Manifestation of Cultural and Settlement Patterns of Vernacular Mizo Villages in Modern Neighborhoods of Mizoram, India

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Abstract

Vernacular settlements along with culture have always formed the basis in the creation of societies. The traces of the origins are seen in many modern communities all over the world. The paper discusses the link between the settlement pattern of a Mizo tribal village and its inherent cultural traditions with the modern urban localities/neighbourhoods called 'Veng'. Mizoram located in the North-eastern part of India with its hilly topography, societal structure and other layers presents a unique case in the understanding of the evolution of vernacular settlements. The inquiry attempts to understand how the vernacular settlement pattern and its embedded culture have influenced the strengthening of communities and community feeling.

The hill tribes of Mizoram usually choose a strategic location for their village guided by certain factors. The communities were administered by very strong social institutions: the Chief and 'Zawlbuk' (bachelors' quarter) which were placed spatially at a very prime location in the village. The open space containing these two important structures (the social institutions) of the village is where the public activity is enjoyed. Due to certain forces, the social institutions are now substituted by a newly reformed organization and with the evolution of the spatial layout, the research brings out how the original spatial and cultural manifestations are realized in modern day localities of Mizoram and how they contribute to community integrity.

The methodology follows a literature study of the historical settlements and cultural traditions and primary studies of the present scenario. Comparisons from various tangents are made from the past to the present in terms of settlement pattern, layout, administration via social institutions etc. to validate the research. The paper concludes by emphasizing on the importance of spatial layout of vernacular settlements and its subsequent cultural traditions in creating strong community culture, which further allows to brace itself from crisis.

Keywords: Vernacular culture, Socio-Spatial, Social institution, Veng, community integrity

1. Introduction

Culture and tradition plays a vital role in the formation of societies thus providing social sustainability, and metaphysical attributes. Indigenous settlements have the influence of

socio-cultural aspects in the spatial layout of their spaces due to certain factors. In the context of Mizoram, the terrain has proved to be a major phenomenon in choosing a site for habitation. The social customs and societal structure have contributed to the utilisation of spaces very specific to the community. This will be elaborated in the various factors contributing to the socio-spatial pattern of the settlement and how this has led to the integration of the community.

The aim of the paper is to bring out the importance of domestication of indigenous culture and vernacular spatial pattern in the contemporary era; as a way forward for community integrity.

The objectives of the study are as follows-

- To trace the vernacular spatial layout and cultural traditions of the Mizo people.
- To highlight the influence of socio-cultural aspects in the spatial layout of Mizo villages.
- To establish links in the spatial and the cultural manifestations of the vernacular settlement with the modern-day Mizoram to understand how this has helped in the strengthening of communities.
- To draw conclusions through the learnings from Mizo community.

Literature Review

The question arises as to whether there is an influence of socio-cultural traditions in the spatial layout of settlements; and whether indigenous settlements rooted to culture is an important factor for community integrity.

Culture as a word has a widespread use, which makes it ambiguous enabling it to enter in different fields. Many of the definitions that refer to the concept of culture tend to shelter the cultural expressions and elements (Mozaffar et al., 2012). According to Sekimoto (1983), culture is human-made by their reliance on Nature and human resources. In order to produce culture, people express their way of life according to particular criteria and sources.

As stated by Memmott & Long (2002), 'A place can be partly or wholly created by enacting special types of behaviour at a particular piece of environment. Such behaviour becomes associated with that place. Territorial relations with place are a special form of place behaviour. People move into new environments, establish new places in such, create boundaries around their places and may be prepared to defend them. Such behaviour may be linked to cultural mechanisms of survival. Most indigenous settlements experience invasions from enemies and wildlife and demands consolidation among the people. Such behaviour and mind-set are often born out of necessity in vernacular settlements, which over time is inculcated as a part of culture. The relationships born out of this may get transcended in modern day in having societies and communities willing to take care of each other. This may mean that community integrity exists in vernacular societies which are strongly rooted to their culture and tradition.

Settlements have historically been shaped by their need to be compatible with social norms and lifestyles (Askarizad, 2019). Properties of place are transmitted socially and thus may stay constant through generations and cultural periods (Memmoth & Long, 2002). Rapoport (1969) says that the local or cultural tradition has a direct connection with the physical structure of each culture. In other words, they are both necessary for each other. According to Moore (1992), a settlement has specific characteristics; therefore, it is an artefact of human expression from his way of thinking. A settlement is largely contributed by the socio-cultural aspects that are involved in it. Rapoport implied socio-culture as the shaping and modifying factors in a settlement (Perry et al, 2005). The reflection of socio-cultural strength, such as beliefs, family relations, social organisation, social or individual interaction, produces the settlement. (Marpaung, 2017).

