

ISSN : 0976 0202

HISTORICAL JOURNAL MIZORAM

(A Peer-Reviewed Journal)

Vol. XXI

Pre-Colonial Mizo Society



Mizo History Association

February 2021

The main objective of this journal is to function as a mode of information and guidance for the scholars, researchers and historians and to provide a medium of exchange of ideas in Mizo history.

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ISSN : 0976 0202

Editor : Dr. Rohmingmawii

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Price : Rs. 200

Mizo History Association, Aizawl, Mizoram
[www. mizohistory.org](http://www.mizohistory.org)

Printed at the **Samaritan Printer**
Mendus Building,
Mission Veng, Aizawl

ISSN : 0976 0202

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EDITORIAL

‘Wear a mask, wash your hands, keep a distance from others’ are probably the most repeated phrases in the year 2020. Someone jokingly counted the months in 2020, “January, February, March.....December.” Indeed, due to the Covid19 pandemic, the year 2020 came to an end before we could stretch ourselves. It felt like a nightmare. The world was, and still is facing one of the hardest challenges after the Second World War, as the invisible army of Coronavirus attack humankind, and millions of people fell to this small yet deadly army. People all over the world, from the global north to the south are hit hard without discrimination.

The year 2020 was, however, a remarkable year for Mizo History Association. It was the **Ruby Jubilee** year of the Association. Mizo History Association has been in existence for 40 years, and actively engaging in an academic adventure to enhance the production of knowledge in general, and research in history subject in particular. Fortunately, some of its founding members are still around and actively involved in Mizo History Association today. The members of Mizo History Association are drawn from various fields - academicians, professionals, bureaucrats, research scholars, students, and citizens of various backgrounds from India and abroad. Since its inception, the aims and objectives of

the Mizo History Association are to generate knowledge about Mizo history, to provide a platform for the researchers and academicians, and to carry the knowledge and writing of history to a higher standard. In its academic pursuit, a Conference cum Seminar has been organized every year, and the papers presented in the conference are published in the *Historical Journal Mizoram*. The journal published by Mizo History Association was on the UGC Recognised List in 2018. Now, it is a peer-reviewed journal, and the current publication is Volume XXI. Due to the pandemic, the celebration of the Ruby Jubilee and the Conference which was scheduled in the last part of the year 2020 could not be held, and the journal also come later than usual.

The *XXXIX Mizo History Association Conference cum Seminar* was hosted by the Department of History, Pachhunga University College, Aizawl during 29-30 October 2019. The theme of the Conference was '*Pre-Colonial Mizo Society*'. The pre-colonial history of the Mizo is a less explored area, perhaps because it is more challenging than the other periods of Mizo history. There are very few reliable sources that make the study of this period very difficult. The researchers have to depend largely on oral sources or written records by the missionaries or earlier Mizo historians. Since these writings are mostly influenced by imperialist ideology and often bias, great care has to be taken while using the sources. To use oral sources effectively is a challenge because it requires certain methodological expertise. While we are aware of the challenges, it is equally obvious that more knowledge about the area is needed because it determines the self-understanding of the Mizo – their values, identity, and worldviews are largely shaped by what and how they

understand the so-called traditional practices. Precisely because of this, the period needs to be treated carefully. Therefore, the theme of the Conference was a very important one. Moreover, since the Association has members from disciplines other than History, the theme was open for approaches from other disciplines as well. The methodology for studying pre-colonial Mizo society, the various aspects of cultural practices, religion, healthcare, political development, etc. were deliberated in the Conference. This volume contains some of the subjects presented in the seminar. However, it should be pointed out here that these papers are not necessarily the stance of the Journal, or Mizo History Association but the individual views of the authors.

Despite the pandemic and other inconveniences, the Historical Journal Mizoram Vol. XXI is published now. I, on behalf of the editorial team, would like to thank all the contributors for sharing their valuable knowledge, and to the Mizo History Association for entrusting us with this responsibility of editorship. On my behalf, I express my sincere gratitude to my colleagues in the Editorial Board for their hard work and dedication. We make a great team.

May God bless Mizo History Association. Thank you.

Dr. Rohmingmawii
Editor

GUIDELINES FOR PUBLICATION IN *HISTORICAL JOURNAL MIZORAM*

Historical Journal Mizoram is a peer-reviewed journal published annually by Mizo History Association. It has been a great platform for researchers and scholars who work on the history of the Mizo. It has been in print for more than two decades and is continuing to scale higher with better quality and higher standard in its product. To this end, a guideline is made for publication in the journal which the authors are requested to follow. The authors are requested to read the guidelines carefully before submitting the article.

Guidelines for Authors

FONT & FIRST PAGE:

1. The manuscript for publication should be typed in **Times New Roman** Font, **12 pt.** size in **1.5 spacing**.
2. The first page of the manuscript should bear the **TITLE of the article** in a BOLD letter; **Name, Designation, Department/Affiliation, Institution, and email address** of the contact person.
3. The manuscript should have an **abstract of not more than 200 words** with **at least four**, and a maximum of **six keywords**.

REFERENCING STYLE

1. The Journal follows **NEIHA Stylesheet** for referencing style (NEIHA Stylesheet is given at the end). The authors should be careful in giving the references according to the stylesheet.
2. The references should be made in the text itself. Only reference list without reference in the text could not be accepted.
3. When quoting more than 100 words, it should be put in a paragraph with a single quotation.
4. Single inverted commas (‘ ’) should be used for quotations. Quotation(s) within a quotation should have double inverted commas (“ ”).

OTHER INFORMATION

1. The minimum word limit is **2500 words**. The maximum number of words is **8000**.
2. The paragraph should be made with one tab.
3. The headings should be in **bold** and ‘**Capitalized Each Word**’ except ‘the’, ‘in’, ‘on’, etc. It should not be Italicized. Only the sub-headings under the heading should be Italicized.
4. All the non-English words, except proper nouns, should be put in *Italics*.

5. The non-English words/phrases/verses should be translated into English as far as possible.
6. The authors should take utmost care of punctuations and grammar.

PROCESSING OF MANUSCRIPT

1. The manuscript should be sent to mhajournal20@gmail.com.
2. The manuscript will be sent for review. The author(s) will be intimated by the reviewer's report. The author(s) is/are expected to follow the suggestions made by the reviewer. The manuscript will be accepted for publication only after necessary changes are being made.
3. The Editorial Team expects good cooperation from the authors/scholars towards the improvement of the *Historical Journal Mizoram*.
4. *Please read the NEIHA Stylesheet appended here for more detail.*

NEIHA STYLE SHEET

All articles must contain a statement about the existing knowledge on the topic concerned so that there is no repetitive research. This should include preferably the following:

- a. A paragraph on the work(s) previously done on the topic.
- b. Why is it necessary to write about the topic?
- c. How is it going to contribute to the existing body of knowledge?
- d. What purpose this paper is going to serve?

NEIHA Follows the Documentary-note styles (=bibliographical citations in footnotes or endnotes) and not the Author-date system (=citing sources in the text, usually in parenthesis, by author's last name, date of publication and page number).

Footnotes/Endnotes

- Footnotes/Endnotes should be numbered consecutively, beginning with 1 throughout the article
- Other References (Some examples)
- p.or pp.= for page or pages

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Field Study Interview

- Data collected out of field study/interview. Details of the person/place should be provided.

Abbreviations

• anon.	anonymous
cf.	confer, compare
chap.	chapter
<i>et. al.</i>	and others
ed.	edition, edited by, editor
f.	and following (plural ff.)
<i>ibid.</i>	in the same place
<i>idem</i>	by the same author
<i>loc. cit.</i>	in the place cited
misc.	miscellaneous
no.	number (plural nos.)
n. d.	no date
n. p.	no place/no publisher/no page
<i>op. cit.</i>	in the work cited
passim	throughout; here and there
sic.	so thus
s.v. or <i>sub voce</i>	under the word (plural s.vv.)
trans.	translator, translated by
vol.	volume, (plural vols.)

Zozia HANDLOOM

Phone : 9612715221/9612894523
T-22/A, TLangnuam, Aizawl, Mizoram

Puan zeh mawi tak tak,
pure silk leh pure cotton-a tah
mahni duh anga order theih a awm reng a.

Mizo puan chei leh stole
pure silk-a tah lei tur a awm reng bawk e.

Hei bâkah hian ipte chei, Mizo bag leh
thangchhuah kawr, pure cotton-a siam
size hrang hrang
lei tur a awm reng bawk e.

FLORIA GLAMOUR

Bara Bazar, Aizawl

*Silpaulin,
Parda leh Sofa puan
chi hrang hrang,
mawi tak tak
duh thlan tur tamna leh
tlâwmna ber...*

Rawn pan ve rawh

RECONSTRUCTING THE HISTORY OF THE MIZO : SOME SUGGESTIONS

Prof. Sangkima
Former Principal,
Govt. Aizawl College, Aizawl

Introduction

Traditionally, it is believed that the forefathers of the Mizo had once found their settlements somewhere in the mountainous areas of Southern China. However, no one knows for sure when and how the people moved to the west and reached the present habitat – Mizoram. Since our knowledge in this regard is very scanty, we cannot go beyond a level of mere conjecture. Hence, any conclusion reached on the early history of the Mizo till now would be considered as ‘premature’ because it has no sufficient evidences based on historical facts.

In this connection, it may be pointed out that there are two sources of history: historical and traditional.¹ The historical or conventional sources are: archaeology, numismatics, epigraphy or inscription, foreign accounts, chronicles, literatures etc. The traditional or non-conventional sources include: folklores, folksongs, beliefs, superstitions, ceremonies, hymns, rituals etc. These non-conventional

sources are important to reflect the needs and aspirations of the people whose sources of information, however lack historical evidences.² Hence, a community like that of the Mizo whose language was reduced to written only in the later part of the nineteenth century cannot be expected to put their history of origin in a recorded form, for they did not have a written language before.

Thus, finding no other alternative to a recorded history, the pioneer historians of the Mizo like Rev. Liangkhaia, K. Zawla, V.L. Siam, Zatlunga and others wrote their books on the Mizo on the basis of oral traditions. At the same time, it may be noted that even modern scholars who have been awarded with PhD degrees in history of the Mizo do not make much headways upon the writings of those local historians. Hence, the importance of reconstructing the history of the Mizo.

Areas to Be Examined

In the light of the above discussion, it is felt immensely necessary to have a comprehensive history of the Mizo by making stringent efforts to reconstruct the history of the Mizo. Therefore, in order to do the task, serious attempts have to be made on the areas noted below.

1) Periodization

To make a serious attempt on the reconstruction of the history of the Mizo, the first and foremost consideration to be taken into account is periodization. There is a universal system of dividing history into periods as *ancient*, *medieval* and *modern*. If we follow this system in the case of the Mizo,

the main problem is how to fit in the medieval period which separates ancient from modern. Unless and until this question is solved, a complete history of the Mizo is difficult to be written.

2) Sources of the History

With regard to the colonial and post-colonial period, there is no dearth of historical information. But lack of conventional sources is a great hindrance in tracing the early history of the Mizo. In spite of this limitation, it is essential to explore the conventional sources such as archaeology, manuscripts, epigraphy or inscription, literatures, etc. which E.H Carr called 'auxiliary sciences'.³ At the same time, non-conventional sources may also be explored as an alternative to the conventional sources in the reconstruction of the history of the Mizo. Therefore, in order to write a reliable book on the Mizo, one has to be able to identify what are conventional and non-conventional sources because both the sources have to be employed in the writing. Unless and until these two sources are used in a proper manner, a comprehensive history will never be produced.

3) Origin of the Mizo

In the absence of any historical evidences or records, it is not possible to give correct account of the people. This is true in the case of the Mizo. In order to have a comprehensive history of the Mizo, what is needed is to identify and substantiate the place of origin of the Mizo. To do this, a survey has to be conducted on ethnology, ethnicity, culture and etymology of the Mizo. Linguistic affinity of the people may also be examined because language can indicate genetic

relationship of different ethnic groups.⁴ Unless and until the origin of the Mizo is investigated systematically a good history of the people will hardly be written.

4) A Study of Megalithic Monuments

Another area to be probed exhaustively while trying to reconstruct the history of the Mizo is megalithic monuments which have been found in Mizoram. The study may produce a significant result because megalithic monuments always serve as an important archaeological source for the reconstruction of a past history. Likewise, the monuments are strong indicative of the pattern of migration of a people.⁵ Therefore, a serious attempt on megalithic monuments could have been a significant factor in supplying valuable information on the history of migration of the Mizo.

5) Review of Literature

In addition to what have been discussed above, it is imperative to give due considerations on review of relevant literatures of neighboring states. In this connection, mention may be made of *Rajamala* or the Chronicles of the Tripura Rajas from which relevant information about the Mizo may be collected (they might be mentioned under different names like chin or Kuki, etc.). At the same time, attempt on the *Ahom Buranjis* may also be made with a view to finding out some information on the Mizo. Meanwhile, the two epics—the *Ramayanas* and *the Mahabharata* may also be examined seriously because these two literatures have references of ‘Cinas’ which may refer to the Kuki-Chins or Lushai.⁶ Other Hindu literatures like the *Puranas*, the *Tantras* etc. may also be scanned with the same motive.

Though in the social as well as the cultural life of the Mizo, no influence of Buddhism is noticed in spite of the fact that the Mizo had entered Burma from the east and then moved out of Burma, a survey on Buddhism is expected to give important information on the Mizo.⁷ Hence, a study on Buddhism is inevitably necessary.

Meanwhile, a review of the literatures from the states of Manipur and Nagaland may also be undertaken with a hope of collecting information on the Mizo. Though there is no obvious connection of the Mizos with these tribes in the northeast, since they shared the same geographical space, there is a chance of contact among these tribes at one point or another. Therefore, if not in the written records, the oral history of these states might also contain some connection with the Mizos.

Way Forward

It is a very big challenge for Mizo historians to explore their past with a new lens and to try to reconstruct a comprehensive and reliable history of the Mizos. Towards, this end, the points mentioned above need to be explored with the help of experts in their respective fields. In order to meet the challenge, the suggestions given below may also need to be taken into account seriously.

a) Appointment of Team of Experts

An authority to carry out such research would have to be formed or the government or its agency could be approached to facilitate this type of research. The authority concerned has to form a 'team of experts'

comprising not more than five members. It may be proposed further that in this 'team of experts', two or more members from outside the state may also be included, or they could be members in an extended team, if not in the core team. The team should be given freedom to move cross-countries if necessary, to collect the necessary materials and to follow trails of their findings all over the world, and they should have freedom to execute the study in a proper methodology which they found suitable for the purpose. This expert team may consist of experts from various fields, not only Historians but also those who have knowledge on genetics, archaeology, linguistics, etc., or it should be ready to employ experts in those fields where and when required.

b) Phase-wise Implementation

The proposed project has to be implemented in a phase manner. Thus, the implementation may be carried out in four phases, which may be divided as follows.

(i) First phase: Review of Literature.

In the first phase all the available literatures may be collected and scrutinized seriously by the 'team of experts'. The objective of this review is to collect genuine and relevant information from the books already produced on the Mizo. The study will take a good deal of time.

(ii) Second Phase: Exploration of Northeast States

In the second phase it may be proposed to explore the neighboring states of the northeast India for

collection of data and relevant information on the Mizo. This will require a good deal of time again but the task is inevitable because a comparative study of information collected will help the writing of the history of the Mizo. The final decision on this matter will be in the hands of the 'team of experts'

(iii) Third Phase: Visit of Foreign Countries

It is believed that a good deal of information on the Mizo could be collected from South East Asian countries including China because of the 'imagined' connection of the Mizos with the societies in that region. These information may be available in various universities and other institutions, but fieldwork among the various tribal groups especially in China and other countries might help the study; thus, a trip to these countries is inevitable. At the same time, a visit to the Commonwealth Relations Office Library, London, is also required to collect materials for contemporary history of the Mizo. This job will, however, require an enormous amount of funds.

(iv) Fourth phase : Genetic and Linguistic Technologies

The fourth phase will inquire into the technical knowledge concerning genetics and language. Since the technology highly requires the services of the experts, serious attempt has to be made so that the required results may be acquired. The technological know-how will be of great help in the

reconstruction of the history if the same is carried out and performed successfully.

Finally, it may be suggested that in order to implement the proposed project, a workable budget estimate has to be evolved. For this purpose, an agency which is very expert in the field may be requested to prepare the necessary budget estimate so as to implement the project effectively. Any shortage of fund will, however, surely jeopardize the whole project. Again, to implement the project successfully a liberal budget estimate is badly needed. Further, it is needless to say that even before the required funds for the project are available, the 'team of experts' has to sit and prepare the groundwork for the implementation of the project in advance.

Conclusion

It is important for any society to be able to connect to its root in order to maintain its identity. For this purpose, history has a role to play, since it connects the present with the past. For the Mizos, their knowledge of their past is limited to the few centuries before the British advent, and as such, it had a negative impact on the people in their self-imagination, thereby leading to lack of confidence in themselves. Therefore, it is imperative for historians today to try to find a way to reconstruct their past with the help of new techniques and methodology though which the challenges highlighted here could be overcome. Therefore, historians should give serious thought and this writeup is intended to provoke the young minds towards this end.

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MACKENZIE READING SAID: MEDITATIONS ON THE PAST

Dr. Lalruatkima
Assistant Professor
Academy of Integrated Christian Studies
Tanhrlil, Aizawl

THE MIZO HISTORY ASSOCIATION (MHA)'s annual meetings usually have a theme for the discussions at each gathering. For its 2019 meeting, the MHA choose "Pre-Colonial Mizo History" to frame the conversation. While the theme flags an important field of inquiry, my lack of gestures towards that area left me short on stuff to put together as a presentable paper, which was the earlier draft of this essay. So rather than speak directly to the theme, I wanted to broach a few meta-critical issues around the theme. At the background of these issues are two important questions: How do we access the past; How do we articulate that which we have accessed? Without over-determining this backdrop, I will layer the foreground with the intellectual underpinnings of these two questions by referencing the intellectual brouhaha raised by British historian, John Mackenzie on Edward Said.

Before I set up the brouhaha, I need to layout my own investments on the topic. Without the credentials of a

certified historian, I have had occasionally to explain my cred when asked what I am doing at conferences such as these. A “*pathian thu zir*” or even “reverend” (a title I have no inclinations of aspiring to) are the default locations people assign to me. I don’t mind it because they always provide more stuff for reflection. What is it about history that one can speak to it or about it as a certified historian? Inversely, how or what disqualifies one from waxing historical about any topic, artifact, or text? With an interest in the techniques, narratives, and practices about meaning-making, I often find that historicizing my data is helpful. I am very conscious that my data are more or less free-floating signs constituting a semiotic field with self-evident meanings, the synchronic frames always sharpen the emplotment of each datum. It is because of this need to historicize that I find myself in conversation with historians—both personally and/or through their writings. But I am not a card-carrying historian.

Which brings me to the debate, or more so, the question of Edward Said’s idiosyncratic reading of history. *Orientalism*¹ has been an immovable cultural artifact since its publication. Analyzing romanticized representations of Arabo-Islamic cultures and peoples during a specific temporal span, Said had argued that a discursive reading rationalized imperial and colonial narratives, in other words, orientalism. Pondering further on these representational dynamics, Said published a collection of essays, *Culture and Imperialism* in 1993. These essays attempted to concretize what was theorized in *Orientalism*—the connection between metropolitan centers and the colonies.

As the former chair of Imperial History in the Department of History at Lancaster University, Emeritus Professor John M. Mackenzie has provided rich tangents to our understanding of imperial cultural history. It is on Said's latter collection of essays in *Culture and Imperialism* that Mackenzie trains his critical eye. "Edward Said and the Historians"² is a scathing assessment of Said's work. To generalize too broadly might not do justice to Mackenzie's assessment but two points here will suffice for now. First, Mackenzie claims that as an analyst of the socio-economic terrain, colonial discourse analyses have little to contribute to the study of imperialism.³ Second, this Marxian-discursive binary sets up an opposition between "good historians on the one hand, and Said and discourse theorists on the other"⁴. It might be noted that Mackenzie identifies as one "brought up in the tradition of E. P. Thompson"⁵. He saw his work so different from Said's arguing that discourse analysis and imperial history "occupy such different linguistic and mental spheres that so far no Rosetta Stone has been found to connect the two".⁶ In sum, discourse theorists such as Said have transgressed into the discipline of history without the sound procedural principles.

