

MATERIAL CULTURE OF THE MIZO DURING THE PRE-MODERN PERIOD

**A thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the Award of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
HISTORY**

by

**LALZARZOA
08SHPH07**



**Department of History
School of Social Sciences
University of Hyderabad
Hyderabad - 500046
Telangana, India.**

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Dr. M.N Rajesh

Research Supervisor

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Prof. P.Venkata Rao

Dean, School of Social Sciences



Department of History
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DECLARATION

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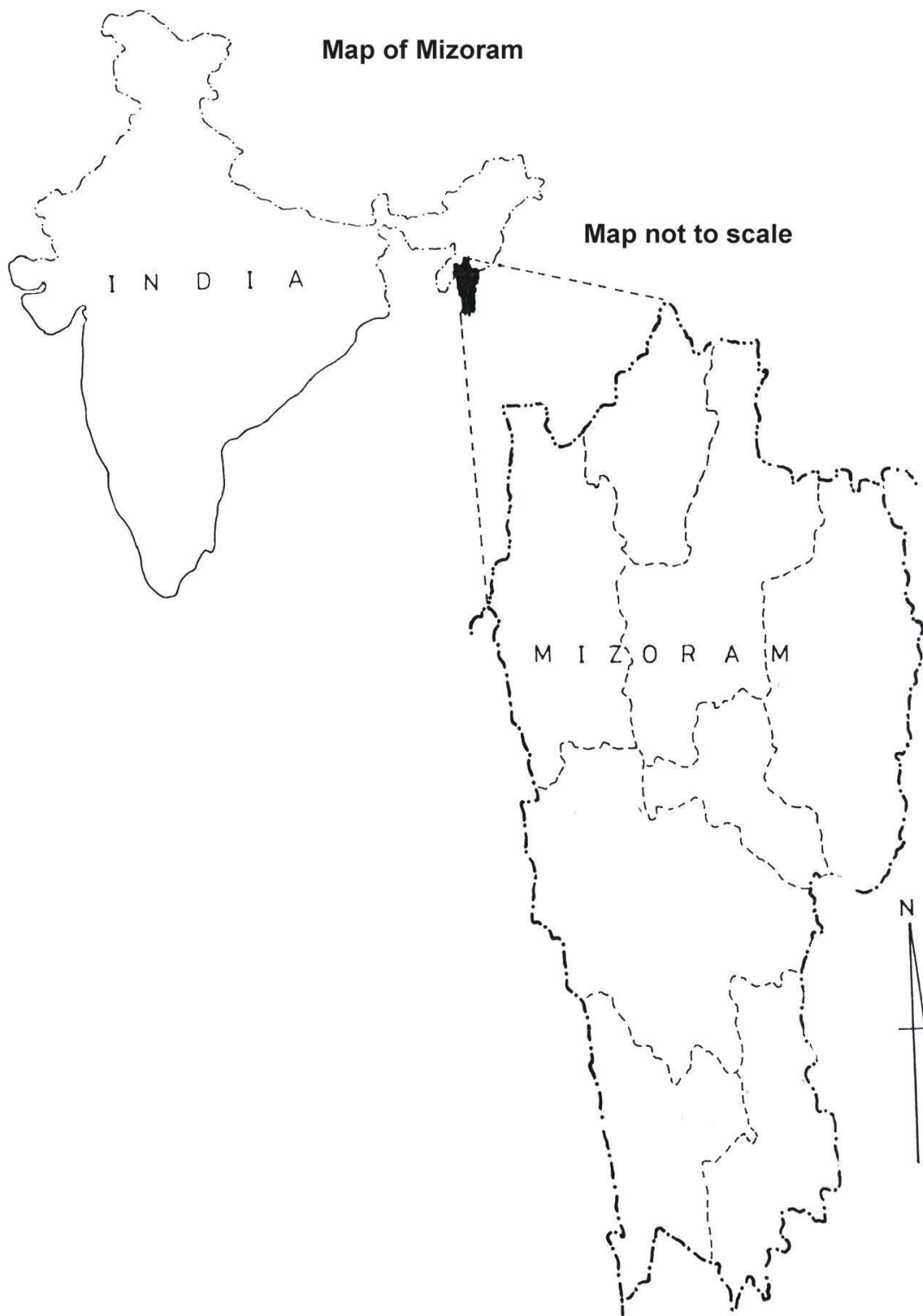
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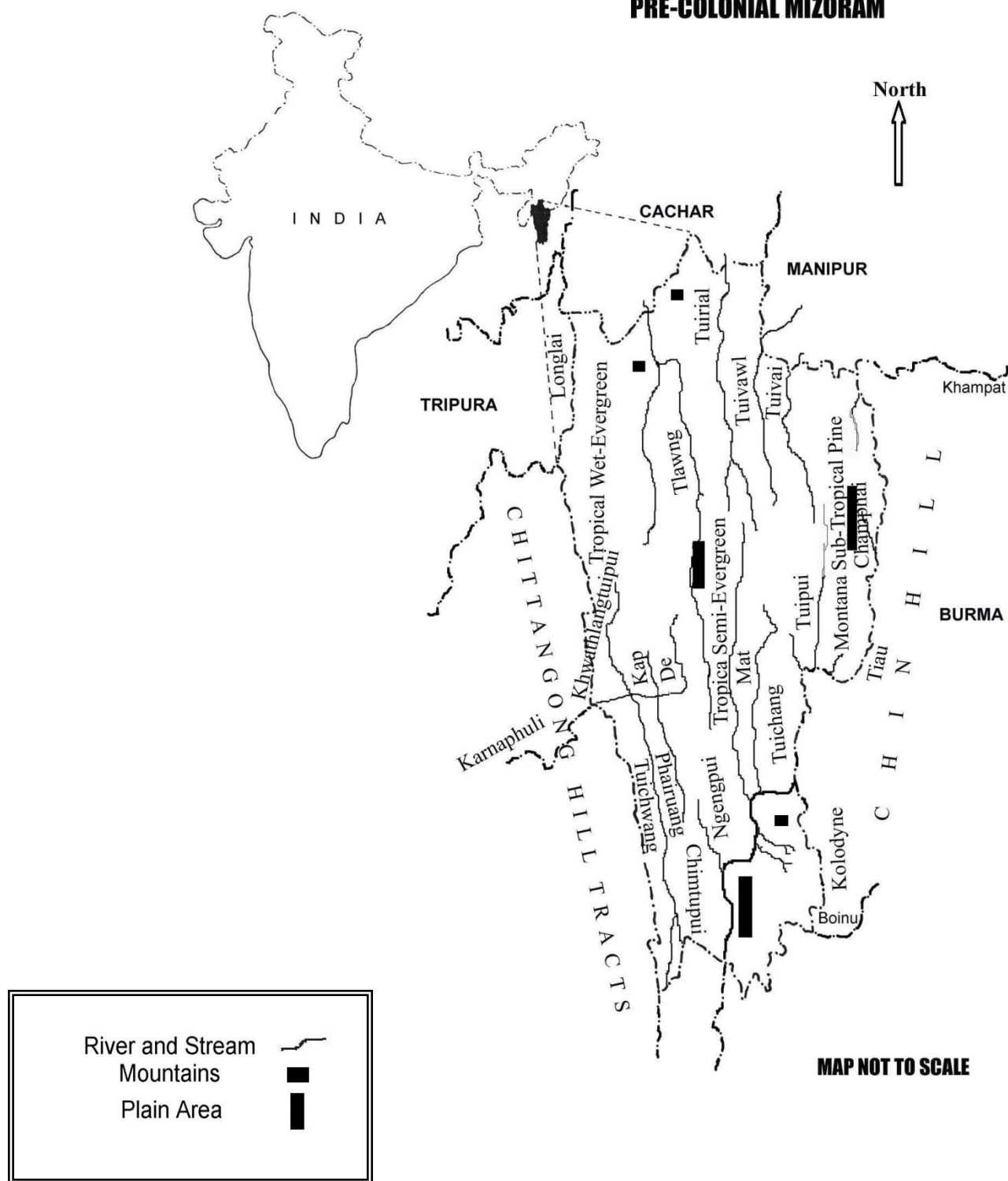
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PHYSICAL MAP OF PRE-COLONIAL MIZORAM



CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The conventional historical writings are mostly dominated by the so called “history from above” like the story of kings and queens, wars, treaties, empires, exploration and discoveries, colonialism, political administrations, economic activities, trade and commercial activities, civilization etc. The world of ‘the things’ or “material culture” has been often left out in the mainstream historical writings. In addition to these, historical studies on material cultures has been commonly absent from most university history programmes. However, from ancient period to present days human being is engaged and greatly depended on materials and tools for their own survival and ease of living. In history discipline the evolution of human past was categorized into numerous phases like Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age etc. The various phases of human progress were divided based on the modification and usage of stone tools by the earliest men. The advancement of technology and knowledge in human society marked the progress of their living standard in every society. The simple explanation of this progress is often considered as the advancement of their ‘things’ or ‘materials’ which are in more productive and useful ways for their day to day activities. Moreover, for the study of human society in historical perspective ‘material culture’ is also an essential one and without knowing their ‘materials’ or ‘things’ no perfect conclusion can be drawn. Therefore, for the study of human society and culture material culture is an indispensable part in history discipline.

In history discipline the approach of material culture is very nascent and not much popular among historians in general. While archaeologists and anthropologists have started material culture studies from 1870’s onwards, some historians and social scientists have only recently uncovered its scope for cultural analysis.¹ Since the beginning material culture is being studied with inter-disciplinary approach, scholars from different subjects are being engaged in it. Thomas J. Schlereth rightly remarked about this “Material

¹ Thomas J. Schlereth, “*Material Culture and Cultural Research*,” in *Material Culture A Cultural Research*, ed. Thomas J. Schlereth (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 1.

culture studies is deliberately plural because it comprises several disciplines, among them the triad of art, architectural, and decorative arts history; cultural geography; the history of technology; folkloristics; historical archaeology; cultural anthropology, as well as cultural and social history.”² Even in historical studies material culture also gives meaningful and valid sources while tracing human pasts and cultural activities. Base on this perspective the present study analyses the material culture in the context of the ‘Mizo cultural area’ during the pre-modern period which was around seventeenth to early twentieth centuries.

1.1 Conceptualizing Material Culture

Human society is intertwined with ‘objects’ or ‘things’ in many aspects. There can be different opinions about how ‘objects’ or ‘things’ have meaning to human society. Ian Woodward throw light this topic in this way, “Objects are the material things people encounter, interact with and use. Objects are commonly spoken of as material culture. The term ‘material culture’ emphasizes how evidently inanimate things within the environment act on people, and are acted upon by people, for the purposes of carrying out social functions, adjusting social relations and giving symbolic meaning to human activity.”³

It is often said that Culture has two aspects which are material culture and non-material culture or tangible and intangible culture. Material culture indicates to tangible things, which are implements, tools, equipment and other household goods, buildings, different kinds of devices, instruments, weapons, utensils, roads and bridges etc. created by individual or groups in a society. Meanwhile, non-material culture indicates to intangible things in which traditions or way of life inherited from past generations and subsequently circulated on to later generation, for example social practices, oral

² Thomas J. Schlereth, “*Material Culture and Cultural Research*,” in *Material Culture A Cultural Research*, ed. Thomas J. Schlereth (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 6.

³ Ian Woodard, *Understanding Material Culture*, (London: Sage Publications, 2007), 3.

culture, knowledge, festivals, performing arts, rituals and practices which concerns the universe and nature or the skills and knowledge to yield traditional techniques.⁴ The present analysis will cover the tangible culture of the Mizo in pre-modern period.

The Mizo call 'material' "*hmanrua*," "chak," "chhakhai," and 'tools' and 'implements' were called "*hmanrua*" and "*hnathawhna hmanrua*". While 'object' is called "*thil*" or "*rilru pawn lam thil*" which means something which is outside to the human's mind. 'Things' are known as '*thil*' or '*englo*' or '*engemaw*' which means something that has meaningful existence or object which can be seen or touch or can be used by human.

Material culture of the Mizo also can be understood as the materials or tools or implements or object or thing which were existed, used and engaged for their day to day life by an individual and group in their society.

1.2 Why study the History of Material Culture?

Materials can play vital role in the history of human past. Objects can reveal history in important ways like how did they possessed, how did they produced or modified, how did they used etc. But unlike other subjects in Social Sciences Historians were not much involved in material cultures studies. Among the Social Sciences subjects anthropology, archaeology, sociology, folk culture studies, etc. were more actively concentrated on material culture studies. Giorgio Riello put a remark on this case, he said, "Historians have survived, even thrived, during the last two centuries with little or no engagement with objects".⁵ In several ways, it seems that historians are uncomfortable when it comes to material things.⁶ On the other hand, it can be argued that many historical events are traced through objects and, indeed,

⁴ "UNESCO: What is Intangible Cultural Heritage?" UNESCO, Access on April 18, 2019 <https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>

⁵ Giorgio Riello, "Things That Shape History Material Culture and Historical Narratives," in *History and Material Culture A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London: Routledge, 2009) 25.

⁶ Leora Auslander, "Beyond Words," *American Historical Review* 110, No.4 (October 2005): 1015.

research work done in material culture has meaningfully impacted historical studies in recent years.⁷ Isolated objects are progressively introduced to Historians, often de-contextualized, then they attempt to appropriate as useful sources in the comprehensive narratives which encompasses the historical subject.⁸ Historians also create their scholarship in a very precise ways, by adopting extensively shared methodologies on material culture studies.⁹

Materials or objects had inherent and attached value to human society. There can be different kinds of value in different society. Jules David Prown rightly put it, “One intrinsic in the fabric of an object itself, is established by the rarity of the material used. Such value will inhere in the object for as long as the material continues to be valuable.”¹⁰ The best example is gold or precious stone as their worth has been evaluated by the people who initially came up with it or continue to use the same object even till today or anyone who used and valued it at any time.¹¹ The value of an object is retained through its utility and last on the durability of the utility, which can also be regained again by an old or unused object. An example can be drawn with regard to this point when there is shortage of cooking gas or oil shortage the manually operated wooden stove or burning will be useful again. Apart from substantial and functional values, certain objects develop aesthetic values like arts, a fortress can be seen as expression of a king’s attitudes toward his subjects or enemies, some objects also have spiritual values like cult objects or icons etc. Then, objects can be seen as embodiment and reflection of culture, belief, arts, feelings, creativity etc.

For historian objects can be useful for studying a specific human society or culture. In this study objects or materials will play important role in

⁷ Richard Grassby, “Material Culture and Cultural History,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35 (2005): 591-603.

⁸ Giorgio Riello, “Things That Shape History Material Culture and Historical Narratives,” in *History and Material Culture A Student’s Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London: Routledge, 2009) 25.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jules David Prown, “Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, No. 1 (Spring 1982): 3.

¹¹ Ibid.

reconstructing the past society or culture as those materials or objects made in the past were the only historical evidences that can be seen and existed in till the present days. The materials which were created in the past and continued to exist today gives us an opportunity to have a first-hand encounter with the past. The other advantage of material remains is there can be direct sensory understanding from some of the existing historical materials. Objects may not be deliberated as imperative historical events, but it can be noteworthy because historian can have experience with it and his/her evidence can be interpreted out of the objects.¹²

In History subject texts or literature are broadly used for the sources of information with regard to the subject or period concern. On the other hand, objects or material remains are more useful than words or texts in many places especially among the people who had no writing tradition who were often labeled as non-literate society. The Mizo in pre-modern period also had no written tradition so that the materials or objects were indispensable for studying their history. Henry Glassie put a comment on this, "Only a small percentage of the world's population is and has been literate, and that the people who write literature or keep diaries are typical. Objects were used by a much broader cross section of the population and are therefore potentially a more wide-ranging, more representative source of information than words."¹³ Jules David Prown also claimed that objects can be constructed as adaptable form, particularly unpopular objects which are never been used or recognized in the expression of cultural activities.¹⁴

There can be differences or biases in the expression of society and culture among the historian or scholars. As the scholars are from different background of profession, state, locality, beliefs, culture, class, racial

¹² Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, No. 1 (Spring 1982): 3.

¹³ Henry Glassie, "Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths; The Artifact's Place in American Studies," in *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies*, ed. Jack Salzman (New York: Burt Franklin, 1977), 29-30.

¹⁴ Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, No. 1 (Spring 1982): 4.

affiliation, age, faith, gender, politics etc. their viewpoint or opinion also can be varied according to his or her background or affiliation. But material culture offers potentially more truthful in greater objectivity. By undertaking cultural interpretation through the surviving materials or objects there can be a possibility to comprehend the other culture in the first moment not with our minds and senses. Jules David Prown stressed this, "This affective mode of hesitation through the senses that allows us to put ourselves, figuratively speaking, inside the skins of individuals who commissioned, made, used, or enjoyed these objects, to see their eyes and touch with their hands, to identify with them empathetically, is clearly different way of engaging the past than abstractly through the written word. Instead our minds creating intellectual contact with minds of the past, our senses make effective contact with senses of the past."¹⁵

Bernard Herman adopted the approaches of material culture studies in two ways – 'object-centered' and 'object-driven.' Object-centered studies lean towards observing at technological development, typologies, and the artistic qualities of taste and style.¹⁶ The object-centered approach can be categorized into two main forms. The first one is on the corporeal characteristics of an object, either with single objects or a series or collection of objects. The second one is entrenched in an art historical approach, in which the attention changes from the object to what we might concern as the emotional or psychological proportions of material culture. Jules David Prown proposed three stages of methods which are as follows: firstly, the researcher involves himself/herself in clear-cut *description*, engaged on the internal evidence of the object; secondly, the researcher employs *deduction*, discovering the possible relations between object and people based on both rational but also psychological responses; thirdly, the researcher uses *speculation*, engaging external evidence but also

¹⁵ Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, No. 1 (Spring 1982): 5.

¹⁶ Bernard L. Herman, *The Stolen House* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 11.

creative conception to comprehend why the object is the mode it is, or aggravates the way it aggravates.¹⁷

On the other hand, material culture studies under the 'object-driven' leans towards 'objects as indication of other composite social relationship.' It was an attempt to recombine objects to their historical contexts by fetching the construction of combined biographies of objects and sites through a process of thick explanation. Using written information and material evidences, things about the people that produced, used and lived with those objects has to be found out.

Karen Harvey proposed the approach for historians in material culture studies by stressing what scholars mean by the term 'material culture'. He said, "Unlike 'object' or 'artifact', 'material culture' summarizes not just the physical features of an object, but the countless and ever-changing contexts through which it procures meaning. Material culture is not a simply object that people make, use and throw away; it is an integral part of – an indeed shapes – human experience. For historians, there are at least two important and related implications of these definitions of and approaches to material culture: first, material culture is a source type that demands new research practices and skills of the historians; second, objects are active and autonomous, not simply reflective."¹⁸

Giorgio Riello divided the studies of material cultures for historians into three categories which are as follows: 'history from things', 'history of things' and 'history and things'.¹⁹ In 'history from things', for the discipline of history and the interpretation of past, material artifacts are used as raw materials. Historians concentrate on its material form and treat it in the same way in

¹⁷ Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, No. 1 (Spring 1982): 7-10.

¹⁸ Karen Harvey, ed., *History and Material Culture A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (London: Routledge, 2009), 3.

¹⁹ Giorgio Riello, "Things That Shape History Material Culture and Historical Narratives," in *History and Material Culture A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London: Routledge, 2009), 25.

which they treat a manuscript, a diary, an inventory or an image: objects as primary sources. Historical analysis of the relationship between objects, people and their representations are known as 'History of things'. 'History and things' are by positioning material artifacts outside history altogether with taking ideas from other disciplines such as sociology, archaeology, anthropology etc. It provides a qualitative pay-off for historians; the capacity to unlock more creative and freer ways of conveying ideas about the past that there are not necessarily mediated by written language in books and articles produced by professional historians. Material artifacts with their manifold meanings, their distinctive opaqueness and their challenging heuristic nature is a reminder that history is always producing but has still a great deal more to do before encompassing all the corners of human experience.

1.3 Definition of Material Culture

Different scholars try to explain the meaning of material cultures. Due their background and subject affiliations the definition that they made were also vary and diverse. The definitions given various scholars are as follows:-

Jules David Prown: *"Material culture is the study through artifacts of the beliefs-values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions – of a particular community or society at a given time. The term material culture is also frequently used to refer to artifacts themselves to the body of material available for such study. Material Culture is singular as a mode of cultural investigation in its use of objects as primary data, but in its scholarly purposes it can be considered a branch of cultural history or cultural anthropology. It is a means rather than an end, a discipline rather than a field...But the material of material culture is too diverse to constitute a single field. In practice it consists of subfields investigated by specialists-cultural geographers or historians of art, architecture, decorative arts, science, and technology."*²⁰

²⁰ Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, No. 1 (Spring 1982):1-2.

Handbook of Material Culture (Christopher Tilley, ed.): *“Material culture is part and parcel of human culture in general, and just as the concept of culture has hundreds of potential definitions and manifestations and is never just one entity or thing so has the material component of culture. Where a thing or an object and a person, or culture and material culture, ‘begin’ or ‘end’ can never be defined in the abstract, all depends on the context of analysis and research.”*²¹

Karen Harvey: *“Material culture is one important key to unlocking the everyday lives of people in the past; it enables historians to tackle directly the issue of human agency, balancing social and cultural contexts with the physical facts of things; and it can free historians to recast historical narratives, sometimes challenging historical orthodoxy. At the same time, trained in using a wide range of sources together, all placed firmly in or used to recreate a multifaceted context, historians make an important contribution to the study of material culture as one part of the endeavor to comprehend the complexities of people’s live and experiences.”*²²

Clellan S. Ford: *“Material culture entails the actions of manufacture and use, and the expressed theories about the production, use and nature of material objects.”*²³

Cornelius Osgood: *“Material culture is the ideas about objects external to the mind resulting from human behavior as well as ideas about human behavior required to manufacture these objects.”*²⁴

Howard W. Marshall: *“Material culture is the array of artifacts and cultural landscapes that people create according to traditional, pattern, and often tacit concepts of value and utility that have been developed over time, through use*

²¹ Christopher Tilley, Webb Keane, Sussane Kuchler, Michael Rowlands and Patricia Spyer, ed., *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 4.

²² Karen Harvey, ed., *History and Material Culture A Student’s Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (London: Routledge, 2009), 13.

²³ Clellan S. Ford. “A sample Comparative Analysis of Material Culture.” *Studies in the Science of Society*, (1937): 225-246

²⁴ Cornelius Osgood, *Ingalik Material Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 26.

*and experimentation. These artifacts and landscape objectively represent a group's subjective vision of custom and order."*²⁵

Melville Herskovits: *"Material culture: the totality of artifacts in a culture, the vast universe of objects used by humankind to cope with the physical world, to facilitate social intercourse, to delight our fancy, and to create symbols of meaning."*²⁶

James Deetz: *"Material culture is that segment of man's physical environment which is purposely shaped by him according to culturally dictated plans."*²⁷

Thomas J. Schlereth: *"Human beings were making things long before they were speaking or writing about such things. Material culture predates verbal culture by several thousand years, since toolmaking, almost universal in all cultures, preceded the invention of writing in practically all of them. Material culture is, without question, humankind's oldest legacy of cultural expression. In fact, some scholars argue that it is the oldest manifestation of our humanness."*²⁸

Anned Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello: *"The term material culture is defined in different ways depending on the disciplinary context within which the term used. Historians have been using the label in a rather loose fashion, and sometimes simply take it to mean 'objects.' The Material culture of domesticity, for instance, might refer to the material goods that turn a house into a home in the past or in the present. These might include soft furnishings and textiles, crockery and china, knick-knacks and children's toys. Even this simple list of material things or artefacts points to the fact that these might differ from similar objects that find in a hotel room. Unlike hotel rooms, our houses are full of*

²⁵ Howard W. Marshall, *Folk Architecture in Little Dixie: A Regional Culture in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981), 17.

²⁶ Melville Herskovits, *Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Knopf, 1963), 119.

²⁷ James Deetz, "Material Culture and Archaeology – What's the difference?" in *Historical Archaeology and the Importance of Material Things*, ed. Leland Ferguson (The Society for Historical Archaeology, 1977), 10.

²⁸ Thomas J. Schlereth, "Material Culture Research and Historical Explanation," *The Public Historian* 7, No.4 (Autumn, 1985): 23.

memories that are conveyed through the objects that fill them. Objects have meanings for the people who produce and own, purchase, and gift, use and consume them. Material culture therefore consists not merely of 'things', but also of the meanings they hold for people."²⁹

Bernard Sellato: *"Material culture is the product of the interaction of people and their material world, and one means by which culture is stored and transmitted. An artifact, therefore, can no longer be reduced to the status of a 'thing'. It is, in an important way, a social rather than individual creation and, therefore, material culture as a whole reflects the conceptual context of a society.*"³⁰

1.4 Review of Literature.

Among the colonial writers who wrote about the "Mizo" with regard to their livelihood and material culture J.Shakespear book on '*The Lushei Kuki Clan*' is an important source for recollecting the pre-modern Mizo society. In the introduction of the book he talks about how the Lusei clan became a dominant ruling clan among the Mizo tribe and many of the Mizo sub-clan were came in contact with the Sailo chiefs. He also talks about the material culture of clothing or dress when the British started penetration in the then Lushai Hills which is present Mizoram. He said, *"All these garments are of cotton, grown locally and manufactured by the women of the household. The cloths in general use are white, but every man likes to have two or three blue cloths ornamented with stripes of various colours."*³¹ We can see the practice of indigenous dyeing of clothes from his work. The Mizo used to do dyeing by means of *ting* which was cultivated in their fields or gardens. J.Shakespear said that this *ting* was Assam indigo (*Strobilanthes flaccidifolia*), the commonest dye and was obtained by boiling its leaves and the clothes were

²⁹ Anned Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, *Writing Material Culture History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 2.

³⁰ Bernand Sellato, "Material Culture Studies and Ethnocultural Identity," in *Borneo Studies in History, Society and Culture*, ed. Victor T. King, Zawawi Ibrahim and Noor Hasharina Hassan (Springer, 2019), 58.

³¹ J.Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 9.

immersed in that to render the colour permanent. He also mentioned about the location and set up of the village in the hilly areas. In his opinion villages that were being located on the top of a ridge and steep hillsides were important for getting a good defensive position. This was very true that during those days inter-tribal feuds and inter-village war were taken place many a times. In his book we can see the brief description of the Mizo furniture, implements, agriculture tools, musical instruments, household utensils, basket works, brass work, iron work, cloth manufacture, weaving, ornamentation, hunting and fishing, agricultural system, weights and measures, food and drinks and amusements etc. these were very useful sources for the present research.

A.G McCall's book '*Lushai Chrysalis*' is another useful source for the present research. He wrote about 'indigenous mode of living' in chapter VII which was helpful for tracing back the pre-modern Mizo society. He discussed about the principal features of the active life of the people, their methods of agriculture, medical practice, arts and crafts, music or games, food and cooking and general points of some interest. He said, "*The needs of the people have mostly been met through the years by an intelligent use of the country's own resources. Lack of intercourse with the neighbouring plains reduced trade to a minimum.*"³² He did not find that the Lushai (Mizo) could manufacture any demands in their neighbouring plain areas. He stressed the changes occasioned by the arrival of the Christian era in the ordinary lives of the people by importing goods from plain areas. He also highlighted with the increase of imported goods from the nearby plain areas demand of indigenous arts of weaving, lacquering, metal working, pottery, basket making, and smithing were in real danger of disappearing. In his writing we have seen that the Mizo were a migratory race therefore there never been any deep urge to accumulate household possessions on any extensive scale. In his book we can see brass and copper moulding done by the Mizo but the raw materials were imported from outside. He said production of material needs was done only when there

³² A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 182.

was on the demand. He put a comment “*The hill-man is not unlike others, in that if there is no need for things, he will not waste of time and effort on making them. The trouble is that there is no section of the community which as yet possesses a natural liking or pride sufficient to support retention of these arts for the sake of the art itself.*”³³

From the works of A.G McCall we can see the limitation of indigenous resources of musical instrument especially with regard to gongs. He mentioned that the gongs were commonly imported from Burma (Myanmar), and frequently were made up of sets of three gongs, on which various emotional tempos were registered. Even till present days Mizo never produced gongs by themselves they still import from Burma (Myanmar). The lack of brass or metal processing industries in Mizoram may be one of the reasons why it is not manufactured in local industries.

‘*A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*’ written by N.E Parry is another useful book from the colonial sources. We can see the administration of the chief and his village from this book. Parry mentioned about ‘salt wells’ or ‘*chikhur*’ which was hardly seen in other books produced by the colonial writers. Some chiefs have salt wells on their lands which were collected for domestic use. He said, “The chief is entitled to a due on all salt collected. When a party of men goes out to collect salt, as soon as they have got their salt they set aside half a seer which is the chief’s due on the total amount of salt collected by the whole party and in addition to this each member of the party must pay the chief a due of half a seer of salt out of his share.”³⁴ Any of the villagers were not permit to collect salt without the chief’s permission. Parry also mentioned about the existence of two types of village blacksmith which was called *thirdeng*. He said, “Villagers are not bound to get their tools repaired by the official village *thirdeng*. They can go to a private *thirdeng* if they like. The

³³ A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 185.

³⁴ N.E Parry, *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 2009), 5.

pumhlawh is payable to the *thirdeng* who actually repairs the tools.”³⁵ The existence of private *thirdeng* mentioned by Parry is hardly seen in other writings.

As the book is mainly concerned with customs and ceremonies we can see how materials were used and engaged in Mizo traditional practices. He mentioned about *puanpui* which was a thick cotton blanket and *thul* which was a basket used for keeping cloths in Mizo house. These were essential parts of women’s possessions and it is considered very disgraceful if a bride has not got these things to take to her husband’s house. We can see from his work how the material possession played important roles in the Mizo marriage and divorce system. When a man’s wife dies, her relations can take back her *puanpui* but unless her husband is quite a young man, who on his wife’s death goes and sleeps in the *Zawlbuk*, they cannot take it away until the man has married a second wife.³⁶

Parry also discussed *hmeichhe bungrua* which was certain property belonging exclusively to Mizo women. The Mizo women’s property included *puan* – ordinary cloths, *puanpui* – thick cotton blanket or quilt, *puanfen* – woman’s skirt, *puanrin* – the cloth used by a young woman, *thul* – the basket used for keeping cloth in, *thembu* – weaving machine, *hmui* – spindles, *phurhhlan* – various kinds of baskets used for carrying things, *thi-nghawng-thlun* – bead necklaces, *tingduang* – blue threads.

Another book ‘*The Lakher*’ written by N.E Parry also gives useful information about the Mara who are the sub-tribe of the Mizo. In the first and second chapter he wrote about the dress and ornaments, weapons and tools, stones and tattooing, the village, houses and household implements, daily life, agriculture, food, drinks, tobacco, trade, spinning and weaving, dyeing, metal works, fire, basket work, bridges, pottery, string, knots, woodworks,

³⁵ N.E Parry, *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies*, (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 2009), 7.

³⁶ Ibid.

gunpowder, hunting, traps, fishing, livestock, medicine, poisons, amusements, songs, musical instruments, dancing, games, measurement of times, length, height, width, area, capacity, counting - points of compass, currency, war, ceremony, peacemaking, cannibalism, captives and slavery.

The three books '*Wild Races of South Eastern India*,' '*A Fly on The Wheel or How I Helped to Govern India*' and '*The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and The Dwellers Therein*' written by T.H Lewin also gave us insightful information for the Mizo tribe when they were encountered with the British military troops. He stated that the physical features of Mizo village when he was entered to Rothangpuia's village like this, "*The village was surrounded by a palisade of enormous logs, as thick as the leg of an elephant and ten feet high. The entrance lay through a stockade passage, thickly studded with downward-pointing bamboo spikes, and defended by two heavy doors of rough-hewn timber, so thick as to be practically fire and bullet proof. On passing through the passage, I found the stockade was lined with men in readiness to repel any attack. Evidently these Lushais (Mizo) were a suspicious race, accustomed to treacherous dealing.*"³⁷ It can be presumed the house of village chief from his writings, he mentioned about the Rothangpuia's house who was a village chief. His house was a large barn-like structure, a hundred and fifty long by forty broads, raised on a low platform about four feet from the ground. It was thatched with wild-palm leaves, and its entrance adorned with long lines of skulls, buffalo, pig and deer, over the doorway.³⁸ He also mentioned about the dresses of the Mizo when he saw them for the first time. He said that their whole clothing consisted of a single long home-spun mantle or sheet of cotton cloth, sometimes white with a blue transverse stripe, or of a dark-blue fabric, the stripe being crimson or yellow. In their encounter he saw the Mizo men

³⁷ T.H Lewin, *A Fly on The Wheel or How I Helped To Govern India*, (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 197.

³⁸ T.H Lewin, *A Fly on The Wheel or How I Helped To Govern India*, (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 197.

carried flint-lock muskets guns and he also noticed that some men carried the handsome gyal powder-horns which were called *fungki*.³⁹

T.H Lewin also wrote about the Mizo were the great consumer of domestic animals not being very plenteous among them, therefore they often went out for large hunting parties and their favourite game was the wild elephant.⁴⁰ He also talks about when the Mizo have learnt the use of fire-arms, in his observation it was within the last 10 or 20 years which was around 1860s.

Bertram S. Carey and H.N Tuck book '*The Chin Hills*' gave a detailed note on the people who were living in the Chin Hills. They mentioned that the agricultural implements used in their fields were short axe and the short hoe which were around 4 inches broad at the edge. Both implements were very light and very suitable to the class of work which was performed.⁴¹ The manufactures in the Hills for export were confined to cane mats, bamboo mats, and baskets, these mats made chiefly by the inhabitants on the slopes of the ranges bordering on Burma.⁴² Spears, doo, axe-heads, hoes and knives were manufactured for local uses. The writers mentioned that iron was procured from Burma and blacksmith were found throughout the hills. In this book we also see earthen pots were made by women everywhere for holding water and liquor, the pots were dried in the sun and then baked. The remarkable thing highlighted by this book was bows and arrows were still used for shooting game, but not as weapons of war. The writers also gave a detailed account on the method of making gunpowder which was being followed since a time immemorial. The book also talks about the use of clay pellets. It was made of very fine and pure clay which was taken from the beds of certain streams and

³⁹ T.H Lewin, *A Fly on The Wheel or How I Helped to Govern India*, (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 196.

⁴⁰ T.H Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and The Dwellers Therein*, (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 147.

⁴¹ Bertram S. Carey and H.N Tuck, *The Chin Hills*, (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 2008), 211.

⁴² *Ibid*, 213.

which was thoroughly kneaded and cleansed of all impurities; it was then fashioned into balls which were then baked as hard as stone.

B. Lalthangliana provided extensive accounts of Mizo tradition and culture on his book '*Culture and Folklore of Mizoram*'. The book is divided into two parts part one is culture and part two is folktales. In the first part we can see the Mizo village, Mizo family life, the chief and his subjects, system of cultivation, clothing, children's games, domestic animals, valuable possessions, festivals, Mizo dances, Mizo musical instruments, customary apportionment of an animal killed in a hunt, said ceremony, community fishing with herbal toxins, life of the young men and maidens, Mizo marriage customs, Mizo divorce system, bone of contention – corpse or sick person, *zawlbuk*, *zu*, supernatural beings, sacrificial rites and customs, observance of head – hunting of enemies rituals and ceremonies and last rites.

With regard to valuable possessions of the Mizo he describes it as '*sum*' or '*sum leh pai*' which meant assets, and could be handed down from father to son or inherited. He listed the Mizo valuable possession into six categories which were *dar* (brass gongs), *darkhuang* (big gong) – *darbu* and *darmang*, *silai* (guns), *thi* (necklace) – *thihna* (amber necklace), *thival* (semi-precious ruby), *sial* (mithun or gayal), *darbel* (big grass pot). He also categorized the Mizo musical instrument into two classes which were those which were made by themselves and those which were imported. The author wrote about the culture and tradition of the Mizo in very precise way which is very useful source for the present research. Since his approach is seen as the insider point of view it can be regarded as a new perspective by comparing with the earlier accounts produced by the colonial administrators and missionaries. In his writings about the system of cultivation he gave detailed account based on the local geographical settings and flora and fauna existed in Mizoram which was very helpful in understanding the actual physical topography of the land. Let's take out few examples from his writing: "*When 'nganbawm' flower bloomed, the birds began to suck the nectar for those flowers, it was regarded as the time to*

*search for a place for their jhooms,” “When the vaube (bauhinia varieta) was in bloom, it was time to burn their jhooms.”*⁴³

A detailed description of Chin society can be seen at ‘*The Structure of Chin Society*’ written by F.K Lehman. Based on his findings, Chin society and culture could be comprehended in terms of a twofold adaptation: first, an adaptation to local resources by means of a particular technology and second, a response to Burman civilization. By pointing out the flora of the land he mentioned the existence of flowering bamboo, which have thick walls, a diameter of perhaps four inches and are useful technology, are found at low altitudes in the rolling country on the south and west. Other species of bamboos were also found in and near the village sites everywhere which have some use in native technology. He also wrote about the pottery in Northern area in the Chin Hills which was made from specific clay of lateritic formation which is common all over this area. Pots were commonly made being round-bottomed, globular in body, with a short but constricted neck and a simple outward-flaring lip. These pots are used for storing water, for boiling grain and vegetable soup and for general cooking.

F.K Lehman also gave an interesting account on sacrifice of cattle, the taking of heads, and the erecting of monuments in stone and wood for deceased persons who have achieved some social standing and prosperity. He said that erecting these memorials to the dead and keeping human trophy heads serve to connect the living with the ancestral dead of the village. He also had an opinion that the skulls collected carry in them the soul-stuff of slain enemies, that this soul-stuff is added to that of the village to enhance its prosperity and the fertility of its crops, livestock and human population. When prosperity declines, head must be taken.⁴⁴ He also discussed about memorial stone complex which was called *lung dawh*, it was a platform some three feet

⁴³ B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 89-93.

⁴⁴ F.K Lehman, *The Structure of Chin Society* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1980), 186.

high, formed of earth and rubble and faced and capped with large flat stones. At the *lungdawh* are usually found posts (*thing tial*) with carved geometric designs (*a tial*). Some of the designs are purely decorative, while others are a sort of code indicating that in life the deceased possessed a quantity of heirloom goods, particularly necklaces. Though he gave a detailed account on the Chin Social system and their history but the material culture was not much discussed in this book.

Lianhmingthanga's book '*Material Culture of the Mizo*' is one of the main sources of the present research. It is a collection of material objects which are known to have connection with the culture of Mizo. The material objects are arranged in chapter wise and under the chapters, the items are serialized and described with illustrations. The materials possessions of the Mizo were described by giving brief history and the technology or mechanism how it was made and used. Overall this book is quite useful and helpful for the present research as it is the first and only works done based on the material culture of the Mizo. The author feared that the traditional material culture will be discarded by the changing society and will be replaced by new culture. He put a serious note on this issue in his conclusion that if these traditional material cultures are forgotten and lost it will be a serious mistake and will be unpardonable offence for the Mizo. He further claimed that the traditional material cultures were the maker and giver of separate identity and unique distinct ethnicity and nationhood.

How the material culture played a decisive role in human memory as a historical study can be seen in the work of '*Memory and Material Culture*' written by Andre Jones. He examined the relationship between reminiscence and material culture especially the interrelation between people and artifacts and how this leads to production of memory. He put a remark, "*How people act on objects and how objects can be considered to affect social actions are paramount concerns. In order that we understand social reproduction, we need to know how it is that people engage with objects and how, an in what manner,*

objects are used to mediate for people. An analysis of the role of memory in these processes is therefore a key to how we describe society and define what we traditionally term culture."⁴⁵ His interest was not only 'how societies remember' but also 'how things help societies remember'. In his writing, remembrance may be seen as a process made prominent to the experiencing subject by the continual and dynamic meeting between the subject and the material world he or she inhabits rather than an abstract and dispassionate exchange between the external world and the mind.⁴⁶

'History and Material Culture A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources' edited by Karen Harvey focused on objects, which are often found around us in daily life as dependable sources, which can assist historians to acquire new interpretations and information about the past. The book is a collection of eleven research articles which raises two central questions: 'How can objects be used in history?' And 'What can objects offer the historians?' By stressing the work of historians using material culture the editor put a remark on that it had to be characterized by interdisciplinarity of different subjects. She also talks about that the challenge – but also the opportunity – of choosing to work on a body of material that has not conventionally come under the auspices of historical research is one that historians are welcoming with open arms. The editor put a stress for substantial culture to be included securely into historical studies, we need to develop methodologies that rely on and counterpart history's status as both a social science and a humanities discipline. As the book is compiled for the students it is very useful for the beginner in material culture, its contents has appendix note for the beginners which includes how to find sources, using – museum, gallery or other collections, image of objects to be included in written works, useful internet resources. This book is a must read for the students and researcher in history who are dealing with material cultures. The approaches of the book are also

⁴⁵ Andre Jones, *Memory and Material Culture* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4-5.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

easy to understand even for the beginners which will be helpful in their further research in material culture studies.