The above points can be inferred by concluding that there is an influence of socio-cultural traditions in the physical structure and spatial layout of settlements and *vice versa*.

If there is a mutual interaction between people and environments, then there must be some mechanisms, which link them. In the case of several of these, the environment is, then, closely linked to culture and a number of aspects of Man-environment interaction and design can be seen in terms of congruence, whereby people try to match their characteristics, values, expectations and norms, behaviors and so on to physical environments. (Rapoport, 1997). Rapoport explains that there are various factors linking Man and environment (physical) which is very closely linked to culture, which may also mean that people mould themselves or adjust their behaviours with respect to the physical layout of the spaces they inhabit. This may be inferred as an interconnection between a settlement pattern and the culture of a place, which, when guided by the local traditions and practices can bring the communities together, thereby manifesting the aspect of domestication on a community level in the strengthening of communities.

Research Methodology

The study follows a grounded research method. It applies descriptive research which is done in two parts. A literature study of the Mizo historical settlements and cultural traditions and primary studies of the present day. The literature study includes facts about the historical evolution of Mizoram as a whole and the forces and changes in the social organization through readings of various books and research papers relevant to the research inquiry. The study of the history brings out the aspects, which shaped the vernacular settlement and the social structure, which holds the community together.

For the primary study, firstly, the open space structure map is provided to relate it to the evolution of the spatial pattern of the city over time. For demonstration, the study zooms into Chaltlang veng to describe the pattern of the spatial organization as well as the societal structure to prove the case. Chaltlang is a locality in the capital city Aizawl, situated in ward no 2 of the administrative division which is in the center of the Aizawl urban area. The morphology of Chaltlang is studied through maps and sections generated by the author, images from sources, and survey of movement with respect to the adjacent localities. Data from Chaltlang YMA is taken to support the role of the social institution in the community. Other studies are done through personal observations and experiences as well as interviews of certain stakeholders. The links are then established by retracing the historical socio-spatial pattern and analyzing the current socio-spatial structure to support the objectives of the paper through the understanding of the literature and data collected.

The relationships established in this study are mainly out of participant observations over the years as a resident of the place.

2. Geography, Land and People

The hilly region previously called the Lushai Hills (now known as Mizoram) lies in the Southernmost fringe of North-East India, lying between 21°56'N - 24°31'N latitudes and 92°16'E – 93°26'E longitudes. It was bounded on the North by Syhlet and Cachar districts of Assam and the native State of Manipur state; on the East and South-East by the Chin Hills District of Burma; and on the West by the native State of Tippera and the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and on the South by the Arakan district of Burma. The Mizo's were originally known as the Lushai, though now they prefer to call themselves Mizo as the term generally includes all the sub-tribes of Mizo hills. Mizoram is the new name given to the hilly areas earlier known as Lushai Hills. The Mizos live in a close-knit homogeneous society with no class distinctions. There is no discrimination on the ground of caste or sex. (Lalkima,1997). This region was the native land of the people who were of Mongoloid stock in origin, whose language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group. In the colonial and pre-colonial period, these people were

known variously by the outsiders as the Kukis, Chins or Lushais. They had lived in numerous small hamlets and villages scattered at long distances, which were governed by the chiefs, and were abstained from a sense of a nation state. (Pachuau, 2009; Singh, 2016).

Fig 1a): Map of Mizoram
Source: The Camera as Witness-A Social History
of Mizoram, Northeast India, Pachuau, 2015

Fig 1b): Map of Mizoram and its neighbours
Source:A.G.Mc.Call,
Lushai Chrysalis

3. Pre-Colonial Era (post 1800s)

Site/Village Selection-Veng/Khua

It is evident that the mountainous setting and its adverse climatic condition are centered towards the upbringing, upholding diversity and governing the livelihood of the Mizos. The topography in Mizoram was a no match for the hill inhabitants to manipulate, but rather to emulate and harness its full potential, a refuge and a safe haven against the attacks by the opponents of the other villages of Mizoram. The houses in the villages were of temporal-built forms made of locally abundant materials, bamboos that cascade along the steep slopes, gently hugging the contours with ample amount of daylight, air and a wide range of view of the surroundings. The hill tribes of Mizoram usually build their houses on the hilltop to protect themselves from wild animals, enemies and the location serves as a conducive place for living in terms of the quality of air, light and views. It also allows for the possibility of having some flat areas of land for a public place and social gathering.