Six prominent counter critiques were issued against Mackenzie's essay "Edward Said and the Historians." All six of them were compiled in the 1995 (vol 19) issue of *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, along with Mackenzie's response to all six critiques in his essay, "A Reply to My Critics".⁷ Rather than get lost in the weeds of the back and forth between Mackenzie and Said, the six critics and Mackenzie, and Mackenzie responding to these six critics, it would be more

helpful, for this essay to focus on three metacritical issues that might speak to the topic of “Pre-Colonial Mizo History.”

1. Sweeping statements about the character of history without the historiographical background to do so

Mackenzie hedges around a field of inquiry—history—and asserts that this work can be done with the appropriate training on the procedural principles. It is interesting that out of six of his critics, only one is a card-carrying historian. The other five critics are from the department of English. That Edward Said was himself in the field of Comparative Literature might explain why those who came to his defense came from a related or allied field of expertise. So one has to wonder if this is a case of disciplinary gate-keeping, where one must remain within one’s field of expertise. In other words, this issue raises the question of whether a non-specialist historian can write about pre-colonial Mizo history. Moreover, how does judge the validity of any writing about this specific period in the past?

I am more inclined to think of this issue as an evolving point in the trajectory of knowledge and knowledge production. Disciplinary specializations that evolved in nineteenth-century Europe were entrenched in the colonial forms of knowledge production. On this side of modernity, knowledge is seen for its holism without discounting the specialized minutiae that disciplinary rigor can produce. Tim Youngs, professor of English and Travel Studies, captures this mood when he observes that “we need both Said and Mackenzie. We need colonial discourse analysts, literary theorists, and historians”⁸ This sets up consideration of the next point raised by Mackenzie.

2. Facts do not all speak for themselves but require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain, and circulate them

Mackenzie agrees with Said on this point against the professor of English Bruce Robbins's critique to the contrary. Mackenzie had claimed that historians look for the "ironic and the unwitting".⁹ The counterpoint is that despite this assertion, Mackenzie is unwilling to afford the twists that Said's analyses discover and articulate. Subaltern historiography is one such case in point of the ironic whereby modes of oppression turn into modes of resistance, stereotypes turn against their purveyors.¹⁰

A cursory scan of this MHA annual meeting schedule of 2019 shows a lineup of, among others, artifacts, practices, attitudes, oral traditions, games as the basic data of/for analysis. Each datum will elicit varying reactions because they are not self-evident semiotic thumbnails. They will make sense within the narrative we have decided for ourselves, i.e. "Pre-colonial" and "Mizo." In other words, these semiotic thumbnails are invested with meaning by the narrative thread or signifying sequence that holds them together.

Implicitly, what becomes of equally decisive importance is how we define or determine the narrative against which we analyze the basic data or the so-called thumbnails. The essays in this volume would, I hope, tutor me and other readers on these historical minutiae. However, I need to get to my final point

3. Lack of economic contexts and class bases in a confessed radical historian is disturbing

The background here is the Thompsonian imprint of Marxist history with which Mackenzie identifies. That Said's radical stance is disturbing because it is not quite Marxian as Mackenzie would accede. For our purposes, this last point underscores the investments in our procedures and practices in light of the presuppositions we bring because of our own locations or concentric zones of identification...as Mizo, as a historian, as historian among other Indian historians, as Marxist or post-structural and so on.

I have tried to bring out the importance of the narrative background that endows our analysis and the subjects of our analyses with meaning. If the role of the historian is the "ironic and the unwitting," how might these subjects and analyses undercut or redefine the very narratives we construct to make sense of them? Take for instance the pre-colonial religious practices and attitudes; do they gain more clarity by the "precolonial" narrative or does the narrative define what we look for? How might these lines of questioning deconstruct or redefine the "Mizo" narrative?

Conclusion

On the Sunday night just before the MHA annual meeting in 2019, there was a message on the MHA whatsapp group: "ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi killed in U.S. raid," The verb "killed" is very different from the fact that al-Baghdadi detonated a suicide vest. "Kill" and "killed himself" underscore a subtle yet important difference. Kill underscores the U.S. flexing of its imperial muscles in one of the remote desert towns of northern Syria. "Kill himself" underscores al-

Baghdadi dictating the terms of his end. Within varied reports of the death of a much-maligned figure—and many will argue rightly so—the difference in reporting underscores agency. Who gets to write about whom or what? What narrative provides meaning to the incident? Would a pathologist provide a more objective assessment than a political reporter?

Writing about the past is a mine-field. If the Mackenzie-Said feud has taught me anything, it is to tread lightly or risk the fool rushing in.

Notes and References

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- ³ Ibid, p.12.
- ⁴ Ibid, pp.4,11.
- ⁵ Ibid, p.1.
- ⁶ Ibid, p.19.
- ⁷ John M. Mackenzie, “A Reply to My Critics.” *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 1995, pp: 19: 91–100.
- ⁸ Tim Youngs, “The Connection between Things.” *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 9: 81–84. 1995.
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THE ETYMOLOGICAL MEANING OF THE TERM ‘MARA’

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Introduction

The Maras formally known as Lakhers are an ethnic group of people who inhabit the southeastern corner part of Mizoram. NE Parry in his book ‘The Lakhers’ classified the Maras as Mongoloid stock of people. Based on their socio-linguistics distinctiveness, the Maras were distinctive and different from their neighboring tribes.¹

The Maras, in the early part of the nineteenth century, are fully independent to their present territory enjoying an independent existence of their own. However, they are ultimately subjugated to the British sway in 1924, with the fall of Zyhno, one of the Mara major groups. They were, then put under the control of British- India Government and were added to the erstwhile South Lushai Hills District in 1930 for administrative convenience. With the independence of India in 1947, the Indian Constitution recognized the Maras as one of the Scheduled Tribes of India

under the name of “Lakher” in 1950 along with the other Tribes of North East India.²

The Maras consist of five principal sub-groups. The Five principal sub-groups are- Tlosai- Siaha, Zyhno, Hawthai, Chapi and Vyty. Each sub-group occupied separate territory of their own right from the occupation of the present Mara District. Each group speaks a dialect of their own which differs from dialects of other sub-groups but can understand each other.

Amongst the five groups, Tlosai-Siaha is the largest group. The people of this group are to be found in the Villages such as Pala, Saikao, Tokalo, Lodaw, Kiasie, Laty, Siaha, Mobyu, Thosai, Amobyu, Tiahra, Tisopi, and Thosai. The second largest group is Zyhno occupying Villages of Vahia, Mipu, Khopai, Ahmypi, Lopu, Laki and Zyhno. The third-largest group is Hawthai. They are scattered in Villages such as Tisi, Chheihlu, Chhaolo, Lobo, Theiri, Phusa, and Theiva. The fourth-largest group is Chapi. The Chapis concentrated themselves in four villages of Chapi, Chakhei, Mawhro, and Siasi. The smallest group is Vyty. The people of this group concentrated themselves in the two villages of Siata and Iana.

The five subgroups are further sub-divided into clans. The most prestigious clan is the ruling clans followed by the high-class clan, the middle-class clans, and the lower-class clan at the bottom. Each sub-group has a separate royal clan. The Saikao branch of Tlosais is ruled by the chiefs of Hlychho clan, the Siaha branch of Tlosai is ruled by the chief of Khichha Hlychho clan. The Zyhno ruling clan is Bohia, while

the Hawthai ruling clan is Nohro, the Chapi ruling clan is Chozah and Vytu is ruled by the chief of Zawtha clan.

In character, the Maras are conservative, reserved, and superstitious people. Traditional norms of society have been strictly adhered to. However the society is free and open where there is no sex discrimination. Both men and women enjoyed free social life. Their moral standard is high, adultery and rape cases are rare. Kinship ties were very strong among them. Kins men were surrounded by concern and care. They obeyed the elders and treated women with respect. They received strangers and help them.

The Maras were religious people. In the olden days, they were animists. They believed in the existence of spirits in rivers, lakes, mountains, big trees, rocks, etc. which could cause many undesirable diseases, even death. All these traditional beliefs and practices were now abolished as they have all embraced Christianity.

The Mara language had been classified by Grierson (1904) as a member of Chin sub-group of Kuki group of Assam Burma branch of Tibeto-Burman family. Their language is a strange tongue to others, very distinctive and different from their neighbouring tribes. Mara language is a three tonal language. The same word has three independent meaning according to its different tones. The last letter of any word or syllable is always a vowel, uttered with an open mouth.

The Mara were hardy and warlike people. They always raided their neighbouring tribes and even fought among themselves. The Mara believed that man was born for war. They highly

esteemed the brave persons and they honoured the warriors. They raided and fought not so much for territorial annexation, but for social status and recognition and economic gain in terms of guns, cash, gongs, or any other portable article which could be found, and then made off with them fast as possible. As slaves too were highly saleable commodities, captives were highly valued, all captives were carried home as slaves. The raiding also spelled glory for young warriors who longed for a chance to show their power and bravery.³

The name of Mara

There are various conjectures as to the origin of the name of Mara. Some people believed it come from Mirang, a name of one hoard of the tribes inhabiting the Arakan Hills. The Mirang in course of their migration from eastern Myanmar to the Arakan Hills may have settled in the present land of Maras.⁴

Some Mara claimed that the name Mara is derived from the predecessor who was called 'Mara'. The Maras were called Miram by the Chin in Haka area and Zo by their Eastern neighbors. Some even claimed that the name had been taken from the name of a hill called 'Marau'. This hill is situated in the river valley of Myitha where the early Mara people settled.⁵

The Maras were also known as 'Samtum' by the Khumis of Arakan Hills Tribes. The term Samtum means "knotting of hairs at the top of the head". In the Khumi dialect 'sam' means 'hairs' and 'tum' means 'knotting'. In the early days, men of Mara used to knot their hairs at the top of the head

and wore a bit of rag around the top knot. The Maras were well known by the Khumis because of their constant raids on the Kumis land. The Khumis thus called them Samtum after their practice of knotting hair at the top of the head.⁶

The British Officers who were in contact with the Khumis of Arakan used the term 'Shandoos' or 'Shendus' a corrupt form of 'Samtum' to refer to the Maras. During the initial period of their contact with the Maras, the British Officers used the term "Shandoos" or "Shendus" to refer to the Maras and Lais.⁷

There is still another name of the Maras. The Lusei called them Lakhers. The term Lakher appears to have originated from the practice of plucking cotton. The Lusei used to pluck cotton from the fruit with the hands whereas the Maras did it with a stick. Thus the name Lakhers came from this method of plucking cotton with a stick. In Lusei dialect, 'La' means "Cotton" and 'Kher' means 'Pluck' or 'Remove'.⁸

It is, therefore, difficult to give the exact meaning of the term 'Mara'. According to many senior people of the Maras, with whom this researcher had an interview, the etymological meaning of the term Mara is 'Western People' or 'Immigrants to the Western land'. It had been said that in the initial period of their migration from Chin Hills, in search of new settlements, the people who left their occupation for western lands were usually referred to as Mara. In the early days, the people of Tlosais who first moved towards the west and occupied the present Mara District were usually called Mara.⁹

The popular use of the term Mara to refer to all the Mara groups is thus of recent origin. In view of their future survival as a tribe, some educated Mara people formed themselves into a political party known as 'Mara Freedom Party' in 1960. The main aim of the party was to secure a separate District Council for the Maras.¹⁰

Since 1960, the party has been trying to unite each of the Mara group by preaching the gospel of regional politics. The party pressed the Government of Assam as well as India to create a separate District Council for the Maras so that they may be able to develop their custom, culture, and language. To this end, the Mara Freedom party called a convention on 16 December 1963 at the Village of Zyhno. This convention was attended by different prominent leaders of the Mara groups. After a long discussion, the convention accepted the term 'Mara' to refer to all the Mara groups. Today the term Mara is a common name to refer to all the Mara people who live in Mizoram (India) as well as the adjoining areas of Myanmar.¹¹

The Maras in the nineteenth century were little known to the outside world. It is after the annexation of their land by the British- India Government in 1924, that the Maras be known far and wide.¹²

The Maras, with the inclusion of the Lais (Pawi) tribe, attained the status of a Regional Council in 1953. The Maras then attained the status of an Autonomous District Council, under the North-Eastern Areas Reorganization Act, in 1972. They, therefore, enjoyed an Autonomous Administrative Authority of their own. The Autonomous District Council

was named “Lakher District Council”. However, with the increasing political consciousness amongst the political leaders, the name ‘Lakhers’ was officially changed into ‘Mara’ on May 1, 1989. Now the Autonomous District Council too came under the name of ‘Mara’, and it is called Mara Autonomous District Council. The land which is inhabited by the Mara tribes, previously known as Lakher District is also known as Mara District which means ‘the abode of the Mara people’.¹³

The Maras are small in size in comparison to their neighboring tribes like Chakma and Lais. According to Statistical Hand Book of Mizoram 2011, the Mara population in the Census of 2011 is 56,366 of which males are 28,590 and females are 27,876. The density of the population is approximately 24 persons per square kilometer. The capital of Mara District, Siaha Town is inhabited by 24,177 persons.¹⁴

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AN ANALYSIS ON THE CONCEPT OF LIBERATION IN MIZO SAKHUA

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THERE HAVE BEEN several writings on the elements of Mizo *Sakhua* (translated as religion). Most dealt with the ritual performances and descriptions of its practices embedded in tradition.¹ This paper aims to analyze in a nutshell, the views and beliefs of the early Mizo people in the area of liberation and its related issues, and thereby attempting to bring out certain problems or shortcomings in the whole framework. I do not find it important to put efforts for solutions for those are things of the past and obsolete practices, rather it would be good to ask certain possible reasons for which those were so, and most importantly the possible consequence.

The concepts of salvation and liberation have been used interchangeably in religion to mean one's entry (after death) to a better level of existence.² These concepts carry along with it a sense of leaving something behind, a sense of being saved or deliverance from evil reality, a sense of freedom from the clutches of earthly life with all its un-pleasant elements

in order to enter into a new realm, a realm where good replace all the pathetic element of earthly life.

The early Mizo people composed their own way of life with the experienced lesson, and in the light of this, they had visionary ideas on death and life after death to give significance to the reality of earthly life. They believed in the immortality of the soul and that the immortal soul has two destinies viz. *Mitthi khua* (the land of the dead) and *Pialral* (another side of the river Pial, the Mizo Paradise or heaven).³ They thought that the soul of the dead lives among them for several days before going to their eternal place.⁴ The soul finds it difficult to leave and they often look back at the living with tears and nostalgia from the so-called '*bringlangtlang*' which is on their way to *Mitthi khua*. Only after drinking '*lunglohtui*' and wearing '*hawilopar*' that they could forget the living and proceed towards their destiny.

Mitthi khua is considered to be a commonplace for all the dead irrespective of their status, position, good or bad during their lifetime.⁵ It is the destiny of everyone except the person who could win a ticket to *Pialral*. One remarkable idea is the belief in the parallel existence between earthly life and spiritual life. This means they believed that people will be living the same social life including work, feast, etc. even in this 'next world'. They considered sadness and joy would still exist (refer to the story of Tlingi leh Ngama⁶). The only difference is during earthly life they have a physical body but in *Mitthi khua* they will have spiritual existence. Since this was so, the significance of liberation is not met here because *Mitthi*

khua is not a better place, and therefore, we could afford to skip this level of existence for it has no relation to our inquiry.

Pialral is a place exclusively for some special few. The ideality of this level of existence is that unlike the earthly life one need not work anymore to support his daily living. They will depend on an abundant supply of food. All needs will be in abundance and they will enjoy comforts.⁷ It is consequential therefore to think that people long and desire to be freed from all hard work if they are so concerned about the condition of their earthly living. It is here that we find a sense of being liberated or a sense of being freed from the necessary hard work in life. It is therefore, worthwhile to continue our inquiry on this.

The reason *Pialral* is for some special few is that only *Thangchhuahpa* can afford the comfort of *Pialral*. In other words, only *Thangchhuahpa* can enter *Pialral* to settle. The possession of the title '*thangchhuahpa*' is not only desired for a comfort settlement in the life after, but also for respect during lifetime and to avoid being shot by the so-called Pu Pawla, who they believed to be shooting the commoners who pass by his house on their journey to *mithi khua*.⁸ The necessary conditions to become *Thangchhuahpa* are so difficult to satisfy for an ordinary man that the comfort of *Pialral* is not for everyone. However, it is still the place that all desire to live in.

Thangchhuahpa is a man's status achieved after the completion of certain prescribed activities. It is an esteemed glory in life and is admired because it assures comfort in the next life.

There are two types of *Thangchhuah*⁹ – *Ram lama Thangchhuah* and *In lama Thangchhuah* both carry with them difficult tasks and conditions. To be *Ram lama Thangchhuah* one needs to be brave and a good hunter and at times good fortune should follow. *In lama Thangchhuah* is equally difficult. One needs to be wealthy and generous. It is said *Khuangchawi* completes the *In lama Thangchhuah*.¹⁰ Both the *Thangchhuah* involve several feasts for the community, the expenditure for which is so huge that ordinary person cannot afford. It is believed that the spirit of all the domestic animals killed for feasts – for *In lama Thangchhuah* and the spirit of all the wild animals killed in the jungle – for *Ram lama Thangchhuah* will follow Thangchhuah pa on his way to *Mithi khua* and enter *Pialral* gloriously. The souls of their enemies if they have killed will serve them as their servants.¹¹ This is the culmination of Mizo *Sakhua*.

Every society and culture composed their own understanding of the state of the afterlife. Any statement about the afterlife is an assumption based on faith, and this faith is certain only subjectively. It is difficult if not impossible; to ascertain what exactly would be the reality since it is beyond experience. In this way, only one could condone the imperfect content of the Mizo traditional conception of liberation. The conception about life beyond death, however unconvincing it may be is tolerable if it is in coherence with every concern in the working day reality.

From the analysis of the above description, certain inexplicable queries naturally arise. Firstly, it is rather strange that in Mizo traditional conception, certain values and ethical life were not given a significant role for Liberation.

Ram lama thangchhuah rests on bravery and skill of a good hunter, which is by far fruitful on chance and luck; *In lama thangchhuah* purely rests on wealth that could be obtained from inheritance and the grace of season. So, *thangchhuah* is not necessarily the product of goodness in human beings; So much so, the untold side of belief sends the good and bad persons equally to the same destiny i.e. *mitthi khua*. Why it is that ethical life is left out to contributing the cause of entry to *Pialral* while the Mizo people were so conscious about ethical life? Could it be that they were contented with the view that all consequences of actions were resolved during this lifetime? For example, all the wrong-doers were outcasts from society and certain punishments were given. However, this is lame contentment for the believers of the immortality of the soul.

Secondly, *Pialral* is dedicated to the wealthy, the good hunter, and the brave who could complete *Thangchhuah*. But at the same time, there is no account where all the brave, all the good hunter, all the wealthy were said to enter *Pialral*. What would be the fate of the heroes and heroines that adorns the society with their good characters and qualities? For example, what about the destiny of Taitekena, Neuva, Vanapa, etc.? What about the reward afterlife for the general mass who at the same time live a remarkably good life that could even win '*Tlawmngai no*' (a cup reserved for the *tlawmngai* person)? Good action should definitely be promoted and encouraged. But what kind of motivation would outlast a motivation that could contribute to personal liberation? Since mere doing good or being good does not assure one's entry to *pialral*, the act of encouragement could be viewed as a mere strategy for spontaneous support of the

ordinary and helpless people in the society that will build a beautiful community. But this beautiful and glorious community cannot go beyond this earth. Certain activities were definitely enjoyed between daily hard works. Though these rejuvenating activities are important for human well-being, it still does not answer the question.

Thirdly, one remarkable note again is that most of the literature account *Thangchhuah* as ‘*pa*’ related. Few have mentioned of *thangchhuahnu*¹² and *khuangchawinu*¹³. The title is awarded to ‘*nu*’ probably on account of their husband. This is obvious especially in the ram lama *thangchhuah* where women never have a role; also there is a specific wearable gear for *khuangchawipa* in lama *thangchhuah* too. Women sharing *thangchhuah* title with their husbands further complicate the concept. Because *thangchhuah* is a hard-earned status that offers coveted life on earth and liberation after death. If one can share or enjoy the hard-earned liberation of others, the very concept and the value of liberation would collapse. In other words, it would be a very cheap liberation if it is shareable. Therefore, conceptually, there is a very little chance for women to enter *pialral*. In fact, if liberation is thought to be for *Thangchhuah* alone, women are consequently denied. Their only destiny is *Mithi Khua*, which is not very different from the earthly life condition. Since this is so, the bias nature of the belief system is so prominent. What would be the possible reason that they hide the picture of women and reluctant to recompense their important roles?