Another collection of research articles '*Material Culture A Research Guide*' edited by Thomas J.Schlereth gave insightful theories and methodologies in material culture studies. According to the editor ,material culture can be best described at present as a growing movement or combined efforts of individuals working in museum, historical societies and cultural agencies, as well as in academic departments in colleges and universities, who are fascinated by the idea of studying the explanatory potential of material evidence as cultural meaning.⁴⁷ He also wrote that the principal duty of material culture is an epistemological one; it is an endeavor to know what can be known about and from the past and present creation of humankind.⁴⁸

'*Handbook of Material Culture*' edited by Christopher Tilley, Webb Keane, Susanne Kuchler, Michael Rowlands and Patricia Spyer is another useful boo for the present research. This handbook does not claim to represent one single theoretical or disciplinary perspective or methodological approach but a wide range, reflecting current modes of thinking and research in the field.⁴⁹The handbook is divided into five parts. The first parts lay out the theoretical terrain for the study of things, covering the history and development of various approaches, the philosophical and conceptual background, key authors, concepts and texts. The second part covers the correlation between the material forms, the body and the senses. It aims to show that material culture cannot be understood apart from the body. The third part focusses on subject-object relations. It considers the manner in which a wide variety of material forms are related to differing kinds of subjectivities and social relations. The fourth part focusses on things made, things exchanged and things consumed which are known as a basic tripartite biography of things. The fifth part

⁴⁷ Thomas J.Schlereth, ed., *Material Culture A Research Guide* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 7.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Christopher Tilley, Webb Keane, Sussane Kuchler, Michael Rowlands and Patricia Spyer, ed., *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 5.

considers the contemporary politics and poetics of displaying, representative and sustaining material forms in the present and the manner in which this affects notions of tradition and social identity.

A research article '*Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method*' written by Jules David Prown is not to be left out in the present review. This article is commonly used and referred in many of the writings and research in material culture studies. Prown pointed out that material culture as a study is based upon the established fact that the existence of a man-made object is concrete evidence of the presence of a human intelligence operational at the time of fabrication.⁵⁰ He further claimed that "*The underlying premise is that objects made or modified by man reflect, consciously or unconsciously, direct or indirectly, the beliefs of individual who made, commissioned, purchased or used them, and by extension the beliefs of the larger society to which they belonged. The term material culture thus refers quite directly and efficiently, if not elegantly, both to the subject matter of the study, material, and to its purpose, the understanding of culture.*"⁵¹ He stated that for the study of prehistoric or preliterate societies artifacts make up the only surviving evidence there might be not much of a choice but it can be useful if it were use them as to determine cultural values as well as historical facts. He warned the scholars that the belief system of a culture might be acquire through its material survival but the technique of material culture should be part of the tool kit of the well-equipped cultural scholar. In his conclusion he stated, "*Use of the work of art as an autonomous artistic sign, as an affective link with the culture that called it into being, because of our shared physiological experience as perceivers and our sensory overlap with the maker and the original perceivers. This is the gift and the promise of material culture*"⁵². The work of Jules David Prown is considered as one the most important proper

⁵⁰ Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1982): 1.

⁵¹ Ibid, 2.

⁵² Ibid, 16.

works in the field of material culture studies. When he was writing this article no complete academic philosophy or discipline for the investigation or study of material culture has as yet been developed.

The first systematic statement of a method for using oral tradition as sources for writing Western-style history was formulated by Vansina in *De la Tradition orale*. This book, which advocated a complex and painstaking method of establishing chains of transmission and comparing variants to correct distortion, was based on the assumption that oral tradition was indeed a purveyor of history as we understand it.⁵³ Thomas Spear's article *Oral Traditions: Whose History?* opposes the western historiography that was firmly grounded on written sources which could be arranged in sequence and scrutinized to trace incremental changes and establish cause and affect relationships in evolutionary patterns of change. As opposed to written documents recorded in the past and passed down unchanged into the present, oral tradition had to be remembered and retold through successive generations to reach the present.⁵⁴

In the writings of Mizo history too, we face the problem from the wrong perspective in an attempt to coerce oral traditions into the mold of documentary sources appropriate for western-style history. Thomas Spears remarked that ,”traditions are not documents, not even oral ones; they are history, the product of oral historians’ attempt to make sense of the past.” He further stated that,” trying to write history from the oral sources is the same as attempting to write history from the secondary or tertiary accounts of historians who selected the items and decided their significance, while ignoring the rest.” In literary tradition historians are capable of working directly on the words of the past in the forms of diaries, letters, and other records while in oral tradition historians must work on the words communicated to him orally

⁵³ Robert Harm, “Oral Tradition and Ethnicity,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 10, No.1 (summer 1979): 61-85.

⁵⁴ Thomas Spear, “Oral Traditions: Whose History?” *History in Africa* 8, (1981): 165-181.

through one or more generations of ancestors from the past. He further states that, “*Such words do not come to the oral historian verbatim, but in a series of core images or formulae embedded in a narrative skeleton around which he, like his predecessors before him, weaves a complete tradition. Each retelling of a tradition thus becomes a separate composition, in which the teller creates the tradition anew around the received core formulae and skeleton. Traditions are thus subject to continual reinterpretation as the words from the past take on contemporary meanings in the context of the present, a tendency which is reinforced by the collective response of the audience to each oral performance. In this way oral traditions are continually generated in a manner which ensures that they express a collective cultural conscience, thereby conveying an impression of cultural homeostasis. The words from the past become congruent with the values and self-image of the present*”.⁵⁵

Walter J. Ong’s book *Orality and Literacy* and his article *Orality, Literacy and Medieval Textualization*⁵⁶ are often referred to in the area of the study of oral tradition and cultures. He classified oral tradition into two parts i.e. *primary oral tradition* and *secondary oral tradition*. *Primary oral tradition* includes people who do not have a writing tradition while he called those who have knowledge of writings as *secondary oral tradition*. Walter Ong sets his views from the modern era when every culture possesses the art of writing, he did not find the existence of *primary oral tradition* but it has a continuation among the people those who practiced oral tradition and they still embrace it through the *secondary oral tradition* of modern electronic devices like radio, telephones, television, printing press etc. His concept of oral tradition can be relevant in the context of the ‘Mizo’ history also. Nowadays the ‘Mizo’ have a system of writing but most of the writings cover the present context since the

⁵⁵ Thomas Spear, “Oral Traditions: Whose History?” *History in Africa* 8, (1981): 165-181. (he cited the words of Scheub, Xhosa Ntsomi & Miller, “*Dynamics of Oral Tradition*”)

⁵⁶ Walter J. Ong, “New Literary History,” *Oral and Written Traditions in the Middle Ages* 16, No.1 (Autumn, 1984): 1-12.

initial stage. By borrowing Walter J. Ong's suggestions, we can also reconstruct the pre-literate history of 'Mizo 'through the medium of *secondary oral tradition*.

The eminent scholar in the study of 'primitive religion' Max Muller talks about the importance of oral tradition in his book of *Anthropological Religion*. According to him, "*Memory and oral tradition are indeed wonderful keepers of popular poetry, and when once certain productions of that popular poetry have been recognized and invested with a sacred authority, I do not hesitate to say that poems are safer in the memory than in manuscripts*".⁵⁷ He also highlights the significance of oral tradition in the reconstruction of the past from his experiences among the pre-literate society. In his further studies he observed that, "*Among the peasants of Finland, among people ignorant of reading and writing, large fragments of epic poetry have been discovered during the first half of our century, entirely preserved by oral tradition, never written before, either by the poet or by his admirers, and yet easily fitted together into one epic poem*".⁵⁸ Based on his writings, there is also a possibility of collecting many memories and oral tradition amongst the Mizo which have been used as one of the main sources of the present study herein.

The writings of military officers in the then British India government provided us a detailed outline of the military operations in the Chin-Lushai Hills. The books like *The Lushai Expedition, 1871-72* (1872) written by R.G Woodthorpe, *Chin-Lushai Land: Including Description of the Various Expeditions into the Chin-Lushai Hills and the Final Annexation of the Country, with Maps and Illustrations* (1893) written by A.S. Reid and J.Shakespear's *History of the Assam Rifles* (1929) mainly highlight their military activities but lots of information could be drawn out about the culture and social system of the Mizo.

⁵⁷ Max Muller, *Anthropological Religion* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1977), 11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 312.

Missionaries who were working in then Lushai Hills published various writings such as *Light on the Lushai Hills: The Story of Our Foreign Mission* (1930) by M.E. Bowser's, *Set on a Hill: The records of Forty Years in the Lushai country* (1944) by Dorothy F.Glover, *Lorrain of the Lushais: Romance and Realism on the North-East Frontier of India* (1944) by David Kyles, *The Lushai Hills: The story of the Lushai Pioneer Mission* (1970) by Grace R. Lewis,. These writings were mainly about the impact of Christianity upon the Mizo society. We can also get some information regarding the culture, social activity and belief system of the Mizo out of these writings. Generally, their purposes of writings were to give information to western readers and to pursue their support for the agents, the missionaries- especially those activities which were "successful".⁵⁹ The descriptions of the people on the moral and religious life that they led were only a slight improvement over the news reporters, so they could not be reliable as a whole. Their approaches were based on mostly with the influence of western perceptions and they were primarily concerned about their mission whom they expected to yield positive changes and a better way of culture. Attempts to see the traditional practices and cultures in positive manner could not be seen from their writings as the readership of these books were not concerned about the local Mizo people.

1.5 Sources of the study

(a) Oral sources:

Since the last fifty years, attempts have been made by many scholars to find ways to retrieve the rich and diverse past of the so-called '*peoples without history*' which implies people without writing.⁶⁰ One of these attempts was 'oral history', a methodology by which peoples' traditions and memories of the past could be understood as 'texts' about their history. Such a methodology has been used in the academic studies of different parts of the

⁵⁹ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1997), 10.

⁶⁰ Ed Steinhart, "Oral History Methods" *History* 5303, (Fall, 2004), 47.

world like African history and that of other pre-literate peoples and periods possible. Although many people were initially critical of the idea of oral history, understanding it as at best an alternative to history using written sources, it was gradually accepted as an important source of knowledge about the pre-literate and non-literate world. Like many other tribes in different parts of the world, the Mizo also do not have literary tradition in the early times; only after the coming of British in the Mizo hills they have written records. In the context of Mizo society and their historical writings we could not ignore oral sources, so the present research will give more importance on oral history and draw many of its sources from the oral tradition. Herein our studies, the oral sources are mostly drawn in the context of continuity from earlier time to present time in the society.

The present research also draws its oral sources from the folk culture traditions like folk dances, folk songs/music etc. The practice of Mizo folk culture contains informative features in their cultural and social organization. Besides, these folk traditions still have continuation among the people till the present days. The Mizo folk dances are usually held in the occasion of their sad and joyous days which were deeply connected with their beliefs in the world of the living and life after death. Examples can be drawn from *Khuallam* dance, it was held exclusively in the time of *Khuangchawi* sacrifice, anyone who wanted access to *Pialral* (Paradise) after their death must observe *Khuangchawi* sacrifice. Without it, they could not reach *Pialral* and at the same time giving them a high standing in the society. Another example is *Cheraw kan*, which is one of the most popular dances performed by the young men and women with bamboo rods till present days. This dance was originally performed to hope the soul a safe passage and triumphant entry into the abode of the dead called *Pialral* for a soul which has just departed from this earthly existence.⁶¹

⁶¹ Lalrimawia, *Mizoram History and Cultural Identity (1890-1947)* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1995), 26.

Folk songs, folk music etc. provides reliable sources in the study of Mizo history and can be related with their material possessions that were mentioned in the lyrics. Singing and music is central to the lives of the 'Mizo'. It can be said that the Mizo sings when they work in the field, when they go for hunting or for fishing, whether they are at home doing domestic work or whether a person dies, they sing. When they are in sorrow they sing for condolence. In festivals, marriages and other joyous days too, singing could not be left out. The Mizo still sing these folk songs even in modern period in many occasions and many of the folk music and instruments are still used in the present days. So the existence of continuity in folk culture helps us in getting some knowledge about the past history of the people and it can be used as one of the useful sources in this research.

Proverbs, myths, legends, folktales etc also provide enormous sources in the study of the Mizo culture. As John Pobee comments beautifully on his study of *African Traditional Religion*, these sources are the storehouses of native wisdom, of philosophy and code of behavior.⁶² Many sources are drawn out from the native proverbs, myths, legends, folktales etc. Out of these useful sources, let us mention just one important reference of the myth which is related with the notion of life after death which talks about the soul of the dead passing through one particular lake known as *Rihdil* in the eastern part of present Mizoram. By this myth the Mizo believed that every soul passes through *Rihdil* and the lake became an important part of their sacred geography. The details of this myth will be mentioned in other chapters.

Besides these sources, the writers conducted interviews, queries and held discussions with local scholars like University teachers, College lecturers, School teachers, elders, theologians and well-known writers who have reliable knowledge in the area of the present study. The information

⁶² John Pobee, "Aspects of African Traditional Religion," *Sociological Analysis* 37, No.1. (Spring, 1976): 4.

obtained from these interactions provided valuable sources for this dissertation.

(b) Colonial sources:

Apart from oral sources, colonial sources have been used in this dissertation which was mostly produced by westerners, particularly British administrative and military officers and later by Christian missionaries who had intimate relation with the Mizo people. After they established themselves permanently among the Mizo, they could have better interaction with the native people so they started introducing written literature among the people and initiated the process of enquiries about the land and the people. Since the Mizo do not have written records, whoever writes about the history of the Mizo has to refer to these earlier writings. They published their reports, tour dairies, ethnographic notes, and articles etc. in the shapes of books, census reports, district gazetteers, proceedings, monographs and journals. Though they were the foremost writers and provided valuable information and records about the land and people, their perceptions and studies could be seen as predominantly Eurocentric and one sided in many ways. This is very true in a larger context by analyzing their books and records through the insider point of views.

(c) Contemporary work: (Secondary sources)

Contemporary literatures like *magazines, bulletins, newspapers, T.V, Internet etc.* are also included as our sources of information in our present study. The modern writings in English and other translations from the neighbouring regions also give us valuable sources. Further, books and literature written in the language previously called '*Lusei tawng*/' '*Duhlian tawng*' but now popularly known as '*Mizo tawng*' have been utilized as important sources. Since the writer was brought up in Mizoram and his mother tongue is '*Mizo tawng*' which gives him privilege to access vernacular materials with comprehensive understandings and valuable insight that may not be available to others.

To collect sources and other appropriate information the writers visited the following places: Mizoram State Library, Mizoram State Museum, State Archive in Aizawl, Aizawl Theological College Library and Archive, Synod Archive in Aizawl, Tribal Research Institute in Aizawl, LTL Library in Aizawl, Synod Bookroom in Aizawl, Cultural Centre (*Zokhua*) at Falkawn, Pachhunga University College library in Aizawl and IGML-University of Hyderabad. Among these Mizoram State Museum and Cultural Centre (*Zokua*) has been extensively used for obtaining Mizo material culture. The information and records obtained from these places are useful and provide helpful materials in this research.

1.6. Plan and Scope of the study.

The central emphasis of this research is to reconstruct the material culture of the Mizo in the pre-modern period. This issue is very important as many people now pay more attention in modern technology and imported materials which create a great chance to forget the traditional material culture in many aspects. Especially in urban areas the Mizo are mostly depended on modern technological products in their day-today livelihood their traditional materials are replaced more and more with modern materials. This has created the lack of awareness among the younger generation in the society that they never heard nor see the Mizo traditional materials, which is very dangerous for the extinction of traditional values. Even in academia there are lots and lots of writings and research on Mizo culture and history but the area of material culture is not to be seen as such till today. This urged the present study to produce an important documentation and proper record of the Mizo traditional material culture with systematic manner. On the contrary, there is little awareness arose among the scholars and few members of civil society to preserve the earlier practices and systems which could be fallen to be endangered if it was not taken serious actions.

The lack of any detailed accounts of the Material Culture the Mizo in pre-modern period has made this topic approachable mostly from modern secondary works, therefore making this the theme of Material Culture pliable to many far fetching generalizations obscuring traditional materials and practices from historiography. Since the penetration of British colonial rulers in the areas of the then Lushai hills and subsequently the whole Mizo population embraced Christianity in the last decades of the nineteenth century many of their traditional materials were considered as less important and insanity for their newly embraced religion. Oral history and performing arts which contain many residues and continuations of the earlier practices would help us to look at these sources from a new perspective borrowing tools from interdisciplinary approaches which deals with Material Culture.

The other endeavor of the present research is to study material culture under the discipline of history subject which is unpopular in many aspects. As discussed above some scholars stressed that material culture studies can be an important source for the historian who gather his or her research on human past. It can be seen as alternative sources in history apart from texts and written documents. Even in the context of Mizo history many sources can be drawn from their material possession and usages in the pre-modern period which will enrich the existing writings in Mizo history. The pre-literate Mizo society had no many other options to reconstruct the past except with the material culture which was considered as the manifestation of what it was actually created or usage at a time by manufacturer or users. In order to comprehend the Mizo culture, the study of Material Culture is an essential one for getting reliable sources. The present will fill the gap in the Mizo historiography with new perspective and new approach through material culture studies by raising questions on how did they led their livelihood and maintaining their culture without employing modern technology and machine made products.

1.7. Period of study.

The period of study will be broadly covered between the 17th century and early 20th century A.D, it was the period when the Mizo tribes making their entry to the present Mizoram by leaving their sojourn place in Thantlang and Lentlang hilly areas in Myanmar (Burma). During these periods the great important landmark settlement could be traced back in the Mizo History, the first three important established villages came into being which were: - (1) Dungtlang (Three Thousand Households), (2) Selesih (Seven thousand households), (3) Tualte. Within the period we can also find many important inter-ethnic/village warfare amongst the Mizo. It can be assumed that the material cultures developed amongst them were one of the leading factors for all these landmark occurrences. A noted Mizo historian B. Lalthangliana put emphasis on the importance of the period by saying “The customs, culture and way of life led by the Mizos today had its origin in Selesih”⁶³. It is undoubted that during these days cultural and social formation of the Mizo met a new kind and magnitude which came to characterize by means of their material possessions.

The period also witnessed immensely innovative and explorative approaches seen in the forms of material culture showing innovative developments, especially in the field of crafts production and tools making. Another component of this phenomenon may have been new ‘management’ strategies with central economic resources such as agriculture (Shifting cultivation). The adaptation of new varieties of plants, soil and seeds are the key factor for agriculture development but it could not be inclusively completed without the development of material possession and the advancement of technological knowledge of the people. Apart from the socio-political factors material possession of the Mizo will always had a great role in their movement from eastern side to western direction till they settled to the present Mizoram.

⁶³ B.Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 7.

This has to be investigating with new perspective by collaborating earlier literatures and existing materials which are recognized with possessing continuity of the pre-modern socio-cultural tradition and styles.

The present study is categorized as covered the pre-modern period in Mizoram. The writings of the Mizo history often encounter problems in periodization. The mainland Indian history has a common accepted tradition with proper chronological order which are - Ancient India (from the beginning to 7th Century), Medieval India (8th-18th Century), Modern India (19th Century onwards). This periodization also has invalidity in some regional areas especially in North East India. In mainland India, Modern period had already started in the last quarter of the eighteenth century but in the context of North East India like Mizo, Naga, Khasi etc., they still led a primitive livelihood. In the writings of the history of Mizo also the periodization that mostly followed in the Indian History could not be applicable. Literary tradition was introduced only in the late nineteenth century amongst the Mizo. There was no literary tradition amongst the people before this, they merely followed oral tradition and majority of the writings came up only in the following centuries. So here also our period of study can be rightly called as Pre-Colonial or Pre-British or Pre-Modern period.

1.8. Thematic division of chapters

The first chapter is the introductory part which challenges with the study of material culture under different academic disciplines and also discussing the importance of material culture studies in history subject as well. The chapter also deals with the definitions of material culture which were proposed by various scholars across diverse academic disciplines. The chapter also contains the review of literature and plan and scope of the study. Further, the period of the study also included in this chapter by highlighting the problems of periodization in the context of Mizo history.

The second chapter appoints with the concept and making of Mizo cultural area. In this chapter the variety of 'exonym' or 'endonym' and 'ethnonym' of the Mizo will be discussed. Landscape and physical features of the Mizo cultural area also will be discussed. The chapter also will be dealing the validity of "Zomia" and borderlands as a category to explain the landscape of Mizo culture area. The origin myth and geographical correlates as shared traditions in Mizo history also to be highlighted. In the same chapter the survey of Pre-British Mizo culture area - origin, migration and settlement will be included. Apart from these the content will also include the existence of sacred geography and its relations with Mizo cultural area. The chapter will be concluded with Origin and development of Mizo chieftainship.

The third chapter deals with material culture and production process. The chapter will analyze Pre-Modern Mizo economy and production process by highlighting the cropping patterns and nature of agriculture and the work forces that relates with production forces. As the main production process was mostly depended on shifting cultivation the chapter also will be investigating religious sacrifices that have connection with their works. Hunting also will be elaborate as production process and the technique and customary practices in hunting will also be discussed. Community hunting and its role on Mizo society also be included in this chapter. The chapter will be concluded by highlighting the role of forest in Mizo production process.

The fourth chapter will be dealing about the classification of Mizo Material culture. It will be the central theme of the research by studying different categories of Mizo material possessions and usages. The Mizo material culture will be divided into eight broad categories which will be (1) Settlement pattern and house types (2) Household materials (3) Agriculture implements (4) Snares, traps and other hunting materials (5) Weapons and ammunitions (6) Musical instruments (7) Pottery (8) Religious and ceremonial objects (9) Games and Sport implements, and (10) Weaving, dress and Clothing materials.

The fifth chapter will be the last and conclusion of the present research. It will be followed by bibliography and appendix.

One of the aspects that emerges from the above discussion is that a study of material culture would give us an idea of the overall organization of the Mizo society derived from a production oriented lived reality that was reflected in the tangible forms. It surmises that the elements of culture and the cultural process flowed from this material base and they were invoked and this material and cultural reproduction helped on the reproduction of the Mizo society over the centuries. We can now summarize this chapter as an introductory in the present research by saying the Mizo had a long and rich tradition of material culture since the time immemorial and will be discussed in more details in the following chapters.

CHAPTER – II

THE MAKING OF MIZO CULTURE AREA

The present chapter will be discussing the culture area of Mizo during the pre-modern period. The said culture area will be considered as comprising the regions or spaces that the Mizo community occupied or pass through during their sojourns from their legendary home till they reached the place where nation state met its existence in late nineteenth century A.D. To delimit the Mizo culture area geographically, in the east their legendary homeland Yunan province in China via Burma (Myanmar) valley to the modern Bangladesh territory into the west have to be included. Majority of the Mizo are living in Mizoram state in India, some are also scattered in their neighbouring regions or states like Assam, Manipur, Tripura, and also in Bangladesh and Myanmar.

To know more about the Mizo culture area, we have to know about the meaning and validities of 'culture area' that are being used and applied in categorizing traditional cultures existed in various parts on globe. In culture studies 'culture area' is well depicted as region or space in which a group of people share similar cultural traits. In different academic disciplines like anthropology, cultural geography and other social sciences researches the analysis based on culture area is being widely used. Culture area analysis is useful for historical reconstruction of cultural development, it enables comparisons between separate regions for analysis, human cultures and its effect of the natural environment also can be studied based on the culture area analysis.¹

2.1 Concept of Culture Area

To trace back the origin of culture area in academic there can be many theories on it. But in the present studies we will be focused more on general accepted theories on the existence and expansion of the concept of culture area. During the period of colonial expansion in the world, the European social

¹ "Centre for Spatially Integrated Social Sciences" accessed on June 19, 2014, <http://www.csiss.org/classics/content/15>

scientists were attentive to study the culture of indigenous people. German geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904) works on culture studies that he proposed *Kulturkreise* (cultural circles) for the analysis of region based on the human culture was considered as one the roots of culture area concept. He was followed with related concept developed by Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845–1918) who was a French geographer under the term ‘*genre de vie* (way of life).’ He described the outline of living distinctive characters of certain cultures or livelihoods. In 1917, American anthropologist Clark Wissler published a book ‘*The American Indian*’ in this book he used new systematic method by highlighting America’s native cultures, social traits and material usages. In his analysis of native America tribes, he used culture area concept to integrate the different tribes based on their similarities and differences in thirteen categories which were including: eating habits, animal rearing, social organization, mode of transport, textiles and weaving, mythology and rituals, ceramics, decorative arts, tools, fine arts, language, physiology and social norms. His concept was generally accepted as the beginning of the classification of native tribes based on their cultural traits.

Russell Gordon Smith defined, “The culture area is an empirical grouping of cultural data in which the unit of investigation and the principle of classification have been derived from direct observation of the facts and of their temporal and spatial distributions.”² He further discussed the development of the culture area concept in United States:

Goldensweiser suggested that the idea of culture-area originated for the classification and arrangement the ethnographic collections of the American Museum of Natural History. He found that the specimens of relatively homogeneous groups could be ranged based on specific geographical districts,

² Russell Gordon Smith, “The Concept of the Culture-Area,” *Social Forces* 7 (1929): 421

and that the division of North America could be based on the areas characterized by their material culture.³

*In brief, the culture-area is a classification of co-existential cultural data according to their objective and psychological resemblances and in terms of their regional distributions. It represents an attempt to reduce the chaotic details of primitive social behavior to the level of human comprehension, to provide that ordered body of knowledge without which scientific factorization and generalization are impossible.*⁴

Irving Rouse also gives a clear idea on 'culture area', "We may define a culture area as a region which is (or has been) inhabited by groups of people who possess different phases of culture but who at the same time share many elements of culture, distinct from those to be found in the neighboring areas, and who have continued to share these elements for an appreciable length of time. They have done this because (1) peoples who live in contact tend to influence each other, (2) they also tend to adapt to similar environmental conditions, and (3) they hand down their culture from generation to generation, thereby providing a certain amount of time depth."⁵

Some cultural researchers do not fully accept the validity of culture area concept as they considered culture as not a static one but dynamic. Even Clark Wissler himself also highlighted in his article, he said, "We see the culture area as a formulation expressing the regional character of human social behavior. No one has, as yet, come into a full understanding of the matter, the present status of the subject but serving to bring into view the vague outlines of the living culture patch."⁶

³ Russell Gordon Smith, "The Concept of the Culture-Area," *Social Forces* 7 (1929): 426

⁴Ibid.

⁵ Irving Rouse, "Culture Area and Co-Tradition," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 13 (1957): 126.

⁶ Clark Wissler, "The Culture-Area Concept in Social Anthropology," *American Journal of Sociology* 92 (1927): 891.

Alexander B. Murphy et.al given a definition of culture area, "As conventionally understood, a culture is comprising a set of people who hold numerous beliefs, behaviors, and overall ways of life in common, including ways of thinking, technology, social institutions, and materials possessions."⁷

R. Jon McGee and Richard L. Warms defines culture area based on ethno-geographical point of view, "A culture area is defined as a more or less contiguous ethnogeography area inhabited by peoples who share cultural traits to an extent that distinguish them significantly from other societies. Some scholars distinguish a culture area by mapping the distribution of a single cultural trait, whereas others group societies together into more complex clusters sharing a number of cultural traits. The concept was developed in the early 20th century, with particular reference to Native American peoples. Although often criticized, the culture area approach is still frequently used in the comparative study of cultures."⁸

Endwin R.A Seligman defines culture area with the perspective of internal and external differences, he said, "*A culture area is an area set off from others by relative internal homogeneity of culture and differentiation against the outside.*"⁹

Thomas Buckley defines 'Culture area' based on his study of Kroeber's approach, "A culture area was a geographical region in which a given culture set a pattern of elements that was reflected by surrounding cultures to diminishing degrees, ascertainable by counting, as one reached the boundaries of the area where the influences of other patterns took over."¹⁰

⁷ Alexander B. Murphy et.al., *The European Culture area: A systematic geography* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 7.

⁸ R. Jon McGee and Richard L. Warms, *Theory in Social and Cultural Anthropology: An Encyclopedia* (Los Angeles: Sage Reference, 2013), 161.

⁹ Endwin R.A Seligman, *Encyclopaedia of The Social Sciences in 15 Vols (30 parts)* (New Delhi: Cosmo Publication, 2006), 646.

¹⁰ Thomas Buckley, "Kroeber's Theory of Culture Areas and the Ethnology of Northwestern California" *Anthropological Quarterly* 61, No. 4 (1988):17.

Another definition of culture is can be seen here: *“A culture area was defined as a geographical/cultural region whose population and groups share important common identifiable cultural traits, such as language, tools and material culture, kinship, social organization, and cultural history. Therefore, single culture area can be classified from groups sharing similar traits in a geographical region.”*¹¹

Based on the definitions given by the above scholars we can understand that the culture area is geographical or ethnographic region inhabited by groups of people who share unique and distinct phases of cultures with their neighbouring areas. It can also be said that it is an area of set of people where the regional character of human social culture existed but are not similar to other nearby culture areas. Likewise, the Mizo people also have long history of culture area from the period of their ancestral home in Southern China till they reached the present Mizoram state in India and its neighbouring regions. In their long sojourn from their ancestral home they passed through different cultures and empires, themselves migrating one place to another over millennia to get a better life for their own survival. Being a migrant tribe in their early period it is difficult to trace back the details of their culture area, but when they crossed Kabaw valley in Burma (Myanmar) gradually their culture area also could be seen as more defined and scattered between Chin hills and Chittagong hill tract including Bengal and Assam regions. Within these areas their societies met permanent existence and our present studies also mostly rely within these culture areas.

2.2 The exonyms of Mizo

As per the classification of Southeast Asian languages the Mizo ethnic tribes are included to Tibeto-Burman group. In India they are listed under the category of Scheduled Tribes. During the pre-colonial period and it's afterwards the 'Mizo' or 'Zo' tribes were given in various exonyms by their neighbouring

¹¹ “Culture Area Concept” accessed on 19.11.2018 <http://anthropology.iresearchnet.com/culture-area-concept/>

communities and colonial writers. They were mostly called as Lushai/Lushei, Kuki, Chin, Pawi, Lakher, Hmar, Dzo etc. Meanwhile, the Mizo themselves hardly accepted the exonyms given others, since time immemorial they claimed themselves as they were having their own endonyms. Majority of 'Mizo' population in the present Mizoram state in India called themselves a 'Mizo' whereas some other clans and in "marginal area" also have their endonyms like 'Zomi,' 'Zo,' 'Hmar', 'Laimi,' 'Mara' etc. By keeping in mind of all these endonyms we can safely portray that the major tribes/clans of the Mizo are: Lusei, Ralte, Hmar, Mara (Lakher), Lai (Pawi), Paite, Kuki (Thadou) etc.

2.3 A carrier of the term 'Mizo' or 'Zo' and its mutation

As mentioned above, since time immemorial these ethnic clans are commonly known as 'Mizo' or 'Zo' till today. As the Mizo are comprising various ethnic tribes within themselves there is continuous debate over the term 'Mizo' or 'Zo', this will be discussing in the following pages. Until the European missionaries introduced writing system amongst the Mizo people they followed oral tradition. In such case it is difficult to trace back when and how the term 'Mizo' or 'Zo' was firstly used. Dr. Vumson said, "*The oral genealogy of Zo claims that a man named Zo was the originator of all Zo people. The genealogy however does not record time and locations, and many names must have been forgotten.*"¹² He further continued that in the historical writings of Indo-Burmese people the word 'Zo' or 'Jo' was cited as the name of the people.¹³ In his book 'Zo History' Dr. Vumson cited that the princes and chiefs in a kingdom of Chindwin valley were called "Zo" which was mentioned in 862 A.D by Fanch'o, a diplomat of China's Tang dynasty.¹⁴ He also added that the petty nation called JO was mentioned by Father Sangermo in 1783 and in 1904 G.A

¹² Vumson, *Zo History* (Aizawl: Author, 1987), 26.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Gierson recorded “The name is not used by the tribes themselves, who used titles such as ZO or YO or SHO.”¹⁵

Since the expansion of colonial administration in the then Lushai hills where majority of Mizo tribes lived the British officers studied who were the people whom they administered. One of the British officers witnessing Lushai expedition of 1871-72 Col. T.H Lewin clearly wrote that “the generic name of the whole nation is Dzo.”¹⁶ However, this notion is not wholly accepted even by the earlier writers and modern scholars.

The interpretation of the term ‘Mizo’ also creates much confusion amongst the earlier writers to modern native scholars. In general translation ‘Mizo’ a combination of two words ‘Mi’ and ‘Zo’, literally ‘Mi’ is ‘people’ and ‘Zo’ is ‘highland’ or ‘cold region’, it’s meaning is the people who lives in highland or cold place. The meaning of the term ‘Mizo’ creates difference opinions amongst the writers, scholars and historians. Vumson argued some intellectual translation of ‘Zo’ as “Highlanders”, he found that some intellectuals oftentimes make the conclusion that the people who are living in highland call themselves ‘Zo’ or ‘Highlanders’, in his argument he stressed that the “Zo” people had not always settled in highlands and there were times when they lived in the plains of the Chindwin valley. The literal meaning of Zo might be highland but had not always been highlanders.¹⁷ He further emphasized that the meaning ‘zo’ in the understanding of Zo common language as follows:

“Zo people divide a mountainous region into two climatic zones. The higher part of the region is characterized by cold, wet, and damp climatic conditions, which have geographical natures of ever-green forest, where potatoes, maize and sulfur bean may be grown. These areas are covered with rain clouds in the monsoon rainy season. The sun is rarely to be seen. Such a place or area is denoted by the term ‘Zo’ in

¹⁵ Vumson, *Zo History* (Aizawl: Author, 1987), 26.

¹⁶ T.H Lewin, *A fly on wheel or How I helped to govern India* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 246.

¹⁷ Vumson, *Zo History* (Aizawl: Author, 1987), 5-6.

distinction from the 'shim or chhim' which is generally lower in elevation and with a warmer and drier climate, where bamboo thrives and hill-side rice may be grown. The generic name "Zo" has no relation with the geographical-climatic term 'zo'.¹⁸

Mizo historian Lalrimawia also argued that the meaning of 'Mizo' as not a mere people cold region, he said, "The general population of the Lushai Hills called themselves as the 'Mizo', which means "children of the hills".¹⁹

Renowned Mizo historian Dr.Sangkima also having an opinion that the origin of the word 'Mizo' is obscure and difficult to give a clear cut account on when it was firstly used. He assumed that it is a gradual process of evolution. Like many other scholars he also argued that the common interpretation of 'Mizo' as 'a people of a cold place' or 'a highlander'. He thinks that if the people living in hilly region are interpreted as 'Mizo' all other tribes inhabiting hill regions of North East India like Nagas, Khasis and others should also be known as Mizos, but they are not.²⁰ Following the viewpoints of colonial writers like T.H Lewin and G.A Grierson he also agreed that the people living in the country between Burma (Myanmar) and India's north east region called themselves 'Zo' variantly 'yo' or 'sho'. He acknowledged that the term 'dzo', 'zo' and 'zau' are the variant words of 'yo' or 'yao', and the word 'Mizo' also variant word of "Mi-dzo' or 'Mizao'.²¹ The two words 'Miao' and 'yao' combining together as 'Miao-Tzu' or 'Miao-yoa' or 'Miotzu' has been the scattered hill tribes in Yunnan, Szechwan, Northern Laos, Northern Vietnam and Thailand are known to the Chinese.²² Based on this viewpoint he admitted that the term 'Mizo' is originated from the two words Miao (mi) meaning 'man' and Yao (zo) also meaning 'man' and the two words having similar connotation. He further emphasized that interpretation of the word 'Mizo' as mi – 'man' and zo –

¹⁸ Vumson, *Zo History* (Aizawl: Author, 1987), 6.

¹⁹ Lalrimawia, *Mizoram History and Cultural Identity (1890-1947)* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1995), 6.

²⁰ Sangkima, *Essays on the History of the Mizos* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2004), 17.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

‘highlander’ thus people living in a high or cold place could be wrong and it is not a name of singular tribe or a clan but it is rather a generic term that included all the tribes under the umbrella of Mizo ethnic group.

Another Mizo historian B.Lalthangliana also has an opinion that the meaning of ‘Mizo’ is hard to explain. In his opinion the people living on the hills could be named Zomi or Mizo or “People of the cold regions” by the brethens of the hot valleys, but he also does not fully accepted this notion because when the Zomi or Mizo people migrated to Chin hills from Kabaw valley after the Shan onslaught no one was left behind to call them with such name.²³ He assumed the people of Zo might be prefixed with ‘Mi’ (people) when they lived in Zopui town in Chin hills under the chieftainship of Lallula, it was during 1965 and afterward. During that period, they were successful on raids against their enemies and they took pride in mentioning themselves as the braves of Zopui, which was known as a big town of Zo.²⁴ To prove his opinion right he said that this was supported by the ballad composed during that period containing the name of Zo in the lyrics:

Zokhawvalhnamchemkanchawi,

Mangngularangkanthawhna,

Run kuamah aw e.

Kazokhua hi dem lo u,

Thlanrawnthlunglukanlakna,

Phanpuizurnguai aw e

Chhimtianghmartiang,

²³ B. Lalthangliana, *A Brief History and Culture of Mizo* (Aizawl: Author, 2014), 198.

²⁴ Ibid.

Saangtlanzove,

*Zopuiahhnutiangka dal nang e.*²⁵

It may be translated like this:

Men in the town of Zo bearing long swords,

Cutting down Mangngul like chicken,

On the bank of Run river (Manipur river).

Don't blame my Zo town,

Where we won the heads of Thlanrawn,

Will be hanging on the branches of Phanpui.

To north and to south,

They scattered like wild animals,

I will stay behind at the Zopui town.

Mangkhosat Kipgen claimed that 'Mizo' or 'Zomi' translated as 'highlanders' or 'hill people' and 'Zo' as 'high land' or 'cold region' were the recent occurrence. He cited the writings of Baptist missionary H.W Carter and Presbyterian missionary J.M Lloyd who wrote about their mission activities in the then South and North Lushai hills that both of them translated Mizo as 'highlanders' and 'people of the hills' subsequently. He pointed out that from that time onwards almost every writer, Mizo and non-Mizo, seems to have accepted this as correct.²⁶ He also mentioned Mizo writer L.B Thanga argued that 'zo' refers more to the concept of 'health and pleasantness' rather than the mere fact of the villages being located on the top of the hills which are more

²⁵ B. Lalthangliana, *A Brief History and Culture of Mizo* (Aizawl: Author, 2014), 198-199.

²⁶ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1996), 19.

often referred to as ‘tlang’ than ‘zo’.²⁷Kipgen also mentioned the work of Mizo veteran writer of late Vanlawma, who also think the etymological word of Mizo is not to be found in the high elevation of their settlement area, but can be seen in the name of Zo ethnic people.²⁸

As we mentioned before the Mizo tribes had no writing system until the arrival of European missionaries, but the more complex we have encounter here is to trace back the origin of the term ‘Mizo’ is even the colonial writers and those missionaries did not clearly highlight the etymology of ‘Mizo’. Meanwhile in the writings of native Mizo writers also gave vague notions, most of them accepted that the Mizo ethnic tribes are the descendants of same ancestors, but they could not have uniform opinions regarding when and where it was firstly used. Nevertheless, some native Mizo writers highlighted the origin of the term ‘Mizo’ in their works that could not be left out in our present studies. Mizo writer Vanchhunga who did thorough investigation among the Mizo living in Burma highlighted that Mizo forefathers used to say “*Keini Mizo te chuan*” which means “*We the Mizo.*”²⁹ Another Mizo writer K. Zawla also mentioned about when the word ‘Mizo’ begun to used. He wrote that when Mizo people were living in Thantlang area at around 1250 A.D as they lived in high hills they were called Zomi by their neighbouring tribes. One day a man killed wild boar with bamboo pike, then he composed a ballad “*Keimah Mizopa, phulraw chawia sa tin kapa*” (Literal translation – “I am Mizo man, killing every animal with bamboo weapon”), since then the term ‘Mizo’ was more popular than ‘Zomi’ and henceforth our elders believed that the term ‘Mizo’ begun to used.³⁰Zatluanga also highlighted that during the Mizo forefathers were living in Thantlang area their clan name was Duhlian, their brethens who still live in Irrawady river valley started to call those who were living in uphill of

²⁷ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1996), 19. (Cited the work of LB Thanga, *The Mizos: A Study in Racial Personality*)

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Vanchhunga, *Lusei leh a Vela HnamDangte* (Aizawl: Zoram Printing Press, 1955), 1. Also cited by Sangkima, *Essays on the History of the Mizos* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2004), 16.

³⁰ K. Zawla, *Mizo Pipute leh An Thlahte Chanchin* (Aizawl: Lalnpuui, 2011), 11.

Thangtlang area as 'Mizo' and afterward Duhlian and Mizo became a mixed ethnonym for the Mizo people.³¹

2.4. Analogous of the term - 'Mizo', 'Zo', 'Kuki', 'Chin' and it's contested ethnonym

Though the 'Mizo' or 'Zo' ethnic tribes accepted they are the same descendants of same forefather but they could not accept the same generic name till today. Lusei and their correlated clans who had been under the chieftainship of Sailo who were now scattered in the present Mizoram state in India addressed themselves as Mizo from a very long time; the meaning of Mizo is Zo people.³² Meanwhile another Mizo historian Dr. Sangkima argued that the term 'Mizo' is a recent phenomenon. He claimed that in recent times the Mizo people themselves use the name Mizo as to develop the feeling of separate identity and to represent their political ideology.³³ By going through the writings of earlier Mizo writers Dr. Sangkima argument cannot be fully accepted because the earlier Mizo writers highlighted the existence of the term Mizo even when the Mizo people reached before their present settlement in Mizoram. So that it cannot be recent term, but if his view is taken with the modern political ideological trend prevalent in Mizoram and other parts of Mizo culture areas it may be true in that particular way. But this viewpoint does not to be taken serious with these present studies as we are dealing about the pre-modern Mizo period.

When the British firstly contact with the Zo/Mizo people they were known as Kuki, but after having interacted with the Lusei, the British comprehended that they were not known as Kuki. The British then started using "Lushai" as to address the people living the then Lushai hills. British

³¹ Zatluanga, *Mizo Chanchin* (Aizawl: Directorate of Art and Culture, 1996), 1-2.