Village layout

Every Mizo village was ruled by a Chief. The house of the chief sits at the centre or a prime location of the village; a bachelor's quarter called 'Zawlbuk' where the male youth train and learn, and the house of the nobles are located close to the chief's house. Due to the hilly topography, the houses of the common people are located at subsequent levels connected through winding paths. Zawlbuk was normally a square building with a thatch roof, bamboo mat walls and floor and usually situated beside or below the chief's house. Zawlbuk was not only the abode of the youth but was indeed a training ground wherein the youth were shaped into responsible adults. It is the place where they learn all the different norms considered a good way of living. It was an oral library where indigenous knowledge was shared and inculcated to new generations (Zama, 2012). It also served as rendezvous in times of social conflicts, disasters and wars (Nunthara, 1996). One of the principles behind such gathering is clearly for safety of the entire

village, as all the most able men are readily called into action. Hence, it was also a form of military barracks. It was particularly important as the village lives were frequently interrupted by wild beasts and enemy invasions (Bhatia, 2012).
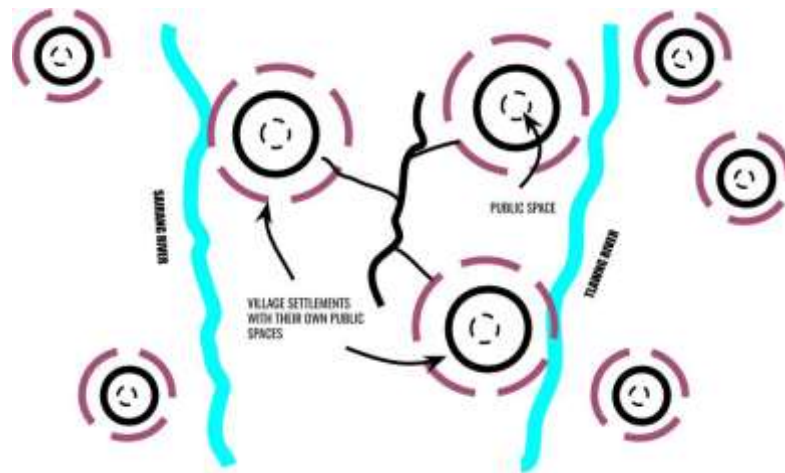
Fig 2: Structure plan of Urban Morphology-Aizawl before 1966
Source: Hmar, 2014

Fig. 3: Typical Mizo village layout
Source: Hmar, 2014
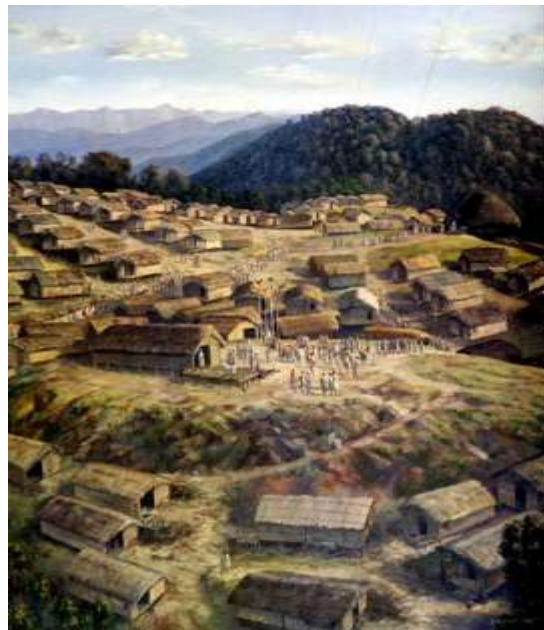
Fig. 4: Typical Mizo village with Chief's house and Bachelor's house (Zawlbuk) in centre
Source: Painting by Zozehart

Fig. 5: Typical Zawlbuk house being showcased in Falkawn
locality of Aizawl
Source: Lalrinliana Sailo

Social Structure and Village Administration

The Chief (Lal), the nobles (Khawnbawl Upa and Val Upa) and the participants (male youths) of Zawlbuk form the social institutions. The role of social institutions is very important since they run the administration, protect its people and work towards bringing integration of their community. The chief along with the nobles enforces *'Ziak loh dan'* (unwritten law) for the smooth functioning of the village. For the integrity of the people of the village, the community's interest was always put first than the private interests.

Fig 6: Mizo Sailo Chief
Source: Lalrinliana Sailo

Fig 7: Mizo village inhabitants
Source : Lalrinliana Sailo

Community Life and Activities

The public activities which are prevalent in the village are harvest festivals (Kut) which includes dancing, singing, feasting etc. All these activities are enjoyed and expressed in the '*Kawtzawl*' (open space) containing the important structures (the social institutions) of the village therefore highlighting the importance of the spatial layout of the settlement. A death ceremony was also a ritual where all the public participate in the funerary process and consoles the members of the bereaved family by singing. The gathering for this event mostly happens inside the house of the concerned family which can be added as a subset for social interaction. As for the Chief, this is demonstrated in the public/open space of the village and for the nobles and the notable hunters/warriors '*Pasaltha*', they are conducted in the Zawlbuk.