To conclude, the concept of *Pathian* (God) has appeared in the etymology of ‘*Sakhua*’. *Sakhua* is the combination of ‘*Sa*’

and '*Khua*', '*Sa*' connotes 'Creator' and '*Khua*' connotes 'Protector'. So '*Khua*' means the God who protects, sustains, and blesses human beings.¹⁴ However, the concept of God that we find here does not seem to play any role in the afterlife. This God does not seem to live in *pialral* or has nothing to do with the liberated. In short, this God has no relation to the liberated in *pialral*. This is strange. One may argue that *Thangchhuah* is possible only with the guidance of this *Khua*, so it is still relevant and significant. But, the idea about God who could play a role only in the human realm but cannot go beyond to have some significance in the state of liberation is rather an element of incomplete comprehension in the framework.

Lastly, history has witnessed the rise of Buddhism and Jainism from Hinduism.¹⁵ This has happened due to the pathetic fate of the commoners in their religious teaching. People lose hope and realized that the Hindu religion does not offer any life that is better on this earth, and liberation is practically denied of them even afterlife. Likewise, the lives of Mizo people were so difficult amidst the daily routine of hard work. Their ideal life was a life of rest with an abundance of food. While they hope to meet this ideal at least in the afterlife, the belief system reserved it for only *thangchhuah* person. Consequently, it is possible to assume that there might be an unspoken discontentment building up among the commoners; and this condition cannot be ruled out among the cause of the relatively smooth transition to another system i.e. Christianity, which perhaps is more attractive. However, to ascertain this, a series of research would be needed.

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REVISITING *THANGCHHUAH*

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THERE HAVE BEEN references to the concept of *Thangchhuah* in different periods and in literature of diverse disciplines. There hardly was any research paper on this topic to dig out the true nature of what '*Thangchhuah*' really was? Literally, *Thangchhuah* was a title given to a man who has distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase, or by giving a certain number of public feasts.¹ The former is called '*Ram lama Thangchhuah*' linked with hunting, and the latter '*In lama Thangchhuah*' linked with a harvest. Kipgen mentions *Thangchhuah* as an 'entrance to *Pialral*' with its 'seven paths' to be achieved.² The entitlements or privileges enjoyed by a person/s paved a higher social ladder and a direct entry into *Pialral* (Paradise?). Was not there any time frame for accomplishing the position of *Thangchhuah*? Had there been any mention of a younger generation who has achieved it? Why was the notion of *Thangchhuah* so close with the spiritual life of the natives of Lushai Hills? This is an attempt at a literary narrative about the past in order to create meaning for the past.³

The word Thangchhuah exhibits twofold meaning- “*Thang*” denoting “fame” and “*chhuah*” denoting “accomplishment” which in combination denotes “all famous (Thangkim)” as suggested by K. Zawla.⁴ Anyone, without discrimination, in the community, can participate to chase or to attain ‘all the fame’ during their lifetime. In order to achieve the title of ‘*Thangchhuah*’ one has to pull off either one of ‘*In Lama Thangchhuah*’ or ‘*Ram Lama Thangchhuah*’ along with the inevitable seven paths or ladder. It has to be mentioned here that the procedure of “*Ai*” or performances of sacrificial ceremonies over good hunting and good harvest is slightly different from region to region or clans to clans but the majority remain the same as ever.

In Lama Thangchhuah involves a huge amount of public feasts in a prescribed order – *Chawnfang* (*Chawng*), *Sedawi Chhun* (*Sechhun*), *Zankhuang*, *Sedawi Chhun* (*Sechhun*) again, *Mitthirawp Lam*, *Sedawi Chhun* (*Sechhun*) again and lastly, *Khuangchawi*.⁵ The first series of public feast *Chawnfang* which was considered to be a glorification of *Pu Vana* (all benevolent God of Lushais) required two male pigs, a piglet, and one Gayal (Mithun in Myanmar) along with several pots of rice beer. *Sedawi Chhun* has to be done twice or thrice in accordance with the clan where the giver belonged. It required two piglets, a male pig and a Gayal for a feast, and children were not allowed to take part in it. *Zankhuang* has to be done at night and it required the same animals as *Sedawi Chhun*. *Zankhuang* was a less elaborated feast as the wealthier person was not obliged to do so. This feast was followed by *Sedawi Chhun* again with Gayal sacrifice. *Mitthirawp Lam* was another costly feast that embraced not only the living but also the relatives of the giver who had died before.⁶ For the

preparation of *Mitthirawp Lam* the giver has to provide one full-grown Gayal, one male pig and a sow. The last of the series and the most expensive feast was *Khuangchawi* which generally was observed during autumn. It required three Gayals (one Gayal was reserved for special guests from other villages who were supposed to perform *Khuallam* dance), one male pig, two piglets, and more than a hundred pots of rice beer (Zu). On this occasion, a large number of gifts were tossed up in the air in the form of ornaments, clothing, gongs, pots, and even Gayal and guns.⁷ The host and his family were carried in a procession with beating drums around the village and the man has bestowed the title of “*Thangchhuahpa*”. If any *Thangchhuahpa* was able to repeat *Khuangchawi* feast two or three times, the name of the feast was “*Zaudawh*” and earned the title “*Zawhzawzo*” (highest distinction) which entitled him to build a summer house “*Zau*” with windows on all sides in the front of his house.⁸ In all those feasts the whole community was involved like collecting fire-wood (*Sathing zartu*), a husking large amount of rice (*Chawngbuhden* and *Sumdeng Zu* originated from here), cooking and repairing works of the house to be able to accommodate such occasions.

Ram Lama Thangchhuah has been opted by those who were more interested in hunting games or perhaps less fortunate in jhumming. One has to hunt down prescribed animals such as barking deer, sambhur deer, bear, wild boar, wild Gayal, elephant and in addition *rulngan* (a large poisonous snake), *Muvanlai* (an eagle), *Zamphu* (Malayan cut-bear), and *vahluk* (a flying lemur). When the additional animals were killed animal with broken teeth and faced backward when killed was not accepted.⁹ It was extremely difficult for the hunters

as the animals were not in the same place and most of them were ferocious. Moreover one had to be affluent enough to be able to perform *the 'Ai' or 'Sa-ai'* which means the performance of sacrificial ceremony over each of the animals killed.¹⁰

The accomplishment of *Thangchhuah* confers a person certain privileges and status in the society not only in his lifetime but also to the next world. The entitlements are: - to open windows, to construct '*Chhwar or Thehlan* (shelves along the side of the house and on the rafter), to make dividing walls, to set up '*Leikapui*' (verandah), to wear '*Thangchhuah puan*' (special cloth), to wear a special '*Diar*' (striped turban) and to enter '*Pialral*' (paradise) directly.

In the pre-colonial period, they were migrating people from one place to another, working day in and day out facing many hardships for survival without permanent settlement. It seems that they have formulated *Thangchhuah* as a sort of belief system to keep the community intact. All the processes of *Thangchhuah* have involved religious ceremonies which indicates the socio-religious basis of the society. The English Christian missionaries simply condemned the *Thangchhuah* feasts as "occasions of drunken revelry".¹¹ But the reality might be that they recuperated from the miseries of existence.

The role and importance of *Thangchhuah* imbibe shared fundamental traits – the fundamental and distinctive character of a group expressed in attitudes, habits, and beliefs. The pre-colonial Mizo society as an organized and functioning human community has undoubtedly evolved some systems intended to guide social and moral behaviour.

What can we learn and what should we say about traditional ideas concerning time, God, or the human person? There can be a meager or rather less elaborate investigation regarding the ideas and beliefs of the Mizo society which bear ethical conduct.

The institution of *Thangchhuah* produced an alternative view of morality – the value of collective good and on membership in a society. Was giving public feasts enough for molding Mizo social value? *In lama Thangchhuah* which was associated with harvest has some requisites – diligence (working laboriously), knowledge of physical geography (seasons, rainfall, terrain, etc), domestication of animals, manpower and agricultural tools, etc. The duration of *In lama Thangchhuah* has no limited time frame and hence, covered almost a lifetime. So, agriculture and domestication of animals were their backbone of the economy to their very existence.

Ram lama Thangchhuah which was linked with hunting provided the field for attaining important concepts like patience, bravery, courage, endurance, etc. They have to chase several prescribed animals for many days and nights covering decades of hard works. By doing so they had gained important knowledge of survival. The killing of some animals alone for food could not provide the necessary skills for survival. There was an element much more precious than the mere skins, bones, and meat of animals.

In pre-colonial Mizo society, the existing social hierarchy was not rigidly followed due to the influence of the prerogative power of the chief. There have been mentioned of eight (8) categories¹² while *Hnamchawm* (commoners),

Bawi and *Sal* (slaves), and *Thangchhuah* are not counted as village officials (chief and his councils) but formed a part of hierarchical order. However, the status and privileges conferred upon *Thangchhuah* by the society did not change.

The mentioning of ‘poor’¹³ in the occasion of public feasts may not be relevant as there was no clear distinction between social class and social rank in Mizo society. A social class is a set of concepts centered on models of social stratification in which people are grouped into a set of hierarchical social categories, the most common being the upper, middle, and lower classes.¹⁴ However, this kind of social stratification did not match up with the pre-colonial Mizo society. A rank is one that ranks an individual in terms of the genealogical distance from the chief.¹⁵

The vital role played by the concept of *Thangchhuah* remains the same in one’s lifetime as well as the afterlife.¹⁶ How was that possible or was there any myth and reality involved? The myth seems to be the life after death envisioned as a settlement with a miniature world. This on the other hand created a strong current of religiosity and spirituality among the people which was utilized during the colonial period under the banner of Christianity. Some writers label the pre-colonial Mizo society as ‘animism’,¹⁷ primal or without religion in the absence of established religion.

The reality of *Thangchhuah* might be the togetherness or in other words, keeping intact the society - to push forward, to grow, and to survive in the midst of miseries of existence. It appears that *Thangchhuah* was a clever formulation that had balanced the society. The chiefs and council of elders

who were at the top of the hierarchy on the one side and the commoners on the other side could have the same fate. In analyzing *Thangchhuah* there occur the problems of meaning, representation, and nature of society.¹⁸

By grasping the inter-relatedness of every dimension of *Thangchhuah* as a human experience, it often tends to involve a great deal of reconstruction.¹⁹ Thus, it incorporated different aspects of the value-system into one and acted as a basis of the socio-economic needs of pre-colonial Mizo society.

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SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF SIAL (MITHUN) IN TRADITIONAL MIZO SOCIETY

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SIAL (MITHUN) occupies an important place in the social, economic, religious, and cultural life of the tribal peoples living in northeast India. It is one of the important and valuable domesticated animals having a significant status in society. The ownership of Sial (Mithun) is considered a sign of prosperity and superiority of an individual in the society. Also, prosperity was measured on the possession of Sial (Mithun) among the Mizo, Naga, and different tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in the pre-colonial period and is still one of the valued semi-domesticated animals in these states.

The objective of the paper is simply to assess the socio-economic importance of Sial in traditional Mizo society.

Synonyms of Sial (Mithun)

The Sial (Mithun), which was given a scientific name '*Bos Frontalis*' has different synonyms and different tribes in northeast India gives their own name. Some of them are,

‘Gavaya’ in Sanskrit, ‘Gavi or Gayal’ in Hindi, ‘methon/mithun’ in Assamese, Adi (Arunachal) - tribe call it as “Eso” or Sobo while Nyishi calls as “Soebe/sebe” , Apatani tribe call it as “Seobo/Seibo”.¹ Some of the Naga tribe calls Mithun as ‘Wei’ and Tangkhul tribe of Naga also calls ‘Seizang’, Manipuri calls it as “Sandung/sandong” and “Sia’ in chin hills of Myanmar.²

The Mizo gives different names to Sial (Mithun) such as Ramsial (wild mithun), Tumpang sial (wild mithun), Sele (wild mithun), Kawlfung (wild mithun),³ and Sial (domesticated mithun). It is learned that wild Mithun was given various names like Ramsial, Tumpang sial, Sele, and Kawlfung but it is proved that they are the same species giving different names according to their nature of living in the forest; particularly that *sial* (mithun) living alone in the forest was called ‘sele’ and those having full-grown horns were also called ‘tumpang chal’. Apart from these, ‘Kawlfung’ was a Lai (Mizo sub-clan living in the southern part of Mizoram) name of wild mithun, and those mithun living in the forest were referred to as ‘fung’ in Lai language.⁴

Paisho Keishing, a mithun researcher in Manipur has given different names for mithun such as the ‘cattle of mountains’, ‘forest asset of Manipur’, ‘pride of northeast’, ‘pride of the hill people of Manipur’, ‘ceremonial ox of the northeast’, ‘forest loving animals’ and ‘the ship of highland’.⁵ So the above names indicated the importance of Sial (Mithun) in the tribal society.

Origin and distribution of Sial (Mithun)

Sial (Mithun) is believed to have originated more than 8000 years ago and is considered to be a descendent from wild Indian gaur.⁶ Though it has a limited geographical distribution, mithun is found over a large area of South and Southeast Asian countries including Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan and China. In northeast India, it is mainly found in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, and Jammu and Kashmir. Interestingly, there are some different folktales and legends on the origin of Mithun among different tribes. Some of them referred to Sial (Mithun) as the descendant of the Sun.⁷

Being occupied an important place in the society, the Mizo had already domesticated Sial (Mithun) during their settlement in the Chin Hills of Burma which is indicated in many of the stone monuments in Chin hills. HNC Stevenson has discussed the significances of Sial (Mithun) in the Chin hills as follows :

‘To the Chin by far the most important of his domestic animals is the mithun (*bos frontalis*), and for this creature alone is a sacrifice and a *Zarhul* or rest day held at birth as in the case of humans. While man may have numerous other kinds of live-stock, it is by the number of his mithun than that his wealth will be judged, for the mithun is the supreme unit in the economic sphere, in the payment of tribute in pre-annexation days, and in the scale of sacrificial offerings.’⁸

It seems that Sial (Mithun) was not reared for milk and put to work, but solely for meat and sacrificial purposes which will be discussed later. The motifs of the head and horn of Sial (Mithun) were the most common figures carved on stone monuments in Chin hills and Mizoram.

Socio-economic importance of *Sial* (Mithun)

The Sial (Mithun) has socio-economic importance in the traditional Mizo society since it was regarded as the most and high valued domesticated animal. It was used for various purposes such as sacrifices, marriage prices, slaughtering for feast, currency (exchanges item) etc. For instance, the value of Sial in terms of currency in the Mara society, as reproduced by NE Parry in 1932, was a bull Mithun valued at between 60-80 rupees and cow (mithun) at 60 rupees.⁹

However, the importance of Sial (Mithun) in Mizo society may be discussed in some points in the following:

a) Sial (Mithun) for sacrificial purposes

The early Mizo performed various sacrifices and ceremonies/feasts, some of them were performed by the household individuals and jointly the villagers for various reasons such as to complete the feasts of merit and to appease the good and the evil spirits etc. Though the various Mizo clans had their own performances, the slaughtering of certain animals was the main and compulsory items. Domesticated animals such as Sial (Mithun), pig, fowl, goat, etc. were mostly used for such performances.

Every series of feasts of merits were related to the sacrifice of domestic animals and those feasts of merits were considered the soul and essence of the socio-cultural identity of the people. The Mizo has a concept of 'life after death' and believed in the existence of *mithi khua* and *pialral*, two places of abode. In order to attain the *pialral*, one has to achieve the coveted title *Thangchhuah*, which carries with it much honour in this world and was much coveted by all who aspired for status in society and a secure place in the world hereafter.

So, for this purpose, one has to complete the series of feasts of merit such as *Sakung*, *Chawng*, *Dawino chhui*, *Sedawi chhun*, *Sekhuan/Zankhuang*, and *Mitthirawp lam*, and *Khuangchawi*. Among the feasts, the compulsory slaughtering of Sial (Mithun) was involved in *Sedawi chhun*, *Sekhuan/Zankhuang*, *Mitthi rawp lam*, and *Khuangchawi*. *Khuangchawi* is the greatest of all the ceremonies and represents the final feast in the prescribed series. The feasts of merit related to the sacrifices of Sial (Mithun) and it was one of the main prescribed animals for slaughtering along with other domesticated animals such as pigs, fowls, goats, etc. during the feasts, without which the performances could not be complete. Some portions of meat such as liver etc. were used for sacrificial purposes and the rest meats were put for a feast.

To complete the series of feasts and to attain the coveted title '*Thangchhuah*', one has to possess a certain number of Sial (Mithun) and other domesticated animals throughout his life. The series of feasts could not be

performed within a short period of time, it is possible only throughout a lifetime. Thus, it is indicating that only the chiefs and wealthy people could perform the feasts. So, the *Sial* (Mithun) is a pride possession that symbolizes wealth, power, and status in society.

Moreover, the Lusei and other Mizo clans rarely used *Sial* (Mithun) as sacrifices to appease the evil spirit, but the terracotta of *Sial* (Mithun) was sometimes used during the *Daibawl* sacrifices.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the Mara peoples in southern Mizoram slaughtered *Sial* (Mithun) to performs '*Raseichho*'¹¹ sacrifices to please the evil spirit to ensure good health for the villager and fertility of the jhum land. Since it is believed that all the entire jhum land and its adjoining areas were completely controlled by the evil spirit, it is necessary to perform jointly by the villager usually outside the village where the jhum lands were clearly visible.

b) *Sial (Mithun) for bride price*

The Mizo customarily used some prestige goods and domesticated animals for bride price (man) before the currency was introduced in Mizoram. Bride price (man) was generally determined in terms of *sial* (mithun) and the price varied in different clans and for instance, the prices of Sailo clan (a chief's clan) are higher than the commoners. It usually fixed that the price of chief's clan at ten (10) mithun while commoners (*hnamchawm*) at 4 or 5 Mithun. The prices fall into two parts i.e *Manpui* (principle price) and *Mantang* (or subsidiary prices). The *Manpui* is always reckoned in Mithun but varies according to the family of the bride. If a Sailo maiden is

valued at ten mithun, while less aristocratic girls are worthless, the lowest price being three¹² or four.¹³ N. E Parry, a British officer had interviewed various Mizo chiefs and elders in 1927 and he finally states that the 'general rate of Manpui is four Mithun or Rs.80/-; if the girls have no dowry and five Mithun or Rs.100/- if the girl has a dowry. This is the most prevalent rate and is considered most suitable by the chiefs and peoples consulted.'¹⁴

A custom seems to spring up of counting the *manpui* in 'tlai (Sial or Mithun)' which is equivalent to Rs.20 (rupees twenty). Some of the terms in connection with the bride's price at the marriage were as follows¹⁵ :

- | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------|
| i) Tlai (Sial) | : Rs. 20.00 |
| ii) Sepui, a big mithun | : Rs. 40.00 |
| iii) Senufa or a mithun and calf | : Rs. 60.00 |
| iv) Puikhat | : Rs. 2.00 |
| v) Puisawmsial | : Rs. 20.00 |

The above prices were mostly used by the Lusei clan, a dominant clan among the Mizo and other various clans also used mithun as the main prices, and the prices were also realized in terms of kinds and animals such as cattle, pig, gun, gong, etc.

c) *Sial (Mithun) for judicial fines, dues*

The judicial fines inflicted upon the offenses by the chiefs and his council may vary from village to village and according to the nature of offenses. The Lusei and other clans used Sial (mithun) as the maximum fines in judicial proceedings which were equivalent to rupees 40/-. For

example, 'if a man found guilty of touching the breasts of a married woman (*hnute deh*) is liable to pay a fine of Sepui (a full-grown Mithun) and *Salam*.¹⁶ It was always accompanied with *Salam* (pig) which was equivalent to rupees 5/-. As in the case of the Mara society in southern Mizoram, the highest fines imposed is Sial (Mithun) which was equivalent to rupees 60.¹⁷ It is the same with the custom of the Pawi/Lai people and the lowest fines was *Salam* or rupees 5.¹⁸ The *Salam* was usually paid in kind (pig) which was normally the share of the chief and the council. Due to the scarcity and unavailability of currency, the fines were normally paid in kind viz. mithun, pigs, gongs, bead, etc.