³² Vumson, *Zo History* (Aizawl: Author, 1987), 2.

³³ Sangkima, *Essays on the History of the Mizos* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2004), 15.

Colonial medical officer A.S Reid mentioned that before the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72 the wild tribe who had been raiding North Eastern Frontier were generally known as “Kukis”, but after this Expedition the term “Lushai” however came into more common use.³⁴ Not only the British called the Lusei or Lushai people as Kuki but also the people of Tripura and Surma Valley in Assam in India called the Lusei people as Kuki. A Mizo historian Dr.Lalrimawia argued that the term Lushai is the incorrect transcription of the word ‘Lusei’ that was the name of a clan who drove out the Kukis to Cachar in the eighteenth century.³⁵ At around Eighteenth century A.D the Lusei ethnic group reached Mizoram through Chin Hills in Burma (Myanmar). The Lusei people speak Duhlian dialects and they are often referred as Duhlian clans. The British military officer Lt.Col. J Shakespear in his book ‘Lushei Kuki clans’ said, “*Among the people themselves the Lusheis are sometimes spoken of as Duhlian, at the derivation of which I will hazard no guess, and the general population of the hills is spoken of as Mizo.*”³⁶ The non-acceptance of the exonym ‘Lushai’ was approved by Colonial medical officer A.S Reid, he said, “I believe the Lushais call themselves ‘Zao’.”³⁷

The British colonial officers and writers applied the term ‘Kuki’ to the Tibeto-Mongoloid stocks lived in Chittagong hill tracts, Bengal and Assam regions. In Burma (Myanmar) they were recognised as ‘Chins’ or ‘Khyan’ by the Burmese people. But these exonyms were not accepted by the Mizo ethnic tribes; this is their uniqueness while comparing with other tribes in their neighbouring areas. Mangkhosat Kipgen assumed that a section of the Kuki-Chins who most vehemently opposed the application of the term “Kuki” to them were the inhabitants of the hills south of Cachar district which later received the name Lushai hills (Mizoram).³⁸ He further mentioned that the smaller sections of the Kuki-Chin people settled in Tripura, Manipur, North Cachar

³⁴ A.S Reid, *Chin-Lushai Land* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1979), 5.

³⁵ Lalrimawia, *Mizoram History and Cultural Identity (1890-1947)* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1995), 5.

³⁶ J. Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), *Intro.*

³⁷ A.S Reid, *Chin-Lushai Land* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1979), 5.

³⁸ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1996), 17.

Hills and Nagaland also reluctantly accepted the name “Kuki’ for some period of time. Even in Burma too the term ‘Chin’ met an objection from the Kuki-Chin clans as they thought that it was a name given by other without their consents. As a whole the Kuki-Chin-Lusei clans in their different settlement areas does not accept the exonyms applied to them by the others.

The uniqueness of the Mizo ethnic tribes is that all of them did not accepted the exonym given by others, on the other hand they are also not yet having common generic name which can be accepted wholly. In larger sense this is a big problem among them as it creates ethnic based demarcations which lead more feeling of isolation with their own ethnic group. Mangkhosat Kipgen rightly states that they are prepared to suffer the consequences of not having a generic name of their own rather than accepting the name given by others.³⁹ Dr. Vumson also feel the same, he said, *“Zo people find it difficult to accept a name other than the one they call themselves.”*⁴⁰ The reason for not having common generic name can be vary, one important point is the people living in Chin hills and Lushai hills (Mizoram) and some section in Manipur area extensively used the term ‘Zo’ or ‘Mizo’ but in Cachar, Manipur and Tripura these ethnic people hardly engaged with the term ‘Zo’ or ‘Mizo’ etc, rather they have their own name. Another problem regarding the common generic name is the use of ‘Mi’ in prefix and suffix. People living in present Mizoram used the term ‘Mizo’ (prefix-Mi) while in Chin hills and Manipur it is used with ‘Zomi’ (Suffix-Mi). Literally these two words- ‘Mizo’ and ‘Zomi’ have the same meaning. In so far, having common generic name is still under debates among the various ethnic tribes of Mizo or Zo, it has long way to go to get accepted in common.

2.5 Variety of ethnonym

³⁹ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1996), 16.

⁴⁰ Vumson, *Zo History* (Aizawl: Author, 1987), 2.

We have discussed well enough the exonyms of the Mizo or Zobefore; let us see the autonyms/endonyms of the Mizo or Zo in different areas. As we already mentioned before the majority of the people living in Mizoram called themselves Mizo, they are most Duhlian dialect speakers, while people residing in Northern Mizoram, Manipur and North Cachar hills call themselves Hmar, Paite living in Mizoram, Manipur and Chin hills call themselves Zomi. Kuki living in Manipur, Cachar and Myanmar call themselves Kuki or Thadou. Lai (Pawi) people living in Southern Mizoram and Falam area in Myanmar called themselves Laimi. Mara (Lakher) in southern Mizoram and Myanmar call themselves Mara. And many other smaller groups are also there in these mentioning areas but we cannot give all in details. Borrowing the classification made by Dr. Vumson his book ‘Zo History’⁴¹ let us see the varieties of different name possessed by the Zo people living in India, Burma (Myanmar) and Bangladesh as follows:

(a) The people living in Burma (Myanmar) - Tedim, Falam, South Haka and part of Matupi and India – Mizoram, Lamka call themselves ‘Zo’ – Zomi, Mizo, Zo, Yo, Zokhua, Laizo and Zotung.

(b) The people living in southern area of Falam and northern area of Haka call themselves Lai.

(c) The people living in Mindat and Matupi call themselves Sho or Khxou.

(d) The people living Paletwa call themselves Khumi or Khami.

(e) The people living in Arakan area call themselves Mru. While the people living in plain area of Arakan and Chittagong hills called Asho (in literature – Khyang)

⁴¹ Vumson, *Zo History* (Aizawl: Author, 1987), 4-5.

(f) The people living in Yaw area call themselves Zou (In Burmese – Yaw)

2.6 Landscape and Physical features of Mizo culture area

Being migrant tribes since their great forefathers' period various ethnic tribes of Mizo scattered in different places covering India's North East, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The landscape and physical features of their culture area can be broadly divided into two major areas *i.e.* India's North East covering - Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, Tripura and Chin hills area in Myanmar. Knowing the diversity and having contiguous settlement areas by the migrating Mizo ethnic tribes across different period of times, a Zo historian Dr. Vumson proposed Mizo settlements areas in Burma and India as East Zoram (Burma area) and West Zoram (India area).⁴² In his proposition the East Zoram lies in the eastern side of present Indo-Burma boundary whereas West Zoram in the western side of the said boundary. By going through several writings in Mizo and their socio-historical related things Dr.Vumson opinion could be seen as one of the acceptable propositions specified by the concerned writers. In these present studies while dealing the landscape and physical features of the Mizo culture area we could not entirely avoid the demarcation boundaries existed in modern India and Burma (Myanmar) with deep respect of territorial sensitivity. But on the other hand, to know more about their settlement areas in somehow, we have to bear with regardless of the modern Indo-Burma boundary with careful proposition as the Mizo ethnic tribes still scattered in different areas across these two nation states, moreover, some parts of Bangladesh also cannot be excluded.

The land occupied by the Mizo tribes in greater context extend from the sub-Himalayan ranges likes North Cachar hills, Naga hills in the

⁴² Vumson, *Zo History* (Aizawl: Author, 1987), *preface*.

north, in the west -Chittagong Hill Tract of Bangladesh, Tripura (and including Mizoram), and in the east Chin hills till Irrawaddy river valley and in the south Arakan mountain ranges. Geographically it is located between latitude 25°30 north and longitude 94°20 east approximately. Based on Dr.Vumson definition the land occupied by the Mizo/Zo tribes is 560 km (approximate) in north-south length and 192 km wide in general.⁴³ The densely populated region is Indo-Burma ranges in parallel sides. Whereas British colonial staff A.S Reid acclaimed the length at some two hundred and sixty miles and with a maximum breadth of about one hundred and twenty.⁴⁴

The topography is hilly and mostly the altitudes of hill ranges are 500- 4,412 meters above sea level. The highest peak in the ranges of Burma side is Arterawttlang (Mt.Victoria) at 3,412 meters; the other high peaks are: Innbuk, Thuamvum (Kenendy peak), Nguvullum, Rungtlang, Kharantlang, Lentlang etc. In India side the highest peak of Mizo culture area is the Phawngpui (Blue Mountain) with a height of 2,157 meters situated in the southern part of Mizoram. Lengteng, Surtlang, Lurhtlang, Tantlang, Chalfilhtlang, Hrangturzotlang, Zopuitlang, Tawizo, Mawmrangtlang, Puruntlang, Hmuifangtlang, Saireptlang, Sakawrhmutuaitlang, Reiektlang, Thorangtlang are other the major mountainsranges in India side they are mostly located in Mizoram. These mountain ranges and peaks were connected with traditional legends and also believed that various spirits were scattered over these hills ranges and mountains.

As the place is mostly hilly terrain there are a few plain areas to be found. The plain areas possess a thick layer of rich alluvial soil and are surrounded by hills. In India side Champhai is the largest plain area which runs seven miles and is nearly three miles across in width. Thenzawl and North Vanlaiphai plains occupy the other important plain areas. There are a few level stretches of alluvium at the bottom of the valleys and at the foot of the Cachar

⁴³ Vumson, *Zo History* (Aizawl: Author, 1987), 21.

⁴⁴ A.S Reid, *Chin-Lushai Land* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1976), 4.

border with Mizoram, large areas of cultivable land is be found there.⁴⁵ In Burma side Run or Manipur river valley and Irrawaddy river valley are the important sites. Cikha area, Thlanthlang, Khuabung, Letak, Buangtu, Mungplang, Khuaphual and Botsung are the important plain areas in Burma side.⁴⁶ The valleys situated between hill ranges are commonly v-shaped gorges, and in between very few flat areas are suitable for cultivation sites.⁴⁷ Because of the hilly topography Mizo tribes mostly depended on shifting cultivation with slash and burnt methods. In such condition their socio-cultural history also largely depended on the background of shifting cultivation.

Rivers and streams form important valleys and deep gorges. Major rivers run from north to south and south to north directions. Few of them are navigable and are often flooded due to the heavy pour of monsoon rain. In India side the major northward rivers are Tlawng, Tuirial, Tuivawl, Tiau and Tut, most of these rivers finally flowing into the Barak river which is in the Cachar District of Assam. The rivers in southern area which run eastward are Chhimtuipui (Kolodyne) and its tributaries Mat, Tuichang, Tiau, Tuipui, while Khawthlangtuipui (Karnaphuli) and its tributaries Tuichang, De, Kao, Tuipuilian, Phairuang run westward. In Burma side Runlui (also known as Manipur river), Chindwin river and Irrawadi river are the major rivers in Mizo culture area.

The landscape of Mizo culture area is rich in trees and bamboos reserves, most of the hills and mountains are covered by thick forests and bamboos from the high ridges to the river banks, except some portion of areas where they have been cleared for cultivation. The forests and bamboo products have a meaningful relation with their religious belief system and their material culture. Many of the objects and materials used in their day to day usages and traditional religious sacrifices were usually made from bamboos and woods.

⁴⁵ Lalrimawia, *Mizoram History and Cultural Identity (1890-1947)* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1995), 2.

⁴⁶ Vumson, *Zo History* (Aizawl: Author, 1987), 23.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 22.

The geographical area of Mizoram is considered 2.11million *ha* and the bamboo forest coverage area is classified 1.59 million *ha*. The total area of Mizoram is 21,081 Sq.km out of its Bamboo forest covers 15935 Sq.km. It is calculated that the bamboo forest in Mizoram covers 14% of all India bamboo coverage area of 8.96 million *ha*.⁴⁸ In Mizoram alone 26 species of bamboo has been identified so far.⁴⁹ All of these bamboo species in Mizoram forest contributes a substantial responsibility in the socio-cultural and economic life of the hill people. It is often said that bamboo is indispensable from the part of culture and folklore of 'Mizo'. One important example is the famous and beautiful Mizo cultural dance 'Cheraw' is needed to play with bamboo logs without bamboo it cannot be performed.

Bamboo is central to 'Mizo' economy; it has a vital role in the production system. From the pre-modern period to the modern period the 'Mizo' economy was, and still is, based primarily on agriculture. The type of agriculture predominantly practiced is the *Jhuming* system which involves the slashing and burning of bamboos and trees, as the area is rich in bamboo forests, so the inhabitants can earn their subsistence through it. Bamboo provides the major essential needs for agriculture production - from the beginning till harvest time. The comments of Mangkhosat Kipgen truly reveal the importance of bamboo in the 'Mizo' society, in his words "*The new shoots provide food; young bamboos provided material for making baskets and other household implements; and mature bamboo provided the primary building materials*".⁵⁰ While bamboo and its products play useful roles in Mizo culture area, on the contrary it also can be seen as the harbinger of periodical famine and misery. Bamboo flowering occurs in Mizo culture area between at the intervals of 48-50 years especially from *Mautak* and *Rawthing* species. It produces a long telling story amongst the 'Mizo' from the early period onwards.

⁴⁸ BP Bhatt, LB Singha, K. Singh and M.S Sachan, "Some commercial edible bamboo species of North East India: Production, Indigenous uses, Cost-benefit and Management strategies". *Bamboo, Sciences and culture, The Journal of American Bamboo Society* 17, No.1 (2003): 1-3.

⁴⁹ "Bamboo Development Agency" accessed on July 21, 2009, <http://mizobamboo.nic.in>.

⁵⁰ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1996), 76.

In traditional sayings, “When the bamboo flowers, famine, death and destruction will soon follow”. It is because of expansive flowering of bamboo yields an enormous quantity of seeds, resulting in explosion of the population of rodents which in turn results in famine as the over populated rodent often destroy rice and other vegetation grown in cultivation site. Within the Mizo culture area, the centrality of bamboo cannot be ignored therefore it can be said that any effect on bamboo affects all aspects of ‘Mizo’ society with large scale repercussions.

Within the Mizo culture area wild animals and birds are found abundantly in the jungle and deep forests. Elephants, bisons, tigers, leopards, bears, deers, rhinoceros, wild hogs, himalayan black bears, malay bears, monkeys, civet cats, jungle fowl, several kinds of pheasant and many varieties of birds are also there. The wild animals and birds not only provide food items, but also the hunting and killing of wild animals has a close connection for wining of honour in society. It further connected with their traditional beliefs which can be linked to their notion of paradise (*pialral*). Hunting and killing of these wild animals elevates them to a position of *Ramlama thangchhuah* which was a necessary stage in order to achieve distinguished privileges in their present life and beyond death.

The climate in Mizo culture area is high altitude and mostly moderate, monsoon rain falls from May to October. Cultivation period also largely depend on monsoon season. In Mizoram where majority of Mizo tribes lives the annual rainfall record is 167.70 mm.⁵¹ Sometime rain is accompanied by a dense mist which envelopes the land and for days at a time it is impossible to see one’s neighbor’s house even at a distance of 20 paces.⁵² As the climactic condition is very mild and varies cultivation and other agriculture works can be done without natural hindrances. Majority of population still depended on cultivation as they can yield crops and grain easily.

⁵¹ *Statistical Handbook Mizoram*, 2010.

⁵² Betram S. Carey and H.N Tuck, *The Chin Hills* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1932), 10.

The geological pattern of the land in Mizo culture area is made out of sandstone and sedimentary rock. Igneous rock and limestone are also existed in some areas. The sedimentary rock and sandstone are relatively soft formation and it can be easily washed away in rainy season, as the rock formation is softer there can be landslide easily in rainy days.⁵³ The surface soil for the most part, and where the slopes permit it to accumulate, is either a rich loam or disintegrated shale, in both of which most plants and vegetables suitable to the climate and elevation flourish.⁵⁴

2.7 The validity of “Zomia” and borderlands as a category to explain the landscape of Mizo culture area

The term “Zomia” is coined by historian Willem van Schendel referring nameless geographical region stretching across the highland’s areas of Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, and East Asia. Willem van Schendel derived a name ‘Zomia’ which is a modification of ‘zomi’, a term used for addressing highlanders who are known as Chin - Mizo - Kuki languages speakers in Burma, India, and Bangladesh.⁵⁵ In his suggestion Zomia coverage areas included the land and people who speaks Tibeto-Burman languages living in the highland of Kashmir in North India, Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, Northeast India region including Sikkim, the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, Burma (Myanmar), Yunnan and Sichuan provinces in China, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam.⁵⁶ Willem van Schendel proposition was further enriched by James C.Scott in his book *“The art of not being governed”* published in 2009, Scott said that *“Zomia is a new name for virtually all the lands at altitudes above roughly three hundred meters all the way from the Central Highlands of Vietnam to northeastern India and traversing five*

⁵³ Betram S. Carey and H.N Tuck, *The Chin Hills* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1932), 10

⁵⁴ Betram S. Carey and H.N Tuck, *The Chin Hills* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1932), 6.

⁵⁵ Willem van Schendel, “Geographies of knowing, geographies of ignorance: jumping scale in Southeast Asia,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20 (2002), 653.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Southeast Asian nations (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Burma) and four provinces of China (Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, and parts of Sichuan)".⁵⁷

James C.Scott mentioned that across the whole world Zomia is the largest remaining region that the inhabitants have not yet been completely incorporated into the dominance of nation-states.⁵⁸

In Zomia region the substantial and social spaces were mark them off from the valley state governances through the high hills. James C. Scott acclaimed that the hills provided the non-state people for a space of political resistance against the state interferences. He also added that the hills are zone of cultural refusal so that they can continues their own system of livelihood separately from generation to generation. The hills social structures are more flexible and more egalitarian than their neighbouring valley state societies which are imbibed with rigid hierarchical and codified structure.⁵⁹ Hybrid identities, movement and the social fluidity are the most common characteristic features that can be seen in the hill's societies.⁶⁰ This opinion is even appropriates in the context of the Mizo society as they were known as egalitarian and non-hierarchical unlike the societies found in "states" zones.

Based on modern nation states demarcations the region of Zomia traverses various international borderlands. It is a meeting point of the four major areas – Central Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia and South Asia. Though it is on such important meeting point but in the world of academia especially in 'Area studies' or 'Regional studies' it is often left out by the scholars. Willem van Schendel rightly remarked the existing partial studies of regional areas, he said, "*The borderlands are rarely worth a real fight - they are more often forgotten than disputed between neighbouring areas.*"⁶¹ In the opinion of Willem

⁵⁷ James C.Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), ix.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 18.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Willem van Schendel, "Geographies of knowing, geographies of ignorance: jumping scale in Southeast Asia," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20 (2002),651.

Schendel the negligence of the region by the scholars became worse in the second half of the 20th century. The reason is that in different areas Zomia people often resisted the attempts of state making and nation building which are initiated by the state rulers in their neighbouring low land. In these state making projects, uplanders or highlanders were often left out from the discourses of citizenship, and were often regarded as non-nationals, aliens or poachers of the state's forestry resources who could be emancipated only by assimilating to the lowland 'mainstream'.⁶² This argument is also valid in the earlier writings of the Mizo, we can see from the writing of colonial medical officer A.S Reid who proclaimed the Mizo as a 'wild tribes' who had been known to have a habit of raiding and disturbing North-Eastern frontier in British colonial India.⁶³ In addition, as we discussed in earlier passages the Mizo culture areas lies within the boundaries of three nation states – India, Burma and Bangladesh, so that the application of borderland studies is necessary in order to get detail information of their culture area.

Another characteristic of Zomia is their agriculture system known as Slash-and-burn, or "swidden" or "Jhum". This is mostly practice in hilly region all over the world. As the Mizo culture area is greatly spread throughout Mizo hills and Chin hills, both these hills provides a suitable space for practicing slash and burn cultivation method. A fine example of the validity of Zomia system of agriculture in Mizo culture areas is the timing and way of observation of the three festivals i.e. *Chapcharkut*, *Mimkut* and *Pawl kut*. *Chapcharkut* is held in February/March it is a period for drying up of trees and bamboo that they chopped for cultivation. *Mimkut* is held when Maizes are harvest from the site in July/August and when they finished all harvest works they held *Pawl kut* in December/January. The relevancy of Zomia approach as the absence of huge surplus and distinction of status and wealth is also clearly depicted in Mizo culture area. As they were moving from place to place in the

⁶² Willem van Schendel, "Geographies of knowing, geographies of ignorance: jumping scale in Southeast Asia," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20 (2002), 655.

⁶³ A.S Reid, *Chin-Lushai Land* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1976), 5.

hill sites they could not have huge surplus from their agriculture products, and surplus could be burdensome for their unprecedented movements in search of better and safer livelihood. Based on the Zomia approach shifting cultivation gave political advantage to the Mizo as there were possessing fewer surpluses in their cultivation they could escape invasion or raid from lowland states and any other stronger groups which were existed near to their cultural areas.

The settlement areas in Zomia region are found in hilly terrain, the relevancy also can be traced back to the said Mizo culture area. Throughout the history of Mizo migrations in search of surviving places from the dominance of state administrations their settlement areas were mostly located in hilly terrains. In the natural settings hills are always colder than lowland, to adjust themselves in the cold area, Zo people built houses with thatched roofs and their bamboo walls were often doubled with thick split layers.⁶⁴ The beginning of chieftainship and religion in their own were also initiated when they lived in the upland of Chinhills. As they were surrounded by nearby states and other tribes' inaccessibility and choice of location had been taken care. Even when the British colonial army came to the then Lushai hills they found that the villages were located on the top of the hills. Lt.Colonel J.Shakespear said, *"The Lushai likes to perch his village on the top of a ridge or spur, partly because, hillsides being steep, it is difficult to find sites elsewhere, partly for the sake of the climate, but chiefly, I think, in order to get a good defensive position."*⁶⁵ It is clearly heard that Mizo preferred to live in hilly areas than lowland because for their own survival and defensive from enemies. Like other places in Zomia region living in such high altitude was a choice rather than falling under the dominance of state suzerainty.

⁶⁴ Vumson, *Zo History* (Aizawl: Author, 1987), 22.

⁶⁵ J. Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 19.

2.8 The origin myth and geographical correlates as shared traditions in Mizo

Myth is often incorporate as the component of history of humankind. Considering myth as mode of explanation of human past creates many confusions among the various historians in the world. The historians in the West generally consider myth and history are different mode of explaining human past with dissimilar methodology. Karin R. Andriolo explained the dichotomy of myth and history in the Western tradition, she said, *“Western tradition tends to view myth and history as concepts that complement each other; they are distinct representations of the course and significance of past events, and they are symptomatic of and eponymous for two alternative modes of thought.”*⁶⁶ The existence of confusion regarding myth and history approaches in Western historiography has been debated since very long time and the debate is still going on till date. American historian William McNeil in argued that the foremost question to ask for historian is not *“What is truth? Unalterable and eternal truth remains, like the Kingdom of Heaven, an eschatological hope but rather what have groups of people known and believed about their past and found necessary to preserve as essential for their entire existence.”*⁶⁷ He stressed that *“myth history is a useful instrument for piloting human groups in their encounters with one another and with the natural environment.”*⁶⁸ As assertion given by William McNeil even in case of the Mizo cognate tribes myth cannot be left out in studying their past history, they had myths and legends since time immemorial and can be used as to know about their past believes and narratives.

⁶⁶ Karin R. Andriolo, “Myth and History: A General Model and Its Application to the Bible,” *American Anthropologist, New Series*, 83 (1981): 262.

⁶⁷ Joseph Mali, “Jacob Burckhardt: Myth, History and Myth history,” *History and Memory* 3(1991): 86-87.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

2.8.1 Creation myth:

The Mizo ancestors believed that the earth is rested on the back of giant tortoise. When there is sound of thunder, they believed that the giant tortoise was making movement so that there is sound of thunder across the universe. In the beginning the earth is almost full of emptiness; there was no man nor earth or any other creatures. There was, however, the god called *Khuazingnu*, who created earth. To provide moisture and a cool temperature to the earth there was a great variety of green vegetation. But the earth remained dry and the vegetation could not thrive. So, in order to water the dry earth, *Khuazingnu* opened the windows of heaven and poured water on to the earth below. This is why Mizo ancestors referred to the rain as water procured by a maiden in heaven.⁶⁹ In due course, man and animals were created in order to eat the fruits of the green earth.

When *Khuazingnu* created the earth there was neither land nor soil, only large flat rocks on which no vegetation could grow. There was a large ocean called *Tuihriam*, on the banks of this excessive cold ocean there was soil deposit. To get this soil no one could swim across this cold ocean. At last, a porcupine was swimming across the cold ocean and brought back some soil from his upper lip. The soil was then eaten by an earthworm and more soil has been multiplied through its excrement. When the soil was sufficient to cover the earth, an animal called *Chultenu* leveled and smoothened it around the spaces. After soil was obtained and increased in this process, trees and plants started growing and flourishing. At the centre of the earth there was a very tall tree called *Thingvantawng*, literally meaning 'the tree that reached the sky/ in a place called Vanlaiphai. After sometime they wanted to cut down this particular tree but they were afraid to spoil the smooth plain that the *Chultenu* had made. So, they decided to wait until the soil had completely dried. One day, they assigned the wagtail to find out. It flew over the land testing the soil,

⁶⁹ Margareth Ch.Zama, "Origin Myths of the Mizo: MIZORAM," *India International Centre Quarterly* 32, No. 2/3, Where the Sun Rises When Shadows Fall: The North-east (MONSOON-WINTER 2005): 7.

but being small and light it was unable to make any dent on the ground. Coming back, it reported that the soil was now dry and *Thingvantawng* could be cut down.⁷⁰ However, when the tree was fallen the earth was not yet dry. The smoothness of the soil was break up. Rivers were formed where the branches of tree hit; the bigger branches forming big rivers while the smaller branches made small rivers and streams. Even mountains, hills, valleys and riverbeds were formed by the great weight of its many branches.

In another version Chhura is believed to have shaped the world, beating it out flat with his mallet.⁷¹ Another version of creation myth among the Lusei community explains how and why the flat land was remodeled. Shakespear recounts this version as follows:

There is a legend that the king of the Water Huai fell in love with Ngai-ti (Ngaitei) (loved one) and, she rejected his addresses and ran away, he persued her and surrounded the whole human race on the top of a hill called Phun-lu-buk, said to be far away to the north-east. As the water kept on rising, to save themselves the people threw Ngai-ti (Ngaitei) into the flood, which thereupon receded. It was the running off of this water which cut up the surface of the world, which Chhura leveled, into the deep valleys and high hills ranges of which the whole world as known to the ancestors of the Lushais consisted.⁷²

2.8.2 Origin of Mankind

The Mizo origin myth of human being is linked with *Chhinlung*. The meaning of Chhinlung is a combination of two words – *chhin* and *lung*, *chhin* means cover and *lung* means rock or stone, *Chhinlung* thus means ‘covering stone/rock’. The nomenclature of Chhinlung has been reffered in various names among the various ethnic tribes of the Mizo. They named it in different ways: Lusei -

⁷⁰ Margareth Ch.Zama, “Origin Myths of the Mizo: MIZORAM,” *India International Centre Quarterly* 32, No. 2/3, Where the Sun Rises When Shadows Fall: The North-east (MONSOON-WINTER 2005): 7.

⁷¹ J. Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 91.

⁷² *Ibid*, 94.

Chhinlung, Ralte – Chhinlung, Hmar - Sinlung, Tedim (Paite) – Khul, Kuki (Thado) – Chinlung, Darlong – Sinlung, Anal – Khol, Kom, Gangte, Vaiphei – Khul or Khulpi etc. Although the nomenclature might be differing among the various ethnic tribes but about the origin of mankind that they referred can be put together under one umbrella as they all claimed that they were from covering stone or the covering ground. It can be said that all the various Mizo ethnic tribes claimed that they are having same origin.

Based on the writing of J. Shakespear we can see that before the appearance of humankind in *Chhinlung* there was a terrible catastrophe in the world which was known as *Thimzing*. Shakespear translated as the following:

“Formerly the Hauhul chief swallowed the moon, having been changed during his dream into an awk, and many people were watching and said, ‘the awk is swallowing moon’, Then he awoke and his mouth was bleeding. A year later he died and his ghost was turned into an awk and went up into the sky, and the moon was full and big, and the ghost, which had been changed into an awk, could not swallow the moon, but the next day the moon was smaller and he swallowed it. Thus, men knew for the first time that there was an awk.”

When eclipse occurs, there is much excitement and beating of drums, etc. This is to frighten the awk, for the Lushais believe that once the awk swallowed the sun so effectually that general darkness prevailed. This awful time is called “Thimzing” i.e the gathering of the darkness – and many awful things happened. Everything except the skulls of animals killed in the chase became alive, dry wood revived, even stones became alive and produced leave, and so men had nothing to burn. The successful hunters who had accumulated large stocks of the trophies of their skill were able to keep alive using them as fuel and some of their descendants still survive among the Thados. As it was pitch dark, neither animals nor men could see at all and tigers webr out biting wildly at trees,

stones and people. A general transformation took place, men being all changed into animals. Those who were merrily to the jhum were changed into “satbhai” (laughing thrushes) as can be known by their white heads, which represent the turbans worn by the men, and their cherry chattering. People wearing striped cloths became tigers, the chiefs of those days being represented by the hornbills of today, whose bills represent the bamboo rod for stirring rice while cooking: but another version is that the chiefs became king-crows, whose long tail-feathers the chief value much and wear as plumes. The black hands of the gibbon prove clearly that his ancestors were dyeing thread when the Thimzing occurred. Another version ascribes the same origin to the crows. Similarly, those who were carrying torches finding their way down stream beds were changed into fireflies. The Chongthu family are sometimes said to have been turned into monkeys, the Vangchhia into elephants: but another version says the elephants were old women who were wearing their “puanpui” – i.e. cotton quilts – with the tufts of cotton outside. Wrestlers were suddenly transformed into bears, who to this day grapple with their foes.

The Paihte or Vuite clan became a species of squirrel, while the Ralte’s ancestor was just saying, “Vaibel kan chep te ang e?” “Shall we suck our pipes?” and was therefore changed into a sort of squirrel called “chep cheap” from the sound it is always making.

The domestic animals were changed into wild ones, but a number of large boulders in the Vanlaiphai are said to represent Chhura’s mithun which were grazing there at the Thimzing. After this terrible catastrophe the world was again repopled by men and women issuing from a hole in the earth called the “Chhinlung” which appeared to me to be a disused “cache” in which some long forgotten chief used to hide his valuables on the approach of danger. Mithun reappeared from gourd seeds, as it shown by their bellow “um mu” – i.e. gourd seed. Pigs issued from the Rih-lake,

wherefore they come to their food when called “rih rih.” Fowls were recreated from the mud, so to this they answer to the call “chirih chirih,” i.e. “*chirh* mud.”

Another version of the linkage to *Thimzing* or great darkness and *Chhinlung* can be seen here:

Once upon a time a thick mist that brought on a great darkness suddenly covered the earth. During this darkness, sudden and strange transformations took place. Humans turned into birds and various kinds of animals. It worried and saddened *Khuazingnu* to see his wonderful creation—man—turn into lesser creatures. He then came up with the idea of collecting a husband-and-wife team from each tribe and shutting them away in a deep pit inside the earth. He proceeded to cover the hole with a huge stone that came to be known as *Chhinlung*.

Time passed, and four or five generations later, *Khuazingnu*, in the hope that mankind would have multiplied by then, partially opened the stone. The deep murmur of a large crowd of people gladdened his heart. So he opened *Chhinlung* to let out the various tribes. They came out in such great numbers that they could be compared to the winged white ants that came out of the ground. Eventually, the Ralte tribe made their way out from the hole. Their numbers had multiplied greatly and their loud, talkative voices made such a great din that *Khuazingnu* decided enough was enough, and fearing that more of them would emerge, promptly shut the great hole. It is said that if *Khuazingnu* had permitted all to emerge from the hole in the ground, the descendant tribes of the Mizo would have been much more than the present number. For this reason, the tribes of the Mizo are said to have emerged from *Chhinlung*.⁷³

⁷³ Margareth Ch.Zama, “Origin Myths of the Mizo: MIZORAM,” *India International Centre Quarterly* 32, No. 2/3, Where the Sun Rises When Shadows Fall: The North-east (MONSOON-WINTER 2005): 11.

2.9. Survey of Pre-British ‘Mizo’ culture area - origin, migration and settlement.

2.9.1. Early Home

As mentioned before, during the pre-colonial period and its aftermath the ‘Mizos’ were identified with various nomenclatures by their neighbors and western writers. They were mostly called as *Kuki*, *Chin*, *Lushai/Lushei* etc. Until now, there is an unending debate regarding the common generic name among the various ethnic-tribes of the Mizos. Many scholars and writers have endeavored to propose names, but have only ended up in confusion.⁷⁴ The major tribes/clans of the ‘Mizos’ are: Lusei, Ralte, Hmar, wMara, Lai, Paite, Kuki etc.⁷⁵ Most of the dialects of the different ‘Mizo’ clans are mutually intelligible, their languages and cultural practices are close related with the dominant Lusei Clan.⁷⁶ Out of these various cognate clans the present study will focus only at the Lusei clan who were earlier known by the outsiders as ‘Lushais’ who speak *Duhlian/Lusei* language, majority of whom are living in the present day Mizoram state. Their language is categorized under the Tibeto-Burman language speaking groups.⁷⁷ The home of these people is not definitely known but somewhere between Kansu in South China and Burma is believed to be their earliest known home.⁷⁸ These tribes were the descendants of early feudal rulers under the Chinese emperors.

The author of “*A History of South-East Asia*” D.G.E Hall said the original home of those who speaks the Tibeto-Burman language is definitely unknown but it can be located somewhere between Kansu in South China and Burma. Like many other groups and tribes in the world, the Mizo also believed

⁷⁴ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1996), 17.

⁷⁵ For more detail information see B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin* (History and Culture of Mizo in India, Burma and Bangladesh), (Aizawl: RTM Press, 2001), 75-145.

⁷⁶ Op.cit Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1996), 29.

⁷⁷ G.A. Gierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol-III, Part-III (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent, Government Printing, India 1967), 3 (cited by Sangkima, “A study of the Historic Movements of an Early Mizo,” *Historical Journal of Mizoram* I, Issue-I, (2000): 20.

⁷⁸ Sangkima, “A study of the Historic Movements of an Early Mizo,” *Historical Journal of Mizoram* I, Issue-I, (2000): 20.

that their original habitat was in the big cave of *Chhinlung*, it was said to be located at somewhere in Szechuan Province in southern China.⁷⁹ The belief of *Chhinlung* as their original habitat could be related from the following folksong:

Ka siengna Sinlung ram hmingthang,

Ka Nu ram, ka Pa ram ngai;

Chawngzil ang kohkir theih chang sien,

*Ka Nu ram ka Pa ram ka ngai.*⁸⁰

The meaning of the words may be translated as:

My famed homeland Sinlung,

I am missing my mother and father's land;

Wishing to be called back like Chawngzil,

*I am missing my mother and father's land.*⁸¹

This folksong tells us that the people might have nostalgic sentiments in their original home '*Chhinlung*' that they wished to go back to as it was a home place of their forefathers. The Tibeto-Burman speaking people located to the south as a vast wave of population movements and also owing to Chinese pressure. K.S.Latourette mentioned that the reason behind the successive wave of mass migration from China was because of the policy of Shih Huang Ti (246-210 B.C), the First Emperor of China. He initiated one centralized administrative system throughout the empire to stronghold his administration he eradicated all the hereditary rulers and the city-state communities.⁸² His centralized policy resulted in the mass movement of the tribal people towards

⁷⁹ Sangkima, "A study of the Historic Movements of an Early Mizo," *Historical Journal of Mizoram* I, Issue-I, (2000): 20.

⁸⁰ Rochunga Pudaite, *The Education of Hmar People* (Siemlat: Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission, 1963), 21.

⁸¹ The writer own translation

⁸² K.S Latourette, *The Chinese-Their History and Culture* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), 92-96.

the south direction. It is commonly believed that the Mizo also moved along with these mass movements southwards from China into the plains of Burma during the late pre-Christian and early Christian eras.

2.9.2. Migration to the Plains of Burma

It is problematic to say when and how the Mizo reached the plains of Burma. What we have to keep in mind is that during this period of population movement, the people might not have been divided into clans or groups. To trace back the period of their migration to Burma plains it is essential to follow the patterns of Tibeto- Burman tribes and the Tai-Chinese peoples.⁸³ The movement from China to Burma is considered to have happened with three main waves of population movements. The first wave of movement included the various groups like the Pyu, Arakanese, Kachin and many other smaller tribes. The second and third waves included Shans or Tais, Karen, Mon-Khmer and others. Mizo tribes were believed to be taken part in the first wave of migration. So, they must be entered Burma (Myanmar) by following one of the river valleys and then turned towards the west into the upper stretches of the Chindwin River at around the early centuries of the Christian era.⁸⁴

From the Chindwin river valley, they set a movement in westward to the Kabaw Valley ⁸⁵(‘*Kawlphaï*’ called in Mizo); during those days the Mizos were said to have settled side by side with the Burmese and had a close contact with them. The evidence can be drawn about their close relation with the Burmese (Mizo called them as ‘*Kawl*’) from the games they played had a similarities with the Burmese like trowing of quoits, gauntlet, wrestling, merry-go-round and chuckfurthing or *inkawlvawr*.⁸⁶ Moreover B.Lalthangliana in his book “*History of Mizo in Burma*’ pointed out that they might have learnt the art

⁸³ Sangkima, “A study of the Historic Movements of an Early Mizo,” *Historical Journal of Mizoram* I, Issue-I, (2000): 21.

⁸⁴ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1996), 37.

⁸⁵ It is located at present Sagaing Division of Northwest Myanmar cited by B.Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin (History and Culture of Mizo in India, Burma and Bangladesh)* (Aizawl: RTM Press, 2001), 54. and he affirmed that the period of their migration at around 800-850 A.D.p.60. Hereafter cited as B.Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*.

⁸⁶ Lalrimawia, *Mizoram History and Cultural Identity (1890-1947)* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1995), 13.

of cultivation from the Burmese as most of their agriculture implements or tools of products had a prefix “Kawl” i.e. *Kawlnham, Klawhrei, Kalwtu, Kawlbahra, Kawlhail, Kawlthai, Kawlfung, Kawlhren, Kawlper etc.* Later on, they departed to the area of Khampat in the same valley ⁸⁷where they spent one of the greatest and significant periods in Mizo history.

It is said that when they were in Khampat area, most of the Mizo major clans lived together under the leadership of a great chief and they followed the same culture and spoke the same language.⁸⁸ They led a peaceful life more than one and half century without the external disturbance and they still continued a friendly relation with the neighboring Burmese people. They constructed an earthen rampart and the town itself was divided into several parts. Long after they had a permanent settlement in Khampat area they had to leave the place and move out to new place. Many opinions could be drawn regarding the reason behind their leaving from Khampat area. K.Zawla one of the earliest Mizo writers asserted that there was new cruel chief and the great famine happened that took many lives which pressurised the people to move out from Khampat around 1170.A.D. The Mizo scholar B. Lalthangliana, however, said it was because of the invasion of an enemy who was stronger than the Mizo, he further stated that the period of their departure from Khampat was not later than 1200.A.D.

Khampat occupied a historic importance in the memory of the Mizo till today. It had fabricated a nostalgic legendary story for the Mizo. It is said that before they left from Khampat the Mizo forefathers implanted a banyan tree at the palace site to declare that they had established this town. They took a pledge with the presence of their Burmese neighbouring friends by saying that they will be back when the sapling grow into a huge tree and when its branches spread so wide that they touched the earth. During these periods the Lusei and their other cognitive clans might not have religious belief practices as

⁸⁷ K.Zawla fixed the date 950.A.D the departure period of their movement toward Khampat area.

⁸⁸ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1996), 39.

no historians and writers ever talked about their beliefs or any other religious practices too.

2.9.3. Migration to the Chin Hills

Soon after they left Khampat area the Mizo peoples migrated toward the north and northwest direction for suitable settlement.⁸⁹ Some of the groups moved directly and indirectly through the Chin Hills till they reached the hills of present Manipur. They were Zous, Paites, Simtes and the Haokip of the Thadou clan. The large group moved toward southwest direction into the Chin Hills, most of them set up their settlement at Tiddim, Falam, and Haka and still others moved more extend to Zotung, Matupi and the Mara areas up to the southernmost areas of the present Mizoram.⁹⁰ The other group which comprised of Pautu, Hualngo, Khawlhing, Darlong, Hmar, Thadou, Gangte and other allied clans moved westward after crossing Tiau river and then they entered into the hilly areas which is now the land called Mizoram.

The other groups such as Lusei, Ralte, Khiangte, Chawngthu, Hauhnar, Chuauhang, Chuaungo, Ngente, Parte, Punte etc. also moved into the Chin Hills. They stayed in the areas of Thantlang and Run river around 1250-1400 A.D., they left Thantlang and Run area and move toward Lentlang and Tiau area and reached there at around 1450-1700 A.D.⁹¹ In the areas of Chin hills they established village settlement and most of them mainly lived clan wise. The geographical topography of Chin Hills made it inconvenient to build a big town like Khampat so they lived in separate villages grouped according to their clans but intercommunication between the various clan based-villages was not always possible. This further led to a tendency of independent entity which gradually led to separation.

⁸⁹ Lalrimawia, *Mizoram History and Cultural Identity (1890-1947)* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1995), 14.

⁹⁰ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1996), 40.

⁹¹ B.Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, 105.