Socio-spatial interrelation

The village was socio-spatially oriented and it enabled having different levels of social interaction. Utmost priority being the '*Kawtzawl*' (open space) contained within

the social institutions; the secondary being the lanes or paths connecting houses; the third, being the funerary activities inside the house (Fig 9). The '*Kawtzawl*' proves to be the most important space since it holds together the important structures in the village- the Chief's house and the 'Zawlbuk'. It also holds a strong perceptual and intangible position in the community due to the presence of the social institutions and also due to the fact that it is the place where the culture and tradition is expressed. The lanes and paths connecting the houses is where children play ('*Pawnto*': local word for playing) and neighbours intermingle. The funerary activities sometimes extend beyond the confines of the house to the front yards and this activity as described before is where the micro level of interaction occurs.

Fig. 8: Crowd gathering in the open area near Zawlbuk
Source: TOI group

Lanes/Paths

Kawtzawl

Front spaces of houses

Fig. 9: Typical Mizo settlement showing spaces for levels of social interaction
Source: Painting by Zozehart, edited by Author

4. Colonialism and Christianity: Agents of Transformation (1870-1947)

Colonial annexation meant that the hill people were now ruled from the plains – an entirely new experience for them. The first few decades after 1891 brought serious self-reflection and reorientation. They had to adapt to new overlords, new political institutions and new procedures. However, most of all, they had to come to a new understanding of their place in the world. This required vigorous cultural adaptation. When the British took over the administration of the Lushai Hills, J. Shakespeare, the first superintendent of the Lushai Hills District under the Assam Government introduced a new land tenure system in 1898-1890. In the new land settlement, boundaries were fixed for every village and all the chiefs were given a boundary paper called *'Ramri Lehkha'*. The jurisdiction of each chief was clearly demarcated based on the decision made by the British administration and not by the chief. Thus, the new land settlement stopped the migratory character of the people and thus, the Mizo could no longer shift their villages in search of fertile land and good water sources. (Lalzuimawia, 2016; Vanlalhmangaihsanga, 2020).

Land Reforms and Policy: Retaining the Chieftainship

Land settlement of 1898-99 was introduced to stabilize the situation. It vested all land in the government, which then apportioned village areas to the chiefs and established their boundaries. Within those boundaries, the chief and his people could move about for the jhum cultivation as they wished. An unrestricted movement to other parts of the hill was thus curbed.

The traditional political system of the Mizos was hereditary chiefship. Customary laws decided disputes arising among themselves and during the British period such laws had legal sanction as well. Each village used to be a separate unit under the full power of its chief or "Lai". The chief enjoyed wide powers and he was assisted by "Upa" or Council of village elders. The following were the duties of the traditional chiefs during the British period. (Lalzuimawia, 2016).

The wave of Gospel: A progress in literacy and education

The Christian Missionaries came to Mizoram in 1894 (Hluna,1985), who were the pioneers in the field of education. They introduced education based on Roman script and opened schools. Even today, a number of schools in Mizoram are run by the Church. The overall development of the literacy standard of the Mizos was due to the sincere efforts and sacrifice of the Christian missionaries, and in the post-independence period, it was the joint venture of the Christian missionaries and the Government that succeeded. The introduction of education gradually led to social regeneration in the Mizo society by ensuring modification and abolition of numerous indigenous social practices. A new educated group emerged in the society who found their traditional political system oppressive, which ultimately led to the demand for introducing modern democratic form of administration. The growing Church substantially dominated and transformed Mizo society with the gradual orientation of the community through Church Organizations, Church Youth Organizations, Women's Organizations and Elder Men within the realms of the Church (Kipgen, 1997; Zorinsanga, 2016; Pachuau, 2009).

Negotiation of Social Institutions | Abolishment of Chieftainship

As the community embraced the newfound faith, commoners slowly got educated and changed their perspective. As evangelism and its deep roots endowed a change in worldview, they felt that it was not enough to be led by Chiefs. Faith until present day engraved a huge role in establishing a healthy, civic and harmonized living. It was for them to abolish their old ways, chieftainship and certain malpractices ended. The traditional Zawlbuk system was replaced by Churches and on the latter civic secular institutions. Hence, villages had their activities centered towards Churches, Sunday Schools and Communions had a deep role in bringing cohesion. Christian death ceremonies led a village owned community graveyard replacing the old customs and no longer relevant practices. (Zohmingmawia, 2020).