The chiefs enjoy some privileges to receive certain kinds of dues (*chhiah*) from the villager such as paddy due (*fathang*), bee-tax (*khuaichhiah*), salt tax (*chi chhiah*), meat tax (*sachhiah*), mithun tax (*sechhiah/sekawt hawn man*), etc., out of which '*sekawt hawn man* or *sechhiah*' was some kind of dues/tax received by the chief from the selling of mithun to another village. If one villager sold his domesticated mithun to a person belonging to another village, he was bound to pay a young pig or Rs. 2 to the chief as a due which was called '*sechhiah*' (mithun tax) or '*sekawt hawn man*'¹⁹. This due indicates that the chief was the ultimate owner of all properties in his village and his control over the property of the subjects.

d) *Sial (Mithun)- a symbol of prosperity*

The ownership of Sial(mithun) is considered to be the sign of prosperity and superiority of an individual in the society. For example, one who performs Sedawi feasts

was required to plant a wooden post (*seluphan*) on which the head of the Sial was attached. *Seluphan* was a forked or Y-shaped post for commemorative purposes during the *sedawt*²⁰ ceremony at the courtyard of the performer. The word *Seluphan* is a combination of two words, *Selu* meaning 'head of mithun' while *phan* means 'a wooden post'. It was a wooden Y-shaped post on which the head of a Sial was attached. It was a status symbol and every Mizo desired to have a long line of such posts in front of the house.

The concept of fertility is underscored in the sacrificial rituals involving the slaughter of animals, for the fertility of crops and material prosperity is a precondition for the erection of megaliths. The erection of megaliths and the accompanying feasts of merit by which individuals acquire social status are believed to promote not only the fertility of the individual but of the group as a whole. The fact that the erection of stones or forked posts in the course of the feasts of merit was thought to promote the fertility of crops is brought out in the *Sedawi* feast, where the village priest, the *Sadawt*, prays for an eternal blessing on the family who performs the feasts and for the prosperity of their fields and crops, etc. During the occasion the following verse is chanted by the *Sadawt*:

Hual ang aw, hual ang,
(chu mi) thla hual ang;
Nipui dam chen hual ang,
Thlapui dam chen hual ang.
Hai tarin hual ang aw,
*Zawhza zovin hual ang aw.*²¹

(The song is about the material blessings that are conferred on the family of the person who performs the feast so that there is increased fertility of his fields and crops, so, that he can accomplish the series of the feast of merit to attain the coveted title of '*Thangchhuah*').)

So, being a high valued domesticated animal, it is hard to possess mithun for commoners and only the wealthy and chiefs could possess.

Comparison with other Tribal People in Northeast India

As discussed earlier, the ownership of Sial (Mithun) is considered to be the sign of prosperity in the culture of various tribes in northeast India particularly in Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and Mizoram. All the wealth and prosperity was measured in terms of the possession of mithun. Particularly, the various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh such as Idu, Mishmi, Nyishi, Adi, etc. used Mithun for various purposes, for instances, the Adi tribe usually performed Sial (mithun) sacrifices on the occasion of marriage to bring the glory and blessings to the new couple and also regarded mithun as a witness to the truth for disputed matters and used as means of proof for truth and justice.²² Interestingly, the Naga peoples regarded Sial (mithun) as a powerful symbol of wealth, prosperity, and fertility and dignified house facades in the form of Sial (Mithun) head carvings which traditionally declared the social status of the owner.²³ The various Naga tribes usually carved the motifs of different animals including mithun, tigers, elephants, snakes, lizards, hornbill, etc. in typical wood carving. Out of which the Sial (Mithun) and hornbill were the common

motifs that had great importance in the Naga society. The wood carving of Naga tribes relates to rituals and architecture. Thus all these factors proved mithun deserved to be declared as the state animal of Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland.

Conclusion

Thus Sial (Mithun) occupied the same position in the social, economic, and religious life of early Mizo society. It was used for different purposes – sacrificial, marriages, judicial fines, the skin is used for drums, social symbol and the ownership of Sial is considered to be the sign of prosperity and superiority of an individual in the society. The horn of Sial (*seki*) is also used for keeping gunpowder (Fungki) and musical instruments for maintaining timing.

Therefore, Sial (Mithun) has a great significance in the traditional Mizo society and is still considered the valued domesticated animal.

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NAMING OF NAMES IN TRADITIONAL MIZO SOCIETY

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IN ANY TRADITIONAL society, there often generally exists a conventional principle of the naming of names within lineages or families. The same could be seen within Mizo society from the earliest times too. This paper will therefore highlight the various ways in which naming of names has been practiced with regard to how names were given to individuals as well as to how names were associated with the wider environment. However, the paper will focus on only a few aspects of the said subject.

The traditional Mizo society comprises of numerous tribes and clans belonging to different divisions with separate languages or dialects of their own. Each divisions therefore had specific customs of naming of names and their surroundings- forest, footpaths or bridle paths, hills, village, newly acquired lands, rivers, springs, and even several spirits believed to dwell in their midst. Moreover, the Mizos had the custom of naming of certain individuals and clans - in memory of their former settlements, to keep in mind such

agreements made by the households of the village, to eulogize and also to condemn the activities of their neighbours, commemoration of their success in wars, honouring certain chiefs, heroes, fore fathers, loved ones etc. The Mizos also commonly named themselves in remembrance of their deceased relatives or chiefs. Giving clan names or names of the concerned family to a person was also the norm even while the chief or householder was still alive.

Further, naming of names becomes common in certain events especially community fishing, hunting, trapping animals etc. The Mizos also had the habit of naming places, events, experiences etc. in their ballads and songs which always had significant bearings on the people.

Some significant feasts were also named so as to remember those celebrated in the village. For example, *Sikpui Ruai* (a public feast given by individuals, mostly the Hmars- one of the divisions of the Mizos), *Chawngchen* (a sacrifice offered by an individual household of the village), *Zaudawh* (to erect a kind of extension outside one's house when someone died in the family), and *Thangchhuah* (a feast given by a man who has distinguished himself by killing a certain number of different animals in the chase, as well as domesticated animals or by giving a certain number of feasts regarded as a passport to *Pialral* or paradise).

In Mizo society, the naming of names to commemorate epitaphs was also practiced. This can be seen in the form of marks or figures on memorial stones, to remember agreements between two villages or tribes or clans, to reflect social status

in the society and to commemorate or remember some significant incidents.

In traditional Mizo society, specifying the date of the birth of the baby was made according to the agricultural seasoning or the year in which some events, etc. took place. Once a baby was born, most Mizos did not simply name a child but always connected their names either with their grandfather or grandmother and with nature or the environment. It is to be noted that the Mizos had several names to address the spirits that dwelt in the surrounding forests but they hardly used or adopted such names in naming their children. It may also be noted that many traditional societies have an ancestral –name taboo; the people are afraid that speaking the name of a dead relative will disturb and anger his ghost.”¹ But in the context of the Mizos, the same is not applicable. Although it was considered taboo to name newly born babies after the names of the deceased relatives who had passed away recently, the deceased were often remembered and revered when referring to their names.

The naming of a child usually happened immediately before or after the birth of the child. Sometimes the couple would decide in advance a name before the baby was conceived by the mother. But the naming of a newborn baby was done usually by the immediate relatives. For instance, the name of the firstborn baby was done by the grandfather on the mother’s side and the second born by the grandfather on the father’s side respectively. The reason for the naming of the baby was that ‘it brought prestige to the person who had so named the baby’.² At times of childbirth, the midwife

would also be given credit by naming the newborn with her name or some parts of her name.

A sacrifice was usually made so that the newly born baby would not be disturbed by the spirit that dwells in the surrounding areas. The offering of such sacrifice is known as *thlahual* to prevent the spirit of a newborn baby from following the spirit of the deceased. It also signified admission of the newborn to the family and protection from the evil spirit. In certain cases, the person who delivered the baby would also give a nickname to the baby before he bore the actual name. It is said that if a pet name was not given, the newly born baby would not survive.³ This was done so as to prevent the baby from the evil spirit. However, the case of the *sal* (slave) or *sawn* (illegitimate child) and *bawi* (chief's retainer or bonded labourer or slave according to possession) were different from the legitimate children. For example, since the *bawi* were mainly owned by the chief and the wealthy family, the naming of the *bawi* children was the prerogative of the owner.

One unique feature to be noted is that if some parents could not conceive a child for many years, but later, fortunately, had a baby then they would go to the '*Mipiang chhungte* (households having more working members). This was done for the survival of the newly born baby. This is called '*Suak*' (*mi chawbel suak ve* or *ring* or the person who depends on the economic resources of others) and the householder who accepted the baby would be the '*Pu Thlam*' (not a real uncle) but more regarded as *Pu chuam* or a real uncle. By adopting the child, the *Pu Thlam* had the priority or power to name the newly born child.⁴

Amongst the Mizos, teknonymical usage which is the practice of referring to parents by the names of their children was also the norm. Parents hardly called each other by name—for instance, *Rovi pa* or *Rovi nu* (father of *Rovi* and mother of *Rovi* respectively). However, only parents or elders would address each other in such a manner and there would be no direct address of names to each other. Children or the younger ones would not call their elders in such a manner. It may be noted that while designating names for their children, the eldest sibling was called *fa hming koh* and usually bore either the name of the father or mother, or grandparents. Besides, the Mizos hardly consulted the priests or *zawlnei* or soothsayer. Usually, the *zawlnei* was believed to be possessed by the evil spirit.⁵ This may be one of the reasons for not consulting such a person.

The naming of names also extended to animals in accordance with their appearance, their way of walking, howling, crawling, their aggressiveness, and so on. For example, upon seeing a small arrogant animal and seeming to be quite fearless was named with the connotation *huai* (brave) attached to it and given the name - *sahuai* (a slow-paced Lemur).⁶ A very big and ferocious animal considered to be quite strange was called *Samak* (Rhinoceros). Literally, *sa* means animal and *mak* means a strange/extraordinary.

Before colonial intervention and their subsequent administration of the hills, Mizos did not have the modern system of counting years, months, or days as they were not influenced by outside civilization. They usually counted times in years and months based on the cycle of the lunar

and solar system and also the agricultural cycle. In fact, they had a systematic way of counting years months based on *thla de* or the new moon and *thla mang* or the invisible moon just before the new moon emerges. Even appropriate days or months for marriage were made according to the cycle of the moon. It is to be noted that till today it is still considered taboo to be married in July and August (known as *thiṭin thla* considered as times when death would be more prevalent). In the context of counting of time, based on the cycle of crops, one year would be counted in accordance with reaping or harvesting of crops especially rice.*

The Mizos were also able to name and gain certain knowledge concerning durations of time from their domesticated animals too. Through the crowing of cocks, they were able to glean knowledge of time such as *zanlai* or midnight, *varṭian* or dawn, *zing* or morning, *chhun* or mid-day and *chawhnu* or afternoon etc. This significantly impacted the schedule of their daily lives. But during and after colonialism, the counting of traditional months deteriorated and the modern calendar was adopted.

In the context of naming of particular months, several debates have ensued which continues today. According to one version, in the month of *Samulphah thla* (October) Mizos usually celebrated the *Khuangchawi* (One of the public feasts of the Mizos for the whole village usually given by a chief or well-to-do family). On such occasion, they would kill a *sial* or bison which was then skinned and left to dry. After the skin was dried up they would (spread) and sit on the animal skin and this is called '*Sahmulphah thla*'.⁷

Another contender stated that one of the favourite games of the Mizos was the hunt for *sanghal* (wild pig). During the reaping season, these animals were plentiful in the *lo* or agricultural land and their hairs would fall in large quantities at the places where they laid on the ground. From this, the hunters could easily know that it was a *Sahmulphah thla*.⁸ Literally, a time when numerous quantities of hair of the *sanghal* would fall and be flattened on the ground when the said animals crouched upon them.

As Mizos were all related either through marriage from one tribe or subtribe, each had ways of naming /giving names or calling each other. For instance-the Pawi, Lusei, Lakher, Hmar, Ralte, Paite, etc., were so-called according to their appearances, dress, behaviors or activities. In fact, each clan was so named according to how they were known or seen by others. Moreover, the Mizos did not have a prefix attached to clan or family names. But if the family names start with a certain vocabulary then they usually named it accordingly.

Among some of the clans or sub-tribes of the Mizos, there exists common nomenclature or word within their personal names. The *Sailo*, Chawngthu, Pawi and a few other clans commonly used the term “*ngur*” or “*ch*” or “*hrang*” etc respectively. Among the Sailo clan, the word “*ngur*” is quite common either for males or females. Similarly, the Chawngthu and the Pawi clans begin their name with ‘*Ch*’ and some Pawi also used “*hrang*” and so on. But clan names are hardly reflected in their personal names. Some sub-tribes or clans definitely ended their names with a consonant, however, as mentioned above due to stronger influence their

names ended with a vowel and a consonant. For instance, in former years, the personal name of the Ralte clan ended with a consonant but in course of time commonly ended with a vowel and consonant.⁹ It has been stated that traditionally, "Owning or designating clan name as a personal name is not a customary practice, therefore it is a great boon and blessing for us."¹⁰

In the olden days, the non- *Sailo* clans also sometimes adopted the nomenclature of the *Sailo* names. (the *Sailo* were majority of the ruling clan on the eve of the coming of the British in Mizoram). This was due to close friendly nature or having closed relations with the non- *Sailo* clans or households of the village who were under the rule of the *Sailo* Chief or the children of their *bawi*. Not only the *Sailos*, generally among the *Luseis* the non-*Luseis* also sometimes adopted the *Lusei* names. This happened due to prolonged settlements or inter -mixing with the *Lusei* households in their neighbouring villages. It is also to be noted that personal or individual names played a great role in society. If a certain Chief or individual was famous due to his prowess and deeds some parents usually would like to name their children after such persons.

The *Lakhers* like other non-*Luseis* have a very unique way of calling names. Although almost all their names ended with a consonant, when actually referring to such persons, the consonant is silent. Unlike the *Luseis*, their names ended with the consonant but when pronounced the consonant is silent. But there is a way of knowing gender classification. When a male is addressed they commonly used '*paw*' and '*pa*' and when addressing the female line they commonly

used ‘*nu*’, ‘*no*’ and ‘*na*’.¹¹ However, Reginald Arthur Lorrain in his opening chapter on *Grammar and Dictionary of the Lakher or Mara Language*, stated: “*All syllables in the Mara language end in a vowel never in a consonant.*”¹² He further stated that both genders are sometimes distinguished by different words such as *Satlia* or a youth, *chapaw* or a man, *pa-pa* a baby boy and *laisa* or a maid, *chano* or a woman, *na na* or *nu nu* or *ei nu* or a baby girl respectively.¹³

Among the Thado Kukis, they usually adopted their names from the maternal and paternal grandparents respectively. Like the Maras their names ended with a consonant. There was hardly any specific gender distinction like the Luseis. But the male line can easily be identified. For instance, the male names usually included the alphabet *j, k*, and *h*. But there are an exception where the female can be distinguished from the male line. In the case of short names like *Niangboi*, *Hlingboi* and *Lamboi* it is easy to know that they are from the female line.¹⁴ Unlike their male counterpart, in their full name, the vowel, like *i* and *e* comes in between the name. This may be the only exception where gender identification is possible.

The traditional names of the Hmar usually ended with a consonant and there was usually no gender classification as a whole but when addressed to each person one could easily find or know the classification of male and female. Like any other sub-division’s of the Mizos, a prefix of clan names in their personal names is not seen in their personal names.

The Hmars commonly used ‘*i*’ and ‘*e*’ before a consonant letter or followed by a consonant. Only when it is two-

syllable, their names usually ended with 'a' and 'i'. The Hmar name generally consists of three syllables, for example - Lallienthang (*Lal lien thang*), Hrangsangkung (Hrang sang kung). This applies to both sexes. Therefore it is impossible to identify whether the person is male or female. However, however there are some exceptions with popular endings. For instance when there are names ending with the words 'hnem' 'kim' 'zo' 'tling' 'mawi' 'pui' 'khawl' 'vel' etc one could easily distinguish that such individuals are female. But there are an exception where even some male persons have 'pui' 'kim' at the end of their names.¹⁵ In the case of names with a short form, like *Luna*, it is clear that the person is a male, and in the case of female, like *Thangi* so there is no problem. However, there are exceptions, for example, the name *Khawla* surprisingly refers to a lady. So, the ending with a vowel in no way suggests that the concerned person is a lady. Some parents use the ending 'a' as a sign of affection and this has created serious problems particularly for the non Hmars.¹⁶ The word *lien* is also quite common in naming their children. Due to influence from the major clans or divisions of the Mizos the Hmars of Mizoram have commonly adopted the Lusei ways of gender classification as such their names ended with a vowel *a* and *i* respectively. The Hmars like any other clans of Mizoram also have their ways of the naming of villages. For instance, there are two particular villages in Churachandpur District of Manipur called *Saikawt* and *Saidan* respectively. *Saikawt* village is located between two hills and is connected by a narrow pass. In the olden days, this was the route usually passed through by elephants.¹⁷ So the village bore the name of the said elephant route. (*Sai* means elephant and *Kawt* means pass so the two syllables formed the name of the village).

Similarly, there is another village called *Saidan* and is located near the Japanese Hills. The reason for bearing such a name is that elephants were prevented from coming to that particular spot. (*dan* means to prevent or not to allow to come to that place).¹⁸ In this way, not only personal names but also different names were given to their surroundings according to experiences or circumstances.

During the colonial period, Mizo names began to change with an addition of a prefix or foreign names. The naming of babies and adults changed due to outside influence and innovations mostly due to the emergence of a new culture. Clan names were maintained and adopted until today. But the style of naming and ritualism practiced were different. Gradually most Mizos had suffixes either in the beginning or at the end of their personal names. After World War I, most Mizos names ended with a suffix “Lushai”. However, as many personal names were similar, it created confusion especially for the officials and the non- Mizos who were serving in Mizoram. So the government devised certain methods for convenience and to differentiate persons having similar names. It was suggested: “If it was addressed *Lala Ralte* trouble would be avoided....Therefore let us try to use it.”¹⁹ In order to avoid such confusion, the Government, therefore, encouraged to put clan names after their forename. This was later commonly used by many Mizos for official purposes and recruitments into employment especially in the armed forces. So it was due to the colonial administration’s endorsement that many Mizos began to change the traditional naming of names.

Today, many Mizos continue to follow the traditional naming of names in many respects. For instance, *Pu Thawnglinga* was named after a particular chief of the Chin Hills of Myanmar. The Chief of *Thangawng* in Halkha (Myanmar) was called Thawnglinga. It is said that Thawnglinga (1920- 4 October 1975) was named after Chief Thawnglinga when the former was given the name of the latter by his father Lallianchhunga. It is said that Lalthawnglinga chief of Thangawng was a good person and being handsome hence taking the name of the said chief his father named him as Lalthawnglinga now commonly known as Thawnglinga.²⁰

Again in the modern world, the system of the naming of names continues. For instance *Tawnluia* of *Zothlang*, Aizawl was named to commemorate that his father went to France. Tawnluia's full name is *Raltawnluia* (*ral* mean enemy, *tawn* mean to push or force to and *lui* mean persistent and *a* is the prefix to indicate gender) and he was born in 1925-now aged 95 years. His father, named *Chawngchhuana* (died at the age of 52), went to France during World War I under the British Labour Corps for one year. To remember that his father went to France to fight against the so-called 'enemy of the British', hence the name *Tawnluia* was given.²¹

One thing is certain that among the various divisions of the Mizos most of their names ended with either a vowel or consonant. For instance among the Luseis and those who commonly used the *Dublian* language their names ended with "*a*" and "*i*" respectively. The '*a*' usually ended with the male line and the '*i*' ended with the female line. Interestingly all Lakhers (now Maras) names ended with vowels. Whereas

among the non-Luseis or those who did not adopt or speak the Duhlian language their names usually ended with a consonant.

It is, also natural that among the different subdivisions or clans wherein the tribes or clans name usually ended with the letter “e” their names also usually ended with a consonant except for a very few clans. This suggests that the Mizos were divided into the alphabet *R* group and the *G* group respectively. The *R* group usually ended their names with a vowel, whereas the *G* group ended their names with a consonant. However, many Mizos who had settled for many years in Mizoram had adopted the Lusei way of writing names. In course of time, the traditional custom of the naming of names of some clans was undoubtedly obliterated.. Hence, one can easily recognized or know the distinction of the different sub-tribes or clans of the Mizos by studying the nomenclature of their respective clans or personal names. handpur, information received.

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- ⁵ T. Nghakliana, ‘Mizo Zawlnai Changmanga’ in *Thu leh Hla*, p. 17.