Rev.Liangkhaia tells us that it was during this period the Mizo commenced their religious belief system for the earliest time.⁹² Their religious practice and sacrifices were also very simple and elementary. Moreover, it was a remarkable period when the Lusei and other cognate clans came under the rule of chiefs. Earlier they were without chiefs so they came to realize the need of a chief to organize them and to settle their internal and external problems. At the request of the people, Zahmuaka accepted the invitation for the position of the Lusei chief. His sons - six of them, Zadenga, Paliana, Thangluah, Thangura, Rivunga and Rokhuma continued to rule over the different villages. Amongst them, the descendants of Thangura, later on known as Sailo Chiefs turn out to be the most powerful and popular chiefs.

2.9.4. Reach and Settlement in the Lushai Hills (Mizoram)

As we mentioned earlier, some of the 'Mizo' tribes moved forward to the western direction from the Chin Hills (Burma) to the present Mizoram, Tripura, Assam and Manipur etc. The first batch included the old Kukis - Hrangkhawl, Darlong, Biate or Hmar with their off-shoots, they moved into the present Mizoram and from there into Cachar and Tripura.⁹³ The second batch included Thadou, Jangshen and their off-shoots drove out the old Kukis out of the present Mizoram, later on they were also driven out by the Lusei people. The Lusei tribe of Sailo clan was the last batch of migration from Chin Hills across the Tiau River.⁹⁴ Dr.Sangkima asserted that the Sailo clans were believed to have migrated into Mizoram beginning from the second half of the seventeenth century which might have continued till the beginning of the nineteenth century A.D.⁹⁵

After the Lusei people relocated across the Tiau River and reached their new home *i.e.* the present Mizoram, their rival cognate group - the *Pawi*

⁹² Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, (Aizawl: Mizo Academy of Letters, 1976), 23.

⁹³ Lalrimawia, *Mizoram History and Cultural Identity (1890-1947)* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1995), 15.

⁹⁴ Sangkima, "A study of the Historic Movements of an Early Mizo," *Historical Journal of Mizoram* I, Issue-I, (2000): 26.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

still disturbed the Lusei who were under the chieftainship of Sailo. The Pawi chiefs often looted the Lusei villages and demanded tributes from the Lusei chiefs. To protect themselves from the attack of the *Pawi*, the Sailo chiefs decided to live together in one place and they founded a large town at Selesih which comprises seven villages located at the eastern part of the present Mizoram. It was around 1740 A.D. that Selesih *sangsarih* (the town of seven thousand households) was established but it did not last very long. The Lusei spread themselves again into different parts of the current Mizoram and its neighbouring areas under the dominance of Sailo. The Sailo chiefs became the undisputed and unchallenged rulers who effectively chased out their rivals from the present state of Mizoram and its nearby places until the arrival of the British in the Lushai Hills (present Mizoram) in the last quarter of nineteenth century A.D. During this time, it can be said that to a large extent, their religious beliefs and practice systems also progressed in a more systematic way.

2.10 Sacred Geography and it's correlation to the Mizo cultural area.

Sacred geography can be linked up with the people's conception of life and death and other association of certain natural phenomena with other worldly connections. Every religion has tried to understand and comprehend the profundity of life and death in its own way and within a historical context. ⁹⁶The Mizo believed in life after death and the soul's way to *Mitthi khua* (Dead men's village) had a close connection with the geographical setting of their areas. Before and after they had a permanent settlement in present Mizoram (during the colonial period it was known as Lushai Hills) the Mizo believed in that the soul has to pass the *Rihdil* (Lake) which is identified as a location in the Chin Hills, Myanmar, bordering present day Mizoram. The above facts imply the presence of knowledge of sacred geography amongst the Mizo. The meaningful relation of the religious practices and geographical landscape,

⁹⁶ Gregory J. Levine, "On the Geography of Religion," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series 11, No. 4 (1986): 428-440.

production and settlement patterns etc. and the notion of sacred geography have often been left out in the study of the Mizo religious practices which is a blind spot in the history of the Mizo. Therefore, a systematic study is needed which would provide a better generalization and a new outlook in the understanding of Mizo spiritual life and its relationship with the physical world.

As mentioned above, the Mizo also had a clear notion of sacred geography an example of which is the existence of *Rihdil*, a lake located in the Chin hills of Burma (Myanmar) about three kilometers from the Mizoram border which was believed as the place every deceased soul had to pass through to get to *Mitthi khua* or *Pialral*.

The Mizo always believed in the existence of souls as well as the possibility of life after death. When a person die, the soul leaves the body from the top of the skull. Following the pole of the wall, the beam and the roof of the house and from the back-corner side of the house the soul went straight to *Rihdil*. After reaching *Rihdil* the soul returned back to the village and hovered around in the vicinity of the house for about three months. The deceased family still reserved the dead man's/woman's usual seat during supper and some food was also kept for the soul to consume. Three months after the person's death, the deceased person's family organizes a farewell ceremony known as *Thithin* and the soul went back to *Rihdil* and precede he/her way to *Mitthi khua*.⁹⁷ This was a liminal period in the Lusei life cycle when a person was in a state of liminality and the soul disassociated from the physical self was not still integrated in the other world.

The belief of the souls passing through *Rihdil* on their way to *Mitthi khua* or *Pialral* originated from one of the mythical tales. A hunting party stopped nearby *Rihdil* and stayed there for the night, one of the hunters could not sleep while the rest of the hunters were sound asleep. The hunter who was

⁹⁷ V.S. Lalrinawma, *Mizo Ethos: Changes and Challenges* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board), 95.

awake heard voices and when the voice came nearer he came to know that it was his wife talking about their household affairs. She said, “Their father left to go hunting, before I left home, I forgot to tell our children that I kept dried meat inside the pot on the fire-shelf and put the eggs where I kept in the container of rice-husk”. When the hunting party reached their village, they realized that his wife had died during their absence. The husband checked their house and found that everything was as his wife had told him. So, from then on, the Mizo believed that every departed soul had to pass through the *Rihdil* on their way to *Mitthi khua*. Even after their conversion to Christianity, this belief was still prevalent amongst the Mizo. The cultural continuation and the existence of their conception of life after death from the traditional religious beliefs can be seen by the following Mizo Christian lyrics composed for the purpose of offering condolence by the Mizo themselves.

Rih tlang a phei duai,

Rau thla leng kalna chu,

An kal zel a,

Van dung chung khua chu an thleng,

Chu rama lengte chuan,

Hnutiang ngaiin,

Suihlung an chhir ngai lo.

*Hringnun hi an ngai tawh lo ve.*⁹⁸

The meaning of the words may be translated like this:

Rih hill stretches afar,

Where the spirits pass along,

⁹⁸ Z.T Sangkhuma, “Mitthite Kalkawng,” *Zorimawi Monthly Literary Magazine* (September 2000): 29.

As they proceed on,
They reach the heavenly paradise,
Those who dwell in that place,
*Never regret nor miss the place they left behind*⁹⁹

The above translation of the lyrics and its incorporation into present day religious life as part of Christian lyrics clearly indicates the residual nature of the religious practices. The negotiation, accommodation and reformulation of such residual practices in the present-day belief system is also further indicated. Since the Lusei believed that the souls passed through *Rihdil*, the plants that grew near the lake were named *Mitthi-pal*¹⁰⁰, meaning 'the dead man's fence' and the birds found near the lake were also known as *Mitthi ar*¹⁰¹ which meant 'dead-man's bird'. From *Rihdil*, the souls proceeded to *Hruaikawn* (it is located near the eastern border of the present Mizoram in the Champhai district). There was a rock known as *Lungrah buk* that every soul had to step on. From there, the souls moved to a rock/stone cave of *Thlanpial* located in the northern part of Mizoram near N.Khawlek village, if anybody died some marks were often found on the rock of this cave, it was believed that the dead souls put a mark on it¹⁰². The earlier Mizo writer Rev.Saiaithanga pointed out that the marks which appeared on the rock were left by the souls of women using some iron materials.¹⁰³ Then, the souls reached a hill called *Hringlang tlang*, from where the world of the living could be seen and the departed soul felt nostalgia, longing for their family and relatives but when they reached a spring called *Lunglohtui*, a sip of its water and the plucking of a flower called *Hawilopar* made the soul lose all desire to turn back to their families and

⁹⁹ The writer own translation.

¹⁰⁰ James Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* (Aizawl: J.D. Press Publication, 1992), 34-35. Hereafter cited as James Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung*.

¹⁰¹ B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin*, 324.

¹⁰² Z.T Sangkhuma, "Mitthite Kalkawng," *Zorimawi Monthly Literary Magazine*, (September 2000): 28.

¹⁰³ Saiaithanga, *Mizo Sakhua* (Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press, 1994), 53.

friends. Then the soul hastily proceeded to the entrance of the *Mitthi khua* which was called *Zingvanzawl*.

There was an entrance gate where all the seven paths from the world of the living converged which was guarded by the dreaded Pawla. It was inevitable for every soul to approach him as there was no route for escape, he shot his pellet at every soul as they passed by, except for those who had died of *hlamzuih* (died during infancy), *thangchhuah* couples (hero hunters/those who completed the necessary sequence of religious sacrifices and feasts) and men and women who had sexual intercourse during their lifetime.¹⁰⁴ Those who got hit by Pawla's pellets could not cross the *Pial* river and were doomed to stay in *Mitthi khua*, where life was difficult and everything was worse than the living world.¹⁰⁵ Those who escaped the pellet of Pawla could freely go to *Pialral* where food and other luxuries could be obtained without labour. The above fact is an indicator of the different variation in society based on age, gender, social class, and achievement and their correlated place in after life. This is elaborated in the following paragraph in a detail form.

2.10.1 Notion of Paradise - Mitthi khua and Pialral.

The Mizo believed in the existence of two different abodes for the dead beyond the grave. One was *Mitthi khua* where the spirits of the all deceased persons would reside and the other was *Pialral* (this may be equivalent with English word 'paradise') where only the chiefs, the rich and *thangchhuah* could reside.¹⁰⁶ In *Mitthi khua* life would be same like life in the living world and would continue their practice of domestic and agriculture works too.¹⁰⁷ But in *Mitthi khua* their materials and objects were not same with the living world; insects took the place of animals, their vegetables and plants were different from the living world. *Mithi khua* is a place for the common

¹⁰⁴ *The Tribes of Mizoram a Dissertation* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1994), 6.

¹⁰⁵ J. Shakespear, *The Lusei Kuki Clans*, p.63.

¹⁰⁶ F. Lalremsiam, "The Traditional Religious Belief of The Mizo," *Historical Journal Mizoram* I, Issue-I (July 2000): 3.

¹⁰⁷ Challiana, *Pi Pu Nun* (Aizawl: The Trio Book House, 1976), 41.

people, there is a river called *Piallui* nearby the *Mitthi khua*. The place beyond this river is known as *Pialral* which is the place of bliss. Everybody aimed to attain this place but only the chiefs, the rich and *thangchhuah pa/thangchhuah nu* could attain it.

The Mizo's notion of *Pialral* may be comparable with the Christians' notion of heaven/paradise. *Pialral* is devoid of labour, hardship, misery, pain, suffering etc, the soul obtains eternal bliss and everything was provided free. The Mizo's notion of *Pialral* and their ceremonial cultural practices had close links. It can be safely said that their cultural practices and traditions were organized and performed in order to get a better livelihood in the life beyond death i.e. to attain residency in *Pialral*. Entry to *Pialral* was not attained by a life of virtue on earth, but was achieved due to performance of unambiguous sacrifices and the act of killing men and certain animals and being successful in sleeping with virgin girls.¹⁰⁸ If these were not fulfilled the soul could not pass through the gate of Pawla, but those who obtained such necessities would have the privilege to enter *Pialral*. To get a hallowed place in *Pialral* every Mizo family tried to achieve the status of *Thangchhuah*, moreover they also occupied a status of respect and honour in the society, therefore, it was the highest and most important status amongst the Mizo in pre-British period.

There were two ways of achieving the status of *Thangchhuah*, one was *Ramlama Thangchhuah* (a *Thangchhuah* connected with the forest) and the other was *Inlama Thangchhuah* (a *Thangchhuah* connected with the house/village). The *Thangchhuah* family should organize a series of public feasts till they attain *Khuangchawi* or killing of the prescribed animal and the celebration of each killing was accompanied with the *Ai* ceremony which made them eligible to achieve the status of *Thangchhuah Pa* (a title for husband) and *Thangchhuah Nu* (wife who shared her husband title).

¹⁰⁸ F. Lalremsiam, "The Traditional Religious Belief of The Mizo," *Historical Journal Mizoram* I, Issue-I (July 2000): 5.

(1) *Ram lama Thangchhuah:*

To achieve *Ramlama Thangchhuah* one needed to be a healthy and skillful hunter, he had to kill each of these animal species - bear, barking deer, wild mithun, sambhur, wild boar.¹⁰⁹ Apart from these, killing of a large snake called a *Rulngan* (Viper) and *Muvanlai* (hawk) were needed for *Thangchhuah*. Besides these, one must cut off the head of their enemies. *Ramlama Thangchhuah* is not easy to achieve. A lot of time is needed for hunting and killing of each of the above animals, so not everyone could achieve it. The hunter family must be rich so that they could be relieved from cultivation work.

Killing of these animals is not sufficient; after he had killed the prescribed animals the hunter had to perform the *Ai* ceremony. This ceremony was performed by the *Puithiam* (Sadawt) on behalf of hunter to enable the spirits of the dead men and animals killed to accompany him with pomp and grandeur on his way to *Pialral* when he dies.¹¹⁰ He would be seen with his killed animals then Pawla would not stop him at the gate of *Pialral* instead he would be sent to *Pialral* with respect and honor.

(2) *In lama Thangchhuah:*

It was generally achieved by the rich and prosperous family of the village. They were usually wealthy in livestock and agriculture. To obtain the status of *In lama Thangchhuah*, one had to organize a prescribed series of feast for the entire village as follows:

(a) Chawng

(b) Sechhun/Sedawi

(c) Mitthirawplam

¹⁰⁹ Challiana, *Pi Pu Nun* (Aizawl: The Trio Book House, 1976), 51.

¹¹⁰ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Conference, 1996), 121.

(d) Sechhun/Sedawi (second series)

(e) Khuangchawi

All these feasts are held with the religious sacrifices which were performed by *Puithiam* (priest/shaman).¹¹¹ To organize a feast for the entire village the killing of domesticated animals like pigs and mithuns and a quite number pot of *Zu* (local beer) were needed. In addition to these, the family had to distribute gifts like ornaments, clothing, brass pots, gongs, guns and mithuns. These were thrown on the open ground free for all those who managed to get hold of it. After completing the prescribed series of *Thangchhuah* feast, the family now became *Thangchhuah* family and the father is now known as *Thangchhuah Pa* and the Mother as *Thangchhuah Nu*. They now have the privilege to enter *Pialral* after their death; moreover, they also possessed a status of respect and honour in the society. From the above instance we see that there was only restricted amount of people who put achieved the status of *Thangchhuahpa/Thangchhuahnu* since it required both physical bravery and economic status to organize faests. Since the numbers of *Thangchhuah* were less, therefore they also had entry to *Pialral* and therefore to find the place in *Pialral* was not for the commoners thus raising its prestige.

2.11. Origin and development of Mizo chieftainship

Mizo historians have referred that the Mizo chieftainship had originated and established in its indigenous form without the effect of external agencies. Being a migrant tribe Mizo migrated from place to place in search of new cultivable lands. The land became a source of livelihood and had importance in their day to day activities. Therefore, the importance of land led them to conflict amongst the different sections of Mizo clans. It is said that these constant conflicts penetrated among them must have birthed the need to have strong and able leaders who will lead them when times of troubles and conflicts occur.

¹¹¹ The word 'shaman' here is used in a specific sense as a ritual specialist of the Lusei and is not to be confused with a generic understanding of Central Asian or North American shamanic tradition.

It seems that the origin of chieftainship among the Mizo was begun when they were living in the ranges of Run and Tiau rivers in Burma (Myanmar) at around 1500 – 1700 A.D. Before they had chief, they were living in their own clans without having permanent chief.¹¹² Every clan had their own places and villages, the stronger ones and brave ones naturally became their leader.¹¹³ So, it is a complicated task to trace back the origin of chieftainship among the Mizo. Basing on oral tradition, the origin of their chiefs and the system of chieftainship of Lusei can be traced back. The ancestor of Lusei chief was known as Sihsinga, he had a son and his name was Ralnaa, the son of Ralnaa was called Chhuahlawma.¹¹⁴ Chhuahlawma was captured by the Lusei at Seipui and he was looking after by Chhakchhuak clan. He got married at Seipui and he had a son Zahmuaka. Zahmuaka was married with Lawileri who was from Lawitlang clan, they had six sons namely *Zadenga*, *Paliana*, *Thangluaha*, *Thangura*, *Rivunga* and *Rokhuma*. During that time Hnamte clan lived in Khawrua and Tlangkhua without having chief. They persuaded the villagers in Seipui as their leader but no one accepted. Instead they suggested Hnamte clan to invite Zahmuaka for their chief. Initially Zahmuaka refused, but eventually acknowledged after the *Hnamte* clan offered a basket of paddy as an annual tribute. In other version Zahmuaka's wife Lawileri convinced his husband by saying "If they really want a poor family like us to their chief we should not turned them down."¹¹⁵ Then Zahmuaka and his family became Chief of Hnamte clan. This is regarded at the origin of chieftainship among the Lusei clan. In that period "survival of the fittest" was predominant requirement for the ruler and their ruled so that Zahmuaka who was having six sons was most appropriate ones to become as a chief. Even in the later period the six sons of Zahmuaka were also succeeded to the positions of chiefs in their own villages before they migration across the Tiau river. Among the six sons of Zahmuaka Thangura descendants were most powerful ones in 'Mizo cultural

¹¹² Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, (Aizawl: Mizo Academy of Letters, 1976), 21.

¹¹³ Ibid, 22.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 35.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 36

area.' Thangura had two sons namely Chawnglula and Thangmanga, the descendants of Chawnglula were not so powerful but Thangmanga's son Sailoa and his descendants were dominant and powerful rulers among the Lusei clan till the forthcoming of British in the then Lushai Hills.

In the meantime, a number of chiefs appeared from other clans like Fanai, Hualngo, Ralte, Ngente, Chuauhang, Mara or Lakher, and Lai or Pawi. The ancestor of Fanai chiefs was Zachhuma. It is said that among the Fanai clan Rohrehlova was considered as the first chief when they reached present Mizoram. But the two Fanai Chiefs Chalbuanga and Kawla were also known as the independent rulers even before they crossed Tiau river. The Fanai chiefs well maintained good diplomatic skills to their neighbouring chiefs. The matrimonial alliance between Rohrehlova's son and the daughter of Chinzah chief Nicheuva was significant one in maintaining peaceful coexistence with their neighbouring rulers. Rohrehlova had three sons namely Samtawia, Khawtindala and Khualsawia. These three chiefs and their descendants were maintaining powerful chieftainship for Fanai clan. When they crossed Tiau river the rulers of Fanai mostly concentrated in South central and South eastern Mizoram.

Ralte were settling in Khawzim and Lenchau after their dispersed from Suaipui and Saihmun. The villagers who lived in Khawzim drove away Hmar clan from Champhai and settled there. During that time their famous chief was Mangkhaia who was the son of Mangthawnga. Mangthawnga was considered as the first chief among the Ralte clan. The genealogy of Ralte chiefs are as follows:

Mangthawnga was the father of Mangkhaia, Mangkhaia the father of Thawnglura, Thawnglura the father of Mangula, Mangula the father of Mangropuia, Mangropuia the father of Manghuliana, Manghuliana the father of Mangthangvunga and Zathata, Mangthangvunga the father of Mangruma, Mangruma the father of Kairuma and Thangkhawlala, Kairuma the father of

Lutzathanga and Saitulera, while Zathata the father of Mangkhupa, Mangkhupa the father of Zaleta, Zaleta the father of Mangselvunga and Sapkaia, Sapkaia the father of Pathuala.¹¹⁶

Within the Mizo culture area, the weaker chiefs normally migrated to farther direction towards the western, southern and northern part of present Mizoram like Cachar, Chittagong Hill Tract, Manipur and Tripura. Some chiefs like Hmar, Paite and Kuki (Thadou) were migrated to Cachar and Manipur areas while other chiefs Palian, Rivung and Thangluah proceeded to the neighboring hill of Tripura and Chittagong Hill Tract in Bangladesh.

The chieftainship of Lai clan was started during the period of 1300 to 1700 A.D when they were in the Chin Hills of Burma. There were six chief's clan among the Lai – Chinzah and Zathang were considered as the original chief's clan, while Hlawncheu, Hlawnhhing, Thlangchhan and Khenglawt were appointed to the status of chiefs by the original chief's clan or who were able to carve for themselves in their own villages.¹¹⁷ As per the record, seven Chinzah chiefs were ruling in Lai dominated areas when the British occupied Mizoram and among them Chinzah appears to have been the most powerful as well as dominant ones.¹¹⁸ As far as the institution of chieftainship is concerned, the Lai followed more of Lusei chieftainship than the Lai system in Burma. In the Lai society, lineage system was developed and the solidarity and mutual cooperation led to the rise of Chinzah lineage above the other Lai chief.¹¹⁹ Chinzah chief were descended from chief Taihmunga. Later, Hausata, Dokulha and Vantura rose into prominence and almost all the Chinzah chiefs were the descendants of these three chiefs. Lai chiefs often developed matrimonial

¹¹⁶ Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin*, (Aizawl: Mizo Academy of Letters, 1976), 47.

¹¹⁷ Valalringa Bawitlung, "The System of Administration in South Mizoram from the earliest to 1890," *Historical Journal Mizoram* IV, Issue.1 (2003): 7.

¹¹⁸ Ibid

¹¹⁹ Ibid

alliances with their neighbouring chiefs, for instance Hausata was married to the daughter of Zahuata chief of Thlantlang.¹²⁰

It also said that Mara chieftainship started when they were living in Chin Hills in Burma. Mara had three nomenclatures to address chief which are *bei*, *abei* or *abeipa*, he was the head of villages, the leader in war, the owner of the village land, the protector and the father of his subjects. Among the Mara, dominant chief clan has never been heard; Tlongsai, Hawthai, Zeuhang and Sabeu had their own chief's clan while the other two groups, Liailai and Heima did not have their own chief clan. Each chief clan operated on their own areas, where he was a dominant ruler and they did not have a synchronizing relationship among themselves and operated on their own.¹²¹

In the making of the sacred geography in the Mizo Culture area, what is striking is that the ideas of the divine are not based on any scriptural derivate or a flow from above that was imposed on Mizo society. Rather it was reflective of the ground reality based on the material practices that circulated throughout the Mizo culture area. It is this circulation of material artefacts that has been underemphasized rather the circulation of ideas and language was taken up. The material basis of the circulation was represented in the myths, folktales and institutions like chieftainship etc. all of which evolved over a considerable period of time and hence built up a durable tradition over the Mizo Culture area.

¹²⁰ Vanlalringa Bawitlung, "The System of Administration in South Mizoram from the earliest to 1890", *Historical Journal Mizoram* IV, Issue.1 (2003): 7.

¹²¹ Ibid, 9.

CHAPTER - III

MATERIAL CULTURE AND PRODUCTION PROCESS

3.1. Explanation of the title and the scope of the chapter

Material forces and relations of production motivated people to realize their material existence. A history of social formation in terms of material appropriations from nature using technologies can be found in pre-modern human societies. The pre-modern communities earn their livelihood through traditional means of production within the limitations of their society. Meanwhile in a developed society the yardstick for the economic production is often the involvement of machines and advances made in the field of technology. However, when it comes to the pre-modern society, production was undertaken by close-knit communities of people sharing a variety of social ties and functions, among which is the production of material goods.¹

The main focus in this chapter will be the pre-modern Mizo economy and the dominant forces of production process which had a deep relation with their material appropriations.

3.2 Pre-Modern Mizo economy and production process

During the pre-modern period, the Mizo economy was mostly depended on agriculture. Shifting cultivation or *Jhumming* was the common method practiced by the Mizo to earn their livelihood. It was primitive and was simple to meet the bare necessities of day to day life.² It can be said that their economic institution was very simple and its progress was limited to the extent of their simple living and livelihood.

It is difficult to trace back when the Mizo adopted shifting cultivation. Being a migrant tribe, they were moving from one place to another for a short period of time, so that shifting cultivation occupied an important place in their economy. Though the shifting cultivation system that they followed seemed

¹ George Dalton, "Traditional Production in Primitive African Economies," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 76. No.3 (Aug., 1962): 362

² Zochungnunga, "Survey of The Pre-Colonial Mizo Economy," in *A Modern History of Mizoram*, ed. Sangkima, (Guwahati: Spectrum publication, 2004), 53.

unproductive, being a migrant tribe, they have to engage with it for their survival.

James C. Scott coined 'escape agriculture' to explain the shifting cultivation practices by the hilly areas of mainland Southeast Asia (Zomia). He argued that the practice of shifting cultivation by the Southeast Asian hill tribes was a political choice. Shifting cultivation was an important and often used agropolitical strategy used instead of raiding, state-making and state appropriation.³ Like other tribes in Southeast Asia who lived in highlands, Mizo ancestors also met frequent inter-tribal warfare and raids with their neighboring communities. Even when they were working in their cultivation sites they were mostly working in common areas so that they can see their neighbour and can help each other when their enemies tried to make an attack on them. Scott mentioned the advantages of shifting cultivation into two points: it offers relative autonomy and freedom, and it also acknowledges the farmers to relieve their own labour and the outcome of their labour, which are both essentially political advantages.⁴ In the context of pre-modern Mizo society the practice of shifting cultivation had a great impact on their production process and survival. Considering their condition in those periods they might not need machine tools or extensive form of agriculture. The materials that they used for their agriculture were also very primitive and simple. Eventually, being a migrant community, storing agriculture products for extensive periods could be burdensome for their movements.

The shifting cultivation practiced by the Mizo in pre-modern period was slash and burnt method, which is commonly known as *jhumming* or swidden agriculture in other places. Farmers clear the plot of land by slashing the trees and bamboos, leave it to dry for some months and then burn it up. *Chem* (dao) and *hreipui* (axe) were the common materials being used for clearing agriculture sites.

³ James C. Scott, *The art of not being governed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 193.

⁴ Ibid, 194.

3.2.1 Types of Cultivation sites

The cultivation sites were generally divided into two which were *Zo lo* (main field) and *Leipui* (extra field). *Zo lo* is usually located in a far distance place with dense forest coverage. The labour work takes a whole day whereas *Leipui* is located at a nearer place which can be taken care of without spending a whole day. Sometimes farmers do cultivation work in *Zo lo* by sleeping over to their huts which is known as *ramriak* in Mizo language. They stayed in their field for weekdays and came back to the village only on weekends.

3.2.2 Selection and clearance of Cultivation site

The village chief and his elders were the main responsible persons for the selection of cultivation site with the advice of *Ramhual*. The selection of agriculture land or *ramtuk rel* usually occurred at the beginning of the year usually in January (*Pawltlak thla*) and February (*Ramtuk thla*). Soil and land selection for the jhum cultivation required skilled knowledge, one who was able to identify the quality of the soil by its colour, weight and taste and assess gradation of the land.⁵ The group of surveyors was known as *Ramhual* who were experts on matters of land particularly in the selection of the best forest areas for each year's cultivation.⁶ The *Ramhual* conducted land survey in every year for the selection of cultivation sites. For selection of cultivation site, the following points have to be considered: first, since the ashes from bamboo or trees were considered as source of nutrient for plant growth, dense forest was the chosen one for cultivation site. Second is the plot of land which have abundant sunlight and the third is the fertility and acidity content of the soil. The *Ramhual* then categorized the soil into grades according to the fertility quality and make boundary line for each household in the village. The portion of land was divided for every family based on the number of labour capacity. Then the most suitable plots of land for cultivation were selected according to

⁵ H. Vanlalhraia, "Mizo Economy and Ancillary Branches in Pre-Colonial Period," in *Mizo Narratives: Accounts from Mizoram*, ed. Malsawmdawngliana & Rohmingmawii (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2013), 71.

⁶ Ibid.

the choice of the *Ramhual*. It is said that *Ramhual* sometimes taste a sample of the soil literally by their mouth to verify the quality of land during the survey conducted for cultivation site.

When *Ramhual* finalized the plot of land for cultivation, the division of the plot was done according to the unique tradition. Generally, the village chief never had a particular cultivation site but in some circumstances, he also chose a plot of land for cultivation which would be taken care of by his servants who were living with him and were mostly pardoned criminal offenders and captives. In such cases, village chief chooses the plot first before his subjects. After the chief, the elders will choose the plot of land. *Ramhual* choose after the elders. Elders and *Ramhual* were expected to share their granary to the chief in times of emergency and shortage. The chief was entitled to *fathang* (paddy due) after every harvest from each cultivating family which was generally two *phur* (basket). The *fathang* would be used by the chief and his families for consumption and to help the villagers who could not engage in cultivation due to sickness and other difficulties.

The last to choose the plot of land is the commoners. Before the day of selection of cultivation site for the commoners the village crier (*tlangau*) made an announcement throughout the village. On the morning of selection day every commoner get ready to proceed to the new site that is already surveyed before by the *Ramhual*. At the early morning the village chief beat *darkhuang* (big gong) or shoot a gun which was a signal for the commoners to move forward to the forest to select their own plot for cultivation. Those who reach early will have a chance to choose the fertile land and the late comers never create dispute with the ones who reach before them. Each family chooses the plot of land for cultivation and they demarcated boundary line for each.

After this every family had to get ready for *lo vat* (clearing the forest for cultivation). The farmers sharpened their cutting materials which were mostly *chem* (dao) and *hreipui* (axe) at the village blacksmith which was called *pum*.

The owner of *pum* (blacksmith) never engaged in cultivation as he was supposed to mend agriculture tools for the entire households throughout the year. As remuneration, he earned a basket of paddy from each household annually. Besides this annual tribute of paddy, he was entitled to a spine or three ribs of any wild animal killed by the hunters which was called *Thirdengsa* (a portion of meat for village smith).⁷

Among the Mizo community *lo vat* (clearing of forest for cultivation) was considered as a heavy task for menfolk, but for the widow families, women were also engaged in *lo vat*. The clearing of expansive hill-sites by cutting down the jungle and the forest was a heavy task, when it was realized that a Lushai (Mizo) householder may have to clear by himself several acres of land, with implements that can lay no claim to being efficient.⁸ The cutting was usually done during the winter season around January and February.

The farmers left the trees and bamboos that they slashed down in their selected sites for dry up for a month or so. The interval period between the drying up and burning of the selected sites was a free time for the farmer which was known as *Chapchar awllen lai*. During this time the village chief and his elders can freely organized festival called *Chapchar Kut*. The festival was observed by the entire village with a great zeal. *Chapchar Kut* is considered as the greatest Mizo cultural festival till the present day.

When the trees and bamboos were dried up in their selected sites, village chief and his elders declared a date for burning called *lo hal ni*. The selection of burning was a matter of considerable skill.⁹ If a burning day is chosen before the fellings have got thoroughly dry in the sun heat, firing will not result in a well-burned field. If rain intervenes before a day can be fixed the whole firing is seriously held up, perhaps for three weeks or a month, and if, as had happened before now, it proves impossible to dry the fellings, before early monsoon or

⁷ N.E. Parry, *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1976), 7.

⁸ A.G McCall, *Lushai Crysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 167.

⁹ Ibid, 168.

unseasonable rains, a serious crop shortage can easily result.¹⁰ If the weather conditions were favourable, the summer heat will parch the stricken forest and will give a good result of vigorous fire. All the menfolk were expected to take part in burning day. When they set out for burning the hunters came with guns and spears and if they were lucky they might have a chance to kill animals that come out from the burning sites, the rest turned out with sticks and *daos* (chempui). Before they set a fire, they cleared the adjacent forest areas in order to prevent fire catch up. The areas that they cleared were mostly the size of highway which was known as *mei lam sial*. The Lushais (Mizo) in this, as in many other respects, deserve commendation for their good sense in genuinely seeking to avoid unnecessary damage to what is their life-blood.¹¹ The farmers were very precautions on the weather condition before they set a fire. They usually observed the weather by smoking a pipe, if the wind blew up the smoke to upper side then they light up their torches and started the fire. Burning of cultivation site was generally done by noon.

The next day after the burning of cultivation site, the famers gathered together the burnt bamboo, wood and creepers which hindered their movement which was called *mangkhawh*. They collected the debris and piled them in convenient places on their *jhum* and re-burnt them. They called the burning of the debris “*cha hal*.”¹² The spots of land where they did “*cha hal*” were used for sowing vegetable seeds. It was considered that the re-burning site was more fertile and suitable for growing vegetables and other food crops.

3.2.3 Construction of shelter hut (thlam sak) and sowing (buh tuh)

In Mizo agriculture system construction of shelter is an important task. The shelter or hut is called *thlam* and the task is also known as *thlam sak*. Throughout the year the shelter had to be used for rest and eating place so

¹⁰ A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 168.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² B.Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Divisions, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 94.

they were very serious in its construction. Before they burnt up the cultivation site they already took out wood and bamboos that will be useful for construction of shelter and were kept safe out of fire. If the location of cultivation site was far from the village they usually constructed shelters in the same place which was called *bawk* or *inbawkkhawm*. But if the location is not so far away and need not to be slept over in the cultivation site each had separated *thlam* (shelter). The construction of *thlam* (shelter) had to finish before sowing. Construction of *thlam* is also considered as a task for men. There were two types of shelters in Mizo cultivation sites. The first one was *thlam* which was constructed with wood and bamboo, having ridge pole roof which was called *tlung*. It was constructed in the main cultivation site (*Zo lo*). The other one is *bekte* which was constructed in pent-roofed without having walls. It can be considered as temporary shed and was mostly constructed in extra field (*Leipui*) which was usually located in nearer place from the village.

The size of *thlam* was depended on the number of the family. The large family had bigger *thlam* whereas the smaller family had smaller *thlam*. *Thlam* was constructed with four walls with thatched roof. Woods were used for *thlam* posts, the walls were made with bamboo. *Thlam* window was called *namthlak* which was made with bamboo strip. At the front there was a platform called *luhka* or *leika*. The posts of *leika* (*tlaitlan ban*) were made protruded and they put a bamboo pole across the posts in upper side, split of bamboos plaited together in between the posts. This was useful for growing edible crops.

When rain is imminent or falling, seeding was mostly done by the farmers and this was done around the month of April to May. Sowing paddy seed was done by a crude process. The paddy seeds were shifted from home to cultivation site. The seeds were distributed to each farmer. Each sower had a small flat basket with a strap. The small flat basket was called a *paiper*. The strap went over the shoulder and diagonally across the chest, and the basket

was carried on the back at the level of the waist.¹³ Sowing of paddy seeds was done from the lower site. The sower took a handful of seeds from the *paiper*. Little holes were scooped out with a hoe (*tuthlawh*) every eighteen inches or so, few grains of paddy being dibbled into one before moving on to sow another.¹⁴ The holes were left as it was, scooped up with hoes. If rain is frequent, germination will commence five or six days after sowing.

3.2.4 Cropping pattern

The Mizo system of cropping had its own distinct pattern, overall, mixed cropping was commonly practiced and sometimes all types of crops were cultivated on a single field.¹⁵ Sometimes cowpea (*behlawi*), eggplant (*bawkbawn*) and chili (*hmarcha*) were cultivated in a separated place. Most of the vegetables and crops were cultivated along the paddy in the main field. The mixture of crops would be depended on the decision of the farmer. There were also some crops to be cultivated along the border and pathway of the field like species of millet (*thal vuai fu/faibar*), tuber/cassava (*pangbal*), gongkura (*anthur*), roselle plant (*lakher anthur*), maize (*vaimim*), corn plant (*puakzo*). Yam (*bahra*), taro root (*bal*) were commonly cultivated in a loose soil area. Cotton (*la*) was cultivated separately in sunny area. Pumpkin (*mai*) was mostly cultivated in border area. There is a saying in Mizo “*Maileng an um ngai lo*” which literally means if the pumpkin plant grew beyond the border never claim it as yours. At the same time, cucumber and pumpkin were planted on the plot over termite mounts. Tobacco (*vaihlo*) was cultivated separately in the main field.

In *zo lo* (main field) the large portion of space was reserved for cultivation of paddy. On the other hand, *leipui* (extra field) was used for the cultivation of maize, millet, vegetables, edible and non-edible crops. Extra fields

¹³ B.Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Divisions, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 94.

¹⁴ A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 168.

¹⁵ H.Vanlalhraia, “Mizo Economy and Ancillary Branches in Pre-Colonial Period,” In *Mizo Narratives: Accounts from Mizoram*, ed. Malsawmdawngliana & Rohmingmawii (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2013), 71.

or *leipui* were usually situated near the village, so that the farmer could easily collect their foodstuff and other domestic needs. In most cases the labour work in *zo lo* was done together by the whole adults in the family. The labour work in *leipui* was considered as lesser and the whole adults were not much engaged as they did in *zo lo*. During the working season all the adult members in the family were expected to work in the field. Only old people, children and sick persons were seen during day time at the village. If any of the adults who do not have sickness or other unavoidable engagement were seen during day time at the village, they were considered as lazy and useless.

3.2.5 Products of jhum - survey of the seasons and main crops

The agricultural crop period in India is from July to June. The Indian cropping season is generally categorized into two main seasons - (i) *Kharif* and (ii) *Rabi* based on the monsoon. July - October is *Kharif* cropping season during the south-west monsoon whereas October - March (winter) is *Rabi* cropping season. Similarly, among the hill tribes in North East India and their neighbouring areas the cropping season can also be classified into monsoon season and winter season. Mizo also followed two patterns of cropping season which were *fur rawl* (*Kharif* crops) and *thal rawl* (*Rabi* season). *Fur rawl* literally means rainy summer crops or rain crops (June to October) while *thal rawl* means winter crops (November to May) usually cultivated on extra field or *Leipui*.¹⁶ Rice/paddy (*buh*), vegetables (*thlai*), millet (*buhtun*) and maize (*vaimim*) were regarded as rain crops on the other hand beans (*be*), peas (*behlawi*) etc. were regarded as winter crops.¹⁷

Mizo main staple crop was rice/paddy, the cultivation site was also mostly occupied and reserved for paddy. When a Mizo said 'food' (*chaw*), it meant rice, crops other than rice was always regarded as supplementary foods (*chawhmeh*). Shakespear comments:

¹⁶ H. Vanlalhraia, "Mizo Economy and Ancillary Branches in Pre-Colonial Period," In *Mizo Narratives: Accounts from Mizoram*, ed. Malsawmdawngliana & Rohmingmawii (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2013), 72.

¹⁷ *ibid*

*“The Lushai (Mizo) when speaking food always means rice. Though he is fond of meat and like vegetables and seasoning, he only considered them as a garnish to his rice.”*¹⁸

Before rice became their main staple crop, tubers and millets were the staples crops for the Mizo. Rice and maize were regarded as the most important crops but maize was later superseded by rice.¹⁹ The Mizo historians believed that the cultivation of paddy was done when the Mizo ancestors reached Lentlang area in Myanmar. Liangkhaia believed that when the Mizo ancestors reached Run lui (river) at around 1000 – 1500 A.D they were not much familiar with paddy cultivation. He said, “As the land was not so fertile they firstly cultivated maize (*vaimim*), millet (*buhtun*) and taro root (*bal*), we came to know that rice cultivation was done only after reaching in *Len tlang* area.”²⁰ V.L Siama also mentioned about the living condition of Mizo when they were in *Run lui* (river) bank like this, “They might not knew cultivation, the present Mizo staple food rice was also not cultivated, they mostly cultivated taro root, maize, millet and sweet patato.”²¹ Another Mizo historian B. Lalthangliana also assumed that Mizo left Run river bank and migrated to Lentlang area. He said, “The land was more fertile here, we came to know that they cultivated paddy.”²² It can be surmised that rice became the main crop for the Mizo when they were in Lentlang area and continued even after this. There were two varieties of paddy which were white paddy (*buhpu*) and red paddy (*kawnglawng*), the former one was common and preferable. Apart from these two varieties there was also another paddy variety which was called *buhban*. It was ‘sticky rice’ but not considered as staple food. It was mostly used for bread and beer. Mizo also had another variety of paddy called *tai* which was considered as early harvested variety of paddy. Unlike the white paddy *tai* was harvested in the

¹⁸ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clan* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 36.

¹⁹ H. Vanlalhraia, “Mizo Economy and Ancillary Branches in Pre-Colonial Period,” In *Mizo Narratives: Accounts from Mizoram*, ed. Malsawmdawngliana & Rohmingmawii (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2013), 72-73.

²⁰ Liangkhaia, *Mizo Chanchin* (Aizawl: Mizo Academy of Letters, 1976), 23.

²¹ V.L Siama, *Mizo History* (Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press, 2009), 9-10.

²² B. Lalthangliana, *Mizo Chanchin* (Aizawl: RTM Press, 2009), 168.

month of August. *Tai* was also not considered as staple food but was used as food supplement. There is a Mizo saying in regards to *tai*, “*chaw chhia-ah tai a tui ber mai*” which meant “among the food supplements *tai* is the tasty one.”²³

Apart from paddy the next important major crop for the Mizo was maize (*vaimim*). Maize was cultivated in the main field along with paddy. It was also cultivated in extra field (*leipu*). It was important because it could be brewed into beer without which life was inconceivable to the average Mizo in pre-colonial period.²⁴

As the pre-modern Mizo society was depended on traditional bound local industry for their clothes, weaving cotton was another important crop in their field. Due to this, they reserved separate space in the main field for the cultivation of cotton. Consumption of tobacco (*vaihlo*) was very popular among the pre-modern Mizo society. Both male and female adults consumed tobacco by using smoking pipes. Male smoking pipe was known as *vaibel* while female smoking pipe was called *tuiburlu*. Women’s pipe has a metal container, in which the nicotine water (*tuibur*) was collected and given to the smoker’s special braves in the belief that this water will encourage them to ever greater heights of fame.²⁵ The metal stem was neatly engraved by means of the local method of metal work designed through heated wax. Guests to the house were also given this nicotine water (*tuibur*) as an honour. Generally, the consumption of nicotine water (*tuibur*) was done by washing it around the mouth for a minute or two and would then be ejected with none being swallowed.²⁶ The men’s pipe was made of special bamboo. Every family needed tobacco for consumption so cultivation of tobacco was an essential one. In their main field they also reserved separate space for the cultivation of tobacco.

