyterian Church shows various social services such as, *Hmangaihna In* (orphanage), Grace Home for people living with HIV, Youth Recreation Centre (Y.R.C), Women Centre (Training-cum-Production), Synod Multipurpose Training Centre, Charity Store for the least advantaged section, Old Age Day Care Centre, Synod Relief Fund, Synod Rescue Home (Rehabilitation centre drugs abusers) and many more.¹⁴ So besides encouraging charity and volunteering, churches itself do things that provide an opportunity for the members to actually do it.

Civic engagement, participation in community affairs, and taking an interest in public concerns be it political, educational, social or environmental, are also actively promoted by the churches and other church related organisations. Church involvement is not only about worshipping and listening to the preaching, it involves collective duty and obligation. To fulfil the institutional need of the church people actually take charge and share responsibility. It provides unique opportunity to practice how to lead others, to give a speech, to stand in front of a public, to negotiate with authority, to bargain with the government, to organise a public protest, to be administratively

responsible, to raise funds etc. Such skills can be applied to the civic involvement and participation outside the church. Many of the church related organisations also constantly engage in guiding and educating people on the issues of public importance through Seminars, Training, Workshops, Awareness campaign, and publications. Mizoram Synod Social Front is one such organisations that either directly take up public issues or motivate others to do so. It promotes education by visiting educational institutions and giving awards for good performances. It instils political awareness by encouraging the masses to vote and exercise political rights, and follow the right concept of politics. It also campaigns against drugs and alcohol abuse, and urges the non-affected people to refrain from them.¹⁵ Another relevant organisation is Mizoram People Forum (MPF), initiated by the churches in 2006, which has the objectives of educating the people of Mizoram to be responsible citizens and ensuring democratic government in Mizoram through free and fair election, where the citizen can exercise their voting rights without corruption and coercion.¹⁶ About Us: Mizoram People Forum,

Mizos are church-going people. Most of them are church members. Not everyone attends regularly, but most people do, especially on Sunday. Participation in church related activities is considered important duty. Right from the early morning, day begins with prayer meeting or *zing tawngtai inkhawm*. Mostly, elderly folks attend the service. When the day is done, it is time for night services or *zan inkhawm* which start around six o'clock. Night services are designated for different categories of the member. Different denominations may have different schedules. In the Presbyterian church, Monday night service accommodates the young people or *thalai*, who are usually within the age of eighteen to thirty-five. Tuesday night is for the women, mostly middle aged. Except for Thursday and Friday, Saturday and

Sunday night services cater to all the members. It is an occasion for prayer and preaching. Sunday is all together different day than the rest of the week. Morning church service starts around ten o clock and goes on till eleven-thirty to twelve. Sunday Schools are conducted for both the children and adults. There is a separate Sunday School hall for the children who are divided into different classes according to their ages. Adult Sunday School takes place in the church, although there are separate classes for them too, it is only for the sake of convenience. After an hour break, there is an afternoon service in which adults listen to the sermon and the children learn songs and Bible verses. In the evening, there usually is a youth fellowship program where they come together for singing, praying and sharing. And then the Sunday night service follows. ‘Time in Mizoram is governed by church time, in the span of both a day and a lifetime’ (L. Pachuau 2014, p. 140). Given the frequent religious services and gatherings throughout one’s life, church is one of the most common platforms for social interaction, a place where anyone can develop associational ties and create a social network. At the same time, frequent community interaction and concerted activities create an atmosphere of generalised trust, not only among the particular religious groups but also within the wider society where they reside.

Religious involvement has also provided an opportunity for associational life through different church-related organisations that deliver social services to the larger community. For instance, Presbyterian church has *Kristian Thalai Pawl* (Christian Youth Fellowship) for the younger members and *Kohbran Hmeichhia* (Mizoram Presbyterian Women’s Fellowship) for the women folks, that serve civic life in various ways. Similarly the Baptist church also runs various associations such as Baptist Youth Fellowship, Women’s Ministry, Baptist Men’s Fellowship and so

on. Participation in such religious associations correlates with membership in non-religious organisations as well. This is partly because the dichotomy between sacred and secular organisations is not strictly observed as long as they are to serve the wider community, and membership of both organisations is usually made up of the same group of people. It is very common that the leader of the non-religious organisation also hold leadership in religious organisation. For instance, local Young Mizo Association (Y.M.A) executive member will also be a committee member in *Kristian Thalai Pawl*, indicating that people indulged in the religious matters also involve in the civic matters. Non-religious associations also have deep religious implication. For example, Y.M.A, the largest non-religious voluntary association in Mizoram, has a motto of venerating a good Christian life. It suggests that religion has played an important role in the civic engagement and associational life.