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- * A significant feature to be noted is that Mizo women were quite specialized in knowing the number of days in a month based on the coming of a new moon. It is said that a healthy woman believed that a month consisted of twenty eight to thirty days respectively. According to their calculation, 'they were clean for twenty-two days and were dirty (menses or period) for six days and so forth'. So, according to their period they could know how many days were in a month (Thawnglinga).
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SOCIO-ETHICAL STRUCTURE OF PRE- COLONIAL MIZO

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Introduction

History has witnessed many great individuals of tremendous importance, who have carried out great responsibilities. Such individuals indeed have given great efforts in carrying out their responsibilities. The results of their actions had great impacts in their present times as well as the future. However, the duties fulfilled by such men of honour became meaningful only because of the others or their supporters who gave them acknowledgments and who in turn carried out their corresponding duties. It was only because of the joint effort of these two factors that gave rise to fruitful consequences. Likewise, in every society, one cannot fail to see the importance of leaders whom we call kings or chiefs. However, just as important as them, are the other members of the society who play different roles. Every member in their own capacities has a certain set of roles to play. It is only when each member carries out their duties diligently that the society functions impeccably. This shows the

importance of each member of the society irrespective of their status. Pre-colonial Mizo society was also this kind of society.

The objectives of this paper are to highlight the roles of certain individuals in Pre-colonial Mizo Society and to highlight the ethical relationship between such individuals and the commoners.

The following are the roles and responsibilities of the most prominent individuals of Pre-Colonial Mizo Society -

1. *Lal* or Chief

He was the supreme authority with great qualities. His main duties were leading his subject, he was the guardian of his people, protecting or defending from neighbouring rival, and mediating in times of dispute among his people as well as in times of war against neighbouring villages. He was confined to administer his people according to custom. There were various taxes levied by the Chief for security reasons. Among all the taxes paid to the Chief, *fathang* was rice tax paid by every family with the amount of one to three baskets¹. The Chief in turn utilized it as a charity to whoever needs it in times of scarcity of food. *Fathang* signifies three things namely social, economic, and moral. As social, they were under one banner expressing sincerity and loyalty to the chief. As an economy, the taxes paid by the people eventually stabilize their economical conditions. As moral, they express the noble traits of not hoarding the property for selfish utility and personal consumption, but the notion of common sharing develops a fresh connotation of friendship,

fraternity, equality, compassion, communion, humility as a whole.

2. *Lal Upa or Khawnbawl Upa or Ministers*

They boundlessly rendered their services to the Chief by discussing various matters regarding administration by contributing their experiences and expertise. The *Lal Upa* or *Khawnbawl Upa* is the one with good intelligence and resourceful person. The chief was very much dependent on his ministers regarding legal matters and in his absence, they are the acting guide and controller of every matter. They are the right-hand man of the chief in every way. They would even generously give up their possessions to the Chief.

3. *Valupa or Youth Leader*

He was the leader of the youngsters. Because of his virtuousness, everyone looked up to him. His main role was guiding youngsters concerning ethical and social matters such as decision-making in crucial moments and organizing *Hnatlang* also known as community services or voluntary services.

4. *Zalen(s)*

In every village, there were a privileged few, usually relatives of the Chief of the village. They were called *Zalen(s)* or freemen². They were exempted from paying *fathang* (rice tax) which was paid by every household. They were also given the privilege to first choose plots for jhum cultivation. One of their important duties is supporting the Chief in the field of administration and thus was also regarded as *Upa(s)* in many villages³. Their

function was somewhat similar to *Rambual*, except they were paying tax to the Chief only when the Chief fell short of paddy. Therefore, he could be regarded as the economic security proprietor in the Chief administration. He served as one of the most potent tools in sustaining society.

5. *Thirdeng* or Blacksmith

In other civilizations such as the Indians, caste is the basis of all professions; blacksmiths were amongst the lowest caste, the *Sudras*.⁴ The caste as well as their profession is not regarded as something respectable. But in Pre-colonial Mizo society, the scene was quite different. The blacksmith of the village called *Thirdeng* was greatly respected as he was one of the village officials. Their service or duties to the village were crucial that he was regarded and they were one of the important officials of each village. They were even called the Chief's blacksmith. The trade was passed down from father to son. It was regarded as a skill that could not be learned by ordinary men and was thus highly respected. Their duty was to master the art of making and modifying tools made of iron. They made different kinds of tools such as daggers, spears, knives, etc., that were used for hunting as well as domestic purposes. This shows the importance of their profession in every walk of life. Their work required a good amount of time which is why they were unable to make cultivation like the other members of the village, this must be the reason why a *thirdeng chhiah* (blacksmith tax) was paid in the form of rice by every household at the time of harvest. This tax was regarded as one of the most

important taxes in a Pre-colonial Mizo society. The amount of rice paid as tax however varied from one village to another.⁵ They also received a spine of three ribs of any wild animal killed by the villagers. This was called '*Thirdengsa*'.⁶ Perhaps the people knew the importance of their service in making tools out of iron otherwise they would have resort to using tools made of certain trees such as *Khawmhma* tree.⁷ The number of blacksmiths in a village also depended upon the population of the village so that the village would be self-sufficient with the iron tools they need.

6. *Rambual*

Rambual was selected by the Chief as they were experts in jhum cultivation. Since *Rambual* was selected based on the family sizes with a good reputation of a diligent working nature. Their importance ranges from paying additional *Fathang* to the Chief by contributing their paddy for the unfortunate and needy.⁸ The quality of *Rambual* includes the ability to choose good cultivation land, which might be regarded as an agriculture minister in our present time.

7. ***Tlangau or Cryer***: Though the occupation might be considered as low and cheap, they had their importance as they rendered important public service in times of emergencies and other social announcements which would not be possible without them. He was entitled to accumulate a small basket of paddy from each household every year as a token of gratitude for his services.⁹

8. *Sadawt and Bawlpu or Priests*

There were two types of *Puithiam* or priests- *Sadawt* and *Bawlpu*. *Sadawt* served as the chief personal priest and he has certain duties to perform three important kinds of sacrifices, such as *kawngpui siam*, *Fano daw*i and *khawkhengthawi*.¹⁰ The objects of these sacrifices were to ask blessings for the villagers in fields of hunting or in fighting against their enemies, for successful harvest and protection from drought respectively.¹¹ While the function of *Bawlpu* was to cure or heal certain kinds of sickness. The duties of the Priests include performing different religious rites for the entire fellow citizen. Their functions could be regarded as service for others with full responsibility and in turn, they were held in high esteem.

9. *Tuim phur rual*: In the Pre-colonial *Mizo* society only women were assigned to collect water for the household. It was considered as one of the first duties of every girl. Starting from around 5-6 years of age, the girls would carry water in *Tuim*, a container made of bamboo in *Em*. This group of girls was also assigned to babysit their younger siblings. Although they were still young to perform such important duties, their mothers either had to work in *jhum* or other household tasks. Babysitting was considered to be the duty of such young girls as well as the elderly who were not fit enough to do other duties. In households where there were no females (*Pahmei*), such responsibilities were carried out by young boys and men if required.

10. *Thingnawifawmrual*

Zawlbuk or Young men's dormitory was one of the most important institutions in Pre-colonial *Mizo* society. It was a place where young men were taught different life skills, hunting skills, etc. by the *Val Upa(s)*. Firewood for *Zawlbuk* was collected by every boy who is around 5-6 years of age till adolescence or is old enough or qualified to become lodgers of *Zawlbuk*. The responsibility of the boys was to collect a bundle of firewood every day. The size of the bundle was not specified but measured according to their age or physical strength. If it was found that the bundle was not decent enough, the lodgers of *Zawlbuk* would punish them. This indicates the way they give importance to the responsibility of every person depending on their capacity.

11. *Ramtangrual*

This group of people includes both boys and girls around the age of 12 or 13 years of age or also who are found physically able to work in jhum.¹² This seems to be one of the most important stages of every *Mizo* because he or she can actually start their duties in the family jhum which was the main occupation and source of food. His or her inclusion will eventually increase and generate the total produce of the family and thereby increase the person's importance and significance not only within the family but also to the society. This is a stage where a young *Mizo* moves towards adulthood and learns not only to cultivate different kinds of crops but also the importance of building relationships with

others in terms of helping each other in the jhum which is called '*Inlawm*'.

These mentioned individuals, despite the difference in their status, not only realize their duties but worked hard to fulfill them. Their services were not taken for granted by the rest of the society either. This was probably the reason why there were mutual respect, admiration, understanding, and compassion towards each other. They were aware of the importance of each member of the society. This is reflected in the way they treat each other to suffice each other's needs. These certain individuals carried out their duties and the rest of the society reciprocated with their corresponding set of duties. It is also important to note that in Pre-colonial Mizo society, selflessness was virtue while selfishness was vice. This can be seen in the famous saying '*semsem dam dam; eibil thi thi*' and other important ethical codes like '*Tlawmngaihna*', '*thianchhantihngam*' etc. Everyone knew the importance of each other, thus, discharging their duties towards each other became an obligation.

Conclusion

Like any other societies, the pre-colonial Mizo society was stratified into groups that have their own differences, importance, and duties vested upon them. When each member of the group carried out their duties efficiently, there was order and peace in the society and vice versa. This was how the pre-colonial *Mizo* society was organized. This however was lost with the advent of Christianity. Though the Christian religion brought about advances in

many spheres, it could be said that the organizational spirit of the society has deteriorated. This led to confusion among the people. They are confused about their status and the duties assigned to such status. If at least some of the social classification along with their duties accordingly modified to current lifestyle were adopted or continued or take pointers from the *Ashramas* of the Hindu society where fixed duties were assigned to groups based on their stages of life,¹³ the *Mizo* people will be more driven and achieve much more since they are endowed with innate potentials. Goals will be set for every stage of life without trying to achieve everything all at once. When each goal set for every stage is achieved, the total goals achieved at the end would be much better than not achieving any goals when one does not know when and what goals to set.

In the Pre-colonial *Mizo* society, one of the most important values taught was hard work and determination in fulfilling one's own-duty. This was perhaps to make them realize the importance of being self-reliant. Once these values were neglected, they believed that the society would not be able to sustain itself and would give rise to more social and ethical problems. This shows the importance of everyone doing their own duties according to their own stations in Pre-colonial *Mizo* society. In doing so, one realizes, appreciates, and acknowledges the works of the leaders and at the same time realizes the importance of discharging their own corresponding duties instead of just claiming their rights for the overall development of the society.

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SACRIFICIAL CHANTS OF PRE-CHRISTIAN MIZO BELIEF SYSTEM

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CHANTS, the vocal music was very important in the pre-Christian Mizo society and they reflected the society in different ways. There were different types of chants depending on their purpose such as *Thiamhla* - to invoke the supernatural power, chanted in performing sacrifices; *Bawbhla* – chants of victory; chants of success – *Hlado*; *Ṭabhla* – chants of dirges. Chanting or performing in the vocal form of music in the style of plainchant, which is monophonic is called *chham* such as *Thiamhla chham*, *Hlado chham*, *Bawbhla chham* and *Ṭabhla chham*. Chanting was done with a specific purpose on special occasions as the names suggested. This article deals with parts of *Thiamhla* that were chanted in performing sacrifices to be in good rapport with the spirits or to appease the spirit with the hope of being healing from illness.

There were four types of *Thiamhla* such as *Sakhaw thiam hla*, *Inthawina hla*, *Thawina hla* and *Dawihla*. The first three were chanted in performing sacrifices: *Sakhaw thiam hla* were

chanted in performing sacrifices of belief system, *Inthawina bla* were chanted in performing sacrifices for the healing of illness and *Thawina bla* were chanted in performing sacrifices upon non-human being objects but valued. *Dawihla* were chanted by those with magical powers having the knowledge to invoke supernatural powers.

The pre-Christian Mizo believed that life was predominantly controlled by their relationship with the spirits. The spirits were broadly categorized as benevolent and malevolent that the latter was believed to cause problems in life such as illness and diseases. The benevolent spirits were the guardians of an individual called *Khaltu*; family and clan or tribe called *hnam* was called *Sa*; the village community, physical and non-physical environment called *Khua* and other spirits such as *Pathian*, believed to be the creator who abode in the sky, observed human beings, help in distress and even bless; *Chung* (same as *Vanchung*), believed to be abode above in the clouds, phosphenes, and haze; *Vansen*, believed to be abode above in the red clouds; *Hnuaipui*, believed to be abode in the layers of the earth; *Hnuaita*, believed to be abode below the house; *Lasi*, believed to be abode in the forest and guardian of animals and *Khuavang*, believed to do the finishing in the creation¹ though the concept of this spirit is not clear about its abode and role in the days of human beings.

Pre-Christian Mizo was concerned about their relationship with these spirits and sacrifices were performed to be in good rapport with them. They expected protection and blessings from the spirits and sacrifices were performed for such favor by maintaining a good relationship. Sacrifices performed to these kinds of spirits were officiated by *Sadarwt* (official of

Lusei community only) and *Puithiam* (official of non-Lusei) with *Sakhaw Thiamhla*. Pre-Christian Mizo believed failure to performed sacrifices to the so-believed benevolent spirit called *Sa* could even lead to distress and misfortunes as a result of the unhappiness of the spirit called *Sa nuar*². Sacrifices to the malevolent spirits, on the other hand, were generally reactive and performed, mostly, in the occurrence of problems on health issues. The *Bawlpw* (trained and well versed with chants to invoke the evil spirits) conducted sacrifices to the malevolent spirits. However, it could not be strictly compartmentalized that *Sadawt* or *Puithiam* dealt with sacrifices of the belief system or to the benevolent spirits neither the sacrifices to malevolent or sacrifices of the health issues were exclusively conducted by *Bawlpw*. There were sacrifices to spirits considered malevolent but performed as a proactive and conducted by *Sadawt*. Also, there were sacrifices performed without engaging neither of the officials *Sadawt* nor *Puithiam*.

Sacrifices to the so-called benevolent spirits could broadly be put into categories in such manners: many sacrifices were performed to *Khaltu*, a spirit which looks after every individual, *Lasi* and *Vanchung* were collectively called *Khal*; sacrifices to the spirits *Pathian*, *Sa*, and *Khua* such as *Sakung phun*, *Chawng* or *Chawnfang*,³ *Sechhun*;⁴ concerning sacrifices to *Vansen*, *Hnuaipui*, and *Hnuait*, there was a set of sacrifices called *Dawino chhui* which preluded *Sechhun* and this set included sacrifice *Lasi* and *Chung*. Sacrifices to *Lasi* and *Chung* were performed as *Khal* known as *Lasi khal* and *Vanchung khal* as well as part of *Dawino chhui*. There were chants attached to these spirits and incanted in performing the sacrifices. However, there was no sacrifice performed to *Khuavang*.

Besides sacrifices to the benevolent spirits, some sacrifices did not address any specific spirit such as *Kawngpui siam*, *Fano dawwi* and *Thlahual*. The *Kawngpui siam* was performed for the favour of blessing in harvesting and hunting as well as a strong and safe village community. *Fano dawwi* was performed in favour of the crops that may grow well and safe. The chants did not address any spirit but were a mere expression of wishes. Mizo called the spirit of an individual as *Thla* and *Thlahual* literally meant 'to guard the spirit'. There was a chant of *Thlahual* which was incanted in sacrifices to *Khaltu*, *Sa*, and *Khua*. It was also incanted in the *Kawngpui siam* guarding the spirit of the performing village chief and his family. The chant did not address any spirit, it was basically an expression of wishes and in its nature, it was a chant to make the spirit of a person feel good and feel secure. Besides its inclusion in the sacrifices mentioned, there was a sacrifice called *Ar Thlahual* generally performed with fowl in the event of a death in the family, distress and shocking or traumatic experiences, bad dream, and submission to the protection of chief to become *bawwi* (bonded person) due to some misfortune.

There two types of *Khal*: performed by parents for their children for favour of success and health and performed by adults to maintain a good relationship with *Khaltu*. Different names were given to the sacrifice *Khal* depending on the sacrificial animal and the chant; for instance, *Ar khal* was performed with rooster and rooster meant for *ar*; and if the spirit, *Khaltu* was addressed as dwelling in the rivers it was called *Luilam khal*; then the sacrifice performed with rooster while the spirit was addressed as dwelling in the rivers became *Ar luilam khal*.

The sacrifices performed by parents of the newly born baby were: *Ar khal* - performed with a rooster for favour of stable health for new born baby; *Ar luilam khal*, a rooster sacrifice for favour of speedy recovery of the mother from delivery, newborn baby's health and availability of enough breast milk; *Ui luilam khal* was a sacrifice with a dog for favour of the newborn baby to be free from physical deformities and *Kel khal* performed for adolescent male for favour of successful life.

The sacrifices performed by adults to maintain a good relationship with *Khaltu* were *Vanchung khal*, *Lasi khal*, *Hmar khal* and *Khalchuang*. *Vanchung khal*, was known as *Chung* if performed as part of the set *Dawino chhui*. Sacrifice to *Lasi*, when performed as part of *Dawino chhui* was simply known as *Lasi* but performed separately was known as *Lasi khal*. Primarily *Lasi khal* was performed by skilled hunters to develop a good rapport with *Lasi*, believed to be the guardian spirit of animals. It was believed that a man who *zawl*⁵ a *Lasi* is very successful in hunting and used to kill the animals easily. To maintain such a relationship with the *Lasi*, a man regularly performed sacrifices called *Lasi khal* with a young pig. It is generally believed that *Lasi* is a female as it largely represents love and sex but the question arises if there were male *Lasi*. *Hmar khal* was performed in a belief that there is *Khaltu* spirit that dwells in the north. *Khalchuang* was performed without a specific purpose but as maintenance of a good relationship with *Khaltu* while all other sacrifices were given names according to the abode or nature of the spirits but *Khalchuang* had no such attachment. Sacrifices to *Sa* were performed at *Sakung phun*, *Chawng*,⁶ and *Sechhun*. The *Sechhun* sacrifices included performance to *Khua*, *Sa*, and

Pathian while the focus was *Khua* as the most valued domestic animal mithan was offered to *Khua* and that sacrifice dominated the ceremony. Sacrifice to *Pathian* was performed in all the performances *Sakung phun*, *Chawng* and *Sechhun* by offering a good young male pig.⁷

Sacrifices aimed at prosperous life which, according to the Mizo belief system, was the key to attain peace and abundance in the afterlife. Mizo, before Christianised, believed that were two places where human souls settled. Those successful in life and fulfilled qualification, after death their soul would go to *Pialral* where no one needs to be worried for food and work while others would settle at *Mitthi Khua*, where life is the same as life in the world. One who qualified for *Pialral* was called *Thangchhuah*. There were two types of *Thangchhuah*; one was *In lama Thangchhuah*, achieved by performing *Khuangchawi* in which sacrifices to *Pathian*, *Sa*, and *Khua* were performed. However, *Khuangchawi* could be performed only by those who completed a series of other sacrifices starting from *Sakung phun*, *Chawng*, *Dawino chhui*, *Sedawi*, and *Sekhuang*. The sacrifices *Chawng*, *Sedawi*, and *Sekhuang* were very expensive as they were sacrifices performed by an individual but the village community joined and practically a family-sponsored grand feast. It could be performed by wealthy persons only. The other type of *Thangchhuah* was *Ram lama Thangchhuah* achieved by the killing of prescribed animals and performed the required rituals called *ai*, practically celebration of success by killing an animal without any ceremonies. Most of the specified animals were dreadful, and their killing was considered relevant for their security or some of them were their important source of meat, killing of which were very

relevant in the society. Thus, to entitle *Pialral*, one had to be very successful in life.

There were sixteen sacrifices and twenty-five chants to the benevolent spirits. Sometimes more than one chant is required to be employed in one sacrifice. Basically, the chants were invitation of the spirits to receive the sacrifice that some of the chants even silent on the purpose of the sacrifice while main concerned and explicitly expressed in the chants were wishes for the performer of sacrifice for success in agriculture, hunting, blessed with children, long life, security against enemies and wild animal. The chants of *Ar khal*, *Kel khal*, *Thlahual*, and *Ar thlahual* expressed wishes that the performer may be successful in agriculture and prosperous. And the chant of *Selu lawh* in the sacrifice to *Khua* also expressed the same as “*Buh leh bal pumpui ang, Chawn leh lam pumpui ang*,” (Let us land with food, let us land with *Chawng* and dance). In the *Sechhun* sacrifices to *Khua*, the sacrificial animal was *mithan* and they chopped off its head and the skull was mounted on a post in front of the performer’s house for three months. After three months it was removed by performing a sacrifice to *Sa* by killing a pig with the chants of *Sa*⁸ and while removing the skull of *mithan* the officiating *Sadawt* uttered the chant called *Selu lawh*. The chant of *Fano daw*i did not address any spirit but expressed wishes for success in agriculture as below:

*Dum bluam bluam, dum bluam,
Mima chi, Fanga chi dum bluam,
Leng rual, ramtuan phekhai zang,
Kan thlawhhma tluang rawh se.*⁹

(Imposing like black, imposing like black,
 The sprouts of job's tear, sprouts of paddy be imposing
 like black,
 May the young people be active and lively in their
 work,
 May the work of jhumming be smooth).