²³ James Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* (Aizawl: J.D Press Publication, 1992), 16.

²⁴ H. Vanlalhruaia, “Mizo Economy and Ancillary Branches in Pre-Colonial Period,” In *Mizo Narratives: Accounts from Mizoram*, ed. Malsawmdawngliana & Rohmingmawii (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2013), 73.

²⁵ A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1077), 190.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 190.

Mizo cultivated wide varieties of crops, the cultivation was mostly depended on the condition of soil and climate. The most common crops were: pumpkin (*mai*), cow pea (*behlawi*), beans (*be*), cucumber (*fanghma*), maskmelon (*hmazil*), watermelon (*dawnfawh*), eggplant (*bawkbawn*), pigeon pea (*behliang*), indian bean (*bepui*), winged bean (*bepui thlanei*), rice bean (*bête*), sword bean (*fangra*), snake gourd (*berul*), bitter gourd (*changkha*), ash gourd (*maipawl*), bottle gourd (*um-ei*), sesame (*chhawhchhi*), cassava (*pangbal*), bitter tomato (*samtaw*), yam (*bahra*), air yam (*bachhim*), spring onion (*pawihpurun*), taro root (*bal*), elsholtzia griffithii (lengmaser), chili (*hmarcha*), kenaf (*anthur*), roselle (*lakher anthur*), sweet potato (*kawlbahra*), soybean (*bekang*), ginger (*sawhthing*), leek (*zo purun*), mustard (*antam*) etc. These different varieties were grown both in main field (*zo lo*) and extra field (*leipui*). Besides these varieties of crops, indigo (*ting*) was also an important crop for the Mizo. It was grown in main field and extra field and was used for dyeing clothes.

Among these crops rice/paddy was considered as the main food and tubers were its principal food supplements. There is a saying in Mizo to mention about food crops “*buh leh bal*” which literally meant “paddy and tubers”. James Dokhuma clarified that “*Buh leh bal* includes rice and all the other crops.”²⁷ Though there were no specific criteria to measure wealth of a family, the one who had abundant rice grain was generally considered as wealthy.

3.2.6 Cycle of *hlo thlawh* (weeding) and *lo zawh ni*

The common material used for weeding by the Mizo was *chemkawm* and *thuthlawh* which were handled tool with thin metal blade, it may be understood as hoes. It is said that the Mizo, before they possessed metal implements for weeding, did weeding by using the thorns of deer (*sazuk ki/sakhi ki*). Liangkhaia mentioned that when Mizo migrated to *Run lui*²⁸ they did not much

²⁷ James Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* (Aizawl: J.D Press Publication, 1992), 16.

²⁸ Run lui is also known as Manipur river in Myanmar.

engage with metals. He said, “They did weeding with deer’s thorns, only few people had metal implements.”²⁹ The usages of deer’s thorns for weeding in that period can be seen on the following poem:

“Khi sa chhuk chho chhumpui zing hnuaiah,

*A ki riu riau riang lo thlawh nan a tha e,”*³⁰

The literal translation may be like this:

“Deer climb up and down under the thick cloud,

The long thorns were useful for weeding.”

Mizo followed a common cycle of *hlo thlawh* (weeding) throughout their cultivation season. After sowing season, the first task they did in the field was weeding which was called *hlo thlawh*. Weed regrows season after season so that weeding was considered as the main assignment to be done by the cultivators in their fields. Weeding was hard, back-aching work.³¹ Farmers spent whole days by bending down snipping out threatening weeds with a small hoe (*chemkawm*), until the whole fields were properly well cleared. As weeding was tiresome, farmers called for break at interval periods which was known as *hmalai chawlh*. At around noon they also had a long break for lunch (*chawchhun*) which was called *chawfak hun*. In Mizo agriculture system a perennial life cycle of weed was generally categorized into five cycles. The first cycle was called *hnuhpui*, the second cycle was *hnuhhram*, the third cycle was *a thual*, the fourth cycle was *a thial* and the last cycle was *pawhchhiat*. The weeding season was held within the months of May (*Tomir thla*) to September (*Mim Kut thla*).

The pre-modern Mizo agriculture weeding was often done in partnership which was called *lawm rawih*. The youths invited their friends to help them in

²⁹ Liangkhaia, *Mizo chanchin* (Aizawl: Mizo Academy of Letters, 1976), 22.

³⁰ Ibid, 23.

³¹ A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 169.

weeding and when they finished weeding at one's field they will help their friend respectively. For lovers *Lawm rawih* was a great opportunity for having working partner in their respective fields. Not only for the lovers but also for the normal friends *lawm rawih* gave a chance to have social interaction with others while doing weeding. In Mizo folksongs we can see many *lawmrawih* songs that were mentioning *lawmrawih* days as one of the unforgotten days in their youth life. This shows that *lawmrawih* had deep attachment to Mizo farmers.

Many studies highlight the practice of shifting cultivation by the Mizo but the interesting event they often miss out was *lo zawh* or *lo zawh ni*. It was a concluding day for weeding work for the entire season. This was usually held at August end to early September with merry making and the family members invited their relatives and friends to witness this event. It was the most pleasant time of the year, and the Mizo who cultivated jhums used to wait eagerly for this occasion.³² Weeding was done only for the namesake on the day of *lo zawh*, they spent their time with fun and lavish lunch. The day was entertained with dancing, gun firing, beating of gongs and drums. The celebration of *lo zawh ni* not only ended in the field but continued even when they reached home where the host family will treat their guests with high tea and dinner. On this day sometimes, the celebrating party hosted roadshows in the village which was enjoyed by the whole community. They all enjoyed themselves late into the night, singing together and dancing. As they continued their merry making, they drunk local beer called *tin zu* and *hranden zu*. *Tin zu* is a strong white-like milk colour alcoholic beverage.³³ *Hranden zu* was not so strong as compared to *tin zu*, the youth preferred *hranden zu* rather than *tin zu*. *Lo zawh ni* was one of the much awaited days by the farmers especially for the youths in Mizo society. After this they could enjoy autumn

³² B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Divisions, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 100.

³³ *Ibid*, 101

season holiday which was called *favang awllen*. The Mizo enjoy their autumn holiday (*favang awllen*) from the last week of September to October.

As mentioned before the inter-relation between Mizo peasant community and merry making through shifting cultivation is hardly seen in the past studies. Regarding the studies in shifting cultivation, a well-known Indian anthropologist L.P Vidyarthi argued Harold Colyer Conklin who was an American Anthropologist and author of 'The Study of Shifting Cultivation' (1963) as Harold left out merry making of peasant community in his work on shifting cultivation.³⁴ He further argued that the study of shifting cultivation may remain incomplete if we fail to relate it to the total culture.³⁵ Even among the Mizo farmers the merry making out of the hard toil they did throughout the year was to be noted for the full understanding of their shifting cultivation.

3.2.7 Harvesting season and measure of products

Mizo farmers harvested paddy cultivation during November (*Sahmulphah thla*) to December (*Pawl tlak thla*). As mentioned before paddy was their main crop and rice was their staple food, harvest of paddy was taken with serious effort. They considered that paddy had to be harvested soon otherwise it can be disturbed by birds and animals. They harvest from dawn to sunset till they finished it. All the adults in the family had to be engaged in the harvesting work since no adults can be exempted. As they wanted to finish harvest soon, the families brought even their children and domestic animals to the field. This was done because no household responsibilities should disturb the family during harvest season.

Mizo farmers harvest manually which require the cutting of paddy crop with simple hand tools such as sickles (*favah*) and knives (*chemte*). Manual harvesting was efficient when a paddy has lodged or fallen over, however it was labour intensive. When the Mizo farmers harvest their paddy crop they followed

³⁴ L.P Vidyarthi, "Shifting Cultivation," *Current Anthropology* 4, No. 5 (Dec., 1963): 543.

³⁵ Ibid

two methods.³⁶ The first method was the longer cutting of the stalks; the harvested stalks were left on the field and collected by tying together later on. When they finished harvesting work the collected tied stalks were threshed together on the ground which was called *buhvuak*. The other method was short cutting of the stalks, the harvesters kept bamboo basket (*em*) on their body and put the stalks on the basket itself. In this method threshing can be done by two methods. The harvested stalks were threshed by their feet on the ground which was called *chil bilh*. The other method was threshing by using *fasuar* (a raised bamboo platform constructed for threshing). Reaping was generally done by the family working together in the field.

Mizo had a unique system of measurement for paddy grain. The quantity of paddy grain was calculated in traditional method which was known as *phur*. The quantity of one *phur* was equivalent to a full bamboo basket (*em*)³⁷. The lowest to highest units of measurement for paddy grain quantity was mentioned in the followings: -

- (1) Kethup (30 *phur* approximate): A person of average height stood toeing the foot of the mound. If the peak obstructed his view of the foot of the mound on the opposite side, it was said that the amount of paddy was *kethup*.
- (2) Buh ke ban (50 *phur* approximate): The person stood at the foot of the mound of paddy and fell forward and could touch the peak, the amount of paddy was *buh ke ban*.
- (3) Favah zai (70 *phur* approximately): It was measured in the same way as *buh ke ban*, but he held a sickle and after falling forward, if he was able to swipe the peak with a sickle, the amount of paddy was *favah zai*.

³⁶ James Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* (Aizawl: J.D Press Publication, 1992), 20.

³⁷ One *phur* is assumed as equivalent to 4 Kgs. approximate.

- (4) Chem sat (80 *phur* approximate): The person stood at the foot of the mound of paddy, he held a dao (*chem*), if he could make a chopping motion with it over peak and the amount of paddy was *chem sat*.
- (5) Hmeichhe chhip zawn (120 *phur* approximate): A women of average height stood at the foot of paddy mount, if the top of her head and the peak was leveled the mound of paddy was *hmeichhe chhip zawn*.
- (6) Chhip zawn (150 *phur* approximate): A man of average height stood at the foot of paddy mound, if the top of his head and the peak was leveled the mount of paddy was *chhip zawn*.
- (7) Kak zawn (200 - 250 *phur* approximate): A man of average height stood at the foot of paddy mound and raised his arm vertically. If the top of his arm and the peak was leveled the mount of paddy was *kak zawn*.
- (8) Tuha zawn (250 - 300 *phur* approximate): A man of average height stood at the foot of paddy mound and held his arm holding a hoe, if the top of his hoe and the peak was leveled the mount of paddy was *tuha zawn*.
- (9) Hreiha zawn (300 - 400 *phur* approximate): A man of average height stood at the foot of paddy mound and held up an axe, if the top of his axe and the peak was leveled the mount of paddy was *hreiha zawn*.
- (10) Silai zawn (500 - 600 *phur* approximate): A man of average height stood at the foot of paddy mound and held a gun, if the top of his gun and the peak was leveled the mount of paddy was *silai zawn*.
- (11) Mautlawn zawn (700 - 800 *phur* approximate). A man of average height stood at the foot of paddy mound and held bamboo pole, if the top of his pole and the peak was leveled the mount of paddy was *mautlawn zawn*.

For the Mizo farmers materials played an important role for the measurement of paddy grain as mention above. The materials that they used commonly in this measurement were: *chem* (dao), *mau tlawn* (bamboo pole),

tuthlawh (hoe), *hreipui* (axe), *silai* (gun) etc. It is clear that even for the measurement of grain the Mizo had extensively depended on the materials available to them.

After finishing all the works of threshing and measurement they kept the paddy in the granary (*buhzem*) which was made with slip of bamboo. The granary was usually constructed near the shelter hut (*thlam*). The farmer had to transport the paddy from the granary to home. This was another task to be done by the family. If the location of their cultivation site was far in, they had to make temporary stock point at interval places. The task of transporting paddy from field to home is called *buhchhek*. The farmer had to finish paddy transportation very quickly because if they did not finish soon paddy was not safe from animals and rodents. As there was no other important work to be done on their fields every family worked together for transporting paddy from field to home. Every house in Mizo village had a permanent granary which was called *buhzem*, it was in circular shape made with bamboo mats. After finishing all these activities, they can now do other personal and community works freely.

The general opinion in contemporary period shifting cultivation has been criticized as irrational and blamed for its negative impacts on the environment in the hill areas. But P.S Ramakrishna, professor of ecology at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi has a contradicting opinion; he said *“Very often shifting cultivation is talked about as a single system. But if you look at it carefully, there are wide variations depending upon ecological and social conditions, and the cultural background of a community.”*³⁸ The inter relationship of Mizo culture and shifting cultivation can be seen in the above discussion. As they spent most of their times in cultivation sites their community activities and their cultural practices were also greatly reflected in their system of agriculture. Shifting cultivation need not much technique and

³⁸ P.S Ramakrishna, “In defence of shifting agriculture” Accessed on September 1, 2018, <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/interviews/in-defence-of-shifting-agriculture-31654>

materials so that the Mizo who were moving from one place to another for short period of times could accommodate themselves for their own survival. This way, simple tools and easily available materials from their surroundings played crucial roles for the survival of migrating tribe like the Mizo.

3.3 Workforce of production process

Man-power as the workforce was greatly needed for the production process in Mizo agriculture system of shifting cultivation. The size of the work force more or less determined the volume of production. Therefore, the more the number of persons in the workforce, it was generally better off economically than a family with one or two working persons.³⁹ Considering the aspect of economy through agriculture, the size of Mizo family was usually large enough to keep the maximum workforce. The workforce was constituted by men, women and children but the quantum of work among the members of the workforce varied according to their working capacity.⁴⁰

There was a clear-cut division of labour in the pre-modern Mizo society. Men were considered as the bread winner of the families. All the hard responsibilities and the works that required physical strength had to be done by menfolk. It was also his duty to cut the *jhum*, obtain meat and other jungle products for meal items.⁴¹ As the responsibilities to support their families were largely depended on them, men were engaged in arduous works like hunting, war, raid etc. In their agriculture system the responsibilities of men was specifically to clearing and burning of forest, construction of shelter and collection of firewood and water. In the later period when British started extension of the then Lushai hills they opened a periodical market and in that too, men were the one who went to the nearest markets to buy their

³⁹ Zochungnunga, "Survey of the Pre-Colonial Mizo Economy," In *A modern History of Mizoram*, ed. Sangkima, (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2004), 55.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 55.

⁴¹ Ibid, 56.

necessities in exchange of rubber, ivory and agriculture products. In village blacksmith house men were exclusively expected to attend for sharpening their agriculture implements and other household materials. In pre-modern Mizo society women were never attended in blacksmith house except widow's families who had no male members in their families.

At the same time, women's role in household and production process were also very important in pre-modern Mizo society. At their home they had to engage in cooking, child care, weaving, collection of firewood, fetching water, threshing and winnowing of rice. It can be said that Mizo women were always hard working and busying themselves for their families. Women rise at dawn, while the men sleep on, and, coaxing up the fire, they start to husk rice, already dried overnight, it having been left on the shelf over the fire place.⁴² In the *jhum* cultivation, she did the greatest part of seeding, weeding and harvesting in which men had given only a helping hand.⁴³ In Mizo cultivation system seeding and harvesting were considered the responsibility of women. She did all the domestic works and made all the clothing for the family. The workforce done by the women in Mizo family can be considered as the backbone of the family. A.G McCall rightly remarks the work done by women like this: "After return from day's outing the women will have to set work to make up an evening meal, usually taken at about six o'clock. This may even involve the husking of more rice. Before sundown the important function of feeding the pigs will have to be performed, the fowls will have to be caught and put away into their baskets of neatly fashioned bamboo, and these will then be hung up or placed high up on appropriated shelves, far out of reach, it is hoped, of civet cats or other prowling vermin. When Lushai (Mizo) women were not actively employed on any of these vital and necessary duties there were

⁴² A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 172.

⁴³ Zochungnunga, "Survey of the Pre-Colonial Mizo Economy," In *A modern History of Mizoram*. ed. Sangkima, (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2004), 56.

still children of varying ages, together with the continual need to produce clothes for the entire family.”⁴⁴

Apart from adults, children also served important role in their family. They can be counted as supplementary economic forces in Mizo traditional society. Boys were not much engaged in domestic works but they could help their father in cutting *jhum* and procuring meat from the jungle by means of snares and traps. On the contrary girls were largely engaged in domestic works by helping their mothers in different ways like cooking, fetching water, cleaning house, babysitting. It can be said that both boys and girls both played important roles in the economic activities of their families.

Family was the smallest unit in traditional Mizo society. They were a very close-knit society and had many responsibilities to be done by groups as well. Some production processes were also mending and accomplished by group works. Raids, community hunting and community fishing were important group works included in their production process.

3.4 Sacrifices connected to cultivation and hunting

The Mizo agricultural work was also closely related with their religious belief system. As mentioned above while the slushed forest was awaited to dry up, they celebrated *Chapchar Kut* with enormous festive spirit and fanfare. Before this, the *Kawngpui siam* sacrifice was held to ensure the whole villagers for success in hunting. Around June, the *Fano daw*i ritual was performed to safeguard good crops for the farmers in the village. Let us discuss in more details about these sacrifices done for the wellbeing of community:

⁴⁴ A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 173.

(a) *Kawngpui Siam*

Kawngpui Siam was an annual sacrifice that was usually held around the month of March or April. It was conducted for the attainment of success in their hunting escapades and to gain victory over their enemies. Most of the Mizo writers hardly mentioned the name of *Pathian* (God) when they describe this sacrifice in their writings. Lianzika, who used to perform all the rituals for this sacrifice strongly bears that there was no other than *Pathian* whom Mizo (Lusei) expected and prayed to in order to be granted hunting success.⁴⁵

Kawngpui Siam sacrifice was conducted by *Sadawt* (village priest/shaman), it was performed outside the village area. Each and every villager was to attend this sacrifice. The entire village came out from the Chief's house and proceeded to the sacrificial place. As it was observed for the whole village, absentees were liable to be fined with *Salam*. Before the *Sadawt* conducted the sacrifices, he named all the animals except the tiger and would start the sacrifice with the chosen animal (a pig or a chicken). They erected two tree-wooden posts on each side of the road. After the sacrifice was over they arranged a small feast and cooked the meat of the sacrificial animals. They had to eat up and finish the entire meat on the spot. A circular ring of cane was placed in the middle of the road, inside of which the priest smeared the ashes. The *Sadawt* picked up some small stones and some peel of the bark of a tree then they went back to the village, straight to the Chief's house and would shout "*Kawng min hawn ru, kawng min hawn ru*" (Open the door, we have arrived) to which the elders who had gathered at the chief's house would respond "*Khual tha nge in nih khual chhia?*" (Are you allies or enemies?), then the people outside the door would respond and say, "*Khual tha kan ni e, milu*

⁴⁵ T. Vanlaltlani, "Experience of Pathian (High God) and other Deities in Mizo Religion and its influence on Mizo Christians," (M.Th diss., Senate of Serampore University, 1990), 35, (Dr.T.Vanlaltlani had an interviewed with Mr.Lianzika who was *Sadawt*)

salu kan rawn hawn e. Punte kan ni punna kan hawn, Parte kan ni parna kan hawn” (We are allies, not enemies. We have brought the heads of humans and animals; we have come to bring you prosperity). Then the door would be opened for them and the stones and peels that they brought were kept in the chief’s house. The next day, they would set out to see if there were any footprints on the ashes that they had left near the sacrificial place. If they found the foot marks of animals, they believed that they would be blessed.

(b) *Fano Dawi*

Fano Dawi was also a sacrifice offered for the whole village. It was performed for the fertility and prosperity in agriculture. Since the Mizo were slash and burn agriculturists, this sacrifice had occupied an obligatory role in the pre-colonial period. It was performed in the house of village chief. The *Sadawt* performed the sacrifices with a black fowl in the corner of the chief’s house; he chanted the rites: “*Dum hluam hluam rawh, sawmfang kan thlawh, Mima chi Fanga chi dum hluam hluam rawh*” (Bring prosperity in our fields for all our crops.)⁴⁶. In this sacrifice, they used only black hen/fowl because they wanted their rice fields to prosper abundantly like a hen produces many chicks. They cooked the sacrificial hen which was eaten by the chief, his family and his elders. On this day the whole village stopped all their works and even domestic household works were not allowed. They observed it as a non-working day and they believed that if anyone worked on this day, bad luck would befall them. Through this sacrifice they ask for blessings for their agricultural land, but from the present literatures available, writers never mentioned whom these sacrifices were offered to. T.Vanlaltlani pointed out that when she conducted an interview with Mr.Lianzika, an old priest/shaman who used to do all the rituals for this sacrifice, he strongly affirmed that there was no being other

⁴⁶ The writer own translation.

than *Pathian* whom Mizo expected to grant blessings and gave offerings to for their agricultural field.⁴⁷

Mizo also performed different sacrifices which had deep connection with their cultivation. The following sacrifices were to be performed with regard to cultivation:

(a) *Lo thiang hman*: To perform this sacrifice, the family first of all had to construct a *thlam* (*jhum* house). It was performed by the owner of the *jhum*, in order to have successful cultivation as well as peaceful labour. The *Puithiam* (priest) was called for this sacrifice and he had to slaughter two fowls. A small hole dug in the ground under the *jhum* house was lined with plantain leaves and filled with water, and then three small stones were dropped in. The *Puithiam* would cut the throats of the fowls, letting the blood fall into the hole.⁴⁸ The flesh was cooked inside the *thlam* and eaten up.

(b) *Vau tui*: When a person was ill and if the *Bawlp* said that it was caused by the stream opposite the *jhum* boundary or *thingzungkai* (the root of a tree crossing a stream). The water of the stream was carried with a bamboo cup and a sacrifice was offered inside the *thlam*.

(c) *Sihluh*: *Sih* was a small spring generally regarded as being haunted by evil-spirits. *Sihluh* sacrifice was performed when the *Bawlp* said that the cause for a person's sickness was because of *sih* that existed in their cultivated land. They slaughtered a fowl in the *sih* then the *Bawlp* chanted an incantation and the fowl was brought back to *thlam*.

⁴⁷ T. Vanlaltlani, "Experience of Pathian (High God) and other Deities in Mizo Religion and its influence on Mizo Christians," (M.Th diss., Senate of Serampore University, 1990), 36.

⁴⁸ J. Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 80.

(d) *Ram dang sih*: If the *sih* existed at a distant place or somewhere far away from their cultivated land, *faidam* (rice), *thirdam* (iron implement) and *patdam* (raw cotton) were dropped in the *sih*. Then they carried three small stones and a few drops of water from the *sih* and a sacrifice was performed inside the house by killing a fowl.

3.5 Hunting as a production process

In the study of human evolution hunting occupied an important place for the early men. The discovery of the bow and arrow heralded a new era in the progress of the productive forces of primitive people. As a result, people began to hunt animals and consequently meat became part of their diet. The development of hunting gave rise to primitive livestock breeding and the hunters began to tame animals. People improved their skills and started to develop useful work experience. Likewise, in the pre-modern Mizo economy hunting played an important role in the production process. Game provided a welcome change and everything from field rats to elephants were ever in demand, caught by trap or shot by guns, in the case of those lucky enough to possess these treasures, the envy of all good hill-men.⁴⁹ B.Lalthangliana mentioned about why Mizo were extensively involved in hunting like this, “To protect their villages and inherently just to procure or obtain food and meat, the Mizo used to hunt, shoot and kill animals. Those who were successful in hunting and killing big game received praise and approval, and could climb the social ladder.”⁵⁰

For the Mizo hunting was called *ramvah* or *ramchhuah*, which can be easily understood as going into the jungle to procure food and meat. There were two types of hunting which were *ramvah* and *ramchhuah*. *Ramvah* was going for hunting and return on the same day. On the other hand, *ramchhuah*

⁴⁹ A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 186.

⁵⁰ B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Divisions, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 164.

was going for hunting to a long distance and slept in the jungle for many days. *Ramvah* can be understood as a small game that can be done by individual or small groups while *ramchhuah* was a big game and it required community involvement.

The thick forest coverage areas were inhabited by wild animals and birds. Wild animals like elephants, tigers, rhinoceros, leopards, wild hogs, wild dogs, porcupines, himalyan black bears, civet cats, land tortoises and malay bears, bison, various species of deer, gaur and serow existed in the forests. Elephants were mostly found in the forests of Cachar and Chittagong Hill Tract borders. Jungle fowls, hornbill pheasants, doves and pigeons were found in the entire forest. Hunting and fishing in pre-colonial traditional Mizo society became more than a game, but was an important part of the economic activity.⁵¹ As meat was a supplementary for main food item they did hunting in various ways like shooting, trapping, and snaring. Among the wild animals the meat of bison, deer and elephants were among the favourite diets of pre-colonial Mizo.⁵²

In a later time when the British started annexation of the area where Mizo were resided in late eighteenth century, the purpose of hunting also changed in many aspects. The Mizo hunters wanted to obtain elephant tusks in their hunting. When they set out for hunting and found a flock of elephant in the forest, they often tried to kill the elephant with having good and long tusks. This was because of the fact that the Mizo highly valued the elephant tusks as it was their main source of income and also, they often used it as valuable gift to the government officers.⁵³ The British started opening weekly market in the border areas which were new for the Mizo who never had monetary exchange before. In these weekly markets they could easily

⁵¹ H. Vanlalhraia, "Mizo Economy and Ancillary Branches in Pre-Colonial Period," In *Mizo Narratives: Accounts from Mizoram*, ed. Malsawmdawngliana & Rohmingmawii (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2013), 76.

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 37.

exchange the elephant tusks and animal skins with other goods. The value of elephant tusk can be imagined from the fact that in 1879, as stated by Mackenzie in his book, 'The North East Frontier of India' some Lushai (Mizo) met the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar and presented him an elephant tusk and conveyed that their community was in dire distress for lack of food.⁵⁴ The Deputy Commissioner of Cachar gave them 35 mounds of paddy in return to elephant tusks. There was also another incident with regard to elephant tusk. In July, 1875, Suakpuilala, the great Sailo Chief and his sister Vanhnuaithangi presented a tusk to Deputy Commissioner of Cachar requesting him to provide rice as their crops were destroyed by the rodents.⁵⁵ In 1877 they send another elephant tusk to the same officer to exchange it with arms and ammunition. With these incidents the relation of production based on hunting was seen as an alteration from traditional economy to modern economy based on monetary system.

3.5.1 Hunting - techniques, strategies and tools

Mizo were good hunters, archers and skilled lancers, a *dao* and shield were constant companions of Mizo fighters.⁵⁶ Before the gun made its appearance in Mizoram the Mizo forefathers used to hunt and kill animals with bows and arrows and spears.⁵⁷

Guns and spears were also extensively used by the Mizo hunters for hunting wild animals and fowls. It was difficult to trace back when Mizo started using guns and manufactured gun powder. T.C Hodson mentioned that the Kukis who were the ethnic tribe of Mizo learnt how to make gunpowder from the Chinese merchant who visited the state during the reign

⁵⁴ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 37.

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Zochungnunga, "Survey of the Pre-Colonial Mizo Economy," In *A Modern History of Mizoram*, ed. Sangkima, (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2004), 57.

⁵⁷ B.Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Divisions, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 164.

of Khogenba around 1630 A.D.⁵⁸ T.H Lewin, on his visit to the land of the Shendus (Lakher/Mara) in 1865, found that the Shendus had already possess gun and gun powder.⁵⁹ He also comments about the carelessness and recklessness of the Lushai (Mizo) in the management of their guns and ammunitions. He put an observation like this, “It is only within the last 10 or 20 years that the Lushai (Mizo) have learnt the use of fire-arms; but muskets, mostly of English make and Tower-marked, are now common enough among them, and rendered what was formerly a horde of simple savages, a band of very dangerous marauders.”⁶⁰ J. Shakespear wrote that Mizo had possessed firearms for the last sixty or seventy years.⁶¹ He further said that they acquired these firearms from the tribes on the Burma border, in exchange of a strong male slave being equivalent to two guns. The other weapons in use were spears and *daos*.⁶²

Mizo hunters killed animals and birds by using different techniques and strategies. The skilled hunters had good knowledge of the landscape and topography of the forests. They could easily prey on animals and birds at their habitation areas. Pheasants and jungle fowls were caught by the long lines of rough fencing which run through the jungle, with small openings at intervals, in which snares were set. The pheasants and jungle fowls will always run along the fences till an opening is found and thus get snared. Porcupines were also killed by using a snare. A bamboo spear fastened to a sapling bent back like a spring alongside a run and so arranged that it will be released just as the animal was opposite the spear point. A platform of heavy logs supported in an inclined position by a strong cane passed over a cross piece held up by two uprights was used to trap tigers. A pig in a basket was placed in a hole under

⁵⁸ T.C Hodson, *The Naga Tribes of Manipur* (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1911), 8.

⁵⁹ T.H Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and The Dwellers There* In (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 159.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 147-148.

⁶¹ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 14.

⁶² Ibid

this platform and on the tiger pulling at the basket, the heavy platform falls and squashes him, while the pig, being in a hole, escapes.⁶³

J. Shakespear gave details about how the Mizo hunters caught deer, wild cat etc. in snares. He explained like *this* “A noose being arranged so that on the animal’s stepping in it a sapling to which the noose was attached, and which was held down in a bent position, was released, thus hoisting the animal up into the air. The method of releasing the bent sapling or causing the platform to fall was in all cases the same. Two uprights were driven into the ground and a bar securely tied across near their tops. The string or rope which supports the platform or keeps the sapling in a bent position had a wooden toggle tied to it. The string was drawn between the uprights and one end of the toggle was hitched under the bar and the other end drawn down between the uprights until it was perpendicular, in which position it was held by a moveable piece of wood being flipped across the uprights, just behind its lower end. In this position the pull of the string was on the upper cross bar, and a very slight touch will remove the lower one and set the toggle free; then up goes the string and down comes the platform or noose is tightened. The removal of the lower bar was achieved in several ways. The bait or one end of string stretched across the run may be tied to it, or it may be made to support one end of a tiny platform, on which the unwary quarry treads as it passes.”⁶⁴

Monkeys were found in the forest abundantly and were commonly hunted by the hunters. Monkey meat was considered as one of the food items consumed by the Mizo from wildlife. To catch a monkey, rice was placed on a small platform at the end of a partial severed bamboo standing at a right angle to the hillside. The monkey, attracted by the rice, springs on the platform and is triggered on to a number of bamboo spikes which have been stuck in the ground beneath it.⁶⁵ To kill tigers and bears the same device was also

⁶³ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 33.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 33.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 33.

employed with suitable alteration. Further, for the capture of elephants the hunter constructed a pitfall which was generally on narrow ridge between precipices.

Apart from trappings and snaring the Mizo hunters also engaged with shooting by using flintlocks. They were often disturbed by bears and tigers so that they killed these animals by shooting. In case a village was having trouble because a tiger by taking away livestock, a general hunt was a necessity for the entire villagers. J. Shakespear put a detailed account about the strategy of hunting like this, *“Guns were borrowed from the neighbours, and the tiger, having been tracked into a piece of jungle, was approached by a shouting mob, from which he flies. Every effort of his turn from the path selected for him was defeated by well posted crowds, who turn him back with shouts and beating of drums, till, wearied out, he comes to bay and falls a victim to a volley from all the guns present, but before he dies he has often severely mauled several of his tormentors.”*⁶⁶

3.5.2 Customary practices in hunting

When friends or small groups set out for hunting, there can be confusion among them regarding who will shoot first. This was taken seriously because the one who shot first will have special portion according to the customary practice. To be regarded as the one who shot first and hit the animal, the bullet or arrow had to draw blood. When there was confusion among the hunter about the first shooter they did verification by specifying that the weapon must necessarily draw blood. If the other person also shot the same animal but the bullet or arrow did not draw blood he could not avail the privilege for being the first shooter.

⁶⁶ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 33.

In that case, a man who was considered as the first shooter and killer was apportioned – the head, cut off above the neck, a piece of the entrails, a piece of all the organs of the abdomen, the part of the breast or throat above the sternum, the lower end of the spine, and the whole heart – the head was never split or cut in half.⁶⁷ If the animal was a bear, the killer was entitled to take the gall bladder. The Mizo considered the gall or bile of the bear and python valuable in their traditional medicine to cure various ailments.

If two friends hunted together, the other person who was not the killer was entitled to get a share of animal leg which was known as *sa bawp man*. A share of animal leg was a portion of animal shoulder to leg. There was another chance of *sa bawp man* if the wounded animal manages to escape and died somewhere, the first person who found the carcass was also entitled to get his portion as *sa bawp man*. In that way, two or three persons could receive as due a shoulder or hind leg of animal simple because they were in a hunting group.

B. Lalthangliana emphasized ‘*sa bawp man*’ in this way, “When two friends hunted together, the whole hind leg was pulled off and given as *sa bawp man*. When the wounded animal was chased by a group, a large portion of the flesh or meat of the thigh was cut off to be shared by all who participated in the chase. In that case, the *sa bawp man* consisted of a little bit of the flesh of the thigh, the thigh bone, the leg and hoof below the knee and the hide covering the whole leg.”⁶⁸

Washing and cleaning animal entrails was considered as another important responsibility among the hunters. Generally, washing and cleaning

⁶⁷ B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Divisions, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 165.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 165.

of animal entrails was left to old or elderly person among the hunters. The killer of animal will select and assign the washing work to the elders and they were entitled to share portion of the entrails. Mizo considered entrails as good meat and sharing to the elders was a kind of respect shown to the seniors.

As per the custom of the Mizo in hunting, if a man killed an animal, the left shoulder and the leg was given to the chief as a tribute which was called *sachhiah*. The reason why they gave meat tribute to chief was because all the lands and forests belong to the chief and the hunter had to give him tribute. If the hunter borrowed gun for killing an animal, the right shoulder of animal was given to the gun's owner as a due for the borrower. Blacksmith was also entitled to share portion of meat from the hunter when they killed an animal. Generally, a portion of animal rib was given to the blacksmith as a due which was called *thirdeng sa nak*. The blacksmith was entrusted to do all the forging metal works in the village free of costs so that he was entitled to have a share in hunted animals. Besides this the one who killed animal had to give a portion of animal ear and its adjacent parts to his best friend as a mark of lifelong friendship which was called *thian sa beng*.

Barking deer was the smallest animal to be given to chief and blacksmith as tax or tribute (*sachhiah*). Among the larger and dangerous animals which were hunted to be given as tax or tribute (*sachhiah*) to chief and blacksmith were bear, elephant, wild gayal, tiger, rhinoceros, Malayan cat-bear. Pheasant, jungle fowl, porcupine, leopard, golden cat, wolf were exempted from tax or tribute (*sachhiah*).

The other custom they followed while hunting was when they returned to the village, the one who got *sa bawp man* and those who washed the entrails were bound to contribute a pot of *zu* (local beer) and take it to the house of the man who shot the animal. They celebrated the successful hunting with singing and dancing at the house of the animal killer. Contribution of *zu* was compulsory in cases like if they did not have *zu* in their home they had to

buy from their friend and relative. The beautiful tradition of the Mizo with regards to hunting was if they were successful in hunting, the meat of the animal was never eaten exclusively by the hunting family. Their relatives and friends were also invited to eat together. The invitees will bring eggs and milk for the hunters.

There was another custom followed by the Mizo hunter which was called *sa chhawl chhin*. It was practiced by a hunter when he killed an animal at the jungle and could not carry it home by himself. He had to do *sa chhawl chhin*. In such a case he covered the carcass with tree branches and twigs. He also spread his turban or jacket upon it, and went home to invite the entire village to go out and divide the carcass among them.⁶⁹

3.5.3 Community hunting (ramchhuah)

General community hunting or big game hunting which was called *ramchhuah* and was held during peace and leisure time from cultivation works, mostly in autumn and post-harvest or before they cut their *jhum* or when they were waiting for the slashed *jhum* to dry. It was proposed by the hunters in the village with the permission from chief and his elders. As they were bounded by frequent inter-tribal warfare the chief did not allow all the hunters to set out for *ramchhuah*, he requested some hunters to remain in the village for emergency that might take place while the hunters were away. As explained before, *ramchhuah* required many days to spend in the long-distance jungle. The animals they intended to hunt were mostly bears, wild boars, stags, sambar deers, indian elk with antlers or many branched horns, elephants and wild gayal (bibo gaurus) such as the *sele* and *tumpang*.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Divisions, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 168.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 169.

Ramchhuah was planned with serious efforts and they were also very superstitious. They observed the following pre-cautionary measures before they set out to the jungle:

- (1) When they set out from the village, if a bird called *bawngpui* or *irliak sava* led the way and went before them chirping and twittering noisily and incessantly, they regarded it as a good omen of success. But if the bird flew towards the village or flew off in a curvature they regarded it as a bad omen and failure in the hunt.
- (2) In a dream if they see a funeral or someone being murdered, they regarded these as a good omen for successful hunting. If they saw or heard mourners lamenting, crying sobbing and wailing loudly in their dream they regarded that they will obviously do chanting of *hlado* when they returned home. The *hlado* was the hunter's chant or cry which was chanted directly when a wild animal was killed in a hunt, and also on the road home and prior to entering the village.⁷¹ But if they were happy and joyous in their dream, they believed that they will be sad or a bad omen will befall during their hunting.
- (3) When they hear the sound of a nocturnal bird crying at night like '*kui*', the hunters regarded it was crier of *saphung* which declared the hunting party will shoot giant animals. If they hear *saphung* cry at night they believed that they will succeed in hunting and will bring back the head of giant animals.
- (4) When they were moving across the dense forest and if a gibbon cast, threw, flung or pitched at them they regard it as a bad omen which would befall on them. If the *tlakawrh* bird swooped and flew at them and disturbed them, they believed that they were unlucky and would meet with accident and other misfortunes.

⁷¹ B.Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Divisions, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 170.

If all these above pre-cautions were not befalling on them they could move forward to the hunting ground without disturbances. When they reached the hunting ground they constructed temporary huts. Cooking, fetching water and firewood were the responsibilities of youngsters. In this hunting their main targets were big animals, but if they were not as successful as they expected they also killed smaller animals too. It was not an easy task to kill an elephant with their flintlocks. A volley was fired at a selected animal, and they would follow it for days, and would fire at it whenever an occasion occurs till it falls from sheer exhaustion.⁷²

As the hunting ground was in a far distance place from the village, they stayed many days in the jungle so that fresh meat could not be taken back and the meat of animals that they killed were dried and smoked through fire. This was mostly done by the youngsters and the elders will take rest. Though the big game hunting ground was a long distance far away from home, perseveringly and with great difficulty, they would bring back the heads of animals they killed.⁷³ But if they killed an elephants on their hunt the head was too heavy to carry home in such long distance so that they would only the tusks and the base of the tusks and the hallow of the upper lip immediately below the centre of the nose, in lieu of the head.⁷⁴ When they thought that the meats were enough for them they set out to the village. The meats were carried by bamboo baskets. The successful hunting party will do the following chanting (*hlado*) before they entered to the village:

*“Sai lian a, nang hmasa law,
Kawl a vuitum a zuitu e,
Pialral e, kai khamtu e,
Vawmphuai e, kal la, ka hmaah”*

⁷² J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 34.

⁷³ B.Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Divisions, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 173.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Literal translation may be like this:

*“The big elephant are you moving forward,
Follow till the horizontal end,
Enabler of heaven passage,
Be it a bear, move forward before me.”*

The chant was usually done by the *valupa* (youth leader), after the chant was over he will shoot a gun toward the sky. All the villagers who heard the chants will run towards the village entrance to welcome the hunting party. When they reached in their village, the meats were not eaten only by themselves they also distributed and shared to their neighbours and relative. Widows were also never ever omitted. In this community hunting chief was given his share of meat as tribute (*sachhiah*) as they do in normal hunting. The meat they procured from this hunting provided additional source of food and were preserved for the time when they would not able to search food due to cultivation works. As discussed before hunting was not only a game but also a chance to procure food and meat for the Mizo. They spent most of their times in cultivation work they had very less free time for searching supplementary foods especially meat so that hunting was a great opportunity for obtaining meat.

3.5.4 Hunting and its relations to belief system

In Mizo traditional belief system to attain paradise in life after death and to be honoured in the society they had to complete certain task of rituals in their live which was called *thangchhuah*. There were two kinds of *thangchhuah* which were *inlama thangchhuah* and *ramlama thangchhuah*. In order to attain *ramlama thangchhuah* a person must be a successful hunter.

He had to killed deer (*sakhi*), sambar deer (*sazuk*), beer (*savaum*), wild boar (*sanghal*) and wild galyak (*sele*). In addition to these if he killed elephant (*sai*), king cobra (*ruangan*), crested serpent eagle (*muvalalai*), flying lemur (*vahluk*) he will be more honoured.

Deer (*sakhi*) was considered as blessing for the hunter. When a hunter killed a deer for the first time they prepared ceremonial rice beer which was called *sakhi zu*. Only the person who already killed a deer can only drink this beer. A person who never killed a deer in his lifetime was not allowed to drink this beer. If they observe *ai* ceremony for a hunter who killed a deer they expected that he will be given more blessings in his hunt. Sometime they observed this ceremony by killing a pig.