Conclusion

Civic community with networks of civic engagements, norms of reciprocity and trust, has deep historical roots as it has evolved through the centuries (Putnam, Leonardi & Nonetti 1994, p. 183). Social capital of any society thus reflected their societal and cultural values which have developed and survived over times. It can then be treated as an exogenous entity. However, institutions and structures of a society also engender stock of social capital. For example, democratic regime or institutions of participation would increase the level of social capital. In this view, social capital is an endogenous element (Radnitz, Wheatley & Zürcher 2009, p. 3). In the context of traditional Mizo society, social capital is both cultural and institutional phenomenon simultaneously, originating from traditional ethos and moral codes such as *Tlawmngaihna*, enforced through institutions like *Zawlbuk* and chieftainship. Due to the process of modernization and Christianization, these earlier

mechanisms that generated social capital have deteriorated as traditional institutions slowly disappeared and the old ethos declined. In the modern setting, the churches with its newly acquired acceptance and wide membership became the primary spot where all sorts of community associational life and engagements have occurred. It also started to replace and supplement the indigenous norms and values with norms based on Protestant ethics. Although there are other parallel existing institutions that fostered associational life and sustained trust, perhaps the church is all encompassing institution that can embrace and accommodate all. Given the frequent church programs and services, countless faith-based voluntary works, numerous church-induced activities, values and morality, Mizo society with a Christian majority, is indeed a 'churched' society, where religion contributes most of its social capital.

(Notes)

¹ Religion here mostly refers to Christianity/ Church in most of the existing works. This paper also does the same.

² For the existing literature, see Kaasa, Anneli. 2013. "Religion and Social Capital: Evidence from European Countries." *International Review of Sociology* 578-595; Lam, Pui-Yan. 2006. "Religion and Civic Culture: A Cross-National Study of Voluntary Association Membership." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 177-193; Berggren, Niclas, and Christian Bjørnskov. 2011. "Is the Importance of Religion in Daily Life Related to Social Trust? Cross-country and Cross-state Comparisons." *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 459-480; Furseth, Inger. 2008. "Social Capital and Immigrant Religion." *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 147-164; Smidt, Corwin E. 1999. "Religion and Civic Engagement: A

Comparative Analysis.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 176-192; Wuthnow, Robert. 2002. “Religious Involvement and Status-Bridging Social Capital.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 669-684, et al.

³ This concept is borrowed from Robert Putnam

⁴ According to Woolcock and Narayan (2000), there are nine major fields on which the concept of social capital is applied, namely (1) schooling and education (2) families and youth behaviour problems (3) community life (4) work and organisations (5) democracy and governance (6) general cases of collective action problems (7) public health and environment issues (8) crime and violence (9) economic development. According to Ferragina (2010), the concept of social capital has been used to talk about diverse issues like, policies of local development, importance of traditional community values, social class perpetuation and social immobility, decline of ‘civicness’ and trust in developed countries, integration of social networks into the definition of the utility functions of the individuals.

⁵ For instance, Nan Lin (2001) defines social capital as rooted in social networks and social relations. According to him, social capital is a resources embedded in social networks, which are accessed and mobilized in purposive actions. Others like Fukuyama (2000) sees social capital as an instantiated informal norms that promote cooperation between two or more individuals. And then people like Robert Putnam (1995) uses social capital to refer to features of social organisations, such as norms, networks and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits. But for Norman Uphoff (2000), social capital consists of all these elements. He distinguished two integrated categories of phenomena; structural and cognitive. Where the former constitutes features like roles,

rules, networks, procedures, precedents etc, and the latter comprises of norms, values, attitudes, beliefs etc.

⁶ ‘Church’ here is used to designate both the Mizo Christian community as a whole and the institutional/ecclesiastical body. Mainly, it refers to the two dominant Protestant churches to which the majority of the Mizo Christian belong today, namely Mizoram Presbyterian Church and Baptist Church of Mizoram. ‘Church’ can also be used as one whole entity to identify the two denominations since their functionings are evidently similar as if they are one single organisation.

⁷ See Saiaithanga. 1969. *Mizo Kohhran Chanchin*. Aizawl: Loch Printing Press.

⁸ See Lalsawma. 1994. *Revivals: The Mizo Way* . Aizawl.

⁹ See Kipgen, Mangkhosat. 1996. *Christianity and Mizo Culture: The Encounter between Christianity and Zo Culture in Mizoram*. Aizawl: The Mizo Theological Conference; Vanlalchhuanawma. 2006. *Christianity and Subaltern Culture: Revival Movement as a Cultural Response to Westernization in Mizoram*. Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

¹⁰ For Christianity and Mizo identity, see Pachuau, Joy LK. 2014. *Being Mizo: Identity and Belonging i n Northeast India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹¹ Mizoram Population Census data 2011 2015, <http://www.census2011.co.in/census/state/mizoram.html> . Accessed September 25, 2016

¹² Today alcohol is legalised and its sales and consumption regulated. It still is one of the most discussed and unending debate topic in Mizo society.

¹³ ‘Tlawmngaihna’ is a moral force which finds manifestation in various types of social activities, prioritizing the needs of others

over one's own. It can also be explained in terms of self-sacrifice for the plight of others or altruism.

¹⁴ For more information, go to <http://www.mizoramsynod.org>

¹⁵ Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod 2006, <http://mizoramsynod.org/index.php?phek=bawm&bid=11>. Accessed September 24, 2016

¹⁶ About Us: Mizoram People Forum, http://mizorampeopleforum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=84&Itemid=64. Accessed September 24, 2016

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