Evolution of Modern Civic Institutions and Social Changes (YMA)

The Young Mizo Organization (YMA), the present largest organization was formed in 1935, formerly known as Young Lushai Association (YLA), renamed for a more democratic and inclusive approach. That stems out from the changes that society has gradually undergone and to cater to the local complexities that progress in literacy has brought, to combat the divide that progress in literacy had brought in; income and occupation differences. The YMA can be best understood as a voluntary non-governmental, secular organization set up at each Veng (village/locality). Its broad functions are closely influenced by Christian ethics, civic matters and good practices apprehended from generations to the other. Participation in such religious associations correlates with membership in non-religious organizations as well. (Zohmingmawia, 2020; Zorinsanga, 2016). Other organizations such as the Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), 1974; women's federation and the Mizo Upa Pawl (MUP), 1957; elderly citizen organizations also play a huge role.

The adoption of Christianity and the formation of community-based organizations like YMA led to the drastic change in the social structure of the community. The newly formed social institutions namely the Church and YMA fabricated the morals and norms to be followed in the communities.

5. Independence and Statehood: An expressway to Urbanization

As the nation gained independence, the Lushai Hills came under the Govt of Assam as the Lushai Hills District. The formation of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) did not meet the aspirations of political leaders of some tribal groups who complained of neglect by the Assam state. (Lalrintluanga, 2008). The first democratic

elections were held in 1952 and the first village council elections in 1954 (Pudaite, 2005) that replaced chiefs. Thus began a new era of government by the people in the form of village councils (Kamath & Waingankar, 2015). Soon movements demanding greater autonomy ensued. The trigger for insurgency however was the 1959 '*Mautam famine*' that was caused by bamboo flowering, and the subsequent boom in the rat population that devastated all the crops. The Mizo National Famine Front (Mizo National Front) was formed, launching insurgency in 1966 to form a sovereign state.

Violence Swept across the Hills
        The violent legacy of the period under insurgency has had important consequences not least the effect on urbanization. The process of forced village grouping – a governmental strategy to isolate villagers from insurgents and more easily keep watch on them – was enacted as part of a spatial control of settlements (Nag, 2012). Due to the practice of *'Khaw Khawm'* (Grouping of villages) there was a huge influx in the city, that led to change in morphology, density and recognition of more localities gave a larger footprint area of the city by 1971 (Hmar, 2014).
        However, the settlement pattern still followed the earlier vernacular Mizo village with each locality or veng having an open space to be utilized by the locality for public activities - sports, festivals, etc.
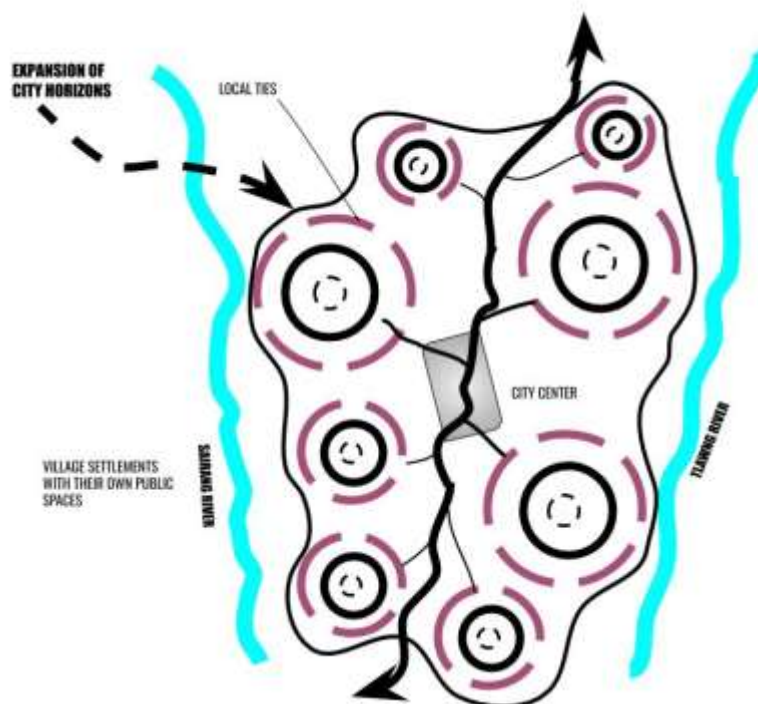

Fig 10: Grouping of villages (Khawkhawm)
Source: Hmar,2014

The Inevitable Urban Growth
        Modernization, and urbanization, the two underpinnings that contribute immensely to the growth of towns. As being said by Lalthankima, (2015); the girth of towns and drastic rise in population was much faster than the growth of infrastructure and service sector, for the latter to be able to cope with it. The Lushai Hills became one of the districts of Assam till 1972, when it was upgraded to the status of Union Territory. On 20th February, 1987, Mizoram was granted statehood and became the twenty-third state of India (Lalnithanga, 2010).