When a hunter killed a bear (*savaum*) he must observe *ai* ceremony. They believe that bear will accompany the hunter's spirit when he died but bear could go straight and by observing *ai* ceremony he will able to control bear in life after death. When a hunter killed a bear, he had to do the following chant:

*“Kawla e, hawng lawi maw law, tlangah luai min tang a thliak e,
Pialral e, kai khamtu e, vawmphuai e, kai hlang ka duhin e.
Vawmphuai e, nang hmasa law, ni hnuai valpan a sul kan zui,
Sai lian e, kan kaih pen e, val tha keini zui ulaw.”*

It can be translated like this:

*“It proceeded to horizon end, doing for the fame,
The bear was the provider for step in to the paradise,
The bear move forward, the hunter will follow you,
We killed the giant elephant, the energetic hunter follow him.”*

When a hunter killed wild galyak (*sele*) they observed ‘*arhnuaichhiah*’ ceremony. Hen or rooster along with the head of animal were kept together at the front side of bed and were covered with main plate (*thlengpui*), the killer of animal was sitting above the plate and they chant “*thlengpui khup hnu a thal leh thei lo*” (the plate used for cover cannot reverse in opposite direction) and the ritual was followed by drinking beer.

Besides these animals when a person killed other animals which were required to kill for attainment of *thangchuah* they had to observe the *ai* ceremonies. After he completed all the necessities to be done for attainment of *thangchhuah* he was now called *Ramlama Thangchhuahpa*. *Thangchhuah* title was the most coveted position that everyone wanted to attain in Mizo traditional society. As mentioned in the previous chapter *Ramlama Thangchhuah* was not easy task to achieve for everyone. It needed lots of time for hunting and killing of the required animals. The hunter family must be rich so that they could be relieved the hunter from cultivation work and other domestic responsibilities.

In Mizo traditional belief system, they believed that when a person who accomplished the coveted position of *Ramlama thangchhuah* was died he will be accompanied by all the animals that he killed in his lifetime on his way to *pialral* (paradise). In life after death all the animals that he killed will go before him and he will follow them till he reaches *pialral*. If killed elephant he will ride on elephant and flying lemur will stretch out his wings to provide shade for the hunter. If he killed king cobra that king cobra will move across the thorns of sambar deer and crested serpent eagle will hover around in above. With that great company he had to cross the entrance of *pialral* where the dreaded *Pawla* was resided. The Mizo believed that *Pawla* will ask every soul to pass through his gate whether they achieved *thangchhuah* in their lifetime or not. Those who

achieve will easily pass through *Pawla's* gate but who did not achieve will bear the curse of *Pawla*.

Based on this traditional belief system the importance of hunting in Mizo traditional society can be assumed. In a wider context it can be presumed that the pre-modern Mizo society was deeply impressed by their traditional belief system. Everyone wanted to achieve *thangchhuah* in their lifetime but that was not possible for all. Only brave and successful hunter had a chance to attain such coveted position in the society. To achieve that position the hunter must possess and must know how to handle useful materials like gun, *dao*, spears, arrow etc. It can be said that materials played an important role for the achievement in hunting as well.

3.6 Community fishing

Apart from community hunting (*ramchhuah*) Mizo also had another community fishing which was called *sangha tlangvuak*. It was done during the months of March to May and September to October of the year, generally when the river water recedes.⁷⁵ The date for community fishing was fixed by Chief and his elders and the villagers collected *ruthei* or *rulei* from the jungle which will be used for poisoning fishes on the community fishing day. Then when all the important tools and requirements were ready they set out for community fishing from the village. Generally, community fishing was done by men for two or three days, so that anyone who participated in fishing had to bring rice from home. When they reached the river bank the first task they did was to construct temporary hut. They were divided into groups one group will construct the hut and the other group will search food items from jungle and river. Some group will also be built bamboo rafts (*mau pum*) which will be required for fishing in the river. After finishing all these works some elders of

⁷⁵ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 59.

the group verify the spot in the river to know where to start poisoning and also to erect fishing weirs. Then they had dinner at the huts and slept early because they had to wake up early in the next morning.

On the next day they started fishing at the river. Fishing was done by poisoning with *ruthei* or *rulei* which was wild vegetation that they already collected before. The next job before the start of poisoning was to erect the fish weirs called *khar* which was roughly constructed with a bamboo lattice work to prevent fish from escaping from the poisoned pool in the river water.⁷⁶ A shoal of fleeing fishes move about searching for a hole in their weir. Those half-poisoned fishes were caught by nets or basket. In this way, four or five weirs were made and erected in response to a number of persons participated in the community fishing. When the weir or *kharpin* was finished, they begin to stupefy the fish by using the different kinds of *ru* collected from various places.⁷⁷ They, therefore, catch the stupefying fish with different kinds of fishing nets.⁷⁸ The participants in the community fishing were getting equal share and bring home the fishes which were smoked and fresh with bamboo baskets and they went home with grand success.

In addition to *sangha tlangvuak* Mizo also had another kind of community fishing which was called *thla sangha tlangvuak*. It was organized only in dry season of the year. This time the whole community did not participate but about 20 or 30 persons participated. If there was not much water in the river during this season, women and children can participate in this method of catching fishes. Sometimes only two or three families participated in this fishing. The method for catching fish was almost same with *sangha tlangvuak* as *ru* being used to poison the fish.

⁷⁶ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 60.

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Ibid

There was also another involvement of community for fishing called *nghavurtingrauh*. It means a large number of fishes shoaling in a deep pool of the river during the cold season of the year.⁷⁹ If anyone in the village see a large number of fish shoaling ‘*nghavurting*’ in deep pool of the river they must inform the village chief and elders. If a person went for fishing without informing chief and elders it was considered as shameful and selfish. Knowing this, the village chief and elders fix the date and informed the date for catching fish through village crier (*tlangau*). In this, the participants were not only men but also women and children. Like they did in *sangha tlangvuak* they used *ru* for poisoning the fishes. The participants must have collected *ru* before the fishing day.

Every family in the village was set out for fishing and spent the night in the river bank. When they reach the place some of the young men built a number of temporary huts to spend the night in and to cook their food. Like they did in *sangha tlangvuak* they divide into groups in which women, children and some elders of the group take charge of putting the beddings in place and look after their respective huts. Cooking was mostly done by the young men, they also collected firewood and plantain leaves to be used for food plates.

To prevent fishes moving from one pool to another pool in the river, a temporary trap known as *khar* was erected in two places of the river. *Khar* makes it easier for the fishing party to catch the fish. The young men carefully watched over *khar* in the night. On the next morning the poisonous *ru* was prepared and dip in the river pool to stupefy fishes. Bamboo rafts (*maupum*) were used for easy moving in the river pool. They collected the stupefied fishes by using fishing nets and a long bamboo, keeping one kind of woven basket in the end which was called *nghasuah*. All the participants get equal share and

⁷⁹ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 60.

bring home the fishes with bamboo baskets. There was another practice in fishing which was called *nghadah*, meaning the dead fishes in the river left behind by the fishing party. To collect *nghadah*, anyone can participate even though they might not be in the fishing party, they were permitted to collect the left over. *Nghadah* was mostly collected by the villagers who could not participate in the community fishing due to some unavoidable circumstances.

Another important community fishing practiced by the Mizo was *ngawidawh*. It was usually held during rainy season at around August and September. Community fishing was regarded as the responsibility of men in the village but in *ngawidawh* widows were also permitted to participate. It is said that the timing of *ngawidawh* was their busy time for cultivation work but no family ever failed to participate. Village chief and elders fixed the date for community fishing for *ngawidawh*. The fishing party spent almost a week in the river. Before they set out from the village they kept every fishing tools ready and then proceeded to the river on the fixed day. When they reach the place they first built temporary huts which were called *ngawithlam* or *ngawibuk*. The first day was usually held for construction of huts and collection of firewood. They also collected bamboo and wood for making fishing weir.

On the next day they started the work for *ngawidawh*. First they made fishing weir across the river which was called *ngar*, the posts of *ngar* were made with the support of number of large bamboo and wood driven in an angle and crossing one another. After that a large number of pebbles '*lungreng*' was thrown in to support the *ngar* to be stabled while the water was flowing through the weir.⁸⁰ To prevent it from being washed away by water, a number of woods were planted across each other just above the *lungreng*.

⁸⁰ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 62.

After finishing their building of the weir, a doorway was made in which the actual fish trap called *ngawi* was arranged. For making a fish trap, a number of long bamboos were used, and these bamboos were tied together and supported at short intervals on the posts planted in the river bed.⁸¹ The walls of the traps were also made with bamboos which were built up from the floor and the traps were closed in with a roof.⁸² The sizes of the traps were around 6 feet wide and 5 feet high by 30 to 50 feet long. Generally, the mouths of the traps were smaller than the bottom ones. The middle part of the trap becomes low whilst the portion of the end becomes much higher than the other parts of the trap. The highest part of the trap was known as '*a kel in*' which was also covered by lattice work made with split bamboos plaited together and crossing one another at right angles called *tahrang*.⁸³ To hit or kill the fish in the trap a big log called *talhtum* was also put inside. Mizo were very cautious in keeping the log inside the trap, they never put *dao* (chem) in the trap which was considered as a sign of bad luck in fishing. Because of this belief they never kept *dao* inside the fishing trap. To catch some escaping fishes, they also made two or more holes in which bamboo traps were kept which were called *rawlruk*.

After finishing all the work for trapping fishes in the river they made arrangement among the villagers to look after the weir. The villagers had to visit the weir in the river on rotation basis. Even in the village one of the biggest houses was reserved for keeping the fishes caught in the weir. The house that they reserved for this was called *ngawipu*. Before they left home from the river they built temporary huts near the bank of the river, which was to be used by the care takers for rest and to prepare smoked fishes. In that hut they kept a pot called *belrem* which was used for measuring the quantity

⁸¹ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 62.

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ Ibid

of fishes caught in the trap. In addition to this they also kept bamboo basket called *ngawi arbaum* which will be used for storage of fishes.

The other important practice of the Mizo for fishing in a group was *ng hafuan ven*. It was to catch and watch fishes that were flocking together for spawning in a smaller river. The species of fish spawning was commonly *ng halim*. In this, fishing was not a community activity as individuals or a group did it by themselves. Individual or group had to stay down at a river for numerous days and nights to avail the exact time of fishes spawning. A bamboo basket called *bawng* was used for fish trap to catch the shoaling fishes. During the peak hour of fish spawning they put a small pipe across the *bawng* and within a short period fishes easily entered in the *bawng*.

From the above discussions we can clearly understand that the Mizo fishing was not only a game but also a source of food supplement and the involvement of community was required in many occasions. Fishing was done mostly with conventional casting net and occasionally killed with spears and *daos*. Bamboo and wood were very useful for making fishing traps and baskets. Even in fishing the available materials in their surroundings played a vital role.

In pre-modern Mizo traditional society, crabs catching is also done for procuring food supplements. There were three methods for crabs catching which were:- *Aiawt chiah*, *Chakai khawrh* and *Chakai chhit*.

Aiawt chiah means catching crabs through traps. *Aiawt* was a Mizo traditional trap for catching crabs. The trap consists of an open basket. The top of the basket was filled in with a funnel made of bamboo slats which were kept wide enough apart by the flow of the water to allow crabs to enter. Once the crabs entered in *aiawt* they cannot escape. The funnel was also made with bamboo which was detachable and removable when the trapped crabs were taken out.

Chakai khawrh means catching crabs with bare hands in the river. This was done by adults and children in the nearby river in the forest. They caught crabs by their bare hands without employing any other traps or weapons. As the method was easy to practice, children often went out to catch crabs in the river. Sometimes they pulled off medium stones in the river and under the stones they often caught crabs. In this method the crabs that they caught were mostly small. Crabs were abundant in small rivers too so that *chakai khawrh* was one of the most common practice for catching crabs.

Chakai chhit was another method for catching crabs. It was done in night time. If they want to catch crabs in *chakai chhit* they prepared fried rice which was to be used for prey. This method was mostly done by adult men. Before they set out for *chakai chhit* they already ate food at home as they might spend more time at the river in the night. They never like to set out with an empty stomach. The materials required in this method were torch, bamboo basket, *dao*. When they reach the river they first spread fried rice in the river where they believe the crabs were. Then they followed the river stream from top to the lower end. As it was night, crabs move out from their hiding places to eat fried rice and were easily caught under the torch light. The caught crabs were kept in a bamboo basket and successfully taken back to the village.

3.7 The role of forest in Mizo production process

For the Mizo in pre-modern period forests were the source of firewood, raw materials, building materials, food, medicines, fodder and other household needs. Apart from cultivation and hunting Mizo gathered their food supplements from the forest. When they were free from agriculture works they often went out to the jungle in search of food items. Many edible plants and leaves were there in the forest and the Mizo collected it as per their

conveniences. The common food items gathered by the Mizo from forest were the following:

(1) Tum zik, (2) Meibu zik, (3) Thangtung zik, (4) Hroi chi tin zik, (5) Aidu sentil, (6) Aidu ria, (7) Zawngtah, (8) Thingthupui, (9) Khanghu, (10) Kawhtebel, (11) Chingit, (12) Tumbu, (13) Ankhapui, (14) Sihneh, (15) Anpangthuam, (16) Hulhu zik, (17) Mautuai, (18) Thingtuai, (19) Rawtuai, (20) Naltuai, (21) Saisu, (22) Pelh, (23) Saptheihnah, (24) Baibing, (25) Chimchawk, (26) Kawksadawn, (27) Anbawng, (28) Chakawk, (29) Nauawimu, (30) Archangkawm etc.

In addition to these, they also collected fruits and roots from the jungle. The common fruits gathered by the Mizo from the forests were: (1) Theichhungsen, (2) Theipalingkawh, (3) Theikelek, (4) Theikelki, (5) Theiria, (6) Pangkai, (7) Vawmva, (8) Theitat, (9) Lenhmui, (10) Chengkek, (11) Sunhlu, (12) Hruipui, (13) Sazutheipui, (14) Tuitit, (15) Ramser, (16) Theihai, (17) Tlingrah, (18) Haidai, (19) Thingsemim, (20) Vuakdup, (21) Theiarlung, etc.

Mushrooms were also gathered from the jungle as food supplements which were: (1) Pasawntlung, (2) Maupa, (3) Pasi, (4) Pachang, (5) Bawngkepka, (6) Paardang, (7) Changelpa, (8) Paseek, (9) Pachanghang, (10) Pauithin, (11) Puvanabeng, (12) Palengvar, (13) Papal, (14) Pahnakhkar, (15) Palengsen etc.

Plants, herbs and soft leaves were also gathered from the forest by the Mizo as food supplements and medicines. Jungle rubber trees were grown naturally in large number in some parts of forests in pre-colonial Mizoram.⁸⁴ Crude Indian rubber was the chief commercial commodity among the Mizo during the early period of colonial expansion in the then Lushai Hills (Mizoram). With bazaars established in the neighbourhood, rubber became the lucrative commercial commodity for the Mizo, as there was a good demand

⁸⁴ H. Vanlalhraia, "Mizo Economy and Ancillary Branches in Pre-Colonial Period," In *Mizo Narratives: Accounts from Mizoram*, ed. Malsawmdawngliana & Rohmingmawii (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2013), 75.

from the traders.⁸⁵ During the famine of 1881-1882, the Mizo exported 1000 mounds of rubber and its value was about Rs.40,000/-⁸⁶ Timber and bamboo were also used for commercial commodities. From these commodities the Mizo derived a fair amount of income.⁸⁷ Mizo also extensively used canes for making household goods.

From this chapter and the lengthy discussion, we understand that there was a considerable variety of implements, tools and other materials that influenced the practices that were production oriented and also ceremonial and ritual which forms and were sustained in the Mizo society. It was the battle for surplus and the redistribution of surplus and its channelization in society that were of concern to the chiefs and many mechanisms were adopted. But, before this, the act of production itself had a nuanced basis and was thereby planned meticulously as in the case of hunting where we see the welding of both the production oriented and the ceremonial aspects. The rise in surplus after the 17th century and the refining of the material objects for harvesting and sowing and also the introduction of new crops like tobacco also point to greater material and cultural interaction that had a considerable impact on Mizo society. It is the adoption of these practices and their dissemination after domestication that laid the basis for a society to achieve a level of stability.

⁸⁵ Zochungnunga, "Survey of the Pre-Colonial Mizo Economy," In *A modern History of Mizoram*, ed. Sangkima, (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2004), 60.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 62.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER IV
CLASSIFICATION OF MIZO MATERIAL CULTURE

4.1 Explanation of title

The present chapter attempts to investigate the existence of man-made or modified objects that were used and produced by the Mizo and their knowledge of technology during the pre-modern period. In this study 'material cultures' will be defined as a segment of human social environment which has been purposely shaped by the people according to their culturally directive plans. It is also an attempt to highlight material cultures as a mode/method of cultural investigation employing physical objects as its primary sources for writing Mizo history.

Traditionally, history writings are mainly based on texts sources but only texts sources could not provide accuracy by it alone. According to V. Gordon Childe, "WRITTEN history contains a very patchy and incomplete record of what mankind has accomplished in parts of the world during the last five thousand years."¹ As the written sources also had incomplete records in many historical writings, this study would like to add material sources as supplementary to conventional style of history writings.

Human being in this world has survived with tools and equipment since the Paleolithic period till the present day. Gordon Childe rightly remarks about the existence and progress of human beings according to their improvement of equipment, he said, "Our species, man in the widest sense, has succeeded in surviving and multiplying chiefly by improving his equipment for living... Even the simplest tool made out of a broken bough or a chipped stone is the fruit of long experience - of trials and errors, impressions noticed, remembered, and compared. The skill to make it has been acquired by observation, by recollection and by experiment."²

¹ V. Gordon Childe, *What Happened in History: The Classic Study Which Opened Up New Perspectives in History*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1964), 3.

² Ibid, 4.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the “Mizo” comprising the ethnic groups such as the Lusei, Paite, Ralte, Hmar, Pawih, etc. formed this subject and of this study under important reasons. The history of the Mizo is written using modern sources that comprise colonial administrator records (archival records) and missionary accounts. These early British rulers, writers and the Christian missionaries produced their writings with predominant ideas of Eurocentric or pre-determined western approach and concentrated more on administrative notes, census reports and later on reports of evangelistic missions, etc. By seeing their accounts it can be presumed that the histories that they produced also were very limited and avoided many topics as it was beyond the scope. Thus, the study of material cultures and their technological knowledge would provide new perspectives and reliable sources in the writings of the Mizo history and their cultural life.

It is said that material culture precedes verbal cultures by several thousand years ago. Like any other tribes in the world, the Mizo in pre-modern period can be recognized as ‘illiterate’ or ‘oral based society’. The Mizo were also known to have passed through different stages of socio-cultural life for thousand years back and their material possessions and productions also may be varying from place to place throughout their history. It is by means of technology they obtained their foods, shelter, implements etc. and it is quite certain that they would not have maintained their livelihood without possessing materials. So that for the reconstruction of the Mizo history writings and understanding of their cultural life, the study of material cultures and technological knowledge will play a vital role in it. Further, it can be seen as material evidences of the different ethnic tribe of Mizo shared similar cultural experiences while simultaneously developing their local and regional differences during their migration periods. In order to survive and maintain their livelihood, different materials were possessed and employed by the Mizo.

But owing to difference in habitation and dialects, the names of such implements and materials were different among the different groups.³

4.2 Classification of Material Culture

The material culture of the Mizo can be broadly classified in the followings:

- (1) Settlement pattern and house types
- (2) Household materials
- (3) Agriculture implements
- (4) Snares, traps and other hunting materials
- (5) Weapons and ammunitions
- (6) Musical instruments
- (7) Pottery
- (8) Religious and ceremonial objects
- (9) Games and Sport implements
- (10) Weaving, dress and Clothing materials

4.2.1. Settlement pattern and house types

The pre-modern Mizo settlement pattern was largely depended on moving from one place to another in search of suitable land for their subsistence. As their main occupation was based on slash and burnt cultivation method, they needed fertile lands for cultivation and they moved from their old to places to new places where there were more fertile and dense forests. B.Lalthangliana said, “They always shifted from one place to another in search of better environment, habitation, vegetation and a good source of water or may be

³ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 2000), xiii.

because they were always at war with another or may be due to some superstitious beliefs.⁴ C.Lianthanga stressed that they hardly stayed in the same place more than ten years.⁵ Moreover, A.G McCall also asserted that villages would move regularly to new pastures, perhaps every fourth year or so.⁶ Moving from one place to new place was called '*ram zuan*' which was important for counting years since in those days they had no calendars. So that when they want to mention about a period or year they used to say that "such time of *ram zuan*, a period of such *ram zuan*."⁷ James Dokhuma pointed out the reasons of their migration from one place to another in the following ways⁸:-

- (a) They lived under inter-tribal warfare period,
- (b) They needed suitable lands for cultivation,
- (c) The place might not be healthy for living,
- (d) There might be some pressures due to superstitious beliefs,
- (e) The place had shortage of food due to famine.

Pre-Modern Mizo community followed two practices when they moved from one place to new place. The first practice was moving all the villagers without constructing temporary huts (*bawk khawh*) before. The other practice was constructing temporary huts before the whole villagers were shifted which was called *bawk khawh lawk*. During this time some villagers were moving ahead and they were joined by the others later. If they moved to a new place without constructing temporary huts beforehand, the reason was mostly due to disturbances or attacks by the other tribes or nearby villagers.

⁴ B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 54.

⁵ C. Lianthanga, *Hmanlai Mizo Nun* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 1999), 95.

⁶ A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 166.

⁷ James Dokhuma, *Hmanlai Mizo Kalphung* (Aizawl: J.D Press Publication, 1992), 4.

⁸ Ibid, 5.

They were very inquisitive when they were planning to shift their village to a new place. The village chief and his elders first search a new place by bringing rooster and slept in that new place. At the night time if the rooster was crowing at the exact timing they could confirm that the new place will be healthy. But if the rooster was not crowing at night time they considered that the new place was not healthy and not suitable for living. The other criterion for searching a new place was the availability of water. If the new place has good water sources they considered that it will be a good place for living which was called *ram thiang*. Therefore, these criteria hold importance for the search of new places. Before they moved back to their village, they reserved places for the constructing chief's house, *Zawlbuk* (bachelor dormitory) and blacksmith's house then they left the place wholeheartedly.

Generally, their living place was situated at the top of the hill. There can be many reasons why they preferred to live in a hill top, J. Shakespeare also commented about the existence of villages on the top of ridges. He assumed that hillsides were steep and not significantly easy to find settlement area elsewhere due to climatic condition in the hills but the main reason can be considered as defensive purpose.⁹ As discussed earlier, the pre-modern Mizo were often bounded by threats of invasion or an attack from the other tribes or villagers, hence living in hill top would provide better strategic position from these threats.

Another interesting thing was that, the pre-modern Mizo never carried over the hearths of the old village to the new village. Indeed, hearths of the old village would be extinguished on hearing that the hearths in the new village had been lighted up.¹⁰ The old hearths would be damped with water to make

⁹ J. Shakespeare, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 19.

¹⁰ A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 166.

certain that none of the disabilities of the abandoned site should venture further afield.¹¹

When they moved to a new place the first thing they had to do as a whole was construction of chief house and *Zawlbuk* (bachelor's dormitory). The whole villagers constructed voluntarily the chief house and *Zawlbuk* then when they completed these two houses they could start construction of their own house respectively. The Chief's house was located at the center of the village constructed opposite to the *Zawlbuk*. Each village was properly fenced by one or more lines made of timber with several rows of bamboo barbs outside them. The wall constructed around the village had sharp pointed bamboos placed on the top known as *dai sakuh* to prevent the enemies from climbing over the wall and at the entrance to the village was a duty post where the village youths take turns to be on guard against any intruders.¹² At each gateway a block house was built and the others were built at suitable places on the roads along which enemies were expected to come, and were occupied whenever an attack was apprehended. At the entrance of the village by the roadside several platforms of logs were placed with posts round them adorned with animal skulls, gourds, rags and old pots. The houses were designed to be constructed facing each other, build with a sense of regularity, usually arranged in two lines with a road which serves as a village street in between the houses.¹³ J. Shakespear mentioned about the outline of the Mizo village as given below:

“The gate itself was composed either of two large slabs of timber, or of a number of stout saplings suspended from a cross bar by holes cut through their upper ends; during the days these were drawn aside, but at night they hung perpendicularly in the gateways and were firmly secured between two cross bars. Passing through the gate, one finds oneself in a sort of irregular streets leading up to the highest point of

¹¹ A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 166.

¹² B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 55.

¹³ A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 166.

*the village, where there is generally an open space, from which other streets branch off. On one side of this space will the chief's house, with the Zawlbuk, or bachelor's hall, opposite it. The villages of powerful chiefs are beautifully laid out in regular streets which follow natural features of the ground. If the village is large one and contains a mixed population, it is divided into several quarters, or 'veng' which are generally inhabited by people of the same clan, and each will have its Zawlbuk, a large building constructed by the united labour of the men of the 'veng' or the village."*¹⁴

Chief's house: As mentioned above the chief's house was generally located and constructed with timber and bamboo and thatches at the Centre of the village. It was a big house and the length was around 50 feet. The reason for the chief's house being constructed in a large size was on behalf of the chief's family was not living exclusively with his family members but their slaves or servants were also resided with them. The chief's house had three partition walls. The first partition was called *vanlung* which was occupied by servants or slaves. The next partition was called *sumhmun*, which was used for threshing rice, storing firewood, keeping poultry and other domesticated animals. The chief's family resided in the inner partition with a large room with several sleeping platforms. In the inner chamber there were two or more hearths. Beyond this was the usual closet, beyond which a spacious verandah was built partially closed in, which was specifically reserved for the chief's family. This verandah was called *bahzar* or *dawvan*. This was forbidden to all except chief and wealthy persons who have given certain feasts like *khuangchawi*. At the front side there was a raised platform which was called *leikapui*. Only the chief and the one who completed the series of *thangchhuah* ceremony could open window in their houses. The other interior designs were almost similar to the commoner's house which will be discussed the details in the later columns.

¹⁴ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 20.

There was a wall around the chief's house to shelter the old, the weak, the children and the properties in case of any attack.¹⁵

Zawlbuk: In simple terms *Zawlbuk* can be explained as bachelor's dormitory in a village. *Zawlbuk* was the largest house in the village and stand prominently near the Centre, not far from the chief's house.¹⁶ *Zawlbuk* was constructed to accommodate all the young men in the village.¹⁷ Each clan in a village had separate *Zawlbuk*. All the youths in a village who were not married were to sleep at *Zawlbuk* at night. The design of *Zawlbuk* was square in shape with semi-circle shape thatched roof. Timber and bamboos are used for construction of the *Zawlbuk*, tied together with cane and thatched with either cane leaves or grass – if the former, then the ridge of the roof was straight and gable-ended; if the latter, it was far higher in the Centre, whence it curves down somewhat abruptly to each gable.¹⁸

Zawlbuk never had any windows and the walls were made with bamboo splits. The front or outer wall was known as *awkpakawngka*, made with bamboo attached from the upper beam with an open space for entry. At about five feet inside the outer wall, a big peeled log was laid to cover the breath of the building over about a three feet wall, this was called *bawhbel*.¹⁹ There was a space between the outer wall and *bawhbel* which was used for keeping firewood called *thingnawi bawm*. There was raised platform around one foot high covering the entire breath of the house at the far end of the *Zawlbuk* was used as sleeping place, and it was known as *bahzar* or *dawvan*.²⁰ A fireplace was set up at the centre of the house and bamboo mat was hung above it to prevent fire sparks from the fireplace which was called *meisi dal*. The main

¹⁵ B. Lalthanliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 55.

¹⁶ Samuel V.L Thlanga, "Zawlbuk," in *Mizo Narratives: Accounts from Mizoram*, ed. Malsawmdawngliana and Rohmingmawii (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2014), 59.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 21

¹⁹ Samuel V.L Thlanga, "Zawlbuk," in *Mizo Narratives: Accounts from Mizoram*, ed. Malsawmdawngliana and Rohmingmawii (Guwahati: Scientific Book Centre, 2014), 58.

²⁰ Ibid.

floor was called *buanzawl*, which was used for wrestling. At the end of the back there was an open space between the inner and outer wall which was called *awkpaka*, mostly used for peeing. There was another raised bamboo platform at the both side walls which was used for keeping bedclothes which was called *puanthuah dahna*.

There was a roof rafter adjacent to the outer wall, to cover this they kept long thatched above which was called *di so*. Usually the house posts were made with durable timbers. Apart from the main posts there were numerous supporting posts which were called *thawmmawl*.

Zawlbuk holds a significant position in the pre-modern Mizo society. It was a sleeping place for the young men in the village, they were ever ready to call for unexpected emergencies or urgent work in the village, and whether be it an attack from the enemies or wild animals they had to serve their services for the safety of village. Moreover, it was the centre of village life and institution, they shared folksongs and folktales together and it were convenient for the younger generation for deliberating folk practices. According to J. Shakespear, “The *Zawlbuk* was the particular property of the unmarried men of the village, who gather there in the evening to sing songs, tells stories, and create jokes till it was time to visit their sweethearts, after which they return there for the rest of the night. Travellers not having any friends in the village use the *Zawlbuk* as a rest house.”²¹

The function of *Zawlbuk* cannot be overstressed; it was a training place for bravery and physical strength. The young boys learnt wrestling and other games in *Zawlbuk* under the guidance of senior inmates. N.E Parry rightly put a remark about the advantages of having *Zawlbuk* in the village, he said, “In villages where there were *Zawlbuk*, the people were better disciplined, more industrious and keener hunters in villages where there were none.”²² The

²¹ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 21.

²² N.E Parry, *A Monograph on Lushai Customs and Ceremonies* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 2009), 9.

responsibility of collecting sufficient supply of firewood for the *Zawlbuk* falls in the hands of the boys until they reach puberty and are to leave their parents and homes and join the men in the *Zawlbuk*.²³ According to *Lushai* (Mizo) custom the most industrious man and the best hunter among the young men in the *Zawlbuk* get a special cup of *Zu* as rewards. These rewards were known as the *Taima zun* and the *Huai Zu no* respectively.²⁴

Zawlbuk was a well-developed institution serving the needs of Mizo society, shaping personality and life style of the youth through calculating discipline as a mode of conduct.²⁵ It was also served as an information centre for the village. Young as well as old gathered at the *Zawlbuk* every evening to share the events of the day, about things seen and heard, activities that merited either appreciation or criticism, and any other matters of interests.²⁶ When the travelers brought information about the village affairs from other villages, they were usually boarded at *Zawlbuk* and the news was then spread to the entire village.

Common man's house: After the construction of chief's house and *Zawlbuk* was over, the village elders' houses were constructed near the chief's house. The next in line to choose their sites were the surveyors and it was only after them that the ordinary villagers select portions to build their houses.²⁷ The size of Mizo house was commonly constructed in rectangular plinth around 25 feet in length, 15 feet in breadth and the front verandah called *sumhmun* was built around 10 feet in lengths. The pre-modern Mizo had three varieties of houses which were:

(a) *Sel in*: This was a temporary house; its roof was constructed with split bamboos.

²³ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 21.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture* (Aizawl: Mizo Theological Association, 1997), 63.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ B. Lalhangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 55.

(b) *Rap in*: This was also a temporary shelter which was used for living before constructing the main house.

(c) *In/Inpui*: This was the main house constructed for the living of family.

The commoner's house comprises of three parts, the front porch-which is accessed by platform of logs, the main room and a small closet partitioned at the far end, beyond which there will occasionally be a small bamboo platform.²⁸ The front porch was called *sumhmun*, which is a place for threshing paddy and *sum* - a paddy threshing mortar made with was placed there. On the opposite side there was a space for stocking firewood. The wall of front porch was made with bamboo mat. If the householder was a hunter he displayed animal skulls and bird he had slain, among them hang baskets in which fowls lay, and even sit on their eggs. Under the attics there was a small chamber for poultry which was called *archhiar*. The fowls spend the night in that chamber, accessible by climbing up an inclined stick from the porch. Hens with broods were kept in baskets with sliding doors at night called *arbawm*.²⁹ As the floor of the house was made some few feet above the ground level, a rough timber was placed across the front porch to serve as an approach from the ground which was called *kaiten*. It was joined with a platform made with logs which was called *luhka* or *sawngka*. It was the main entry point in the house from outside.

The house can be entered through a small door about 2.5 feet by 4, with a very high sill, a door was called *kawngka* or *kawngkhar*. It was made with a panel of split bamboo work attached to a long bamboo which slides back and forth, resting in the groove between two other bamboos lashed on the top of the sill, in which there was usually a small opening, with a swinging door, for use of the dogs and fowls when the big door was closed.³⁰ Inside the house, close to the door, there was a place at the corner for keeping hallows bamboo tubes for

²⁸ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 23.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

storing water which was called *tuium hmun*. Opposite to this, there was a large circular bamboo granary called *buhzem* which was used for storing paddy. Next to sleeping platform, known as *khum ai*, is placed and close by was the hearth of earth (*tapchhak*), in the centre of which three stones (*lungthu*) or pieces of iron were fixed, on which the cooking pot (*bel*) rests.³¹ Above the hearth there were two bamboo shelves one above the other called *rapchung*. The lower shelf was used for drying paddy and firewood and the above shelf was called *rappui chungsang*, which was used for stocking splatted bamboo, canes and other domestic needs. These selves also serve to keep the flames from the fire to the roof. Next to the hearth there was another sleeping place, called *khumpui*, which was reserved for the parents, while the young children and unmarried girls were slept at *khum ai*. On the opposite of *khumpui* side, a bamboo shelf was placed up above which was called *thehlan*. It was used for keeping barley and other articles.

Beyond *khumpui* there was a small recess which was used for lumber room. The beds and hearth were placed on the side of the house adjacent to the hillside, usually not extended quite to the centre. The rest of the floor being vacant, the posts which support the ridge were placed slanting thus passing through the floor in line with the edge of hearth.³² Along the wall opposite to the hearth were lashed two or more bamboos, forming convenient shelves, while a platform of the same useful plant was assembled from one cross beam to another.³³ Forked sticks were tied to the wall or to the supports form hooks, and the large bamboo have openings cut in them which convert each joint into a tiny cupboard, wherever used. Opposite to the front door at the far end of the house, a similar door was opened on to a small platform, which was used for going to the garden or street. Next to the front porch there was a raised bamboo platform which was called *leikapui*, on which the women folk sit and weave and children play. They are also used for drying their household

³¹ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 23.

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

belongings. There was no provision of toilet in the pre-modern Mizo house, hence they relieve themselves to the outskirts or immediate surroundings of a village.

The materials used for the construction of house were mostly timber for posts and cross beams, bamboos for the framework of the floor, walls and roof, split bamboos for the floor and walls, and if cane leaves were used to cover the thatch, they are tied together with cane. The posts were made with hard wood and durable ones. Cane leaves and thatching grass were commonly used for house roof.

Blacksmith's workshop: In the pre-modern Mizo society, a blacksmith occupied an important position. A blacksmith was known as *thirdeng* and his workshop was called *pum*. It was commonly built near the chief's house in the village. It was constructed by the whole villagers as a community work. As mentioned in the previous chapters blacksmith was given community annual tribute from paddy and meats. As he was the forger and producer of tools and weapons in the village, he had no time for cultivation throughout the year so that every family had to give their dues to him at the time of harvest and hunting.

The blacksmith's workshop was constructed with timber and bamboo with thatched roof. The forge was placed in the middle of the broadest street to lessen the risk of fire; it was only a rough shed with a log platform in front.³⁴ The bellows consist of two bellow wooden cylinders in which pistons fringed with feathers were operated up and down.³⁵ The lower ends of the cylinders were buried in the ground, side by side, and from them two bamboo tubes converge, meeting just behind a stone through which there was a hole, the charcoal fire was placed in front of this stone, and when the pistons were

³⁴ J. Shakespear, *The Lushai Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 28.

³⁵ Ibid

worked rapidly a very strong draught was obtained.³⁶ The main work done by the village blacksmith was made and repair of agricultural implements. The other interest thing about the usage of blacksmith workshop was it was used for keeping the captives they bought from war. It was said that if any of the captives who were let them stayed in the blacksmith's house were usually to be killed on the other day.³⁷

4.2.2 Household implements

The materials used and made in the pre-modern Mizo society were mostly done by themselves. The common household implements used by the Mizo family were:

Thlengpui: The dining plate was called *thlengpui* or *chawei thleng*. The whole family dined together in this common plate. The dining plate was made from large wood and made in spherical shape. The size varied in accordance with the size of the family. Some families made the dining plate with stands but some family made without having legs. The plate was kept on the floor and the families sit together around the plate for dining. Rice was placed at the fore side and curries were kept at the centre. It was said that *thlanvawng* tree (*gmelina arborea*) was most preferred for making the dining plate.

Fian: The scoop or spoon was called *fian*. The pre-modern Mizo had two kinds of spoons - the smaller one was called *fiant*, the bigger one was called *fianpui*. Spoons were made from bamboo, they preferred *phulrua* (*Dendrocalamus hamiltonii*) species of bamboo for making spoon. It was used for stirring curry in a pot or bowl and for drinking soup.

Buhtlei: Rice spoon was called *buhtlei*. As rice was their main staple food they had separate spoon to ladle out rice from the cooking pot. Rice spoon were made from bamboo and wood. They preferred *batling* wood and *phulrua*

³⁶ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 28.

³⁷ C. Lalbiaknema, *Mizote Khawsak Dan* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 2000), 9.

(*Dendrocalamus hamiltonii*) species of bamboo for making rice spoon. The Mizo rice spoon commonly has a hooked handle which was kept at the shelves above the hearth.

Khelawk: *Khelawk* was a small bamboo ladle or spoon with a hooked handle. It was used to ladle out *saum* (fermented pork fat) from the gourd (*saumbur*). It was also used for stirring cooking like vegetables and chutney. *Khelawk* was kept near the hearth.

Saumbur: *Saumbur* was a gourd in which a portion of pig fat was kept for fermentation. The fermented pork fat was called *saum* which was an important ingredient in Mizo food preparation. *Saumbur* was kept near the fireplace for longer preservation. In the pre-modern Mizo society, every house had *saumbur*. *Saumbur* served as an important utensil for the preservation of food ingredient.

Belval: *Belval* was a stand for pot. It was made of cane in the form of a small hoop. As the Mizo pots were made with having rounded bulge bottom *belval* was required for its stand.

Chingal thlawrbur: *Chingal thlawrbur* was a leaching funnel for making lye (*chingal*). *Chingal* (lye) was an important ingredient for Mizo food preparation. They placed hot ashes from the hearth to *chingal thlawrbur*. Then water is poured in and then the water runs down to the sharp bottom of the funnel. The leach water (*chingal*) was stored for food preparation.

Tuium: The pre-modern Mizo had a bamboo tube for carrying water or for storing water in the house which was called *tuium*. They have a separate space for keeping this bamboo tube in the house which was called *tuium hmun*. Generally the length of *tuium* was around 3-4 feet.

Fenthlir: *Fenthlir* was the implement used for drawing water from the fountain or river. It was a ladle or dipper made from a gourd. The gourd was

cut at the vertical side to make a hole and the remaining part was used for its handle.

Chhemthei: *Chhemthei* was a hollow bamboo tube for blowing a fire, it was generally kept at the hearth. The length of *chhemthei* was usually 1-2 feet long. Cooking was done with wood and bamboo fires *chhemthei* was an important tool in pre-modern Mizo kitchen.

Chaicheh and Sunkual: *Chaicheh* and *suankual* were a kind of bamboo pincers or tongs. It was mostly used for taking pots off the fire and holding firewood in fireplace.

Thuthleng: Low wooden stool was known as *thuthleng*. Stool was made from wood with having four stands which was used for seat at home. There was another kind of stool called *herhsawp*. It was made in a circular shape with cane and animal skin. The bamboo sticks were tightened at the interval place in between the two circular canes. One of the sides was covered with animal skin and was used for seat at home.

Kho/Fawng: Kho/fawng was a thin strip of bamboo basket. It was used for measuring rice and some clean rice for cooking. It was also used for keeping vegetables and other household articles. It was made in square and the size was around 1-2 feet.

Faikhiat: It was a small bamboo basket used especially for taking out or measuring cleaned rice for cooking. It was also used for holding the ball of thread when preparing the warp for weaving. Its usage was almost similar with *kho* or *fawng*.

Thlangra: *Thlangra* was a bamboo tray for sifting and winnowing grain. The sifting process was proficiently done by shaking the tray up and down and from side to side in such a manner as to separate the husks from the rice as

well as broken pieces of grain.³⁸ The up and down motion was also used to winnow, unhusk and separate the full grain from the chaff.³⁹ In pre-modern Mizo society winnowing of grain was considered as the responsibility of woman. Every woman had to know how to handle *thlangra* when they were doing winnowing grain.

Chhihri: *Chhihri* was a bamboo sieve used for dry up some small articles at house. It was made with split bamboo in semi-circular or square shape. There were a number of small holes in between. It was usually kept above the fireplace for drying food items and seeds.

Thul: *Thul* was a very special basket of the pre-modern Mizo which was used for keeping clothes. It was made with neatly stripped bamboo or cane. The inside surface was neatly lined with leaves called *hnahtial*. It had conical lid with four short legs at the bottom. *Thul* was used for transporting beddings and other household clothes from place to place. *Thul* was considered as one of the most important materials in the pre-modern Mizo house. It was made in square and its height was commonly 3-4 feet.

Nghawngkaw: *Nghawngkaw* was a wooden yoke for carrying heavy objects by men. The wooden yoke had holes at both ends which were joined with plaited band of cane which was to pass over the top of the head, and the yoke was joined with sling of cane to lower side to support or raised a hanging weight on the back.

Hnam: It was a plaited band of cane which passes over the forehead in which slings are attached to support or raised a hanging weight on the back. It was generally used by women.

³⁸ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 109.

³⁹ Ibid.