The chant of *Kawngpui siam* also did not addressed any spirit but expressed wishes for success agriculture as follow: "*Buhza lawi nan Kawngpui kan siam e,*" (We prepared road, so that success in agriculture may come in).

The desire for long life was found in the chant of *Kel khal* as "*Pi khumin rawn khal ang che, Pu khumin rawn khal ang che, Tar kun khupbihin han khal ang che,*" (Keep him to live longer than grandma, Keep him to live longer than grandpa, Keep him to live very long, even bending) or "*Puakpovin, khupbihin khal ang che,*" (Keep him old with grey hair and bending body) and the chant of *Thlahual* expressed the same wish, "*Hai ang tarin hual ang aw, Tum vuaiin hual ang aw,... ...Tarkun khupbihin hual ang aw,*" (Let us guard to grow old, as old as mango tree, and naturally faded away at like a palm tree... ... Let us guard to live up to very old even the body gets bending). The same kind of wish was also found in the chant of *Ar thlahual*, "*Khup bihin hual ang, tar kunin hual ang, Nipui dam chen hual ang, thlapui dam chen hual ang,*" (Let us guard to live very old even the body get bending, Let us guard to live long as long as sun and moon).

Chants of *Kel khal*, *Ar thlahual* and *Lasi khal* referred to a kind of life which is free from troubles in their prime time; *Kel khal* in particular concern with death at the prime of life

and appeal to the guardian spirit," *Nun tluakin rawn khal ang che, Par tluakin rawn khal ang che*" (Keep him to live through the prime of life, Keep him enjoyed the prime of life). The chant of *Ar thlahual* also concerned the same and referred to as "*Nun tluakin hual ang, pang damin hual ang*, (Let us guard to live through the prime of life, and healthy). In the chant of *Zu-zo*, recited during performance of sacrifice to *Khua* as invitation of the spirit to take rice beer also talk about a healthy and successful life, "*Nuntluak, pangdama thoin Zu va zo vuai*," (Arise with healthy life which lived through prime of life, please take rice beer). The main concern as transpired in the chants was death in the prime of life. *Lasi khal* though performed for the favour of success in hunting referred life free from misfortunes as: "*Nuntluang pumpui che, Pangdam pumpui che*" (Land with smooth life, Land with healthy life). Chants with regard to *mithan* sacrifice to *Khua* emphasized smooth and healthy life; when a *mithan* was being killed for sacrifice, the performer recited a chant that he is not doing it out of dislike or inability to look after but for favour of smooth and healthy life, "*Ka hmu mawha ka ti a ni lo, Ka en mawha ka ti a ni lo, Nuntluang pangdam ka dilna a ni e*." *Se lu lawb* chant in the same sacrifice referred to a smooth and healthy life as follow, "*Nuntluang, pangdam pumpui ang*" (Let us land, bringing smooth and healthy life). In the chant of *Thlahual* and *Kel khal* wishes for the procreation of children were found. The words of these chants were almost the same such as "... *Fanau maltluan chawiin 'hual' ang aw*,..." in *Kel khal* and "... *Fanau maltluan chawiin 'khal' ang che*,..." in *Thlahual*.

Hunting was an essential part of traditional Mizo life. Hunted animals were the most important source of meat

for the domesticated ones were virtually reserved for sacrifices. *Lasi khal* and sacrifice to *Lasi* performed as part of *Dawino chhui* were performed for the favour of success in hunting and the chant, after inviting the spirit *Lasi* to receive the offering, asked to bring success in hunting as, “*Salu pumpui ang che*” (land with the head of animals). The two sacrifices: *Lasi* and *Lasi khal* have the same chant. The chant of *Thlahual* referred to success in hunting as “*Satin satang kapin hual ang aw*,” (let us guard his spirit so that he becomes a person who shoots all kinds of animals) which expressed wishes for the performer to be successful in the hunting of all kind of animals. One of the purposes of *Kawngpui siam* was to seek favour for successful hunting; the chant invited different animals to come to their village as: “*Buannela sa, ... Tumpanga sa, ... Lentlanga sa lo lawi rawh, lawi rawh, I lawi nan kawngpui tluang kan siam e....*”

Security was a fundamental issue during pre-colonial times as their life was always under threat of rival villages and wild animals. In those days, inter-village feuds were very common. *Thlahual* and *Kawngpui siam* chants reflected their concern for the security of their villages. The *Thlahual* chant reflected the state of their security “*Miral - saral thatin hual ang aw*,” (Let us guard his spirit so that he become a person who kills the **enemy** and dangerous animal) and “*Hmelma zun fei hman lakah hual ang aw*,” (Let us guard against the enemy’s spear). Such reflections on the state of security were also found in the chant of *Kawngpui siam* as, “*Kawngpui kan siam e, kawngpui kan siam e, Mi lu, sa lu lawi nan kan siam e*” (We prepared road...for the arrival of trophies of slain enemies and animal’s head). There was a *Thlahual* chant recited only in the *Kawngpui siam* which focuses exclusively on village

security and protection. In this particular chant, the focus was security against enemies or rivals and there was no reference of favour for success in hunting, bless long life, etc. The importance of security against a dangerous animal was also reflected in *Thlahual* chant as, “*Miral ‘saral’ thatin hual ang aw,*” (Let us guard his spirit so that he become a person who kills the enemy and **dangerous animal**).

The chants also reflected the relationship between pre-Christian Mizo life and the natural environment had been reflected in various chants. They had a concept of a creator with superior power and abode above called *Pathian*; but they still looked for some other spirits which had abode in the sky such as *Vanchung*, *Vansen*, and *Chung*. The chants to these spirits were mainly invitation to receive their sacrifices. However, the purpose may be inferred from their way of addressing it. *Vanchung* (*Chung*) was addressed as ‘*Chung ri thang*’ and ‘*Chung rithluai*’ which referred to thunder and indicate their concern for the weather. It was also addressed as an abode in phosphenes and haze which appeared in the sky during the dry season and profoundly touches the Mizo sentiments. The term *Vansen* referred to fine weather like red colour clouds as ‘*Chhum-sen*’ which was taken as a sign of beautiful weather.

In various chants, hills, rivers were referred as the dwelling place of spirits. The chants of *Sa* and *Khua* invoked the spirits to receive the offering while *Zu zo* chant invited the spirit to take rice beer (*zu*). All the three chants such as *Sa*, *Khua*, and *Zu zo* called the spirits to rise from different places of Lentlang in Chin State (Myanmar) such as Ruahhmur, Thlanchhak, Thlanthlang, Lailut, Bualchhum,¹⁰ Vahlut,

Buhmam,¹¹ Muchhip, Khawkawk, Thawhhmun, Muallian, and Lenpui,¹² and different hills or mounds in between Lentlang and their settlement at the time of performing the sacrifice.¹³ The chants of *Khal* were an invocation of spirit to receive the offering and addressed as an abode in different hills and rivers. *Ar khal* chant called the spirit to rise from different hills such as Lurh, Tan, Puanvawrh, Mulen, and the mountain where they were performing the sacrifice.¹⁴ In the pre-Christian Mizo belief, Pan and Lurh, located in eastern Mizoram were the home of *Lasi*, the guardian spirit of animals. *Kel khal* chant called the spirit to rise from Sangawi and Pawi hills. Pawi was a Mizo term for its cognate group Lai who is found in the southern part of Mizoram and its neighbouring areas in Chin State (Myanmar). However, there were two different chants of *Kel khal*, reproduced by Zairema which had a reference to Pawi hill, and the other reproduced by RL Thanmawia¹⁵ which was started with various locations of Lentlang. For instance, Lusei chant started with Muchhip, Chawngthu chant started with Sanzawl and Bochung, Fanai chant started with Rungtlang, and so on. There was no reference of Sangawi and Pawi in the latter.

Reference of spirits believed to have an abode in rivers was found in the chants of *Luilam khal* such as *Ar luilam khal* and *Ui luilam khal*. In the chant of *Ar luilam khal*, the spirit was addressed as an abode in the minor rivers started with Suklui, a tributary of Manipur River in the Chin state of Myanmar which was known to Mizo as Runlui, followed by Tuingha, Tlairawn, Tuiphai, and Tuingha. The chant of *Uiluilam khal* on the other hand addressed the spirit as an abode in the major rivers such as Runlui (Manipur River);

Piau lui, the boundary river of India and Burma then Tuipui and Tuivawl. The Mizo avoided Tuichang because they belief Tuichang was not kind to a human being. Many people had got drown in this river.

The concept of spirits in the pre-Christian Mizo belief system was not clear in some aspects, for instance, *Khaltu* was addressed to have an abode in the hills by the chant of *Ar khal*, while the chant of *Ar luilam khal* addressed as having a dwelling in the rivers. There was no interpretation of the nature of *Khaltu*, whether it was omnipresent or there was more than one guardian spirit for an individual like those having abode in hills and rivers. However, it is certain that pre-Christian Mizo was firmly attached to their geographical environment; geographical features that they explored in the east were incorporated in the chants.

Apart from hills, rivers, pre-Christian Mizo believed that spirits also resided in houses. The chants of *Sa*, *Zuzo*, *Khua*, *Hnuaiipui*, and *Hnuaita* had references that the pre-Christian Mizo believed spirits abode in the structure of the house, inside the house, below the house, roof-ridge, batten wall, floor rafters, gutter fence, and surroundings of the house. *Hnuaiipui* chant included layers of earth as the abode of the spirit.

From the chants, it is clear that health, agriculture, hunting, and security were the primary concern of pre-Christian Mizo life for which they turned to the spirits, and sacrifices were performed. Thus, the traditional Mizo worldview was dominated by spirits. They even attached their environment with spirits and their life was much influence by the

environment. The chants referred to some places in the Chin state of Myanmar which seemed to be their old settlements. Most of such places are located in the Lentlang or places not far from there. The chants, thus, suggested that the cultural formation of Mizo took place in the Chin state only. Most of the Mizo historians working on migration suggested China as their homeland, but the oral tradition on political formation and chants of the belief system did not go beyond the Chin state. Thus, the question arises whether the Mizo cognate groups arrived in Chin state as a distinct tribal group or a group of people branching out from a larger tribal group. Further research with a comprehensive study of the belief system of Mizo cognate groups beyond the Lusei dominated is required to answer the question and the finding of the parent group will be very relevant in the study of Mizo migration.

Notes and References

- ¹ Zairema, *Pi Pute Biak Hi*, Aizawl: Zorun Community, 2009, p. 200.
- ² *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.
- ³ Herein after referred as *Chawng*.
- ⁴ There were three types *Sechhun* – *Sedawi*, *Sekhuang* and *Khuangchawi* which were performed to *Khua*. The sacrificial animal being mithan which is *Sial* in Mizo, the three sacrifices were collectively known as *Sechhun* because the performer pierced at the axilla the of animal but not hard before it was killed.
- ⁵ The good relationship developed between *Lasi* and humans was known as *Zawl*. Such association was usually between man and *Lasi*.

- ⁶ Sacrificial animal was pig and the chant was same with that of *Sakung phun*.
- ⁷ Zairema, op.cit., pp. 70, 196.
- ⁸ C Chawngkunga, *Sakhua*, Aizawl, Dept of Art & Culture, 1997, p. 48.
- ⁹ Zairema, op. cit., p. 38.
- ¹⁰ According to J Shakespeare it was Bualchuam where men first built village in Mizo tradition which was apparently same with Bualchhum. See J. Shakespear, *The Lushei-Kuki Clans*, Reprint, Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute, n.d., p. 72.
- ¹¹ The hills where first nest was built by crow. See J. Shakespear op. cit., pp. 71-72.
- ¹² The places mentioned in the chant were not uniform, but some of them were common. See *Sa, Khua* and *Zuzo chants*
- ¹³ Zairema, op. cit., p. 24.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ¹⁵ RL Thanmawia, *Mizo Hla Hlui*, Aizawl, Din Din Haven, 2012, pp. 119-120.

Traditional Social Values and Practices in Mizo Society

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Introduction.

This paper delves into the importance of some customary practices and the value systems that the Mizo in the traditional society possessed and inculcated from their forefathers to their succeeding generations till the advent of Christianity. Though some important customary practices have been rejected and condemned as taboo today, a few of them continue to exist even today. It is believed that they will continue to exist at least in a modified form. Appeasement to spirits that were unknown to them had been the culture of the traditional Mizo society and was deeply ingrained in the minds and hearts of the forefathers of the Mizo.

History reveals that every nation has a unique character, social values, and practices. Some of the Festivals, customs, and traditions mentioned in this paper had been practiced by the Mizo in the pre-Christian era. Sacrifices and feasts were important and they were part and parcel of traditional

Mizo society. These social norms and practices enhanced integrity in the socio-cultural setting of the Mizo society. The festivals of *Chapcharkut*, *Mimkut*, *Pawlkut* were important in keeping them united. There were three main festivals called *Kuts*. However, except *Chapcharkut*, the other *kuts* had lost their relevance today. *Zawlbuk* acted as an institution where discipline, courage, education, dancing, warfare, right attitudes, and value system were imparted into the young minds.

The Genesis of the Mizo

The word 'Mizo' can be defined as 'hill people'. Some historians believed that they belonged to the Tibeto-Burman race. It is popularly accepted that the Mizo came from a place called *Chhinlung* somewhere in the Sino-Burmese border. But some authors considered *Chhinlung* as the name of the chief. Therefore, the name *Chhinlung* which the forefathers of the Mizo claimed their original home has been embroiled in controversy. For this reason, the exact answer to the origin of the Mizo has been unresolved even today. Some historians believed that the Mizo migrated towards the west and reached the sources of rivers *Mekong* and *Yangtse* in about 100 BC and the settlement of the Mizo between river *Tiau* and river Run in Myanmar was between 1000-1500 A.D.¹ Some Mizo historians also believed that in around 500 A.D, the Mizo settled in the Shan State where they thrived for three centuries and then moved to Kabaw Valley in around 800 AD.² It was during this period that the Mizo had come into contact with Burmese culture. *Khampat* was regarded as the next settlement of the Mizo where they planted a Banyan tree and moved further towards the Indo-

Burmese border promising to return when the branches of the Banyan tree touch the ground.

Till the Mizo came into contact with the British, there was no knowledge that the Mizo had alphabets to record the events of their social movement, settlement, and their history. Therefore, the sources of the origin, their movement towards the west from *Chhinlung* were mainly based on oral history.³ Festivals that have been mentioned in this paper were in vogue since the Mizo were settling in Myanmar and eventual settlement in the Lushai Hills, particularly in the pre-Christian era. Sacrifices and feasts were important in Mizo traditional society. Indeed, the practices of customs and traditions provided cohesiveness in the society as they became a binding force to the society; they enhanced integrity in the socio-cultural setting of the Mizo society. The festivals of Chapcharkut, Mimkut, Pawlkut, and other societal observations were important in their own times.

Status of Women

The traditional Mizo society was basically a patriarchal society wherein the father was the head of the family. Generally, women held an inferior position in all social settings, and men used to be regarded themselves psychologically superior to women. The condition of Women in the Mizo traditional society was low with regard to the inheritance of property as women had no right to inherit property, except in very limited and special circumstances. However, Women engaged in religious ceremony and played an active role in household work,

they fetched water with hollow bamboo pipes, specially made for fetching water. Women cooked, looked after domestic animals, and arranged clothes for all members of the families. Their presence in the family was absolutely necessary.⁴ However, the Mizo society was transforming gradually in such a way that women have become more and more equal to their male counterparts in various fields in the society.

Bawi System

Bawi custom prevailed among the Mizo for several years. The chiefs acquired *bawis* under different circumstances. In the traditional Mizo society, there were three systems of *bawi*. *Inpui chhung bawis* who were driven by hunger and poverty and had no one to rely upon. They included widows, orphans, and others. This category formed the largest *bawi* in the system. The *bawis* were dealt with humanly and as such there were several faithful and capable *bawi(s)* who rose to trusted advisers to the chiefs. The chiefs often promoted into their own family by the ceremony known by the name *Saphun*.⁵ *Chemsen bawi* were criminals who took refuge in the chief's house. Murderers, debtors sought refuge in the chief's house. Thirdly, there was *Tuklut bawis* who deserted the losing side during the times of war and shifted their allegiance to victors.⁶ Though *bawi* system prevailed in the traditional Mizo society, their relationship between the masters and *bawis* seems to be good and loving. Some people due to economic hardship willingly became *bawis* and thus strived well under their masters and mistresses.

Serh and brilh

Serh and *brilh* were the customary practices in the traditional Mizo society. *Serh* means to regard or treat as sacred or to keep or observe any special day, especially by abstaining from going to the jhum.⁷ On the other hand, *Hrilh* can be meant to solemnize such events as untimely death, etc.⁸ Both *serh* and *brilh* could be used interchangeably and could mean the same thing as well. If someone died due to an unnatural cause such as drowning in the river, or fallen from a tree, or was killed by a wild animal the village was *brilh* for a day.⁹ The non-observance of these *Serh* and *Hrilh*, while the whole village was observing, was considered *thianglo* or *taboo* by the society, and no one dared to break the social norms. These values systems had been inculcated in the mindsets of the Mizo since time immemorial and as such continued to exist in the Mizo society even today though in a lesser form. However, it is to be noted that Penalty was not given to people who did not observe *brilh*. However, it was considered that the breach would bring bad luck, and as such people would like to avoid the disrespect of social norms and observance.¹⁰

Sakhua

Mizo *Sakhua* was the Mizo system of religion wherein the Mizo forefathers worshiped “*sa and Khua*”. They considered “*sa*” as their creator of individuals and clans respectively. Each individual and clan had their separate “*sa*.” *Khua* was considered, having the powers and abilities of God dwelling in the midst of mankind. Therefore, the Mizo forefathers wanted to pacify whom they believed as their protectors and benefactors so that their desires in the world and after

that might be fulfilled.¹¹ The Mizo forefathers had the saying, “*khuanu tuah*” which means *khuanu*, or god had pre-arranged to be coupled. Therefore, the Mizo had to pacify *Sakhua* by offering some sacrifices so that ill wills, sickness, misfortunes, etc., might be waded off. Traditionally, the Mizo were very religious. They worship their *Sakhua* with full dedication. If some bad omens took place in the family, they thought that their *Sakhua* was not satisfied with them and as such, they tried to make the *Sakhua* happy by incantations and sacrificial offers.¹²

The Mizo forefathers always wanted to pacify their *Sakhua*. They did not like to dissatisfy the evil spirit called *Rambuai*. In spite of sacrificial offers and incantations, they were always in fear of *Sakhua*. When the Mizo came into contact with the Christian Missionaries and heard the Gospel of Christ, they came to realize that Jesus had powers over all evil spirits and hence the Mizo gradually accepted the Christian faith. The religious values that they had inculcated were shifted from *Sakhua* to Christianity.

Zawlbuk

In the Mizo traditional society, the system of *Zawlbuk* or young men’s dormitory was instituted in almost every village. It was usually built near the chief’s house in the middle of the village and all the young men and boys had to sleep at night. The *Zawlbuk* culture was so significant that it was considered as the lifeline of the village. The travelers also could put up in the night and the chiefs too utilized *Zawlbuk* as a meeting place where he could issue his orders and make known to the villagers. It was the center of the village life and was very essential for the survival of the

village itself. Discipline was strictly maintained in the Zawlbuk. Boys were trained in the arts of hunting, dancing, bravery, warfare. It was an educational institution where respect for elders, good manners, and zeal were inculcated in the minds of young boys. The Zawlbuk culture was like a regular system of self-governing administration. The young men were trained by older men under the supervision of *Val-upa* or, a middle-aged man who was a well-respected man. The existence of *zawlbuk* enabled the efficiency of the village administration very significantly. If a sick man or a dead body had to be carried from the forest to the village or from one village to another, or a grave to be dug, the authority could know exactly where young able-men were to be found. *Zawlbuk* was all the more important when the village was attacked by the enemies as the young men could be summoned immediately as and when required.¹³

***Tlawmngaihna* as a Strategy for Integration**

Tlawmngaihna was one of the most cherished Mizo customary practices. It was a system of sacrificing oneself for a good cause, living for others even in a difficult situation. This Mizo value system was deeply rooted in the Mizo society so much that it became part and parcel of Mizo culture.¹⁴ It acted as a catalyst for the continued observance of some of the cultural values and practices of the Mizo society. During chieftainship, the chiefs and the elders in the village people practiced *tlawmngaihna*. In fact, the traditional Mizo society was very united and cohesive in such a way that even when there was a sick man to be lifted from the jungle to the village, everybody was struggling to be the first to lift the sick man. This was the type of *tlawmngaihna* prevailing in the traditional Mizo society. Mizo

tlawmngaihna can be simply defined as the zeal to serve one's fellow human beings whenever is required. The real equivalent of the English meaning of the word Mizo *Tlawmngaihna* is very difficult to find. This culture has been in practice in Mizo society by the forefathers of the Mizo from time immemorial. This tradition has been handed down by the forefathers of the Mizo to their generations and has been greatly valued and kept intact by the succeeding generations of the Mizo.