Veng as global villages

The rapid growth of Aizawl's population has put tremendous pressure on the land, economy and physical infrastructure of the city. Aizawl Development Authority Act, passed in 2005 was subsumed by Aizawl Municipal Council under JNNURM in 2010 and then eventually by 2015, Aizawl Municipal Corporation. Where village councils were rechristened as local councils under Ward Committees. (Saitluanga, 2018).

On a larger note, the Mizo urbanism anchored in the veng or locality, setting in motion indigenous politics. Veng(s) are village-like habitations of approximately 1500–5000 people that have distinct histories of settlement, configurations of infrastructure and inter-connected governance by village councils (VC), community and church organizations. A veng can be best understood as a socio spatial unit, where a community's affinity, territorialization and solidarity co-exists with neither homelessness nor slums (Kamath, 2020).

The settlement pattern continued the vernacular upbringing and centered around the former 'Kawtzawl' most commonly referred today as 'Field'. Each locality has a church (mostly more than one) and a YMA hall/office since they formed the new social institutions. The Figure 11 shows the city level structure plan of Aizawl showing the localities having their own open space called field centered around the neighborhood which is where many public activities are enjoyed.
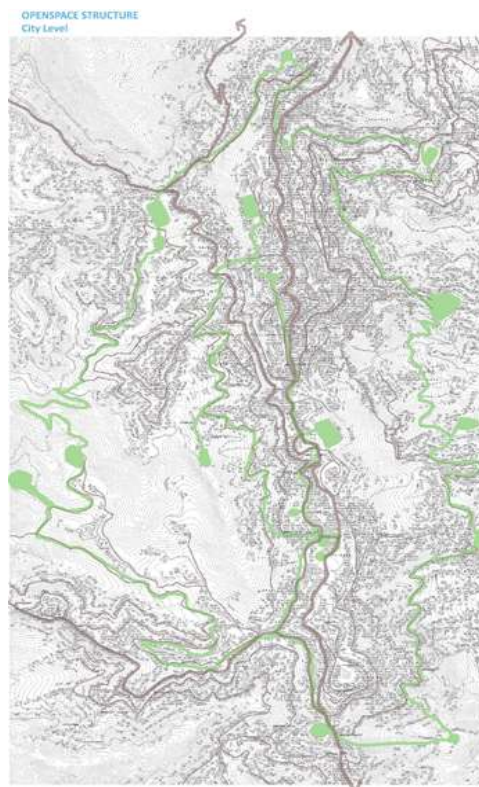
Fig 11: Contemporary Aizawl city level open space structure
Source: Hmar, 2014

6. Memoirs, Reflections and Manifestations from the Past

The case of Chaltlang veng, Aizawl

Through the tracing of the vernacular settlement, it is observed that the same layout of the vernacular spatial pattern is replicated in the Chaltlang locality with the administrative centre being substituted with a different establishment. The Local

council house now stands where ideally the Chief's house would have stood. The Zawlbuk have long been substituted with the Church with the arrival of Christianity and the playground/field now holds a venue for festive occasions and social gatherings. The spatial layout clearly shows traces of vernacular spatial layout with the presence of the structures of the new social institutions (the Church and the Council house for YMA) and the open space (Fig 12). They are situated at the prime location of the veng, binding together the entire neighbourhood.

It is observed that there is an intangible aspect of a feeling of integrity being steered by the social institutions mainly because of their role to the people of the community as well as their physical position in the spatial layout.

Fig. 12: Aerial view of Chaltlang
Source: Image - Patea Chawngthu, edited by Author

Fig. 13: Figure ground of Chaltlang central area
Source: Author, Rastered from Google satellite image)

Fig. 14: Chaltlang Field (1950-55) showing public activity
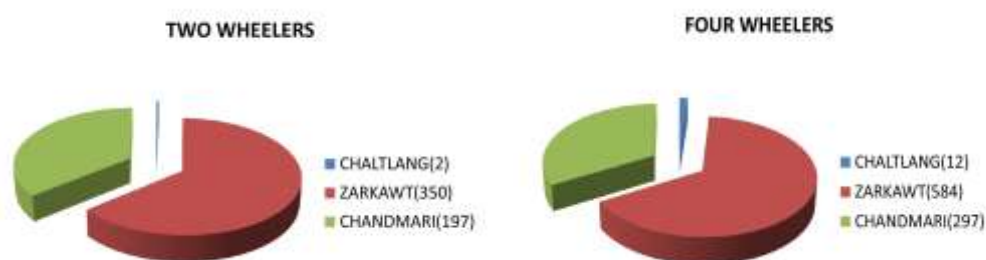Source: Chaltlang YMA