Dumbur: *Dumbur* was a small wooden box made for keeping tobacco and flint stone. It was crafted in waterproof and airtight. In pre-modern Mizo society every adult member in the house had their own *dumbur* respectively.

Sekino: *Sekino* was made from gayal horn for drinking rice beer. It was popularly used for ceremonial and festivals. When they killed gayal they dried its horn for sometimes and later used for drinking. The warrior and hero were given rice beer by *sekino* as a kind of honour during festivals.

Fairel bel: *Fairel bel* was a bamboo basket used for storing clean rice. It was generally kept near the fireplace. A finely split bamboo was closely plaited and the basket has a lid made of the same material. The size of *fairel bel* was depended on the number of member in the family.

Paikawng: *Paikawng* was a bamboo basket used for carrying wood and water. It was made with bamboo which was loosely plaited in circular shape.

Emping/Empai/Paiem: It was also a bamboo basket used for carrying rice and vegetables. It was made with bamboo which was closely plaited in circular shape. It had four legs at the bottom.

Dawrawn: *Dawrawn* was a tall bamboo basket for carrying rice and vegetables. Bamboo was closely woven and tapering downwards. It had four legs at the bottom. Its height was around 3-4 feet.

Tungchaw: *Tungchaw* was a bamboo hole used for keeping small articles at Mizo house. The bamboo bedpost was cut into holes at several interval ends. This was suitable for keeping household articles.

Arbawm: *Arbawm* was a special basket for keeping fowls. It was made of small plaited bamboo with having portable door. It was kept at the front verandah and hen and chicken were kept each night. This was very common to all the families in the village.

Sum: Sum was a bulky wooden mortar used for husking and pounding rice. It was kept separately at the front verandah in the house which was called *sum hmun*. In the pre-modern Mizo society, husking and pounding of rice was considered as the responsibility of a woman. A woman was expected to wake up early in the morning and complete her duty of husking and pounding rice at the early morning, she never wakes up lately.

Suk: *Suk* was a long wooden pestle for pounding rice in a mortar. The length of *suk* was commonly 5 feet. In pre-modern, Mizo society the length of *suk* was often used for assuming measurement.

Tuithawl: *Thuithawl* was a water casket for storing drinking water. It was made of gourd and had a tight lid made of wood. Sometimes, they put a tight cane around the gourd for its handle.

Tuiburum: *Tuiburum* was a small gourd for storing nicotine water. Consumption of nicotine water was very common in the pre-modern Mizo society. Woman's smoking pipe was attached with small gourd filled with water and the nicotine had been infused in the water while she smoked.

Tuibur: It was a smoking pipe for woman. It was made of a bamboo container with small silver pipe originally made of bamboo and small earthen pipe of tobacco-holder. Smoking *tuibur* was very common in pre-modern Mizo society. When a woman was smoking, the water inside the container will turn into nicotine and was used for consumption.

Vaibel: It was a smoking pipe for man. It was made of bamboo. Tobacco was kept at the head of the pipe and was smoked through the small bamboo pipe.

Papui and Pate: *Papui* and *Pate* were the bamboo baskets made for storing household articles and agriculture products. *Papui* was big in size whereas *pate* was smaller one. Bamboo was closely woven in circular shape for

making *papui* and *pate*. The height of *papui* was around 3-4 feet while *pate* was around 1-2 feet.

Hmunphiah: *Hmunphiah* was a broom made from dried grass or reed. The botanical name of *hmunphiah* was *thysanolaina maxima* which was harvested during winter and dried under the sunlight for sometimes. When it was dried up the sticks were tightened together for broom. *Hmunphiah* was an important material and commonly used for cleaning the house.

Sumairia: It was a small container used for keeping small valuable items possessed by the forefather. They mostly kept *lawngbarh* and *falung*.

Falung: This was considered as a lucky stone. It was a black smooth glossy stone. It was used for predicting whether the harvest would be successful or not. When its glossy appearance was dull the owner will be unsuccessful, but if the appearance of its colour was not changed the owner will have a successful harvest.

Hachhek: It was a small axe used for trimming wood and for splitting bamboo. The iron head was sharpened at the edge and was tightened at the bamboo or wooden handle. Its size was about 1 foot.

Zu sawrna: It was a funnel for filtering rice beer. A piece of bamboo was woven widening towards the mouth of the funnel in which a small portion of rice beer was kept to squeeze out pure beer.

Talhtum and **Hem:** It was a wooden hammer/club and wedge. It was mostly used in cutting and splitting firewood. The wooden hammer/club was called *talhtum* and the wooden wedge was called *hem*. Both were very useful materials for the Mizo in pre-modern period.

Chirawt lung: It was a stone used for grinding salt. In those days the Mizo used to extract salt from the specific spring in the jungle which was called *sih*. Water from *sih* was boiled in a pot till it was fully evaporated. The salt

contains were left over at the bottom of the pot which was collected and store at the house which was called *chibur*. Then the salt was grinded with this *chirawt lung* for the preparation of food. There was also *chirawt thleng* which was a plate used for grinding the salt.

4.2.3 Agriculture implements

As stated in the preceding chapter, the pre-modern Mizo main occupation was agriculture which was called *jhum* cultivation. Shifting cultivation has been not only the main and traditional subsistence but also seen as a cultural activity of the Mizo. The pre-modern Mizo system of cultivation was confined to slashing down the forests, burning it and dipping the seeds among the burnt ashes. Therefore, they need the apparatuses and tools in their agricultural work which were very important for the success of their hard work throughout the year. The materials they used commonly in agricultural works were:-

Chem: It was a kind of iron knife or *dao* with triangular shape and its size was 3 inches wide at the tip and 1 inch or so at the handle side. It had a blade at the edge, the broad end being only sharpened. It has a bamboo or wooden handle. This was mostly for clearing the forests and cutting hard substances. Its broad end was used for digging holes in which the seeds were place during sowing season. When it was blunt they sharpen it with a stone which was called *lungtat*.

Chemkawm: It was bending *dao* made and used for weeding. Like a *chem* the size and design were roughly similar. Weeding was done together by the family in their cultivation sites therefore; *chemkawm* was the most common tool used by all the cultivating families.

Tuthlawh: This was a small hoe made from iron. It was used for wedding, digging holes and cutting bamboo poles. The small iron hoe was tightened at the bamboo or wooden handle. Its length was about 1 foot.

Hrei or Hreipui: The axe's head was made from iron and its size was about 1.5 inches wide at the edge and taper roughly to a pointed end, the handle was made from bamboo or wood. The head being fixed through the hole made at the tough root portion. It was an important tool for felling trees, cutting wood and hard substances. Lianhmingthanga stated that in earlier days, the Mizo also used stone instruments which they called *teklung* for sowing seed.⁴⁰ A large number of stone tools were found and excavated in some old and deserted places in Mizoram. These tools are kept and exhibited in the Mizoram State Museum, Aizawl.⁴¹

Favah or Fawvah: This was a kind of sickle made from thin iron. It was commonly used for harvesting paddy and reaping other vegetables. Its head was made in semi-circle shape and the edge being sharpened. The handle was made with bamboo or wood.

Ipte: Whenever a man went out to jungle or *jhum* he was supposed to take with him *ipte* which was a bag made of coarse cloth.⁴² *Ipte* has multi-purpose usages like for keeping *dao* and other tools, it was also used for carrying back agricultural products from *jhum*.

Em: It was a generic name for different types of baskets made of canes and bamboo such as *dawrawn*, *paiem*, *emping*, *paikawng*, *siktuam*, *tui chawi kawng*, *paiper*, *kalang* etc.⁴³ The size and design of these baskets were different. The most common baskets used for agricultural works were: *Kalang* for threshing paddy, *paiper* was a flat-shaped basket for carrying paddy seed during sowing season, *tlam em* was a bigger size and mostly used for threshing paddy during harvest season, *dawrawn* and *paiem* were used for carrying or transporting paddy and other vegetables from agriculture site to home. Women were never seen going to their fields without carrying any kinds of *em*.

⁴⁰ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 12.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 13.

⁴³ Ibid.

Siksil: This was used like an umbrella. It was made with splatted bamboo and *hnathial* leaves. The splatted bamboo was plaited together and crossing one another at the length and height to cover human body. In which the *hnathial* leaves were kept inside and plaited again with split bamboo same like the other side. It was useful for shielding human body from rainfall. If *siksil* was there they can resume their agriculture work without getting wet while raining.

Darbak: It was a strap or band (usually or plaited cane) worn over the shoulders and across the chest to support or help to support a load when carried on the back by the man during reaping paddy.

Benvawn: It was a bamboo basket used for keeping seeds at the cultivation site. It was mostly used for keeping the seeds in new *jhum* site after burning it. It was made with strips of bamboo which were plaited together closely and crossing one another. Sometimes, they also made handles with cane or bamboo at both sides.

4.2.4 Snares, traps and other hunting materials

The pre-modern Mizo also gather food supplements from snares and traps. Birds and small animals were often caught and killed by using snare or trap which was called *thang*. Trapping or snaring of animals and birds had a close link with Mizo folktale called *Mihriampa* and *Vanhrikpa* story⁴⁴. The tale was like this:

In olden times human and wildlife were living together without having discrimination. Human called '*Mihriampa*' and the master of human and wildlife was called '*Vanhrikpa*'. All the wild animals, birds and human were looking after by *Vanhrikpa*. *Mihriampa* was having tail and he used to killed animals and birds. He smoked them at fire and ate them. When this was heard by the wild animals and bird they were very worried. Once *Mihriampa* caught

⁴⁴ C. Lalbiaknema, *Mizote Khawsak Dan* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 2000), 56.

sahmaitha (Ferret-badger) and kept him at his bag. He light up the fire to roast the caught animal. When the other animal saw the fire they came near and asked about *Mihriampa* that for what purpose he set a fire. He reluctantly replied them by merely saying “you will know it later.” When the fire was intense he took out *sahmaitha* and roasted over the fire. Then the other animals were come together again. They saw the burning animal and asked *Mihriampa* why he was burning *sahmaitha* as such. He told them that he will eat them like *sahmaitha* at any time soon. Then all the animals dispersed and never appeared again. From this time, human and animals began to live separately. As the animals disappeared for so long, he had nothing to eat and he went to his master *Vanhrikpa*. He told about his worries to his master. Then his master told him about how to handle his problems.

Vanhrikpa told *Mihriampa* how to trap animals. He said like this: *Make a trap with cotton rope, put the rope loosely but it should be instantly tightened when it was touch by someone. Make a hole in their path, cover the hole with split bamboos and spread the soil above the split bamboo. Tighten the other end of rope to young tree that you used for the hanger of rope. When they come in the path they will fall in the hole, the rope will be tightened and you will catch them easily.*

Mihriampa then made a trap as per the advice of *Vanhrikpa*. He could catch animals whenever he wants. But he fed up with animal meat soon. He asked again *Vanhrikpa* how to catch birds. *Vanhrikpa* told *Mihriampa* the strategy to catch bird. He advised him to prepare various bird traps and snares like *thangthleng*, *be-ai* and *sahdal*. Then he knew how to catch birds.

When the animal knew that they were liable to trap by *Mihriampa*. They went to *Vanhrikpa* and told him about their problems. He called termite, and he asked termite to bite the rope used by *Mihriampa* for trapping. The termite then bites all the ropes used for traps by *Mihriampa*. Then *Mihriampa* could no longer catch animals. He asked again *Vanhrikpa* to solve his problem.

Vanhrikpa told him to get fibre made from palm tree. As per the advice of *Vanhrikpa* he made a fibre from palm tree and used for trap. The termite could not bite the palm fibre anymore. He could caught animal and bird again.

The animals and bird came again to *Vanhrikpa*. They asked him to solve their problems with *Mihriampa*. But this time *Vanhrikpa* did not call any other creatures to solve their problem. He asked them to be cautious whenever they see the bent young tree and rope joining together. It could be trap or snare for them. He told them to avoid that kind of trap or if it was unavoidable to jump over it. Knowing the advice of *Vanhrikpa*, many animals could avoid the prey of *Mihriampa* but some unlucky animals and birds were still caught by trap. Then human being continued the strategy of *Mihriampa* till today for catching animal and birds by means of traps and snares.

The various traps and snares used by the pre-modern Mizo were as follows:-

Thangthleng: This was mostly used for killing birds like owl, crimton, greas barbet, chloropter and small birds. The snare was made of cotton rope and about a half foot long of a species of cane which was bent forming a 'U' shape upside and the two ends of the cane were sharply twisted and bent so that both ends came across and hook each other.⁴⁵ The rope was tied to the 'U' shaped cane the base of which was tied with a creeper or other cane to a stick that has been places horizontally just below the fruit or tree or any other thing as bait which was so attractive and delicious to birds. The other end of the rope was tied to the top of a whippy bamboo and was tightened by bending down the bamboo which was held by a small piece of bamboo (*zangsi*) one end of which rests against 'U' shaped cane and the other end by a stick against the 'U' shaped framework.⁴⁶ Just below the bait the other end of this stick (*adawh*) was rested, if a bird come and sitting on it will able to pick up the fruit. The

⁴⁵ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

noose part of the rope was set on the stick. When the hungry bird comes and no sooner it sets its foot on the stick then the stick moves down releasing the small piece of bamboo. It makes the whippy bamboo to spring up and the noose was tightened immediately at both or one leg of the bird.

Thangthleng was mostly used by young boys to catch birds. It was mainly trapped during winter when the fruits of trees were ripe. Sometime this kind of trap was also used in river for trapping the bird that came for drinking water at the river in winter season. Even the older people also used this trap in certain occasion for catching birds. In the pre-modern Mizo society, all the boys were expected to know how to handle this trap. It can be said that it was one of most common bird traps among the Mizo. Its preparation and strategy were very easy to know so that even young boy could easily caught birds by using this trap in their nearby places.

Sahdal: It was a snare for bigger birds that were mostly walk in land like wild fowls, pheasant, partridge etc. This was also commonly used for catching porcupine and other small mammals. Small fences were made at the jungle, there were gates at the regular intervals, in those gates birds will pass through the fence and the snares were kept at the gates. Loose nooses were kept at the gate which was tied with whippy sapling at above, the main rope was tied again with small bamboo stick (*zangsi*) near the gate and tree wig was put against the ground which was also joined with the rope. When the bird come its foot pressed down the tree wig and the small bamboo stick was released and the noose was tightened around the neck of bird. Then the bird was being trapped.

Thangchep: This snare was mainly used for catching squirrel, rats and other small mammals. Bamboo frame of triangular size was kept at the ground by fixing split bamboos at both sides. A bent sapling held by a small bamboo stick was joined with bark string, which was connected with bamboo frame and was again hold horizontally by another small and short stick. This short stick was tied with a thin palm fibre which runs down in the middle, the other end of

which was tied at the base of the framework. The noose was loosely put around the ground. When the animal comes, it tries to pass through the bamboo frame, it makes the stick to fall down which release the bent sapling and the noose was tightened immediately at the neck of the animal and was being caught.

Vaithang: This was a snare for catching rats. A long bending bamboo stick was tightened with a bark string and the other end of the string was tightened at smaller bamboo stick, which was twisted and bent forming a triangular framework which was again tied to the bending bamboo stick with a pointed end. At any regular route of the rats the pointed end of the bamboo stick was fixed firmly to the ground and the triangular shaped bamboo framework was kept in place for the passage of the rats. At the tapering bamboo the bark string was tightened which was fastened by a small bamboo stick and was held by a thin piece of split bamboo. Within the triangular framework the noose was kept. When the rat came it moved down the thin piece of bamboo and that loosened the other bamboo stick then the noose was tightened immediately at the chest or neck of the rat.

Mangkhawng: This was a trap used for killing small animals like rats, porcupine, monkeys and bird. A fence was created around the ground and there was space at the fence which was a passage for animal. Over the space a heavy log was hung up by a rope which was tight together with the end of smaller stick, and the stick was kept at a forked tree, the other end of the stick was joined with another rope which was fall down to the ground, the falling rope was joined with wooden pole. The rope was tightened at the interval by means of a small bamboo stick which was held by another stick. The stick was covered with split bamboos or twigs where the animal was likely to set its foot. As the animal was approaching the covered bamboo or twigs its weight pressed down the stick and that released the small stick again and the heavy log was fall down and hit the animal. The size of log hung up above was depended upon the animal that they wanted to trap.

Beai thang: *Beai* is a seed of black hard bean which was used as bait. This trap was used for catching partridge, wild fowl, black pheasant and peacock pheasant. At the ground a hard-pointed bamboo stick of about 6 inches long was fixed firmly to the ground. Near the tip of the bamboo stick, a hole was made where a small piece of bamboo stick about 1 inch long was inserted horizontally. A young tree standing by the side of the spot was bent with a cotton rope in the middle of which was tied a small piece of bamboo stick that has been inserted horizontally near the tip of a bamboo stick. A small piece of bamboo stick was held by a folded cane which carries the black seed of bean. The seed of bean was often polished with oil to make it attractive to the birds. The other half of the cotton rope which was used for the noose was stretched by means of four or five small sticks around the folded cane where the black seed was firmly inserted. When the bird comes, it tried to eat the bean, when it touched the bean the folded cane falls down releasing the small stick and the bent young tree pulls up the rope, and the noose was tightened at the neck of the bird.

Buhchuk: The preparation of *buhchuk* was almost similar to *beai thang*. Here in this trap they used rice unlike *beai* for bait. This trap was mostly used for catching wild fowl and small birds.

Kilen: This trap was used for catching parrot and wood pigeon. It was a very simple trap. The net was hung up between the two poles at the shallow valley between two hillocks. When the birds were flying through the area, they did not see the net that was hanging there and were trapped.

Chipthang: This was used for catching the species of bunting. The snare was commonly kept in the outskirts of the village. The method of preparation was similar with *sahdal* but the materials used were smaller than *sahdal*.

Hnawhtawt: This trap was used for killing rats. One of a cut piece of bamboo about 1 metre long was made forked and near another end a notch was made. A split bamboo of about 2 metres long was then bent like a bow by

tying it with a bark rope which rests at one end of another smaller bamboo that was inserted into the bamboo pipe. At the end of the smaller bamboo pipe some cooked rice was kept as bait. The pipe was held by a small bark string that runs across the bait. When the rat tried to eat the rice, it enters into the notch and bites the string that finally breaks up. As a result, the bent split bamboo straightened and the bark rope presses the smaller bamboo pipe which thrusts the rat against the wall of the notch.

Saithang/Sai hum/humhiah: This trap was used for the pitfall of an elephant. At the passage of an elephant, a hole was dug in the soil at the depth of the size of an elephant. Inside the hole they kept spears closely and was covered with bamboo mats and soil. They made it to look like the normal passage. When the elephant came to that passage its weight broke the bamboo mats which were kept below the thin soil and fell down the hole. As the spears down below pointed the elephants and wounded. The wounded elephant was then killed with guns. The same trap was also used for killing deer, tiger etc.

Sakei thang: This trap was used for killing tiger. Mizo had many methods for killing tiger. The most common one was *kar*. At the passage or the place where tiger left wounded animal, they usually kept a *kar*. Gun was kept across the passage to shoot the tiger at around its shoulder. They tight the gun with rope, and a trigger was connected with sling. The sling was put across the passage and when the tiger come it will touch the sling by its foot. When the tiger foot touched the sling the gun's trigger will automatically fire the tiger and killed.

The other trap for killing tiger was called *falpu*. A platform made of bamboo and wood was made, the other end was kept hanging on the poles and the other end was rested on the ground. To get more weight they kept big stone or log above the platform. The platform hanger rope was joined with a small piece of stick which was hooked to a triangular framework rod that had been attached firmly below the platform. Near the piece of stick they kept animal or

meat to serve as bait. When the hungry tiger came, he tried to eat the animal or meat and it loosened the stick which was joined with the platform and suddenly the heavy platform was fall down and hit the tiger.

The same trap was also used for killing smaller animal and birds. The bait was change according to the animal or birds they aimed for trapping. The smaller one of this kind of trap was called *falte*.

Tlak: This kind of trap was used for killing bear, tiger and monkey. The pole of tree fork was laid strongly on the ground. They kept a strong stick across the tree fork and both the ends were tied with ropes. The ropes were used for hanging the two long logs which were to use for ladders. At the top of the tree fork they left meat or any other attractive bait. The bait was joined with the rope that they used for hanging the ladders. They also kept spears between the ladders. When the hungry animal came and tried to take away the bait the rope was loosen and ladders were fall immediately, the falling animal too was pricked by the spears that were kept below and the animal was then killed.

Sakhi thang: This was a trap used for killing a deer. A fence was made by felling of young trees and bamboos in the jungle where the animals live and roam about. At each regular intervals and convenient spot where animal always pass through, gaps were left of the fence. At each spot, a hole of 6 feet square and 8 feet deep was dug in the ground. A young tree was then bent with a creeper called *vawmhruui*, the end of which was attached to a strong black palm fibre for the noose. The bent young tree was hold by hooking a short stick to another stick which had been laid and fixed firmly at the rim of one side of the hole by forked sticks. The short stick was held by another small stick against two sticks which were fixed against the wall of the hole. Just over the stick, some split bamboos were placed to cover the hole. Above it the split bamboos leaves were spread and the noose was laid on the leave which was again covered with soil and dry leaves so that the animal will not recognize the snare. Along each side of the hole a piece of wood was placed so that the

animal comes and sets its foot in between the pieces of wood at the desired spot. When the animal comes and sets its foot there the cover of the hole collapses and the bent young tree flies back pulling the noose which tightened itself at the leg of the animal.

Sanghar thang: This was a trap for a wild cat and the method was almost similar with *sakhi thang*. But the noose was made with cotton fibre. The catch of the noose was held a stick on which were placed some split bamboos to cover the pit. The noose was then placed over the split bamboos and which was covered with soil and dry leaves so as non-recognizable to animal. Two pieces of wood were placed along the two sides of the pit to guarantee that animal's foot will be trapped in the desired spot. When the animal comes, it did not know the snare being set there and it places its foot in between the two pieces of wood and due to the weight of the animal the cover of the pit was collapses and as a result the sapling flies back pulling the noose tightening at the leg of the animal.⁴⁷

4.2.5 Weapons and ammunitions

During the pre-modern period the Mizo often met inter-village feuds and wars. The chief and his villagers waged wars against another village or another clan in other village. The main objective for their waging wars were nothing but to gain supremacy over the others and annexation of their domains.⁴⁸ One interesting thing during that period was that guns were not being used in their wars, and it was said that guns were introduced amongst the Mizo during the later period of eighteenth century. The absence of guns makes them to wage war to their fellow tribesmen with primitive type of weapons like spears, bows and arrows and *dao*.

Gun: When the British started their penetration in the then Lushai hills (present Mizoram) and its neighbouring areas the Mizo used guns as their main

⁴⁷ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 7-8

⁴⁸ Ibid, 47.

war weapons which were called *silai*. There were some records that they possessed gun even before the British annexation but those were owned by few individual or chief and could not be considered as a whole community were having guns. B.Lalthangliana asserted that the gun was mentioned for the very first time in the history of the Mizo when they were living on the western slopes of the Lentlang mountain range which was around 1450 to 1500.⁴⁹ In that time Kawlni sub-clan were living in Suaipui and Saihmun and were raided by the Lai (Pawi), many were killed and beheaded in this raid. They composed a song to commemorate this incident and the song was:

*Out of the blue Pawis raided,
Our Kawlni sub-clan,
My Suaipui village and square were unpleasant,
My Suaipui village and square were unpleasant,
Our headless dead propped in a row in the shade,
They took many heads, clothes and guns in the raid.*⁵⁰

The guns mentioned in this song were antique flintlock guns which was called 'Awlan silai'. But after this incident we hardly seen guns in their warfare the popularity of gun was more in when they were in touch with British during the later period. As mentioned in the previous chapter the guns that they used were imported from outside. It seems that they never manufactured guns in their own. N.E Parry mentioned that the Mizo had no gun before 1777 A.D.⁵¹ When they started using guns as the main weapon it was very useful and became one of the most valuable possessions. Guns were mostly used in wars and hunting. The guns possessed by the Mizo in that period were most commonly muzzle-loading and flintlock guns which were:-

⁴⁹ B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 135.

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ N.E Parry, *The Lakhers* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl), 45.

1. *Mu puah or Meipek Silai*: This was the first known gun among the Mizo which was possessed either from Burma or Chittagong side/
2. *Awlan silai*: Holland made gun was called by the Mizo in their own pronounciation “*Awlan*”. It was a flintlock gun.
3. *Tukuli*: A Turkey made gun muzzle-loading gun was called ‘*Tukuli*’ by the Mizo.

Apart from gun the other Mizo weapons were:-

Chem: As mentioned before *chem* was a kind of knife or *dao*. There were three different *chem*:

- (a) *Chempui*: It was a common *dao* with having a sharp edge about two feet long and made with bamboo or wooden handle.
- (b) *Lulak chem*: This was a *dao* especially used for head hunting. They used to chop off the head of their enemies with this *dao*.
- (c) *Kingkawt*: It was made with bended. This *dao* was decorated with *chhawn* at the handle by the one who killed enemies.

Sairawkherh: This was the common weapon used by the Mizo men, it was a pellet-bow string.

Thal: It was a bow and arrow. It was mostly used at the time of war. The arrow was generally made with bamboo but there was also some record that they used iron or metal arrow.

Fei: It was a spear. Spears were the main weapons before they possessed gun. There were three kinds of spears used for war which were *fei beng*, *fei kibar* and *muzuk fei*.

Kawlnham: This was a kind of long sword. *Kawl* means ‘Burmese’ and *hnam* means ‘dao’ or ‘sword,’ therefore; they might get this long sword from Burmese. It was a useful weapon for war.

Sahmim: It was a bag used during war and hunting. The cover was made with bear’s skin which cannot be torn with *dao* or spear. They used for keeping rice and other food supplements while they were set out for war and hunting.

Hreipui: This was an axe. It was also used for war. The axe was around 3 feet long and the handle was made with bamboo or wood.

Darlukhum: This was a helmet made from brass or copper. The warriors often wear this kind of helmet in time of war. They might get this helmet from their neighbouring Burma people.

Phaw: It was a shield used for war. The Mizo had two kinds of shields made with animal’s skin. The first one was round shape and two feet long and one to two feet broad which was decorated with feathers called *chhawn*. The other one was rectangular shape and bit longer than the first one. This was used for guarding shoulder and back.

Zen: It was said that the Mizo started manufacturing gunpowder soon after they got guns. Gunpowder was called *zen* or *silai zen*. It was difficult to trace back from where they learnt the art of gunpowder making. Some opinions said that they knew it from the Chinese through the Burmese.⁵² For making gunpowder the Mizo used charcoal (*meihawl*) and some specific soil which were called *leial* or *leitha*. To produce charcoal they preferred these trees – *khawmhma thing* and *sernam thing*. Some specific soils were also taken from

⁵² Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 50.

the ground where there was a thick crust of animal's excrement or manure which was considered as salty. The salt was mixed with water and boiled in the fire to produce nitrate. The water evaporation produced nitrates and nitrate crystal which was collected. The charcoal and the nitrate were mixed up and were pounded in a wooden or stone mortar. Then the powder was let it dry under the sunlight and ready for use as gunpowder.

Fungki: This was a gunpowder container made from gayal or mithun's horn. It was beautifully coloured, ornamented and well-polished with pig fat oil. It has a lid which was made from bamboo or wood. It was a very essential for hunter and warrior for keeping gunpowder.

Silaimu: *Silaimu* means bullet. The Mizo used different varieties of bullets. They used lead and other metals for bullet but they also used their own made bullet. When there was no metal for bullet round stone and clay pellets were also used for bullet. They also knew the art of making lead pellet for themselves. They kept the heated liquid lead in a bamboo tube to produce a stick. When the heat was decreasing they split the bamboo tube and taken out the stick of lead and cut into small pieces, which were then rolled between two stone slaps till it turns to round shapes.

4.2.6 Musical instruments

The Mizo socio-cultural life was closely interwoven with music. During feasts and dancing (*chawng leh lam*) and during the celebration of community feasts and festivals (*kut ni vangthla*), they were entertained with their musical instruments.

The Mizo musical instruments could be divided into two categories:-

- (1) Instruments produced by themselves
- (2) Instruments imported from outside.

The musical instruments produced by the Mizo themselves were:-

Tingtang: It was made with hollow gourd in which a bamboo shaft was fixed. The other side of the hollow gourd was sliced and concealed with dried animal bladder. The gourd was joined with bamboo shaft. A string of palm was tied at both ends on the bamboo shaft. The string was played with a thin bamboo stick.

Lemlawi: It was a kind of mouth organ. It was made with bamboo strip, the size and length of the bamboo strip was finger size. A string was tied at both ends of the bamboo piece. The performer plays with the help of his hand and teeth inside his mouth. Different notes can be produced according to the performer expertise.

Phenglawng: It was a bamboo flute. A bamboo tube was cut at both ends. One end was notched with splinter of bamboo and a small hole was made for blowing. To produce musical note they pierced the bamboo tube into three holes. When the performer blows, notes were produced by placing fingers across the holes.

Tumphit: *Tumphit* was made with three bamboo tubes. The open ends of bamboo tubes were cut in different sizes and were plaited together in a row. The player put the open tubes into his mouth and blows them accordingly to make different notes. This musical instrument was used during ritual rites and particularly on the occasion of a ceremonial called '*rallulam*', in which the use of this musical instrument was a must.⁵³

Mautawtawrawt: This was a cane trumpet. Three or four bamboo nodes of different sizes were joined by inserting the smaller ones into the bigger ones.

⁵³ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 50.

When it was blown it can produce a noisy sound which was very useful for frightening away wild animals and to tell about their whereabouts to others when they were in jungle or cultivation site.

Rawchhem: It was made with gourd and bamboo tubes. It can be said as Mizo pipe organ. The gourd was pierced into regular interval around three or four holes. They inserted bamboo tubes into the holes and the stalk of the gourd was cut off for mouth piece. When the player blows the gourd from the mouth piece he holds the tubes with his fingers separately to make different notes.

Tuiumdar: This made from bamboo tube. The bamboo tube was cut into three or four holes to make string. The strings were then elevated up by insertion of two pieces of bamboo between the string and the bamboo tube near each node. The strings were played with fingers. It was mostly played by children.

Talhkhuang: It was made with three wooden pieces which were made in hollowed. The hollowed wooden pieces were played with small sticks to produce note. It was often kept at the raised platform in the village entrance and were never kept inside a house. It was taboo to take them away from the memorial platform.⁵⁴ While some have said this simple music was used or beaten only in the *jhum* house for calling *lawmrual* (those working together in one's *jhum* for a similar turn) at midday meal and at returning time from *jhum* in the evening.⁵⁵

Bengbung: It was made with small pieces of wood of different lengths and as large as human's wrist. It was made from *khawmhma* tree (*Rhus javanica*). The wooden pieces were played with small sticks to make note. It was

⁵⁴ B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 158.

⁵⁵ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 28.

in the past usually played by the women and to make the sound echoing they sat on a mortar and *bengbung* on their legs that had been laid straight on the curved wooden mortar and played.⁵⁶

Sekikhawn: This was a music played by beating the two horns of gayal or *mithun*. It was commonly used in *chai* dance. When they were playing sets of gongs *sekikhawn* was used to lead and to give supplement to the music. It was a very simple instrument and anyone can play it.

Khuang: It was a drum made from hollow wood and was covered with animal skin. There were two kinds of drums, the bigger drum was *khuangpui* and the smaller one was *khuangte*. Khuang was an indispensable musical instrument when the Mizo observed various festivals and celebration like when they chased and killed wild animals. In earlier time it was played with bare hand but in later days it was played with a stick made from wood or bamboo. Among the Mizo musical instruments *khuang* was the most common one and continued to use till modern days.

Hnahtum: This was a music played with leaf by mouth. It was a very simple and easy to play. Even children also often played this when they were in jungle and village outskirts. *Hnahtum* was also played by adults when they have free time or during night time especially when there was moonlight. The Mizo enjoy playing tunes on a leaf, and in the still of night, the sound could be heard from a long distance.⁵⁷

The musical instruments used by the Mizo but that were not produced themselves were:-

⁵⁶ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 29.

⁵⁷ B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 161.

Darkhuang: It was a big brass gong. Among the Mizo musical instruments the *darkhuang* was the greatest and the most costly.⁵⁸ It can be beaten any time like joy and sorrow. It was also beaten with other gongs to accompany the timing. There was fix time for its usage.

Darbu: It was set of three medium brass gongs having different notes in themselves. It was played on important days and occasion like festivals and celebrations of important events. It was also played when they had *khual lam/thingdim* dance. It was rarely possessed by ordinary persons, only the chief and rich persons were in possession of this set of gongs in the past.⁵⁹

Darmang: It was a gong made of brass. It was beaten on festivals and ceremonies. It was a small gong and was used for accompaniment of other gongs. It was mostly used in a dance of *khual lam*, *sapui aih* and *mithi rawp lam*.

These gongs were not manufactured by the Mizo but were used from time immemorial as a part of their cultural activities. It cannot be left behind in the study of material culture. It were not only used in the past but also still used in present days as cultural activities. Gongs played important part in Mizo culture.

4.2.7 Pottery

During the pre-modern period Mizo had extensively used earthen pots for cooking and storing food items and beverages. As they were moving from one place to another for a short period of time their pottery was not so decorative and was very simple ones. The most common pots were clay pots. Generally the task of making pots was the responsibilities of women in the family. At the outskirts of their villages there were specific spaces reserved for burning clay

⁵⁸ B. Lalthangliana, *Culture and Folklore of Mizoram* (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 2005), 161.

⁵⁹ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 26.

pots which were called '*belrawh mual*.' J.Shakespear commented about Mizo pottery,

*"The woman makes clay pots, moulding them by hand. There were only two kinds in use – a small circular pot with a mouth some 6 to 8 inches in diameter, used for cooking, and a large jar, about 24 inches high and 15 inches in diameter, tapering to about 9 inches at the mouth, which was used for brewing beer in."*⁶⁰

Pot making was called *bel vuak* and usually held during spring season. Women brought clay from termite mound; they also collected clay by digging the soil to get the lower ones. They also collected sand from the big river. At the river they brought *chhihri* for filtering the sand, the filtered sand was called *siak*.⁶¹ At home they mixed the clay and sand carefully and wrapped with big leaves which was kept for some time at bamboo basket. Then they took out from the basket and pounded in mortar until it became sticky. The sticky clay was rolled into round shape. Then the potter put the sticky clay to desire size at the bamboo mat and crafted pot out of it. They designed first the bottom and the rim was designed later. The main body was covered with cloth and kept cotton inside. The rim was kept dried under the sunlight for some time. Then the outer side of the main body was molded with smooth stone called '*beldolung*'. The main body was joined with the rim and molded carefully with the same stone at outside and inside. Then they kept the crafted pots to paddy granary for about ten days. When the pots were completely dried up they brought to the village outskirts (*belrawh mual*) which was reserved for burning pots. They burnt the pots with fire till it become hard. The burning pots were taken out from the fire and poured in rice water to make the inner parts thicker for leaked proof which was called '*bel-tuih*'.⁶² They considered that if rice water was not poured inside the pots it will be leaked soon. Then the pots

⁶⁰ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 27-28.

⁶¹ C.Lalbiaknema, *Mizote Khawsak Dan* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 2000), 26-27.

⁶² Ibid, 27.

were ready for use. It was said that pot making was commonly done by groups of women but it was also sometime done by alone. The timing of making pots was also depended of the requirement of the family.

The common pots used and made by the Mizo family were as follows:-

Chaw chhum bel: This was a pot for cooking rice and food items. It was a small spherical pot with a mouth- approximately 6 to 8 inches in diameter.

Khuhhriang: It was round in shape used for covering or a lid of cooking pot. It was also used for serving curries.

Vawkchaw bel: This was a large pot used for cooking pig's food.

Zubel: The Mizo had different types of pots for brewing and storing rice beer which were called *zubel*. The most common *zubel* were *hranden zubel*, *nganbel*, *cherzing* and *khawn zubel*. Drinking of rice beer was very common among the Mizo during the pre-modern period. The sizes of *zubel* were also varying as per the preparations. *Hranden zubel* was considered as one of the biggest pots for brewing rice beer. Rice beer was commonly store at the earthen pot and was drink with special bamboo tubes or cups.

4.2.8 Religious and ceremonial objects

The pre-modern Mizo traditional religion required religious sacrifices and ceremonies. They believed in the existence of Supreme Being which was known as "*Pathian*" or "*Khuanu*" or "*Khawzing Pathian*". On the other hand they also practiced sacrifices to appease the evil spirits which were considered as the harbingers of detrimental and troubles to human. Priests occupied an important position in the pre-modern Mizo society, they were known as *Puithiam*. Each clan of the Mizo had their own *Puithiam*, the priests were responsible for all the ceremonial rites in the religious observances and the

sacrifices and other observances in case of sickness, accidents, festivals and all the special occasions. The priests - *Sadawt* and *Bawlpu* were commonly called *Puithiam*. Both of them occupied important positions in the village hierarchy and they were the officials in the village administration next to the Chief's elders called *Upa*.⁶³ Most of the authors clarified the *Puithiam* (priests) into two classes - one was in charge of religious observances and was called *Sadawt*, while the other *Puithiam* was *Bawlpu* who was responsible for performing sacrifices concerning observances and appeasement of evil spirits. Sometime *Sadawt* was assisted by junior priest who was called *Thlahpawi*.

The pre-modern Mizo religious and ceremonial objects were listed as follows:

Arkeziak: It was cotton ornament used for decorating the corpse of dead man. After the burial the *arzkeziak* was used to decorate the grave or memorial platform. It was also used for honouring the brave warrior when they returned home from hunting and raid by the young women. The young women tied *arkeziak* on the hair of warriors to mark and honouring their success and bravery. It was a lengthy white cotton intertwined with red, blue and white yarn at both ends. The thread was called *hranghrual*.

Buhtlei: It was made with piece of bamboo to stir or ladle out rice from the cooking pot. On marriage ceremonials, the fowl was killed on its back by hitting with *buhthlei* by the priest.

Bukte lem: To make *bukte lem* feather of a hen (*arpui hmul*), leaf of chestnut tree (*thingse hnah*) and quill of porcupine (*sakuh hmul*) were required. By using these articles they build a small model of hamlet with stone which was used for performing religious ritual before *sechhun* sacrifice. *Bukte lem* was also used for offering sacrifice by the Lai ethnic clan for curing chronic

⁶³ Sangkima, "Role of the Priests in the Traditional Religious Practices of the Mizos" in *Essays on the History of the Mizos*, ed. Sangkima (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2004), 108.

illness. In this sacrifice a *bukte lem* built at the village outskirts was burnt when used as sacrifice which was called *tialtuk*.

Bung lem: It was made with splinters of bamboo or wood for constructing a model of banyan tree. The model of banyan tree was kept at the top of the roof while performing the sacrifice of *chungbawl*.

Chawmnu lim: It was an effigy of *chawmnu* which was considered as a female demon who caused serious illness like typhoid etc. To treat such illness *Bawlpui* offered *bawlpui* sacrifice to appease *chawmnu* in which the liver of animal killed for sacrifice was offered at the effigy.

Chhantiang: It was a sacred arrow used for killing sacrificial animal. It was practiced and used by Lai ethnic clan. The priest used *chhantiang* for killing the animal for sacrifice by piercing at the region on the side of animal opposite to the heart.

Chhawndawl, ngenchi and hruk: *Chhawndawl* was a head tuft made from the dyed red hair of goat. It was used by the warriors who have taken enemy's head in raids. *Ngenchi* or *hruk* was made of metals such as copper and bell metal designed in conical shape on which the *chhawndawl* was attached. This headgear was worn on ceremony relating to success in war. It was also called *lenchhawn* or *thihchhawn*.

Thil lem: It was a kind of figurine made from clay used for sacrifice. The clay figurines of fish, gong, beads, *mithun* etc. have been used in sacrifices of *bawlpui*, *lo hman* and *chawngbawl*. When the priest offered sacrifices these kinds of figurines were either sacrifice or used as ritual objects.

Farthing suihmum: It was made from fir tree which was cut into sharp edge. It was used for piercing eggs which were erected on the poles made for religious rituals.

Haite: It was a water ladle made from small gourd. In all the rituals and sacrifices which required involvement of water *haite* was used for it.

Hnang: It was a piece of cane's fibre or thin split bamboo which was used for tying anything. In all the rituals and sacrifices which required tying to any objects the priest used *hnang* for such purpose.

Hlang and Milem: *Hlang* and *milem* means stretcher and effigies. These were used in *mitthi rawp lam*. It was a sacrifice offered to honour the deceased members of the family. It was also offered to entertain the spirits of the dead. The effigies of such dead persons were kept upon the stretcher and carried around the village and the effigies were offered meat and beer.

Khuanghlang: It was a bamboo or wood stretcher made for the performer of *khuangchawi* ceremony. The performers were carried in this stretcher by men on their solders to honour them.

Kawkvahai: It was bird image made from wood. *Kawkvahai* was used for a ceremony related with head hunting. When the successful raiding party came back to their village they kept the heads of their enemies that were taken in the raid or war at a pole along with *kawkvahai* then the ceremony was held by the warriors.

Lampe: It was a potsherd for keeping cooked rice in the ceremony of head taken at war. The heads were fed with cooked rice which was placed in *lampei*.

Lenglep: It was small diamond shaped flag made of bamboo and cotton thread dyed red, black and white. It was used in the sacrifices of *daibawl* and *bawlpui*.

Maicham: It was a small altar made from bamboo or cane. The altar had four pillars at its four sides which were made with split bamboo. It was an important material in religious sacrifice.