Courage

The social value that has been deeply entrenched and admired in the traditional Mizo society was bravery. The traditional Mizo culture like many other cultures was embroiled in internecine warfare with neighbouring tribes. The survival of the traditional chiefs was largely contingent upon the brave men in the village who would face the enemies as and when required. The young men in the village continuously had to be alerted to protect the village from the invading neighbouring tribes. The noted chivalry among the youths was honored special recognition by offering *Nopui*, it was a special cup of rice beer. Obtaining *Nopui* had a special significance and earned social recognition among the Mizo in the traditional society. Hence, all the able young men were slogging hard to obtain *Nopui* in their lifetimes. There were war chants and songs over the victory of their enemies which were part and parcel of Mizo traditional life.¹⁵ Bravery has been one of the hallmarks of Mizo identity. From time immemorial the forefathers of the Mizo considered bravery as an essential part of Mizo identity as such the youths have been trained from their early age to be brave and courageous in all their way of life. Significantly bravery

could be manifested on two accounts such as bravery before the enemies as well as from ferocious wild animals. The Mizo forefathers were often at war with neighbouring tribes as such the youths were trained and encouraged to be brave and to fight the enemies without fear and to bring home the heads of the enemies. This is one of the reasons why the forefathers of the Mizo were called “headhunters” by many writers. The Mizo youths were encouraged from their early times to be brave and tough. A person who could not fight for his friends in the face of enemies or wild animals was considered a coward and not worthy to be called a man and as such only fit to wear “*Puan-fen*” a short petticoat worn by Mizo women.¹⁶

Conclusion

From the above discussion, we know that the value system and the customary practices that have been enforced in the traditional society enabled the Mizo society to survive as a nation. There were many social values and practices in the Mizo society, some of which had passed into oblivion in the process of time, nevertheless, a few of them still survive and continue to play a vital role even today. Some of these social values and practices have transformed Mizo society into a distinctive nation. These social norms and customary practices of the Mizo forefathers enabled them to keep the society intact and cohesive. Many of them have become significant strategies for the very survival of society as a whole. The soul of Mizo *tlawmngaihna* that had been implanted firmly in the hearts and minds of the forefathers of the Mizo continues to exist in their succeeding generations even today.

Notes and References

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- ² B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, RTM Press, Aizawl, 2009, p. 3.
- ³ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/history of Mizoram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/history_of_Mizoram).
- ⁴ Lalrimawia, *Mizoram History and Cultural Identity*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1995, p. 18.
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- ⁶ Ibid., pp. 20-21.
- ⁷ James Herbert Lorrain (Pu Buanga), *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1975 (Reprint),p. 415.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 183.
- ⁹ N.E. Parry, *A Monograph On Lushai Customs And Ceremonies*, Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, 1976 (Reprint), p. 88.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., pp.89-90.
- ¹¹ Zaliana, *Mizo Sakhua* , Lois Bet Print & Publications, Aizawl, 2013 (Reprint), pp.8-9.
- ¹² N.E. Parry, op. cit., pp. 10-11.
- ¹³ Lunglei Writers' Club, *Zotuithiang* , Lengchhawn Press, Aizawl,2003, p. 137.
- ¹⁴ R.L. Thanmawia, *Mizo Values*, Gilzom Offset, Aizawl, 2011, p. 10.
- ¹⁵ B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Culture*, Gilzom Offset, Aizawl, 2010, p. 198.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 199.

ROAD AND COMMUNICATIONS – PRE-COLONIAL AND COLONIAL PERIOD: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECT

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Introduction

Mizoram has considerable geo-political significance as it has approximately 1014 kms. of international boundaries with Myanmar and Bangladesh. The recorded history of the Mizo dates back only to few more than a couple of century or so since the areas we occupied the so called Lushai hills, now Mizoram. Geologically, like other parts of the North-eastern region, the hills in Mizoram are of soft sandstones and shales, which make the area prone to frequent and heavy landslide during the rainy season. Severe and devastating landslide following heavy rain frequently resulted blockade of roads and communications. As such cutting of roads to make good communication was complicated work.

Road Construction in Pre-colonial and Colonial period

During the pre-colonial period, Mizo were the formidable fighting race, raiding and skirmishing again each other even for a small reasons like quarrel over the possession of guns, envy about an affiance of wife, etc. Although they were

ethnologically same tribe they were unable to live perpetual peaceful and harmonies life if at all they were different community. Each and every village has their own chiefs having absolute power to execute up to capital punishment. As such no village considered themselves to be inferior to other village. Thus at the time of the “Chin – Lushai Conference” held at Calcutta on January 1892, Mackenzie remarked:

...it is a mistake to treat the tribes inhabiting these hills as though they were one and a same people. Ethnologically they may be so, but politically they are a congeries of independent, and even hostile communities, looking out of their hills towards the plains from which they severally draw their surplus of salt and (hitherto) of slaves. The Chins on the east look to upper Burma; those on the west to Sandoway, Kyaupyu, and Akyab. In all these three district we have Chin communities under settled administration and paying regular taxes, as well as a fringe of hills Chins who are more loosely managed.¹

Under such condition and insecure relations good and well developed communications between one village to another could not be expected. Even then primitive and irregular simple approach roads between villages to villages were available following the cattle grazing route in the jungle. These jungle roads provided their basic needs for their livelihood and their relation to each other during the time of peace. Moreover, they frequently shifted their villages in search of better fertile land for cultivations mainly in the interval of more or less five years. As such good roads and communications could not be prepared during the short stay

in a particular place or village. Roads were not the main point of measure to determine the relations and the development of the inhabitants. But that does not mean there were no communications between villages to villages. Sometimes they need to convey message to each other to inform death of one's relative or any other calamity with an urgent messengers. With such unstable conditions it was not an easy task for the British expeditionary force to visit each and every villages within a single stroke.

During the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72, the first bridle path of Mizoram were constructed by the British expeditionary forces trailing to recover Marry Winchester, who was captured by Bengkhuaia, chief of Sailam, at the time of raid conducted at Alexandrapur, Cachar district. At the same time another long bridle path was constructed from Cachar to Tipaimukh, following the Chalfilh range upto Champhai via Khawlian Hills under the supervision of General Bouchier in 1871-72.² These bridle paths temporarily constructed by the British expeditionary force were usefully utilized by the native inhabitants following the opening of frontier markets by the British.

One such bridle path, comparatively longer than the previous one was also constructed in the same year from Tlabung, the western station, to Sailam by Captain T.H. Lewin. This bridle path was in fact the most important route taken by the expeditionary force to recover the four years old daughter Mary Winchester from the captor's village. Side by side a mule road was constructed from Tlabung to Sailam under the supervision of General Brownlow in the same year.

After the annexation of Upper Burma of which the Chin Hills formed a part, the Government of India saw the need for a direct line of communication between and the newly acquired territories. As a preliminary to opening up communications between the two regions, Lieutenant John Stewart of the 1st Battalion, Leinster Regiment, was to begin a reconnaissance to the south east of Rangamati in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, to make a road and strengthen the frontier by additional outposts.³

He was to use Rangamati as his base and from there work southwards to effect a junction with another survey party under Lieutenant J. Mc D. Baird of the 2nd Battalion, Derbyshire Regiment.⁴ Two men of his own Regiment, Lance Corporal Mc Cormick and Private Owens, to assist him in his survey operations, accompanied Stewart. His escort consisted of one *naik* and ten Gurkhas from the Chittagong Frontier Police together with some porters.

Stewart left Rangamati on the 16 January 1888.⁵ But no sooner than he set out he received information from Demagri, supplied by the friendly chief Seipuia, that a large body of men from “Muallianpui, Thlantlang and Lungtian were on the warpath and proceeding in a westerly direction.”⁶ While eighteen miles off Rangamati on 3 February, Stewart received another warning about raiding parties. But, as Colonel Scott Reid, the Officer quoted earlier, wrote:

With such contempt did he regard either the probability of an attack on the valour of his enemies, that when pressed by the *Naick* of the escort to be on his guard and to take additional precautions he

replied: '*Kuki log ane se hamara salam do*' (give my compliments to the hill men and let them come on), and persistently declined even to post a sentry. He had left five *sepoys* of his small guard behind him, one to run with his elephants, another to take back his letters and three to look after part of the provision and form a depot a few miles to the rear.⁷

Lieutenant Stewart paid for all this with his life. Early next morning he was attacked and killed.⁸ Stewart was apparently the victim of a quarrel between Hausata and his wife,⁹ but it was an act that no government could overlook and it called for the customary punitive expedition. Besides, it was evident that the existing system of the frontier outposts was powerless to check raids and that only the appearance of British force in the Lushai country itself would prevent the tribes from creating trouble in the frontier.

Meanwhile significant developments were taking place east of the Mizo hills. The incorporation of Upper Burma after the third and final Anglo-Burmese War (1885-86) brought about a radical change in the policy of Government of India towards the Mizo Hills. Hitherto, the area occupied by the Mizo tribes formed the 'real frontier' extending up to the border of Burma when the occupation of these hills would have brought the British into immediate contact with the tribes then under 'the imperfect control.'¹⁰ Thus the expeditions in the early years were no more than what was called on the North West Frontier as "butcher and bolt". No attempt was made at controlling the tribes from within. Apparently Mizo hills became an island between the settled districts of the British. Therefore it was

absolutely necessary to connect the settled areas with good communications.

The Bengal authority presumed that the frontier disturbances might be put to an end to if the governments of the surrounding country unitedly applied the same methods of dealing with these tribes. The Lushai hills were now surrounded by the settled districts of Bengal and Chin hills over which control was being established. The Governor General in Council accepted Bengal's proposal for an Expedition and it move into the hills. The expedition made a garrison of one British officer and 212 men of the frontier police at Lunglei and the road linking Demagri to Lunglei was completed.¹¹

After the final pacification and control of the hills, the British authority began to take steps to connect the northern and southern headquarters with at least bridle path. During 1893-97, under the supervision of Mr. A. Porteous and Synded Hutchinson, the British constructed a bridle path from Silchar to Sairang of 120 miles. A new bridle path connecting Aizawl and Lunglei was also constructed in 1896- 97.¹² Above and beyond, Aizawl to North Vanlaiphai 128 Km was constructed in order to final pacification of Kairuma group; Aizawl to Tipaimukh road 115 Km to connect the Manipur settled area; Lunglei to Serkawr 108 Km to control the Lakhers or Shendu as it was known by the British; Dokhama village 50 Km to Koladyne to check and hold back the Pawis and to connect the Southern Chin Hills up to Haka; Zawngling to Tongkolong 67 Km to connect the Chittagong district; Tuipang to Chakang 72 Km and Loch's trace road 83 Km.¹³

Conclusion

During the pre-colonial period the roads and communication did not occupied important place in the minds of Mizo people. The only means of communications provided by the country was no better than the jungle roads mainly created by them for jhuming cultivation and cattle grazing tracks due to the absence of any means of communication like carts and other modern movable vehicles. As such the importance of roads and communications other than provided by the then available routes was not considered essential needs.

It may be recalled that the British survey party under Lt. Stewart, to survey the communications between Chittagong and Burma, the newly settled area, was attacked by Hausata and his war party in the southern Mizoram. This incident clearly proved that making any roads and communications was not an easy task for the British as the Mizo people resist any intruders within their territories. But communications to connect the settled areas of Bengal, Assam and Burma was inevitable for the British for smooth and control of administrations. Hence, the annexation and pacification of Mizo hills was the only means of solution. These problems called for the Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1890 to cover up the whole hills for final annexation and pacification. It was only after the control of the hills proper works of making usable roads was undertaken. Although the road constructions were meant for the easy and convenience of administration of the hills by the British, it came to be the most important roads and communications even long after the Republic of India government takes over the works under Public Works Department.

Notes and References:

- ¹ FEAP September 1892; Nos. 9-62 (31). Mackenzie drew this idea from Macnabb and Carey who supported this idea and furnished through briefing to Mackenzie prior to the conference. Carey upheld that the Chins have nothing in common with the Lushais, and that their historical connection, tribal sympathies and political interest were with Burma. Both Carey and Macnabb discouraged the plan with regard to the difficulties which may arise in constructing roads and telegraphic communications. Macnabb held the idea that the combination of the three districts would be too vast for one man to look after.
- ² C. Lalthlengliana, M. Phil dissertation (unpublished), p.4.
- ³ A.S. Reid, *Chin-Lushai Land*, (First Edition 1893, Reprint Calcutta, 1976), Ch. IV, p.39.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ FEAP. March 1888; Nos. 332-339. David Robert Lyall, Commissioner of the Chittagong Division to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal. 11 February 1888.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ A.S. Reid, *op.cit.*, p. 40.
- ⁸ *Ibid.* p. 41. Reid thus described what happened: "In the early morning Lieutenant Stewart awoke, dressed, and gave the usual orders for the move, but had not left his hut or put on his boots. The two soldiers were still asleep in their own quarters, and the *sepoys* of the escort were beginning to move about, one lighting a fire, and the other engaged in the various preparations which precede the striking of a camp in the east." When the attack came, "Lieutenant Stewart received a bullet in the chest and fell back dead, not, however, before he and the two men had accounted for several of the enemy. Such was the story told by the survivors, but, as Stewart's body was afterwards found at

the foot of a precipice twenty or thirty yards from the huts, some of the particulars are probably inaccurate.”

- 9 FEAP. October 1888; Nos. 87-117. C.S. Murray, Superintendent of Police, Chittagong Hill Tract to Inspector General of Police, Bengal, Panji Ham Dubashi's report of the enquiry on the outrage thus concluded: “Hausata's wife is a daughter of Jahoota; Hausata and his wife had a quarrel, and he beat her and generally used her. She then left her husband's home and went to her father, Jahoota, to claim his protection. Hausata followed her to Jahoota's village and tried to recover her. Jahoota at first refused, but finally agreed to give her up if Hausata would bring him two heads of any foreigners, i.e., of any one not a Kuki. Hausata agreed to this and assembled his warriors to the number of 150 and started off taking the following route: - They crossed the Phairuang kai, the Lungrang Hill, the other side of Uiphum range and made for the big Saichal, Hausata accompanying them. Seipuia got this information from his brother Vandula, who said to him, ‘You have sworn an oath of friendship with the foreign chief Murray Liena. You should therefore warn him about this.’”
- 10 H.K.Barpujari, *Problem of the Hill Tribe: North East Frontier, (1873-1962), Vol. III, (Calcutta, 1981). P90.*
- 11 Sir Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam*, (Shillong, 1942, reprint, 1978), p. 11
- 12 C. Lalthlengliana, *op.cit.* p.4
- 13 *Ibid.*

SOCIAL FORMATION OF THE KAIPENG

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North Tripura

THE TERM 'KAIPENG' in the present context may be normally understood as one group among the Halam community in Tripura. The term 'Halam' is an imposed name by the Tripura Maharaja to identify his subjects, especially those who did not have a chief, probably from the last quarter of the eighteenth-century AD.¹ Originally there were twelve groups in the Halam community; later on, there were subtractions and additions to it. Although Kaipeng is recognized as Halam, they never called themselves as Halam to identify their particular group.² Presently, the Kaipeng are settling in the Amarpur sub-division and Teliamura sub-division of Tripura. The size of their population is approximately 7000 people.³

The methodology adopted in this paper is heavily dependent upon the primary data collected from the fieldwork. As there is no proper literature on these people, it is explorative. The main objective is to unearth the hidden history of the Kaipeng from a broad angle. By doing so, this

paper delves on migration, religion, society, economy, and religion of the Kaipeng community.

Anthropologists have classified the human species into several ethnic groups. The Kaipeng belongs to one of the branches of the Mongoloid stock. Linguistically, the Kaipeng have been grouped under the Kuki subfamily of the Tibeto-Burman groups. It is generally accepted that the Tibeto-Burman groups migrated from the plains of China to Burma and subsequently some ethnic groups came down from the Chin Hill of Burma.

According to oral tradition, their earliest memory goes back to a place called *Sinlung* which means rock cavity.⁴ This theory of origin is a very common story among the Chin-Mizo-Kuki groups with slight variations in the name. They did not know the exact location of Sinlung but lately, they believed that it may be located somewhere in China. In tracing the migration tails and trails, the Kaipeng claimed that they came from the present western part of Mizoram via Chittagong hill tracts to their present habitat. But the time of their migration is lost in oblivion. Some claimed that they were early known as the Kuki in Rajmala in which their appearance is recorded in 1512 AD.⁵

The different groups tell different legends of stories relating to the cause of migration from the plains of Burma. When we look at the political turmoil in the Kabaw valley, departure from this place seems to have been prompted at different times arising generally out of the political unrest due to the tussle among the Burmans, the Shan, and the Manipuri kings. It seems that Kaipeng were forced

out of the Kabaw valley. To understand the Kaihpeng migration into the hills from the plains of Burma, it may be imperative to cite James C Scott who beautifully theorizes the possible context that could explain the Kaihpeng migration. He says,

“Expanding kingdoms have forced threatened population to choose between absorption and resistance. When the threatened population was itself organized into state form, resistance might well take the shape of military confrontation. If defeated, the vanquished are absorbed or migrate elsewhere. Where the population under threat is stateless, its choices typically boil down to absorption or flight, the latter often accompanied by rearguard skirmishes and raids”.⁶

It can be assumed that the ancestors of the Kaipeng had to leave the Kabaw valley of Burma helter-skelter and in small groups. This had far-reaching consequences that could nurture in them a deep feeling of insecurity and a sense of loss. Under these given conditions, the higher ridges were normally sought, as they were easily defensible. Moving westward towards the present Mizoram, their tradition says that they reached *Rihdil* and Champhai and they stayed there for some years.⁷ This place might be their first halt with ease in the Chin Hills. In addition, this area is a fertile land that accommodated many other groups of people on their way to westward migration.

The reason they leave this place, according to them, was the pressure from the Lusei migration that harassed the

Kaipeng along with other small groups.⁸ The Kaipeng migration story tells that they did not enter Tripura directly from Mizoram. From Champhai area, they were dispersed in many directions. The bigger group took the northern direction and followed the Barak River by rafting till they reached the present North Cachar Hills. Oral tradition alludes that while rafting in the Barak River many of them drowned in the river. By following the Hachhek⁹ range, they further migrated to the southward direction towards the present northwestern part of Mizoram.¹⁰ They halted at a village called Rengdil and Hriphaw in the northwestern part of Mizoram and after that, they migrated to the southern direction to reach Chittagong. From then on, they again were heading towards Tripura. From Tripura they further migrated westward to Comila district of Bangladesh. They did not stay for a long period in Bangladesh and the majority of them came back to Tripura. In the western part of Tripura now known as Sonamura sub-division, there is a place called Kaipengbula¹¹ which means the place where the Kaipeng were beaten up. This reveals their migration route towards Tripura from Bangladesh. It is also said that a sizeable number of them remain in Bangladesh with the title of Tripura.¹²

Religion

In the field of religion, they followed their traditional beliefs and practices. They believed in the existence of God the creator. They hardly give a sacrificial offering to God. On the other hand, many evil spirits caused sickness and suffering to the human being. In this way, most of their sacrifice was meant to appease the evil spirit. To administer the process, they have a priest (*Bolpu*). Fowls and pigs were the main

offerings to appease the evil spirit. The entire appeasement offerings were mostly based on individual family/Most of the appeasement offerings were based on the individual family. Apart from this, once in a year, they observed ritual in the whole village to prevent them from the disease. On this day, no one is allowed to enter and move out of the village. By doing this, they made a warning sign¹³ in the main entrance of the village so that even the stranger from the other village would not enter that village. On this occasion, they would sacrifice swine and fowl and the whole village would partake in the sacrificial food.

The Kaipeng believed in the existence of the next world after death. So, if a person dies, they used to burn all the belongings of that person for the next world. The dead body was first washed with water and dressed in a new cloth. They thought that the soul vacated the dead body and hovering around the house for three months.¹⁴ During this time, they kept a small plate in the verandah for the deceased person and they offer whatever they eat in the meal to that plate. It is interesting to note that while carrying the dead body to the cremation ground, they thought that the spirit could not cross the water in the stream. To help the soul, they put a cotton thread as a bridge for the soul to pass the water.¹⁵ After they return from the graveyard, all the persons involved in the cremation ground have to attend a small programme of burning rice husk to clean their body.