Fig. 15: Chaltlang Field (year unknown) showing public activity
Source: Chaltlang YMA

Topographical Variations and Dispositions

The hills of Mizoram have always been a shield that keeps the village intact. Every typical Mizo village starts from the hilltop branching out towards the foothills, which often makes accessibility difficult providing an advantage in warfare. Although times have changed and developed to a much more modern society, this vernacular layout still proves to be an advantage in many aspects. The urban village is an entity that exists only in concept for most parts of the country. However, the precipitous terrain presents an opportunity where it could indeed exist. The Chaltlang hill separates the locality from the adjacent localities of Zarkawt and Chandmari and therefore restricting the vehicular penetration and commercial potential of Chaltlang drastically. To understand this, the traffic movement was observed for 10 minutes in Chaltlang, Zarkawt and Chandmari between 12:45pm to 12:55pm on a weekday and the result shows an immense contrast in vehicular movements in Chaltlang compared to the adjacent localities.

This data is mapped to understand that despite the locality being present in the prime location in the capital city of the state, there exists a high level of social interaction on the streets due to the locality not disturbed by a lot of vehicular movement due to topographical variation; which shows similarities with the vernacular spatial pattern and use of spaces.

Fig 16: Comparative data of vehicular movement in Chaltlang and adjacent localities
between 12:45 - 12:55pm on a weekday
Source: Author

The Role of Functioning as a Collective

"The veng is the basic unit of social organization. Identification with a veng goes beyond the purposes of an address or of the location of one's family. It carries with responsibilities and associations, as well as expectations that signify and give meaning to belonging." (Pachuau, 2014). Despite having diverse age groups, background and income, the close-knit nature of the community remains intact. Resulting in collective decision and upbringing, a locally driven and locally responsive neighborhood in which

residents are involved in managing the life of the village. This manifests itself in the community participation during times of unfortunate plights in the locality. The funerary customs in Chaltlang presents an excellent example of community participation guided by the social institutions. The YMA with its slogan *'Tlawmngaihna'* meaning 'Service above self' acts as a binding element for uniting all the residents of the society. The youngsters both male and female from each family voluntarily participate in the functioning of the YMA, which renders it as a strong community-based organization; an impact of our predominant Christian identity. Each locality has a space assigned for a cemetery reserved exclusively for the locality, which is handled by YMA. Each year a sum of Rs. 250 is collected from each household called *'Chhiatni fund'* which is to be used in times of death, crisis etc., eg, 43 deaths were recorded in Chaltlang locality in the year 2020 and two bags of rice and Rs 8000 were given to each family funded by the "Chiatni Fund".

This collective functioning of the community is possible because of the guidance by the social institutions (the Church and YMA), a culture which has been passed on through generations and this largely contributes to integrity in the community.

Fig. 17: Community participation in a funeral
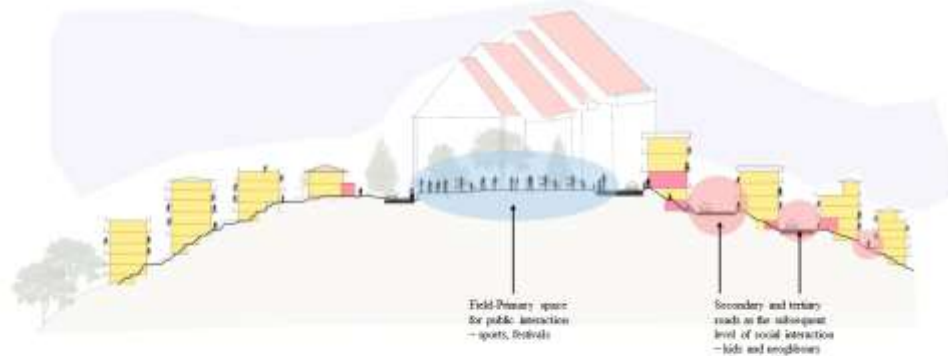Source: Chaltlang YMA

Fig. 18: Community participation for burial
Source: Chaltlang YMA

Interconnections and Dependencies

Roads though their main purpose is for transportation and connectivity, they often are a complex form of interactive space which binds the community. Spaces have a unique way of creating interactions between people, the roads of Mizo village provide just that. Typical Mizo villages were never mass transit oriented. Rather they branch out in a series of tertiary and secondary roads forming a web of connections inside the locality. Not only does the web of roads link to almost every part of the area, it also creates pockets of space which automatically acts as interactive space. The secondary and tertiary roads are more inviting for pedestrians and smaller vehicles resulting in a more vibrant street life for the children and adults alike. Children playing on the roads, adults sharing a drink or having a conversation are a common occurrence on the roads which if not for the layout would certainly be rarer. Secondly, the width of the roads plays a significant role in aiding the strength of the community. Proximity has always been an important factor in urban sociology. It comes as no surprise that people living near narrow roads tend to connect more with their neighbors than the ones living near a highway. Roads in these regions are rarely more than 3m wide, which renders the roads a shared space between the rows of buildings facing each other.