Nopui: It was a cup of mithun's horn used for drinking rice beer. When they honoured a brave warrior in a village they used *nopui* to offer a cup of rice beer which was a highest honour given in a village.

Nghaleng nupa: It was a couple of fish made from clay. When the priest offered *bawlpui* sacrifice to cure serious illness he used *ngchaleng nupa* for his sacrifice.

Phawnglung: It was a piece of rock taken from Phawngpui Mountain which was used for offering sacrifice to the mountain's spirit. The animal used for sacrifice was killed beside *phawnglung* by the priest.

Seluphan: It was a wooden sacrificial pole. It was used for exposing the skull of *mithun* which was killed for sacrifice. The preparation and erection of *seluphan* required an elaborate religious ritual.

Rawcheh: It was a bamboo stick used for *daibawl* sacrifice. The top of the stick was cut split for the insertion of a piece of cotton wool dotted with iron filling, the sides were tattered at intervals, and the bottom pointed for sticking in the ground.

Sahlam: There was a particular tree for hanging the heads of the enemies killed in a war which was called *sahlam*.

Thleng ke neilo: It was a plane wooden plate used for sacrifice. The priest often used *thleng ke neilo* for keeping the sacrificial articles.

Thingserh: This was a tree erected near the house of warrior who performed a ceremony over the heads of enemies that were killed in war. In that tree a dao and a bowl of rice beer were kept which was used for trailing brave men to show their courage to sacrifice themselves for the village. Once the brave man strikes that tree with *dao* and drink the rice beer he was regarded as brave enough to save his village from the attack of enemies.

Tuirual: It was a head-dress made from pieces of raw cotton which was dyed red and white. It was used and worn by women at a ceremony related with head hunting.

Tul: It was a skewer made with bamboo for killing sacrificial animals. One of its ends was made with sharp pointed. Sometime the priest also kept the meats of animal used in *tul* during the sacrifice. It had multi usages in religious rituals.

Theibial: It was a bamboo stick used for performing *daibawl* sacrifice. The bamboo stick was placed upright on the ground when they performed *daibawl*.

Tifang: It was used for keeping water and rice for spraying animal which was to be killed for sacrifice.

Zawngchal: It was a turban or headgear made from dyed goat's hair used when religious sacrifice was done.

Zupeng: It was a gourd used for keeping rice beer which was required in the religious rituals.

4.2.9 Games and Sport implements

Like many other tribes in the world the Mizo also had various indigenous games. But throughout the year they were busying in their agricultural works they had very less time for playing serious game. They seldom organized competition in the field of any discipline as it is done today.⁶⁴ Most of the Mizo indigenous games were played by children. But the youth and adult men also played some games at night time in *zawlbuk*. Many Mizo indigenous games required materials made from wood, bamboo, stone and other forest products. The list of Mizo indigenous games which required materials were discuss below:-

Inbuan: It was a kind of wrestling. Clothes were tied around the waists of the player and was tried to pull up their opponent by using this tied clothes.

Insuknawr: It was a game of trial of strength. In this game the players holding both ends of wooden pestle with hands to push each other. The wooden pestle was around 4 to 5 feet length.

Insaihrui pawh: The material used in this game was a rope. The two players were tied with the same rope at their neck and trying to move in opposite directions. The player who moved across the line drawn in between was the winner in this game.

Inhrui pawh: It was a tug of war game. They used long rope or thick woody creeper for this game.

⁶⁴ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 16.

Insukherh: This was played by using pestle. The two players holding at the both ends of the pestle with their hands and each tried to twist in the opposite directions of their opponent.

Sukkhawh: It was a kind of javeline throw. Pestle was thrown into far distance place by the players. The one who thrown the pestle at farthest was the winner.

Lung in chawi siak: Almost every village had a huge stone for trial of strength which was called *chawilung*.

Lungden: It was a kind of shot put game. The player shot the stone at far distance place to show his strength.

Lawnlem: It was a game for climbing up to the tree branches. They brought a young tree from the jungle and they dug a hole in the ground and fixed the tree in the village street. The boys then climbed up and swung about in the forked branches of the tree.

Khawhding: This was a game of throwing wooden spear. A tree trunk of about four feet long was trimmed to the size of finger and one of its ends was made flattened and at the other end eight inches long of a small bamboo stick having a pointed end was inserted.⁶⁵ At the flattened end fowl's feathers were attached which was called *sepa mawngpaw*. The spear was thrown over a longer distance or a target.

Lunginvawmsiak: It was a game of stone throwing played by boys. They collect stones of their desired size and shape and thrown to anything convenient to target. The first throw was a trial which was called *aitechhin*, the

⁶⁵ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 20.

second throw was *ainnawnpara* and the third and final one was called *aitakpara*.⁶⁶

Inkawibah: It was played in group by using *kawi* which was the seed of large creeper bean (*endata scanden*). The players were divided into two groups. The one group will place their *kawi* at the ground in straight line at the target while the other group will try to shoot down target with their *kawi* by crisscrossing with their fingers from a distance. This was considered as girls' game but boys also played in some occasion.

Invaibah or **inleibah:** The materials required for this game were round flat stones or broken plates. Sometimes the seeds of jungle bean (*kawi*) also used. The game was played in the lines drawn on the ground in which the stones were kept.

Inkawihnawk: This game was almost similar with *inkawibah* but this was mostly played by boys. In this game the bigger or heavier *kawi* were required. The players were divided into two groups. The one group will placed their *kawi* at line marked at the target then the other group will try to shoot down with their *kawi* from a distance.

Inkawlvawr or **invawr:** The material required for this game was five round pebbles. The game was played by throwing up the pebbles and receiving it with the front and the back palm alternately. They played starting from the easiest one to hardest one.

Kalchhet: It was a game played with bamboo stilts. The bamboo poles were cut into 4 to 5 feet in length and at around 2 to 2.5 feet they placed a foot

⁶⁶ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 20.

rest. In which the footrest they climbed up in straight direction and the one who fastest was winner.

Inbuk: This was a very simple game by balancing one another in a log or wooden plank.

Sanghar ngul lawn: When a wild cat was killed boys carrying the dead wild cat into all the houses and collected eggs on behalf of the killer. After this they fixed a bamboo pole in the street and the head of the dead wild cat was hung up at the top end. Then the boys tried to touch or pull down the head of the cat by climbing over the bamboo pole. Only the boys who were involves in the collection of eggs can be participated in this game.

Maimawm rilsak: This was a game for making like a spider web. A rope and a strong wooden stick were used. A wooden stick was tied at the end of the rope for the player's foot stand. Holding the other end of the rope with his hands and standing stick, the player swing up to the wooden cross beam of the roof and down upon the floor as if a spider spinning its web.⁶⁷

Intawk: It was a game played with a spinning top (*kaihbu*) and was believed to be one of the oldest games of the Mizo.⁶⁸ The top of the wooden spinning top was tied round several times at the upper part with a tapering rope made of *vaiza* or *hruikhau* and then released simultaneously pulling the rope. It was one the most favourite Mizo games played by the boys.

Kahkhet: It was a simple gun made from bamboo. The length of this bamboo gun was around two feet. The bamboo nods was cut into open in its end and make a hole at one point. At the hole the split of bamboo bent was

⁶⁷ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 22.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

inserted which will work like a spring. They used a small pebbles and pointed bamboo stick were used for bullets. It was mostly used by boys for shooting each other or shooting targets.

Kahchik: It was a kind of water pistol. It was made from bamboo tube around one foot length. One of the bamboo tube nodes was cut opened and the other side nod was pierced into hole for the outflow of water. The bamboo stick which was tied with clothes was inserted on the bamboo tube. Water was inserted into the tube by pulling the bamboo stick and water was release toward their friends or anyone by pressing the bamboo stick.

4.2.10 Handloom, dress and clothing materials

The pre-modern Mizo were self-sufficient in producing clothes and dresses. In their cultivation field they grew cotton which was reaped and took processing through different simple machines and tools. The materials that they employed for ginning, spinning and weaving were done with manual works but that were sufficient for them by considering their living standard. They wore simple and plain clothes and the designs were also not so decorative in particular.

The pre-modern Mizo ginning and spinning machines and tools were:-

Herawt: It was a locally made wooden mill comprising of a frame holding two wooden rollers. One end of the two rollers is carved for a few inches of its size into a screw or pinion, furrowed in the opposite way to the other, so that on the turning the handle, the rollers revolve in opposite directions, and the cotton was drawn between them, the seeds are removed.⁶⁹ Pig's fat (saum) was often pasted in the rollers to make the pinions working smoothly.

⁶⁹ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 30.

Lasai: It was a bamboo bow constituted of a fitted curved piece of cane attached at both ends by a thin cane string. The cotton was carded with this bow about five times to become clean.

Chawnzial: *Chawnzial* was a mat made from bamboo or wood used for keeping raw cotton rolls which were ready for spinning. The cotton was placed on a smooth plank and rolled with the stem of a tall grass.

Hmui: This was a spinning wheel made from wood and cane. The spinning wheel was kept between the two wooden pillars and the draws the cotton into a thread by rolling the other of the thread by hands.

Ladinlek: It was a piece of wood which was sharpened at both ends. There were two holes below each of the sharpened points of the stick. Thin bamboo sticks were inserted in the holes and were used for processing cotton threads.

Lazar: It was a hanging post of the wetted thread of cotton. The threads were hanging into upright position to keep it dry.

Lakhuilh: It was a comb for combing cotton yarn. The threads of cotton were brushed with this comb while it was still wet to make it smoother.

Suvel: It was a revolving tool made from bamboo and cane fibre. It had four extending arms around which skein of cotton yarn was put for making the yarn into balls around a small stone. It had a stand which was made with wood.

A.G McCall put a comment about the Mizo weaving technique like this, “The warp was bound over a fixed beam of wood or bamboo, and the other end

was tautened by the weaver wearing, round the hallow of her back, a leather strap to which was attached the other end of the loom. The weaver sits between this leather and the loom, adjusting her position to suit the warp length. The woof was passed through by means of prepared spindles, and was battened firmly down by the use of a smooth, and comparatively weighty, blade of polished wood, usually of sago palm.”⁷⁰

The followings were the pre-modern Mizo loom and weaving tools:

Themkawl: The bar in a loom situated immediately in front of the weaver with which the weaver kept the warp taut. At both ends leather strap was attached.

Kawngvawn: The leather strap which was attached at either end to the extremities of *themkawl* bar in a loom and passes round the weaver’s waist so that by leaning back on it she may keep the warp taut.

Themtlang: It was bar made with bamboo or wood. The bar was attached to the wall from the upper end of the loom. The string which was used for tying the bar was called *themhrui*.

Thembupui: It was a large bamboo bar at the loom which raises the threads of the warp. Before it was used in the loom the surfaces were clean with fig leaves to make it smoother.

Themtang: It was a small bar in a loom which was used to raise certain threads of the warp when necessary.

⁷⁰ A.G McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1977), 183.

Hnahchawi: The long thread in a loom to raise the thread of the warp. It was made from bamboo or cane.

Themper: It was a small pointed bar made with split bamboo in a loom which kept the cloth stretched to its full width.

Themtleng: It was a flat polished bar in a loom for ramming home the threads of the woof after each passage of the shuttle. It was made with specific cane called *meihle*.

Tukrek: It was made of cane or bamboo used in a loom to keep the threads of the warp spread out. The bar was cut into sharp point at regular intervals in which the threads were putting through it.

Themtuihnawih: It was a tool used for damping the interlaced yarn while weaving. Water was store at gourd or bowl which was called *themtuihnawih bur*. A brush used for damping the interlaced yarn was called *themtuihnawih fung*.

Sahthlau: It was a sharp pointed bamboo tube used for raising the threads of the warp while weaving.

Dawhkilh: It was a porcupine quill called *sakuh hmul* which was used for tightening or loosening the threads while weaving.

Puanphei or Laphei: It was a bamboo stick shuttle in which cotton threads were rolled around. With this stick the threads which were kept at warp were weaved into crossing each other in straight line.

With regard to clothing and dress the pre-modern Mizo were depended on the cotton that their grown at the cultivation site, therefore, their clothes and dresses were very simple and plain. Generally, their dresses were not so

expensive, they wore similar dresses, there were none who had better quality of clothes to another one, but there were differences amongst the women with regards to necklace and earrings.⁷¹

Men's dresses: Mizo men in the pre-modern period hardly worn upper wear, they worn plain cloth around their waist. Some wealthy men had worn with *thihna* and *thipui* necklaces at their neck and *thimkual* headgear in their head, the common men worn with *saruh dawhkih* (bone comb) in their head.⁷² They started upper wear at around 1911 when some Mizo men returned from Abor expedition.⁷³

The followings were the Mizo men's wears in pre-modern period:

Thangchhuah puan: This puan had a very high social significance as it could be worn only by those who had earned the highly coveted distinction of performing *Thangchhuah* ceremony.⁷⁴ It was a long cloth having stripes with black, yellow and maroon colours.

Mangpuan: This cloth was for chief and his wife. They had worn this cloth in certain occasion. It was white color stripe with black lines.

Tawlhloh puan: It was a cloth given to the warrior by woman when he was about to move or return to war. If a woman gave this cloth to a man he should not retreat at war. It was black colour and stripe at the centre with red and white lines. Only a few brave or warrior could wear this cloth.

⁷¹ C. Lianthanga, *Hmanlai Mizo Nun* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 1999), 48.

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 69.

Pawndum: It was mostly used by the young men at night cover in Zawlbuk. This cloth was more useful for women. It was red and black striped cloth.

Women's dresses: Unlike Mizo men the women had worn upper and lower wears in pre-modern period. The followings were the women's dresses:

Siapsuap: It was the first type of women's skirt made of twisted stripes of special tree called *vaiza* which was known in Mizo as *hruikhau*.

Fenngo: It was a plain mini skirt worn at home and cultivation site. It was white colour.

Fenthuah: It was a plain skirt worn over the *fenngo*. It was worn mostly in leisure time.

Hmaram: It was a kind of petticoat. There were two designs which were called *kawkpui zikzial* and *lenbuangthuam*.

Kawrchei or **Kawrlaisen:** It was a white coat or jacket ornamented with broad coloured bands on the arms, back and front, worn by young women.

Puanngo: It was a simple thick white cloth used for casual wear.

Puanrin: This was only worn by a wealthy family on special occasion and festivals. It was a white stripped cloth with a black background.

Ngotekherh: It was a cloth worn at special occasion. It was white background on which black stripes were woven.

Puanlaisen or Puanchei: This was the most valued cloth. It was a white cloth decorated with beautiful colour stripes like red, green, blue, yellow, pink and white. There were different designs which were *hruih*, *disul*, *sakeizangzia*, *lenbuangthuam* and *fanghmamu*.

Pawndum: As mentioned above it was red and black striped cloth. This cloth was very important for women because they had to bring it at their husbands' houses. If a husband was died his wife had to cover the corpse of her husband with this cloth. That was why it was also called as *zawlpuan*. If the wife did not do so she might be accused of committing adultery and should not be given helps from her husband's relatives.⁷⁵ Before the marriage took place a young boy and girl used this particular cloth as *dawnpuan phah*, which means when a boy and a girl slept together on the *pawndum* with the permission of the girl's parents, the boy must marry the girl, if the girl was refused by the boy; he had to pay a fine.⁷⁶ It was also used for wearing at dance in festivals and special ceremonies.

Headgears: During the pre-modern period both the Mizo man and woman had various headgears which were:-

Thangchhuah diar: It was a turban made for a man or father who completed *thangchhuah* ceremonies. It was striped with black, yellow and maroon colours.

Chhawn: It was a headgear for warrior. It was made from goat's hair, dyed in red and fixed in a pointed piece of wood the long feather of hornbill was attached. This was to be worn over by the one killed enemies.

⁷⁵ Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1998), 69.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 67.

Thlanthla Chang: It was made from the feather of *drongo*. It was worn by the warrior or hunter who completed *thangchhuah* ceremonies. It was also worn by the village chief.

Vakiria: It was a special headgear made for women. It was made with brass or cane and porcupine quills with the feather of parrot in which beetles' wings were also hung horizontally. It was worn on important occasion like *chai* and *cheraw* etc.

Thimkual: It was a hairpin mostly worn by men. It was made from brass. When a boy proposed a girl for marriage he gave his hair pin as sign of security.

Bakkilh: It was a hairpin mostly used and worn by women. It was made from bone or metal.

Samkhuih: It was a hair comb. It was made with bamboo sticks and wood. Sometimes they also used cane parts for comb.

Earrings: Generally earrings were worn by women in Mizo society. But men also have worn some earrings. The earrings possessed by the Mizo were the on the followings:-

Saiha bengbeh: It was made from ivory. Only the rich and well to do family possessed this earring.

Thibeh: It was a single bead earring worn by the family of chief and wealthy family. Those who worn this earring were considered as having a voice in the court of chief.

Thing bengbeh: This was made from wooden studs. Its size was approximately half inch in diameter, red coloured or cornelians suspended by a piece of string. Its stone was kept at the centre.

Necklace: The various necklaces worn by Mizo men and women were on the followings:

Thihna: It was the most valued necklace among the Mizo. It was made from amber bead.

Thival: This was mostly worn by women, sometime this necklace was given for marriage contract.

Thifen: This necklace was made with beads of various colours threaded in three rows with a larger one in the middle. It was worn by both men and women. It was considered as one the most valued materials possession in a family.

Apart from these clothes and dresses the Mizo also had the following clothes:-

Naupuakpuan: It was a cloth made for carrying a child. It was a thick white cloth and a number of black thin stripes each about an inch wide were also woven vertically in the middle and on the two edges of the cloth.

Pawnpui: This was cotton blanket or quilt which was used by every family. As it was an important cloth for all the families it was prepared by a group of women. If any woman wanted to make *pawnpui* she will invite her friends and relatives to help her. It took a lot of time in its preparation so that they were mostly done in leisure time or holiday season.

The Mizo women also possessed belts which were known as *kawngghren* or *kawngchilh*. The most popular ones were: *darkawngchilh* which was made with copper or silver, *darzai* which was a long spring rod used as a belt that can be put around the waist two or three times and *rangkha* which was possessed by the wealthy family.

Iptechei was another important bag for the Mizo. It was also known as *khiangkawi ipte*. J.Shakespear mentioned about this bag, “As the Lushai (Mizo) has no pockets, he carries, wherever he goes, a haversack made of some pretty coloured cotton cloth slung over his shoulder by a strap of the same material. In this he carries his flint and steel and his tobacco.”⁷⁷ It was a very useful shoulder bag in pre-modern period.

From the detailed description of the tools, implements and the regalia and the dress and the musical and ritual instruments used we get a clear idea of the wide variety of goods and the processes that were employed in a variety of production processes and domestic needs. It was the ability to settle in the different eco-zones and the successful domestication and the further ability of the hunter and cultivator to move into different eco niches during times of stress holds the ability to exploit the plant and animal species as food.

Elaboration of cultural patterns followed on the basis of an assured food supply and the redistribution of the same through the institution of the chieftainship with the production solely in the hands of men a clear marker of gendered labour is also apparent and women are represented as doing gathering and certain type of jobs that were ascribed a femininity. Ceremonial cycles like the ‘*Thangchchuah*’ were devised to minimize potential conflict and at the same time also act as avenues for social and material mobility and thus keeping in tune with the overall communitarian ethos a method of

⁷⁷ J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 1988), 9.

reorganizing society was devised. In all these aspects ranging from the production oriented to the cultural and the ritual we see a large element of engagement with this world, the making of new realities through human labour and references to the other world. Thus, reality and the representations of the different worlds were rooted in a strongly material basis and derived from the material practices rather than from above.

CHAPTER - V
CONCLUSION

The present thesis examines the role of “materials” or “things” in Mizo culture during the pre-modern period which was about the period between the 17th century and early 20th century A.D. The present research locating the problem in Mizo historiography that the role and impact of material culture has not been included in the existing Mizo historical writings. Meanwhile, the role of "materials" can be seen almost every aspect of Mizo culture and society like the production process, dance and songs, social formations, crafts and arts, belief system and religious practices, community activities etc.

The first chapter of the thesis opens the plan and scope of the present research by highlighting the importance and needfulness of material culture in the historical writings of the Mizo. The term ‘material culture’ has been conceptualizing with the context of Mizo culture and the understanding of the word ‘material’ has been described into the tangible Mizo cultural context. Generally, historians hardly engaged with the material cultures in their research and writings. This is mainly due to the subject ‘material culture’ itself is mostly done with multi-disciplinary approaches with varied methodologies especially from anthropology, archaeology, art history, sociology, folk culture studies, history of technology, social history etc. The first chapter of this thesis argued that the text or words were mostly used as a source of information for history which is applicable to any of the historical writing across the globe, but the materials evidence of human past are more reliable especially for the people or society who did not have a literary tradition. Among the pre-literate society written texts and documents could not be seen; likewise, the Mizo were also passing their historical records from mouth to mouth since their ancestors' period to later generations. Thus, the evidence of events and practices of the Mizo in pre-modern cultural life could be traced back with their possession of "things" or "materials" in their day to day activities and production process with required the employment of tools and implements.

The first chapter also argued that historians also should widen their perspective by using “objects” or “things” or “materials” as primary sources in the same way like they treat and use their sources from a manuscript, a diary, an inventory or an image. There can be an alternative source in history writings especially a pre-literate society like the Mizo. History should not always depend on written documents or texts for sources information. The present research reminds us that history writing can have new perspective by searching alternative sources in human material possession in the past at the same time it also has a great deal more to do in any other possible sources as well. The chapter reveals that the possibility of material evidence as reliable sources for the reconstruction of Mizo historiography.

The studies of cultural areas give a meaningful understanding of indigenous people based on the areas characterized by their material culture. This is discussing in the second chapter by highlighting the different concepts of cultural areas propounded by various scholars in their study in cultural areas at different places. The Mizo cultural area is divided by modern nation-state boundaries into several international and state demarcations. The thesis argued that the Mizo in the pre-modern period also had long historical experiences in their culture areas from the period of their ancestral home in Southern China till they scattered to the present Mizoram state in India and its neighbouring areas like Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Bangladesh and Burma (Myanmar). Though they are living in different places across the demarcations of modern nation states their cultural areas could be seen as having similar traits and practices in their cultural aspects and material possession which is considered as the homogenous entity of Mizo across these diverse international and state boundaries. The tangible culture of the Mizo within this culture area is homogenous and uniform in most of the aspects which is large because of

their shared common resources and adaptation of available materials in similar ways.

There is a contestation of the term "Mizo" among the various sub-tribes of the Mizo which is highlighted in the second chapter with two broad references of 'exonym' and 'ethnonym' concepts. The Mizo called and addressed themselves as 'Mizo' or 'Zomi' or 'Zo' which are the accepted terms of ethnonym for them. The meanings of these ethnonyms were the same which means the people who are living in highlands. As the Mizo did not have writing tradition in the pre-modern period, they were known and called with different exonyms by their neighbours and the colonial records. The British Missionaries introduced alphabets and vowels to the Mizo after the annexation of the Mizo cultural areas under the British Colonial territory. The British military expedition teams and missionaries encounter with different Mizo sub-tribes at different times so that they recorded and classified the Mizo with varied nomenclatures. Lushai/Lushei, Kuki, Chin, Pawi, Lakher, Hmar, Dzo etc. were the common exonyms of the Mizo during the colonial period. Even among the Mizo modern historians the generic term of "Mizo" create confusion, and it has been debated till today. Two Mizo historians Vanchhunga and K.Zawla write about when the term "Mizo" was used when the Mizo ancestors were living in Burma (Myanmar).

The thesis argued that the exonym given by the earlier writers were not wholly accepted by the Mizo tribes. The contestation of the generic term "Mizo" has been under debate among the scholars and leaders of the various sub-tribes of the Mizo. The main problem regarding this is the usage of the term "Mi" for prefix and suffix for "Zo". Majority of the people living in the present Mizoram have accepted themselves as "Mizo" while the people living in Manipur and Burma find it difficult to accept the term "Mizo" as their common

ethnonym. They called themselves as “Zo” or “Zomi” to address their tribe name. However, the meaning of “Mizo” or “Zomi” can be regarded as similar denotation. Within the Mizo culture area, the two terms have been widely accepted for the ethnonym of the "Mizo" or "Zo" or "Zomi" tribes. The contestation may be going on and will be taking more time to have a common generic name among them.

The thesis examined the physical landscape and topography of Mizo culture area where thousand the Mizo ethnic tribes are scattered in different places. The settlement areas were mostly in hilly areas which having high elevation points, and hills are considered as a safe zone for survival. The thesis argued that living in such high altitude was imminent to mark them off from the valley "state" political administration. The Mizo being the lesser tribe with compare to their neighbouring “state dominated areas” so that the hilly topography was best suited for their survival from the annexation or extension under the “state”. James C.Scott proclaimed that the area of “Zomia” is not only a place for resistance to valley states but also a zone of refuge as well for million tribes in South East Asia. The thesis argued that for the Mizo living in such high altitude was a choice rather than falling under the dominance of state suzerainty.

The pre-modern Mizo migratory routes and settlement areas during the interval periods were examined in the thesis chapter two. Like many other tribes in the world, Mizo also migrated from South China through Burma and then their present state in Mizoram. Their early home is still not definitely known, but their folksong and oral literature tell us they came from big cave ‘*Chhinlung*’ which was said to be located at Szechuan Province in China. Their migration from China to Burma is believed to have happened with the three main waves of population movements. When they were in Burma, the Mizo

were said to have settled side by side with the Burmese and had close contact with them. It was no doubt that when they lived in Khampat area most of the Mizo major clans are believed to live together under the great chief following the same culture and same language. But when they reached in Chin hills, they lived in separate villages according to their owned clans or groups this further led to disunity and differences amongst themselves. Even when they reached in Lushai hills (Mizoram), Mizo tribes were living under separate chiefs, and their chiefs were later subjugated by the British colonial ruler.

Throughout the migratory history of the Mizo in the pre-modern period land was a source of livelihood and there were conflicts amongst themselves which has been examining in the thesis. The origin and development of chieftainship among the Mizo were generated with these constant conflicts urged them the need to have strong and capable leaders who will lead them in times of troubles and conflicts. Generally, the chieftainship was developed when they were in Chin Hills in Burma where shifting cultivation became their main source of livelihood. The ownership of land was considered as the suzerainty of the chief so that it was important to have a chief who could settle and divide the land for the entire population as the land belongs to the chief which was useful for his local administrative setup. In those days there were no remuneration and salary for his council of elders who helped them in his administration. The fertile land was first reserved for the elders and the experts who were appointed by the chief this was a kind preference could be given by the chief under his suzerainty. Those who received the preference had to give back the dues to the chief whenever there were emergencies and urgent needs. The prevalent distribution of land could be seen as the enrichment of the chieftainship among the Mizo society.

The present research also examines the existence of sacred geography within the Mizo cultural area. The meaningful relations of the religious practices of the Mizo and geographical landscape about the notion of sacred geography have never been included in the existing Mizo historiography. This can be regarded as the blind spot in the history of the Mizo which more concentrated on political and social history especially the administration and political development after the coming of British.

The present studies examine with the connection of the sacred geography and the belief system of the Mizo with a new perspective which is a new theme in the Mizo historiography. This analysis can be seen as the clear depiction of the Mizo religious belief system and its correlation with the notion of paradise. The Mizo believed that to attain paradise in life after death they had to accomplished certain rituals and ceremonies and physical attainment in their lifetime. Those who completed the required ceremonies or series of hunting were given honour in their lifetime and expected to attain eternal peaceful existence in their life after death. Out of these sequences of ceremonies and hunting, materials play vital roles for its achievement. Based on the analysis in the present research a hunter who completed the required series of success in his hunting to attain the status of '*ram lama thangchhuah*', he must have been possessed the hunting materials if it was not, he might not complete the requires series of achievement. For this purpose, the materials like gun, spears, axe, knife, *dao*, arrow and bow etc. played a great role for the hunter. In times of wars and raids the warrior who killed the enemies and taken enemy's head was given high honour in the society. Moreover, he was expected to pass through the passage of soul without having any obstacles in his death. This can be achieved with the help of his material possession for warfare.

The third chapter of the thesis examines the role of materials in the pre-modern Mizo production process. The Mizo economy was depended on shifting

cultivation which was done with the slash and burnt method. The first important things that required for clearing the thick jungle was the cutting implements. After clearing and burning the cultivation sites, the farmers required tools for sowing the seeds. When the plants and grains were growing the main task done throughout the agriculture cycles in the field was weeding. The Mizo had done weeding in proper sequences which were called the first cycle - *hnuhpui*, the second cycle - *hnuhhram*, the third cycle - *a thual*, the fourth cycle - *a thial* and the last cycle - *pawhchhiat*. The success of the farmer was largely depended on his/her possession of weeding materials. It was said that if weeding were done properly in the field, the farmer could harvest more. Therefore, the weeding materials used by the Mizo like *chemkawm*, *tuthlawh* and *dao* were indispensable tools to attain successful harvest at the end of the year. Further, the material possession had played an important role in the post-harvest works also. The harvested grains had to store in granaries which were made from bamboo which was the most commonly available material within the Mizo cultural area.

Apart from agriculture the Mizo in pre-modern period obtain supplementary foods from hunting and fishing which were examined in the third chapter of this thesis. The physical features and geographical settings of the Mizo cultural area provided ample opportunities to obtain food supplements from jungles. The materials possessed by the Mizo for making traps, snares, weapons and tools were extensively engaged for the success of these activities. The availability of wild herb or vegetation *ruthei* or *rulei* at the jungle which was used for poisoning fishes enabled the Mizo for organizing successful community fishing which was called *sangha tlangvuak*. This was another source of food supplement for the entire families in the pre-modern period.

The fourth chapter in the present thesis examines Mizo cultural history by using material cultures as a mode/method of investigation in which the physical objects used and possessed by the Mizo as its primary sources. The

pre-modern Mizo were moving from one place to another at different times. When they were moving to a new place, the first thing they had to do was the construction of houses. They were very careful in choosing the new site for the village, and even the construction of houses was done with the traditional routine. First, they construct the chief house and then *Zawlbuk* which was a dormitory for young male bachelors in the village. After completing these two houses, the common people then started construction of their own houses. In the present research, it can be seen that the construction materials for houses were common for all the families. The materials were mainly drawn from wood, bamboo, cane and thatches. This clearly showed that the egalitarian condition of the Mizo society in the pre-modern period.

The pre-modern Mizo houses had similar design, and the household implements were also common to every family. There were very few metal items in their household materials. Most of their household materials were made from wood, bamboo and cane which were collected from their nearby jungles. The metals that they possessed were mainly copper, brass and iron; these were usually used for weapons and cutting tools.

Thirdeng or blacksmith occupied an important position in traditional Mizo society. They were giving free service to all the families in the village by forging their implements and tools. Though the blacksmiths were there in every village but the sources of metals were hardly seen in the pre-modern period. Many historians believed that metals were possessed from their neighbouring places like Burma (Myanmar) and plain areas in British colonial territory. Metals were drawn from their nearby places through raids and barter exchange. Especially iron implements were largely used for clearing the forest and weeding, but no iron ores or mines were found within the Mizo cultural area this need to be a further investigation for researchers.

In the present research, the clear-cut division of labour among the Mizo in pre-modern period can be seen in many aspects. Most of the materials depicted in this thesis were produced, manufactured and forged by men. Meanwhile, the women were more engaged in the production of pottery and clothing. Further, the elaboration of the materials points to the transformation of the worlds that the Mizo encountered by engaging with the landscape and the eco-zones and thereby transforming them. This intricate work had many facets, and the wide variety of the tools and implements and the cultural correlate of the ceremonies and the rituals also gives an idea of the complexity of the whole process. In the domain of religion and politics, the elaboration of chieftainship and its sophisticated functions maintained the social order and also minimized potential conflicts and also gave mobility allowing for an orderly reproduction of the cultural process. This cultural process was in itself rooted in a material basis.

The thesis emphasizes that since the pre-modern Mizo were categorized as pre-literate society material culture can provide reliable sources of information for the reconstruction of their historiography out of the limited availability of written texts and accounts. Therefore, the present research will contribute a new approach and methodology in the Mizo historiography since the area of the present research has never been incorporated in the Mizo historical writings.

We may thus conclude by saying that a reading of the material goods of Mizo history would also help us to locate the historical process of the Mizo in a more concrete framework rather than from a purely textual plane and give concrete explanations to events and process. This extends to the other world

also where the paradise was imagined as a place where a person was free from work and had ample food.

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7. Personal Interview:

B. Lalthangliana – Historian and Author, Interview date: 3rd June 2010 at his residence at Chhing Venga, Aizawl.

C. Chalenga – Retired Medical Worker, Interview date: 12th July 2012 at his residence at Damdawiin veng, Sialsuk.

Darchhawna – Retired Professor and Historian, Interview date: 20th December 2014 at his residence at Kulikawn, Aizawl.

H. Vanlalhruaia – Faculty, Government Aizawl North College, Interview date: 12th February 2018 at his residence at Ramhlun North, Aizawl.

J.V Hluna – Professor and Historian, Pachhunga University College, Interview date: 4th September 2005 at his residence at Mission veng, Aizawl.

Lalthangpuia and Siamliana – Senior citizens, Interview date: 29th December 2009 at Chawilung village, Mizoram.

Lianchhingpuia – Senior citizen, Interview date: 28th December 2009 at his residence at Hmunsam veng, Sialsuk.

Lianhmingthanga – Retired Deputy Director, Art & Culture Department, Government of Mizoram and author, Interview date: 16th January 2014 at his residence at Chaltlang, Aizawl.

Nundanga - Senior Citizen, Interview date: 28th January 2010 at his residence, Chhing Vengthlang, Aizawl.

R. Chaldailova – Retired School Teacher and Author, Interview date: 1 July 2012 at his residence, Ramhlun Venglai, Aizawl.

Sangkima – Retired Professor and Principal and Historian, Interview date: 30th November, 2008 at his residence at Tlangnuam, Aizawl.

T. Vanlaltlani – Professor, Aizawl Theological College, Interview date: 6th June 2011 at her residence, Durtlang, Aizawl.

Z.T Sangkhuma - Retired Presbyterian Church's Pastor & writer, Interview date: 9th February, 2009 at his residence, Zotlang, Aizawl.

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7. Personal Interview:

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C. Chalenga – Retired Medical Worker, Interview date: 12th July 2012 at his residence at Damdawiin veng, Sialsuk.

Darchhawna – Retired Professor and Historian, Interview date: 20th December 2014 at his residence at Kulikawn, Aizawl.

H. Vanlalhruaia – Faculty, Government Aizawl North College, Interview date: 12th February 2018 at his residence at Ramhlun North, Aizawl.

J.V Hluna – Professor and Historian, Pachhunga University College, Interview date: 4th September 2005 at his residence at Mission veng, Aizawl.

Lalthangpuia and Siamliana – Senior citizens, Interview date: 29th December 2009 at Chawilung village, Mizoram.

Lianchhingpuia – Senior citizen, Interview date: 28th December 2009 at his residence at Hmunsam veng, Sialsuk.

Lianhmingthanga – Retired Deputy Director, Art & Culture Department, Government of Mizoram and author, Interview date: 16th January 2014 at his residence at Chaltlang, Aizawl.

Nundanga - Senior Citizen, Interview date: 28th January 2010 at his residence, Chhing Vengthlang, Aizawl.

R. Chaldailova – Retired School Teacher and Author, Interview date: 1 July 2012 at his residence, Ramhlun Venglai, Aizawl.

Sangkima – Retired Professor and Principal and Historian, Interview date: 30th November, 2008 at his residence at Tlangnuam, Aizawl.

T. Vanlaltlani – Professor, Aizawl Theological College, Interview date: 6th June 2011 at her residence, Durtlang, Aizawl.

Z.T Sangkhuma - Retired Presbyterian Church's Pastor & writer, Interview date: 9th February, 2009 at his residence, Zotlang, Aizawl.

APPENDIX-1



Picture no. 1: Mizo smoking pipes and smoking materials
Courtesy: Mizoram State Museum



Picture no.2: Mizo ordinary house and Daibawl sacrifice
Courtesy: Mizoram State Museum

APPENDIX – 2



Picture no 3: Mizo household materials
Courtesy: Mizoram State Museum

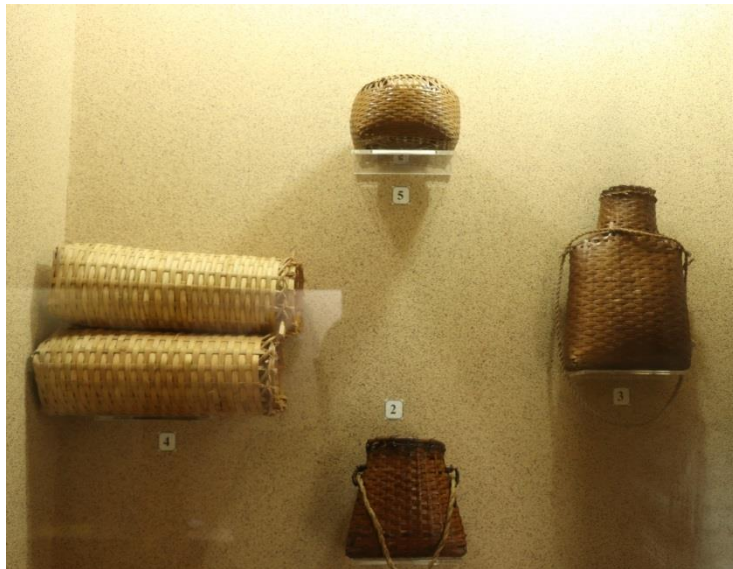


Picture no.4: Mizo bamboo combs (Mau samkhuih)
Courtesy: Mizoram State Museum

APPENDIX - 3



Picture no. 5: Mizo necklaces, Courtesy: Mizoram State Museum



Picture no.6: Mizo fishing and crab snares & catching materials



Picture no.7: Mizo wooden hammer

APPENDIX – 4



Picture no. 8: Mizo Cutting and digging tools



Picture no.9: Mizo bamboo basket (Fawng)



Picture no. 10: Mizo brass hairpins (thimkual)



Picture no.11: Mizo necklace (Tihna)

APPENDIX - 5



Picture no.12: Mizo weaving materials (puanbu)



Picture no.13: Mizo cotton winding machine (suvel)



Picture no.14: Mizo spinning machine (hmui)



Picture no.15: Mizo cotton gin (herawt)



Picture no.16: Mizo cotton quilt or blanket (Pawnpui)



Picture no.17: Mizo cotton bed clothes

APPENDIX - 6



Picture no. 18: Mizo rice cleaning and storing materials



Picture no. 19: Mizo kitchen materials



Picture no. 20: Mizo rice beer vessels



Picture no. 21: Mizo clay pots



Picture no. 22: Mizo rice beer horns cups and bamboo funnel.



Picture no. 23: Mizo brass vessels.

APPENDIX - 7



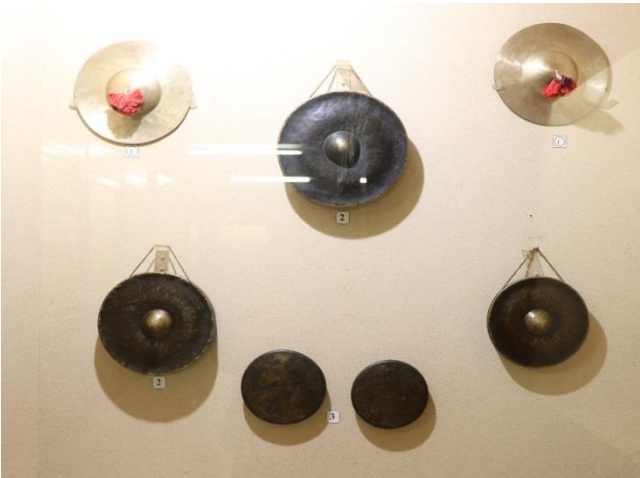
Picture no. 24: Mizo musical instruments.



Picture no. 25: Mizo brass gongs (darkhuang & darmang).



Picture no. 26: Mizo drums (khuang).



Picture no. 27: Mizo set of gongs (darbu & darbenthek).



Picture no. 28: Mizo gunpowder containers (fungki).

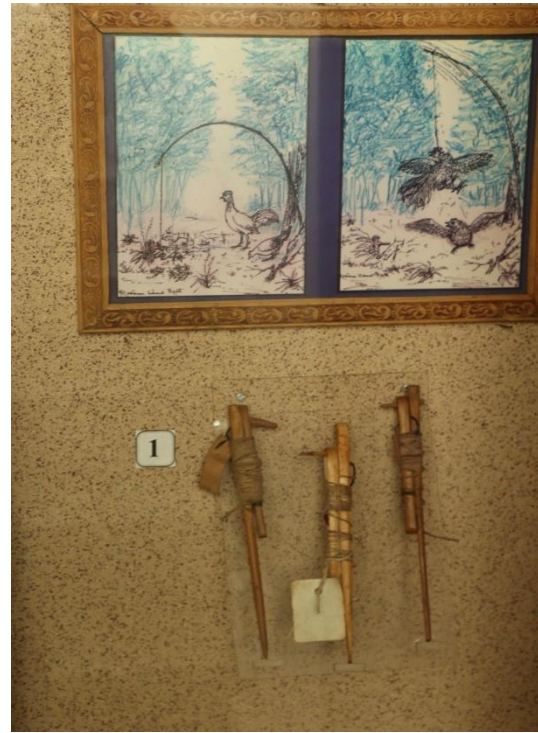


Picture no. 29: Mizo guns (silai) and

APPENDIX - 8



Picture no. 30: Mizo weapons



Picture no.31: Mizo beai snare/trap.



Picture no. 32: Mizo sahdal snare/trap.



Picture no. 33: Mizo hnawhtawt and other snares/traps