It seems that the government census of 1901 recorded them as Hindu.¹⁶ They did not know when did they are converted to Hinduism. But it is clear that since the 1950s it has been found that they employed Bengali Hindu priests in their

indigenous ceremonies and festivals. The worship of Durga, Chandi, Shiva, Kali, etc had been incorporated into their religion.¹⁷ There was another wave of life in their religion since the 1960s when the Christian missionary intervened in the area. They converted many Kaipeng into their folds and in the present context, the majority of them are Christians.

Society

The Kaipeng are divided into seven clans or groups. They are Sunzang, Kurset, Singer, Donrai, Lungthang, Senghor, and Siantai.¹⁸ At the social level, the form of service and festival were attributed to the agricultural cycle. To secure the best harvest, they observed a festival known as *Arthinang Nai*. Another festival known as *Parton* and *Buhzon* signifies the good harvest. There was no fixed date for this, but normally, they observed after the harvest. In this festival, home-made rice beer and the sacrifice of chicken were considered compulsory.

It was a noticeable fact that the Kaipeng was accustomed to smoking. They called it *Daba*. It was a device for relaxation, stimulation for work, and the medium for making and enjoying with friends. The women folk were also fond of smoking and eating betel leaf and nut. When a girl attained the age of puberty, they observed a ceremony called *Risabhom*. In this ceremony, a girl wears a *risa*, the breast garment, for the first time in her life, signaling that she is a mature lady in society.

Regarding the marriage system, normally there were two types of marriage: marriage by service and marriage by

payment. Marriage by service was one of the earlier ways of having a wife. Service being personal, it was almost impossible to serve for more than one wife at a time. The economic role of the wife was the mainstay behind the primitive marriage system in tribal societies. In this system, if a Kaipeng young man wants to marry a girl, he had to serve three to five years in the proposed wife's house. The period of service was fixed by the bride's side. During this period, all sorts of work like jhum cultivation, other agricultural work would have to be done by him. After the completion of the service period, the man can marry and stay in his father-in-law's house forever or he may return to his own residence.¹⁹ This kind of marriage is abandoned in the present situation and marriage by payment becomes the dominant practice in the present context. It seems that after staying for a long time among the Tripuri and Reang communities they adopted a system of marriage by giving service to the wife's house.

Economy

Since a long time back, the Kaipeng are known as semi-nomadic people. They were shifting from one place to another after the local supplies of food are exhausted. In this way, possessions are limited to what can be carried from one camp to another and housing usually consists of simple huts. Social groups of semi-nomadic people must "necessarily be small since only a limited number of people can congregate together without quickly exhausting the food resources of the locality; such groups are typically either individual family units or several related families collected together in a band."²⁰ This condition set the main tenor in their conception of society and economy.

In this situation, the Kaipeng economy was based on the principle of self-sufficiency center around the hills and the forests. Like other pre-literate people, the Kaipeng were essentially food gatherers. Apart from this, their food items were supplemented by some form of agriculture known as shifting cultivation. Cooperative labor was very common among men and women.²¹

Hunting is another significant characteristic of the food gathering economy of the Kaipeng community. In the olden times, they organized hunting regularly to meet their food requirement. In most of the intervals between their agricultural operations, they roamed in the forest in search of the game. Even the children were also busy with fixing the traps and snares for small game and birds.²²

In the early period, the Kaipeng did not acquaint with plough cultivation. In 1943, to induce his tribal subject to plough cultivation, the Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya reserved a large tract of land.²³ But the Kaipeng did not like it because they thought that shifting cultivation could produce better economic returns than plough cultivation. Besides, they did not have cattle and the knowledge of wet rice cultivation during those times.

They led a very simple life and their needs were few and limited. They depended heavily on the forest products and even they did not bother for the future. The system of curing disease was based partly on magic and partly on herbs and roots. They only went to the doctor when the priest's prescription fails to cure. Till the 1980s ordinary families did not include medicine and education in their

family budget. On the contrary, recreation and drinks were essential items in the list of expenditures. Rice beer played a very important role in their life. No gathering can be successful without it.

From the 1940s, the Kaipeng economy had to pass through a drastic change.²⁴ Some families started plough cultivation for the first time whereas the majority were constantly shifting their village. The sudden change in the technique of cultivation shattered their traditional economic life. Besides these, a reduction in the scale of the agricultural operation, decline in agricultural yield in the increasing social and religious ceremonies forced them into a deficit economy. They failed to produce sufficient crops since they were not well versed in plough cultivation. In the meantime, they kept on shifting their village site in search of new cultivable land which resulted in heavy loss of crops and forced them to borrow from the private money lender. It is interesting to note the situation in the 1980s, although there were government agencies and Cooperative banks, the Kaipeng thought that it was a complicated job to get loans from these agencies; therefore, they got loans from local Mahajan, who hardly have sympathy for them.

Polity

To maintain social discipline, individual entity, and characteristic of the Kaipeng society, they have their own administrative and judiciary system. There is no mention of a chief in the early period, but it seems that after they reached Tripura, leadership amongst the Kaipeng emerged. Also, when different small groups settled down at Tripura, the Maharaja introduced different types of leadership among

the Halam. For the Kaipeng, a community leader known as *Rai* was initiated to look after the internal affairs of the group. The post of the *Rai* was appointed for one year. Rotation among the seven groups was the common practice.²⁵ From each clan, they nominate a person who knows the customary laws and administration. The *Rai* functioned as the agent of the Maharaja and he collected taxes from his people and later on handed them over to the King. *Rai* was assisted by Kalim and Khandol. Rai did not receive any kind of taxes from his people except the fine imposed on the guilty in his court. The office of the *Rai* had full autonomy in terms of internal administration. It is said that the post of the *Rai* was not lucrative rather it needed extra spending from their personal belongings.²⁶

The *Rai* tried all the judicial activities and the people give due respect to them. Among many other systems of judgment, one system of finding out the truth is worth mentioning. When a person accused another person, the matter would be placed before the court of the *Rai* and if both the party does not admit their mistake, the *Rai* would suggest three-tier methods called *Tuilut*. In the first stage, they would go to the river to collect two snails; the *Rai* would appoint one person as the judge, both the party would choose the snail and they put it under the water separately; they would carefully observe that which snail first produce bubble and the owner of that snail was considered as a proved to the wrongdoer. If the accused does not accept the result of a trial by snail, they will use the second method. In this method, the priest (*Bolpu*) would kill fowl in the flowing river by cutting in the neck. Soon after the priest cut the neck, he would let loose the dying fowl into the flowing

stream and if the fowl move towards the opposite direction to the flowing stream it is considered that the accused is wrong. Further, if the accused did not accept the second stage, they will go for the final method which they thought to be the real proof. In the third stage, a river is needed and the priest would push down the two-party under the water. They believed that the person who sinned will suffer heavy heat pressure in the ear unable to keep the head down under the water for long period and stand out of the water quickly.²⁷ In this stage, many villagers witnessed the proceeding and they have often beaten up the culprit.

The *Rai* has a very high judicial power to punish the culprit. When man and woman committed adultery, both of them were beaten up in front of the public and a fine of a pig would be imposed. In extreme cases, depending upon the *Rai*, they punished both by making them in a very awkward situation; a man would stand naked in front of the public and by using one string they will tie a stone on one side and the other side will be tied on his private part; in the same way, a woman will be posted naked and her legs will be tied separately by using the traditional rice pestle to spread her legs.²⁸

Conclusion

By observing the general migration of the Tibeto-Burman, it may be suggested that the ancestors of the Kaipeng came to their present land from South-western China through the corridor of north-western Myanmar via the Irrawaddy and Chindwin valley. Assumably, among those people displaced by the Han ascendancy in China as far back as 700 BC. The movements seemed to be caused by the

pressures of successive Chinese rulers at different intervals.

From a very early date, swiddening was a constant factor acting on the Kaipeng people having a direct bearing on their mores and attitudes towards life. The regular shifting of villages marginalized their life in several ways. As the settlements were abandoned within very few years, they did not develop better surroundings. They did not construct roads, made permanent edifices, or manufacture items and assets that were not easily transportable. Their material life was largely depending upon their ability to avail virgin forests for agriculture and proximity to more advanced culture. It is also evident from the social and religious practices that they have been living with Tripuri and Bengali for a long time and imitated a good chunk from them.

Notes and References

- ¹ Interview with Sailiana Sailo in the month of September 2011 at Agartala.
- ² In Tripura, the Term 'Halam' is still the official name of the Kaipeng. Due to technical reason many older generation of Kaipeng still used Halam as their title, but, the new generation start using Kaipeng in their official title.
- ³ Interview with Dovanlian Kaipeng in 2011.
- ⁴ Interview with Rajani Kaipeng in 2012.
- ⁵ Sri Rajamala Vol-1 to 4, translated by Dr. N.C. Nath, TRI, Agartala, 1999, p.77. Some people believed that the name 'Kuki' that was mentioned could be the present Halam groups.
- ⁶ James Scott, *The Art of Being Not governed*, Yale University Press, London, 2009. p.130.

- ⁷ Rihdil is located in the western part of Myanmar and it is around 10 Kms from Champhai in Mizoram.
- ⁸ Interview: Rajani Kaipeng, op.cit.
- ⁹ It is located in the North Cachar Hills and this mountain is running from north to south and the southern parts become the north-western part of the present Mizoram.
- ¹⁰ Interviewed with Donnghaklian in 2012.
- ¹¹ It is a Kokborok language.
- ¹² Normally in Bangladesh, many tribal were recognized as 'Tripura'.
- ¹³ It is a bamboo slice where both ends are inserted in cross section under the soil to make the sign of 'X' .
- ¹⁴ Interview: Donnghaklian, op.cit.
- ¹⁵ After a careful investigation, I found that this was the imitation of Hindu Vaishnavite's practices.
- ¹⁶ S.B.K. Dev Varman, *The Tribes of Tripura: A Dissertation*, TRI, Agartala, 2004 (3rd Edition),p. 36.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, p.36.
- ¹⁸ Interview: Donvanlian Kaipeng, op.cit.
- ¹⁹ Interview: Donnghaklian, op.cit.
- ²⁰ *Encyclopaedia Britanica* 2007 Ultimate Reference suite, 'Primitive society'.
- ²¹ Interview: Sailiana Sailo, op.cit.
- ²² Interview: Donvanlian Kaipeng, op.cit
- ²³ Interview: Rajani Kaipeng, op.cit.
- ²⁴ In 1949, the then princely state of Tripura was merged with the Government of the Union of India.
- ²⁵ Interview: Rajani Kaipeng, op.cit.
- ²⁶ Ibid
- ²⁷ Interview: Donnghaklian, op.cit.
- ²⁸ Interview: Rajani Kaipeng, op.cit

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE EVOLUTION OF MIZO NATIONALISM

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IN THE PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD, the Mizos live an isolated life without any interference with other people in their habitation. No matter how backward they were, they enjoyed secluded independent life having their own distinct culture and tradition. They were not aware of the existence of the mighty British empire or the Hindu/Mughals empire. But they were scattered in different villages, each village having its own traditional hereditary chiefs, who had enjoyed supreme power within their jurisdiction. They thought that they were the only human being before they encounter the outside world. When their braves found a bigger road in the early 19th century in the neighbor of plains area of Cachar while hunting, they said that there must be other human beings in the world. Due to their narrow outlook and ignorant, they only thought of themselves. They cares only their own kinds, their own village, their own tribes, and their own family. They also regard all other people of their neighboring villages and areas as their enemy. The love of a particular region, particular people, clan or tribes,

simultaneously expose and synonym to ethnic nationalism. In short, the Mizos had their own ethnic nationalism in their secluded tribal society even before the pre-colonial stage no matter how backward they were. Therefore, the living standard of the people may not be the determinant factor for the feeling of nationalism among people. The people always have a collective sense of common destiny through a common past and a vision of a common future.

Nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the 19th century. It pretends to supply a criterion for the determination of the units of population proper to enjoy a government exclusively its own, for the legitimate exercise of power in the state and for the right organization of a society states. In the broadest sense, nationalism may be defined as a peoples' sense of collective destiny through a common past and the vision of a common future. "Historical facts seem to constitute an important and perhaps indispensable feature of nation buildinguture"¹. The image of common past experiences enables the people of the same territory or tribes to hold and share in collective attitude and to merge their own identity. For example: Ethnically and culturally the Jews of Israel are not homogenous, but their common history of suffering gives them their national identity.

The colonial policies and processes in Mizo hills provided initially the stimuli for the crystallization of the multi-tribal/clan identities. Unlike Presidencies of Madras (now Chennai), Bombay (now Mumbai), and Bengal in which the British colonial ruler had entrenched themselves during the 18th century, their annexation of the hilly tracts of Eastern

India including Mizo hills took places by the end of the 19th century. The British found it politically expedient to maintain the indigenous patriarchal system of tribal chieftainship under their dominance. Under the government of Indian Act 1935, for instance, the Mizo Hills were designated as “Excluded Area”, which means they will remain under the direct control of the Colonial ruler, excluded from the Provincial rules².

The British pattern of dominance facilitated the political insularity of the area *vis-à-vis* the rest of the country. Besides, in their recognition of the traditional political administration, socio-political status quo was maintained. The colonial government also acknowledge the tribal groups into relatively wider tribal conglomerates, naming them in the census reports as Lushai, Hmar, Chakma, Pawi (Now ‘Lai’), Lakher (Now ‘Mara’) and Kuki etc³.

Among these groups, the Lushai formed the majority in the area. Notwithstanding in intra-tribal differences, the acceptances of a general name provided them an identity with a wider space and meaning. Almost simultaneously, the induction of Christianity was a significant factor indirectly for the Mizo for the development of their ethnic-national feeling. According to the 1951 census, Christians accounted for 90% of the total population in Mizo Hills. The situation hardly changed in the later decades, and the Mizo themselves proclaimed 100% Christians.

Christianity among the Mizos provided linguistic, territorial, and cultural integrity and a sense of cultural homogeneity, especially in the central part of the Hills⁴. In the process, it

also gave rise to a new educated elite which developed a sense of relative deprivation vis-à-vis the traditional chief sought to change. However, it was not easy to challenge the dominance of the chief as they were being virtually protected by the colonial government. Nonetheless, the process of power transfer of the chief took place soon after the India Independence under the stewardship of the Mizo Union party. Despite the different course of action propounded, they underscored the distinctiveness of the Mizo as a 'nation' in a similar vein as seen in the Tamil cause, but not as clearly articulated.

It was said that an alternative scheme was floated by Professor R. Coupland in the eve of India Independent, which suggested the creation of a 'Crown Colony of Eastern Agency', consisting of the hill areas of Assam, part of Burma (now Myanmar) which would in due course be an independent state⁶. Of these alternatives (a) the option to join India, (b) that of becoming a separate state, (c) union with Burma, and (d) continuation as a Crown Colony. The last three options did not seem to be politically feasible, partly because of the then Burmese Prime Minister U Nu's attitude on the issue⁶. As a matter of fact, the secessionist group was highly antagonistic to the option of joining India.

The Mizo also faced several problems of history in the past, since they migrated from the Chin Hills to their present land. It is believed that due to fear of an enemy, they came to their present habitation in the middle of the 19th century for their survival. After settling down, their occupational territory was subjugated by the mighty British government. After the British left India in 1947, the Mizo were left behind

to remain as part of Indian territory. Under the Indian government, the Mizo faced enormous problems of negligence in developmental spheres. Besides, the people and the territory were being kept isolated by the 'Inner Line Regulation'.

All their common sufferings in social and political of common past experiences exercises gradually developed into logic characteristics to their ethnic nationalism. Lack of adequate infrastructure, protracted negligence in the field of economic development, and political exploitation have frustrated the people towards sharing the vision of a common future for them. Consequently, the Mizo National Front (MNF) leader stated that

"The Mizo people had not been able to feel at home with Indian or with India, nor have they been able to feel that their joys and sorrows have really ever been shared by India. They do not, therefore, feel Indian. They refused to occupy a place within India as they consider it to be unworthy of their national dignity and harmful to the interest of their posterity. Nationalism and patriotism inspired by the political consciousness has now reached its maturity and the cry for political self-determination is the only wish and aspiration of the people. It is the only final and perfect embodiment of the social living for them. The only aspiration and political cry is the creation of Mizoram, a free and sovereign state to govern herself to work out her own destiny and to formulate her own foreign policy"⁷.

The evolution of Mizo identity was fascinated by the large-scale conversion of certain tribal groups to Christianity,

common language, and education during the colonial rule. Thus, the evolution of ethnic movements indicates the process of selection, standardization, and transmission of myths and symbols woven around heroes and a glorified past with an emphasis on norms and traditions. In the process, the 'Mizo-ness' was ascribed a quality and a character as well as a broadly defined habitat – the homeland, thereby qualifying them for self-determination as a nation or nationality.

In this respect, a reference to the provocative study of Benedict Anderson is relevant reflecting on nationalism. He said, "All that I can find to say is that a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one."⁸

According to Romulo, "The feeling of nationalism is determined by the love of common soil, race, language and history, culture, which led the desire for the political independence, society, and prestige of the nation".² Gidon stated that "Statehood has become the ultimate prize of nationalists; their banner is self-determination and their demands are territorial."⁹ Ajit Singh also argued that "Race, language and territory, common culture evolution of middle class in the society and religion are the pre-requisite condition for the emergence of nationalism. Yeal observed that "Nationalism encourages them to see themselves as contextualized, as a member of the particular continuous community"¹⁰. Anthony also observes that nationalism as a self-centered collective resistance to foreign rule to preserve the group and its culture. He said, " A powerful means of

defining and locating individual selves in the world through the prism of the collective personality and its distinctive culture “¹¹.

Nationalism, though defined in different ways, almost all definitions agree to this point that a nation is a people occupying a particular area bounded by a common language, culture, custom, and ethnic origin and thus, nationalism is a psycho-political aspiration of the people, organized in a particular time. The nationality problems of the Mizo is, therefore, a complex problem.

The Mizo people who occupied a definite area in the northeastern part of India spoke and used the same language. They were more or less bound together by their common custom and culture and sharing the same ethnic origin of Mongoloid stock. Their pattern of thinking and attitude and vision for a better future were determined by their enormous common problems of past experiences. Even after they associated and encounter with the outside world, they were politically exploited for several years by the imperial ruler. To make it more deteriorated the situation, the government of India after the British left, neglected the territory in economically and other developmental spheres which disgruntled the tribal people against the plainsmen in general.

Using the word ‘*vai*’, (outsiders) in a somewhat derogatory sense, the newly elites in the society maintained that the Mizo did not consider themselves Indian because of their socio-cultural distinctiveness in any case. In fact, the Mizo maintained that the government of India had failed to bring about socio-economic development in the area. With its high

rate of literacy and equally high rate of unemployment, young Mizos felt that they had highly limited opportunity structures for employment. It was the youth, in fact, who provided among other things, initially under-employed or unemployed as the youth was, it perceived in the Mizo ideology and goal as an explanation as well as an alternative to remedy its frustrations.

An analysis of the Mizo problems reveals that ethnic sentiments were exploited in a planned and systematic manner. The name 'Mizoram' provides a recognizable sense of community. Along with it, 'greater Mizoram' was the declared aim of them and was openly highlighted throughout the entire territory. The Mizo along emphasized the pre-British settlement without any artificial interference and artificial division.

However, ethnic mobilization takes a definite shape through the idea of national self-determination. It is through self-determination that ethnic nationalism takes hold of a given population. The spread of the political movement in the Mizo Hills in the early post-independent era was through the demand for self-determination which swept the whole district and earned its popularity within a short period. The Mizo demand was a secessionist one inspired through ethnic-nationalism, and it was this demand which at that time inspired the confidence of the Mizo in the leadership of the party- the Mizo National Front. Their rise to prominence could be attributed to its successfully channelizing the feeling of Mizo nationalism to its advantage and secession was openly propagated in full knowledge of the then incumbent government machinery.

All these different elements were responsible for the growth and development of the Mizo ethnic nationalism, which was later, exploited by the emerging educated middle class in the society for the potential struggle of self-determination against the government of India.

As regards to the goal of such movement, though spelled out in universalistic terms as socio-economic and political emancipation of the community, the movement reflected in the context of social transformation and change, an increasing number of people jostling for power and resources, a comparative nexus of emerging and established elite in the social arena invoking idiom for group mobilization.

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