Therefore, interactions are made possible due to the layout and the width of roads similar to the vernacular layout as well. This encourages the communities to come out of their houses, socialize and interact which generates stronger bonds between them.

Fig. 19: Section across the field of Chaltlang veng showing levels of interaction
Source: Author

Fig. 20: Tertiary roads-subsequent level of social interaction (kids playing)

Fig. 21: Secondary roads-subsequent level of social interaction

Fig. 22: YMA aiding the community during pandemic

7. Conclusion

The typical layout of Mizo village branches out from a core consisting of (Lal in) Chief's house, Zawlbuk, Kawtzawl (open space) which since earlier times functioned as an administrative and cultural hub. The Chief's house and "Zawlbuk" serves as social institutions to the village. The open space near the Chief's house caters to the festive occasions. The presence of the central open space and the structures of the social institutions holds the community together, in both the tangible and intangible way. There were subsequent levels of interaction provided by the Kawtzawl (open space), paths and lanes, and the funerary activities at the household level. The physical spaces along with the culturally rooted traditions guided by the social institutions have influenced the strengthening of communities and community feeling. There was a sense of belonging, a protected feeling and an avenue for public activity and interaction in the village.

With the multiple changing forces over time, there was a massive change in the societal structure; the abolition of Chieftainship, the birth of new community-based organizations mainly the YMA, the Church and the evolution of different localities (Veng) influenced by the rise in population and modernization. Despite the changing forces, what remains intact is the ethnic indigenized urbanism. The contemporary era moulded itself following similar patterns with the traces of the vernacular settlement layout and indigenous culture. This is presented through the study of Chaltlang veng

looking at the spatial layout, topographical dispositions, role of collective community functioning guided by the social institutions. The present day 'Veng' centres itself around the open space (field) contained by the structures of the social institutions. The open space/field presents itself as the primary space for neighborhood interaction where festivals, sports etc are enjoyed. There are subsequent levels of interaction provided by the secondary and tertiary roads where children play and neighbors intermingle. The third layer happens in the Church (in times of weddings and community service) and the funerary activities inside the houses (also extends in the front space of the house). All these activities are guided by the new social institutions mainly the Church, the YMA and other community-based organizations. The presence of such spaces and institutions created a strong community culture and a sense of belonging leading to community integrity. The presence of the social institutions poses a big advantage for the community since they provide aid in times of any crisis occurring in the neighborhood. This was clearly seen in the recent pandemic of 2020 wherein they distributed food and other utilities to each house of the locality, maintained and guarded quarantine centers etc.

This inherent cultural tradition as well as the physical spaces manifests from the vernacular traditions. This, therefore highlights the importance of domestication of indigenous culture and vernacular spatial pattern in the contemporary era which in the case of Mizoram presents itself as a strong factor behind the strengthening of communities.

Glossary

Aizawl	: Capital city of Mizoram
Chaltlang	: A locality in Aizawl North
Chhiatni fund	: An amount which is collected from each household to be used in times of death, crisis etc.
Kawtzawl	: A flat open space in front of a structure / front yard/front lawn
Khawkhawm	: Grouping of villages (the insurgent period)
Khawnbawl Upa	: Noblemen, the Chief's Nobles
Khua	: Village/Town irrespective of size and agglomeration
Lal	: Village Chief/ Chief of a clan
Lushai	: A tribe under Kuki-Chin group mostly referred as Mizo
Mautam	: Meaning 'bamboo death' which is a cyclic ecological phenomenon that occurs every 48 years in Mizoram and Manipur. A bamboo flowering leading to a sudden rise in rodents causing famine
Mizo	: Zo people who are native of Mizoram and the Chin
Mizoram	: A northeast Indian state in India
MHIP	: Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl, a women welfare/federal organisation
MNF	: Mizo National Front, a regional political party in Mizoram
MUP	: Mizo Upa Pawl, an elderly welfare organisation
Pasaltha	: A name/honour given to a notable hunter/warrior of the clan
Pawnto	: A local word to describe kids playing
Ramri lehkha	: Boundary letter/record
Tlawmngaihna	: Meaning 'service above self'
Val Upa	: Elder / Member of the Locality
Veng	: A local name for locality/neighborhood
YMA	: Young Mizo Association, the largest non-profit, secular and non-governmental organisation of the Mizo people
Zawlbuk	: Bachelors dormitory used to train male youths in a village
Ziak loh dan	: Unwritten law enforced on the people in a village

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